

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, JANUARY 26, 2004

GLOUCESTER CLOSE IN ON QUARTER-FINALS

GLOUCESTER'S reward for their outstanding victory in Bourgoin on Saturday will be a place in the Heineken Cup quarter-finals if they beat Treviso on Saturday.

A victory without a bonus point against the Italian champions at Kingsholm (5pm kick-off) will hand Gloucester 23 points, which should be enough for a place in the last eight.

Edinburgh are the only other side who could reach 23 points and finish second in their pool – should they lose but earn a bonus point in their group decider in Toulouse.

But Gloucester will automatically qualify for the knock-out stages if they score four tries and earn a bonus point.

Nigel Melville's side also find themselves in a position of strength because of group deciders in the remaining five pools.

Leicester face an eliminator against Stade Francais in one, Toulouse face Edinburgh, Biarritz host Leinster in three, Northampton are at home to Llanelli in four, while Wasps face Perpignan in six.

All of those clashes will effectively rule the loser out of a place in the last eight – meaning Gloucester only have to win at Kingsholm.

Director of rugby Melville hailed their 37-18 victory in Bourgoin on Saturday as a 'fantastic' performance, capped by James Simpson-Daniel's last minute try that earned a bonus point.

"It was great, wasn't it," Melville said. "It was a fantastic performance and I was so pleased for a lot of people.

"Defensively we were outstanding and that was great for Dave Ellis, being in France. Jon Goodridge was bombarded with balls but did really well and Toddy [Robert Todd] came back into the side and did really well.

"But I was so pleased for everybody else involved.

"We have been away to Leicester, Munster and Bourgoin and won twice and that is very impressive.

"We know four points will see us through next week, but we have to go and do it."

Skipper Jake Boer, who was at the forefront of an outstanding effort by the pack, paid tribute to the 550 or so fans who made the trip to cheer Gloucester to the rafters and then invaded the pitch to chant their heroes off the field.

"The support sounded more like 6,000 and each one of us as players have the greatest respect for the Gloucester fans," he said.

"On days like that, when it is tough, they make us what we are. They were fantastic."

- THE venue for next week's Kingsholm Supporters' Mutual forum has changed. It was planned for tomorrow at Woodlawns, prior to the venue's closure. It will now be held at Churchdown Community Centre, Parton Road, Churchdown, on Thursday, January 29 (7.45pm).
- GLOUCESTER'S World Cup winning heroes will be made Honorary Freemen of the City of Gloucester in the presence of the Webb Ellis Trophy on Thursday, January 29 (6pm).

Phil Vickery, Trevor Woodman and Andy Gomarsall will receive their honours at a ceremony at Kingsholm.

- GLOUCESTER'S A league match against Saracens at Kingsholm tonight has been cancelled.

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