

THE CITIZEN

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GLOUCESTER GRAB FINE VICTORY

FRENCH SUCCESS IS BREATHTAKING AFTER HECTIC SPELL

When Gloucester picked the bones out of their fixture list way back in the depths of time last year, the month of January looked about as inviting as an arm wrestle with Martin Johnson.

Not only did they begin the year with a Welford Road welcoming committee that rubbed its hands with considerable glee, but they were also then subjected to two back-to-back meetings with Munster.

We were made to believe the Heineken Cup was the pinnacle environment of club rugby, the top end of the game in the northern hemisphere, but both occasions were played to packed audiences like internationals – staggeringly intense, bone-jarringly physical and mentally exhausting.

So when you consider Gloucester exchanged niceties with the Tigers – still the most arduous Premiership examination in the country – and when you consider the withering physical and mental demands made upon Nigel Melville's squad during the past three weeks that have stretched resources to the limit, and then throw in a trip to the south of France just for good measure, this was a simply breathtaking result and an even better performance.

They will end an excruciatingly difficult few weeks with a home game against Treviso next Saturday, and although nothing is a gimmee in this competition, only the most myopic pot-bellied inhabitant of the Shed will not start gazing ahead to a place in the Heineken Cup quarter-finals.

Gloucester were simply on a different level to Bourgoin in terms of application and attitude. They were streetwise, tough and well disciplined – despite the stamping boots and sneaky punches – to become only the second team this season to win away on French soil.

They asked so many questions of Bourgoin they could not cope, whether it be through their forwards or the bewitching hands of Duncan McRae and Henry Paul.

But during their difficult recent tour of duty, Gloucester have unearthed a few more gems. We have known about the varying talents of Paul and James Simpson-Daniel for a while now but this was all about the death-defying talents of Jon Goodridge, a prodigiously instinctive footballing full-back whose confidence has blossomed over the last month plus a muscular, fiery performance from Robert Todd, a centre with attitude.

While Paul surely took another step towards international fulfilment with a performance that was littered with good things, awareness, execution and composure, Todd tackled like a runaway goods train and also created a try for the equally impressive McRae, the pocket-sized stand-off, who conducted proceedings with almost total conviction.

While the match-winners ran away with the praise, Gloucester's pack went above and beyond the call of duty to establish dominance in a hum-dinging contest and won enough quality possession and field position to let the reflective talents of the outside backs shine.

Defensively, they were magnificent in churning over possession, particularly at the line-outs, de-railing anything Mattys Stoltz and Pascal Pape threw at them, while denying the hard working Julien Bonnaire any space to cause serious havoc.

Gloucester were also supremely well powered through Trevor Woodman and Phil Vickery and despite one indiscretion, kept sufficiently composed and disciplined even when the solids were hitting the air conditioning at either end of both halves.

Their back row were terrific, Jake Boer and Peter Buxton in particular chewed through huge amounts of work, while Alex Brown and Adam Eustace were no less impressive in their drive, and Chris Fortey, always an incendiary competitor, worked his socks off and not his fists.

The magnitude of Gloucester's victory cost Philippe Saint-Andre, the insanely passionate Bourgoin coach, his position at the club but the real reason for his departure was his application for the vacant Welsh position at the fag-end of last week.

Bourgoin president Pierre Martinet clearly felt he was not getting value for money and ushered Saint-Andre towards the exit door immediately after the final whistle of an almost totally one-sided victory.

And without their French international flanker Sebastien Chabal, who is not just the brains but also the considerable brawn behind Bourgoin's progress – presumably rested because of pressing domestic matters – the home side were taken to the cleaners.

Melville had fervently believed that Bourgoin, with nothing to play for, would possess a thin enough veneer if Gloucester got on top early and despite edging into a 13-0 lead, still found themselves with all the work to do after the break.

But from the moment Brown napalmed Pierre Caillet from the kick-off to turn over immediate possession and help create a try for Marcel Garvey, Gloucester's intensity didn't waver.

They remained clear-eyed enough to hit back after tries from lock Pape – after Buxton had disappeared to the sinbin – and centre Florian Fritz – hinted at a turnaround immediately at the start of the second half. But it was not to be. When Paul plucked out of the air a pass from McRae that had 'local infirmary' plastered all over it with a step and go, his break and Todd's inside pass ended with a beautifully crafted try for McRae.

And when the excellent Andy Gomarsall found McRae cutting a lovely angle across the cover at the start of the final quarter, Paul was sent crashing in for Gloucester's third try.

