

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 2004

MASTERLY PAUL GIVES CHERRY AND WHITES A CRUCIAL WIN

GLOUCESTER 22

MUNSTER 11

15. J. Goodridge	1. T. Woodman	15. S. Payne	1. M. Horan
14. M. Garvey	2. C. Collins	14. J. Kelly	2. F. Sheahan
13. T. Fanolua	3. A. Deacon	13. M. Mullins	3. J. Hayes
12. H. Paul	4. A. Brown	12. R. Henderson	4. D. O'Callaghan
11. J. Simpson-Daniel	5. M. Cornwell	11. A. Horgan	5. P. O'Connell
10. D. McRae	6. J. Boer (capt.)	10. R. O'Gara	6. J. Williams (c.)
9. A. Gomarsall	7. P. Buxton	9. P. Stringer	7. D. Wallace
	8. J. Paramore		8. A. Foley

Replacements:

E. Elloway	J. Blaney
P. Johnstone	G. McIlwham
R. Roncero	D. Pusey
A. Eustace	S. Keogh
J. Merriman	E. Reddin
A. Page	J. Holland
R. Todd	J. Staunton

Referee : N. Williams (WRU)

Gloucester whipped up a Heineken Cup storm to collect four hugely crucial points to strengthen their quarter-final hopes against Munster at Kingsholm.

They will enter Thomond Park next Saturday for the return leg five points clear of the Irish province after administering another crushing defeat at Castle Grim.

Henry Paul completed an outstanding contribution with 17 points to deny Munster a bonus point on a thrilling night under the Kingsholm floodlights.

James Simpson-Daniel got Gloucester's only try and despite a late rally, Munster were shut out of the game for long periods.

It had been, as predicted, a tight and tense affair – despite Gloucester's willingness to put as much width on their game as humanly possible in the opening half.

That they disappeared down the tunnel for a spot of light refreshment locked at 3-3 would have been of some disappointment to the home side, after they played the majority of the rugby but could not penetrate an excellent Munster defence for 37 minutes.

HENRY PAUL kicked them in front after three minutes with a penalty after Munster were penalised for off-side, but thereafter, could not press home their advantage, despite the best efforts of Paul and Duncan McRae at outside half.

Munster worked themselves to a standstill in defence – not only to protect a midfield battered by the running of Paul and Terry Fanolua, but also around the fringes to prevent Jake Boer and his chums pressing home their advantage.

Gloucester's momentum arrived early and never waned. After Jon Goodridge had been forced into two hectic clearances in the first two minutes, Boer's awareness allowed him an early dart at Peter Stringer, the scrum-half. He ploughed forward from a mis-directed Munster line-out, before James Simpson-Daniel, Marcel Garvey and Andy Gomarsall all looked for an opening against a sea of blue shirts.

Munster also struggled at the set-piece – Frankie Sheahan lost three line-outs on his own ball, while Trevor Woodman set about John Hayes at scrum-time, in a confrontation referee Nigel Williams struggled to contain.

But from their own malfunctions, Munster levelled the scores when RONAN O'GARA kicked a penalty when Gloucester were penalised at the breakdown.

The concern for Gloucester was that while Paul displayed some outstanding awareness, McRae asked questions with his distribution and Gomarsall was a pain in defence and attack, the home side could not get through.

And almost everyone had a go – from Boer to Simpson-Daniel, but Jim Williams' men defended with control and determination.

Paul had a chance to re-establish Gloucester's lead but dragged a penalty wide in the 10th minute and then O'Gara did the same at the end of the half.

In between times, the rain sweeping across the main stand affected control of the ball at crucial times but only added to the occasion.

Half-time : Gloucester 3, Munster 3.

O'GARA'S late first half miss was not costly. He had an immediate opportunity to hand Munster the lead as he landed a 41st minute penalty.

But for the rest of the quarter, Gloucester's domination continued.

They had asked so many questions of Munster in wide channels, at some point their pressure had to tell.

Woodman was involved twice in a midfield attack that tied in the Munster defence but it needed the input of Paul, arguably the game's most incisive player, to create the first try of the game.

He pulled down a pass one-handed before a sliding kick behind Munster's retreating defence found SIMPSON-DANIEL, Gloucester's most potent attacking weapon, and he swooped on the kick and scored.

It was his fourth try of the competition and he has now found his way to the line against every pool opponent so far.

But he would have been the first to thank the wearing down job that had gone on up front, where Boer, Woodman, Andy Deacon, Mark Cornwell and Pete Buxton excelled, and it was now where it took hold.

Gloucester were sure they had too much versatility in their game and that Munster would find it difficult to alter from their strangling style to threaten them wide out if they got ahead.

Basic errors also began to creep into their game – O'Gara's line kicking deserted him, while passes found the floor instead of waiting hands.

It allowed Gloucester the chance to extend their lead and PAUL found the target after 57 and 62 minutes with well-struck kicks to take Gloucester 16-6 ahead.

Only one try was meagre reward for such effort despite the efforts of Paul and Fanolua but the centre landed his fourth successful penalty after 69 minutes to virtually close out the game.

Finally, it was just reward for Gloucester's all-round excellence – not only through Paul but in their application and drive up front.

And as it turned out, they needed the cushion. Munster finally awoke from their defensive duties to cause a few heart tremors when Stringer and O'Gara were heavily involved in a move to the line that sent ANTHONY HORGAN in for the score.

But O'Gara could not add the extras and Gloucester regrouped sufficiently for the outstanding PAUL to chip over a drop-goal in the final minutes.

The points scoring might not have been as heavy as last year, but this was every bit as convincing and almost certainly Gloucester's most convincing victory of the season.

JC