

## THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31, 2004

### ROBERT'S EFFORTS ARE UP WITH THE BEST

It could have been easy to under-value the enormity of Robert Todd's performance during Gloucester's victory over Bourgoin last Saturday.

He does not score tries with the same regularity as James Simpson-Daniel or make as many quick-footed breaks as Henry Paul but his effort was right up there with anything else the Cherry and Whites had to offer. As a combination, he worked with Paul quite superbly to cause no end of damage with the weight and force of his tackle in defence while operating with powerful determination in the wide channels when Gloucester attacked.

His break, dummy and inside pass to help create a try for Duncan McRae was first class but he menaced all evening – pumping his powerful legs into the contact area and wrapping his mightily strong arms around would-be invaders.

Todd, and to some extent his centre colleague Terry Fanolua, do not get the plaudits they often deserve but take one or both out of midfield and Gloucester are not as physically capable in attack or jarringly competitive in defence. He has relished the number 13 jersey – there is more space and opportunity – and believes Gloucester have been galvanised by a month of activity that has taken in Leicester, Munster twice and Bourgoin.

"I think we have generally been more accurate in what we want to achieve," he said. "Last week the intercept try galvanised us a bit – we patted Marcel Garvey [it was his pass that was taken by Florian Fritz] and told him to forget it. Sometimes you cannot control those sort of things.

"In the past we may have lost our focus or started arguing among ourselves but under the posts we just wanted the ball back so we could get back into the game.

"I don't think we have been as clever or as controlled in European company before but it really started away at Leicester where we were very specific in what our roles were and everything was given over to detail.

"We obviously had a bit of a hiccup in Munster but we had total belief in what we were doing. Everyone has a say in the process and what will be involved. We are a lot more selective in our targets.

"I think we have played differently from the Premiership, maybe a little bit quicker, but it has been directed better and that is what is important."

Gloucester were ahead quite comfortably in the Stade Pierre Rajon before Bourgoin stole ahead with two tries to take the lead and potentially threaten a huge turnaround.

But there was never a sense they had control of the game despite the fact they were ahead. Gloucester had played the majority of the attacking rugby and went about their business with almost unusual calm and focus.

Their bonus point try did not come until the final minute but even then Duncan McRae was calm enough to break, slow down and wait for support before Paul and Simpson-Daniel arrived to add the glorious finishing touches.

And Todd was crucial in the dismantling process. Fritz and his centre partner Glenn Davis ran at him all night but were sent shuddering back each time with a series of merciless tackles.

It would be easy to underestimate the significance of his defensive effort in nullifying everything Bourgoin threw at him, but Todd insisted he was not after any individual praise.

"I never go out there looking for any sort of individual kudos," he said. "If things go well for us it is because the boys up front have been doing a great job.

"All in all things are going well and I have enjoyed the number 13 position because of the outside space it provides. You can look up and see the gaps and the room and that is nice to have.

"There were a couple of gaps last Saturday and it was nice to have the chance to run into them.

"But it has been the return of people like Andy Gomarsall who has got us organised and the forwards going well which has helped. If I can be a part of that, that's great."

Todd will play a bigger part in that than he would care to mention. Just try asking Florian Fritz of the importance of Todd's role last Saturday night and you will get one emphatic answer. Massive.

JC