The only question that remained was that of a bonus point but the deadly double act of McRae and Paul had one more act to play in the closing stages.

The Australian held up play intelligently with an in-field break, waiting for Paul on a cut-back run and when the centre arced towards the line, James Simpson-Daniel was on hand to do the business and march Gloucester to within touching distance of the quarter-finals.

MATCH FACTS

CSBJ RUGBY

18

A. Forest
G. Estenhuizen
G. Davies
F. Fritz (M. Forest 74)
J-F. Coux
B. Boyet (K. Zhakatta 64)
C. Laussucq
O. Milloud (Capt.)
B. Cabello (J-P Bonrepaux 62)
P. Peyron (J. Boulc 32)
M. Stolz
P. Pape
J. Bonnaire
A. Petrilli
P. Calliet

GLOUCESTER R.F.C.

37

J. Goodridge
M. Garvey
R. Todd
H. Paul
J. Simpson-Daniel
D. McRae
A. Gomarsall
T. Woodman
C. Fortey (C. Collins 78)
P. Vickery
A. Eustace (M. Cornwell 72)
A. Brown
J. Boer (Capt.)
P. Buxton
J. Paramore (J. Forrester 56)

REFEREE : D. Courtney (Ire).

ATTENDANCE : 6,000

STAR MAN : Jon Goodridge.

ONE MINUTE: Gloucester make an unbelievable start when Bourgoin number eight Pierre Caillet is turned over from the kick-off, and Trevor Woodman recycles possession to Duncan McRae. He aims a kick towards Marcel Garvey and although it slides off his boot, Garvey regains possession from Glenn Davies and scores after 20 seconds. Henry Paul adds the conversion.

BOURGOIN 0, GLOUCESTER 7

13 MINUTES: Gloucester's excellent start continues when Jake Boer and Trevor Woodman move play into midfield alongside Robert Todd before the referee brings play back for hands in the ruck. Paul adds the penalty.

BOURGOIN 0, GLOUCESTER 10

20 MINUTES: Fuelled by their encouraging start, and despite the terrible conditions, Gloucester look to attack at every opportunity and when McRae kicks for James Simpson-Daniel to chase, Bourgoin are penalised for off-side and Paul adds his second penalty.

BOURGOIN 0, GLOUCESTER 13

38 MINUTES: Despite enjoying large periods of possession, Bourgoin cannot break through Gloucester's defence until Peter Buxton is sinbinned for his second warning at a maul. With a man advantage, Bourgoin kick a penalty to touch and drive a line-out infield where lock Pascal Pape is driven over for the try.

BOURGOIN 5, GLOUCESTER 13

42 MINUTES: And their impetus gathers pace two minutes after the re-start when their pack drive a maul infield and scrum-half Christophe Laussucq drops a goal to cut the deficit further.

BOURGOIN 8, GLOUCESTER 13

45 MINUTES: Bourgoin make the most of their man advantage and when Gloucester attempt to play their way out of defence, Garvey's pass is intercepted by Florian Fritz who has a clear run to the line. The conversion from Benjamin Boyet hands the hosts the lead.

BOURGOIN 15, GLOUCESTER 13

48 MINUTES: But Gloucester strike back when Paul lands his third penalty after Bourgoin are penalised at the contact area.

BOURGOIN 15, GLOUCESTER 16

52 MINUTES: Paul is then instrumental in Gloucester's second try when his lovely soft shoe shuffle in midfield takes him clear of the cover and he finds Todd on the right. Todd has Garvey outside him but cuts inside and sends McRae in for the try. Paul converts.

BOURGOIN 15, GLOUCESTER 23

53 MINUTES: However, Bourgoin are not finished and Boyet lands a drop-goal immediately from the re-start from 45 metres.

BOURGOIN 18, GLOUCESTER 23

63 MINUTES: Gloucester, though, have been by far the better side all night and when an attack beneath the Bourgoin posts comes to the left, McRae moves the pass out of the tackle beautifully to send Paul in for a well-deserved try. The centre converts his own score.

BOURGOIN 18, GLOUCESTER 30

79 MINUTES: And the rout is completed in the final minute when McRae steals possession up the narrow side and links with Pau, who breaks back inside him. With support coming up on the left, his pass finds Simpson-Daniel who races in for the bonus point try. Paul converts.

BOURGOIN 18, GLOUCESTER 37

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