

THE CITIZEN

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2004

REVIVAL OF FORRESTER GIVES JUNIOR A BREAK

James Forrester will return to the Gloucester side tomorrow for their one-off knock-out European clash with Treviso (5pm).

The number eight made a more than encouraging return to action during Gloucester's victory in Bourgoin last weekend and will replace the outstanding Junior Paramore, whose tour of duty in the last six weeks has been remarkable.

Forrester has missed a vast chunk of the season because of ankle ligament damage, but will offer a completely different option from the back of the scrum as a free-running attacking threat.

And that will be crucial as Gloucester go in search of four tries and a bonus point that would certainly see them into the knock-out stages.

His inclusion is the only change from the side that won in France which means the hugely impressive Adam Eustace and Robert Todd retain their places in the side.

"Junior has played 80 minutes for the last six weeks and James comes in fit and fresh," said director of rugby Nigel Melville.

"He will provide a bit of variety and something different for us. It is good to have a player of his quality back with us."

Gloucester have selected a big, bruising pack with Trevor Woodman and Phil Vickery partnering Chris Fortey in the front row.

Alex Brown, whose tackle on Pierre Caillet created Gloucester's first try after 20 seconds in Bourgoin, will partner Eustace, while skipper Jake Boer and Peter Buxton will pack down alongside Forrester.

"We have used this week as normal," Melville confirmed. "The players know how important it is, even though we have been sensible with the training.

"We could have been playing anybody tomorrow, but the attitude would be just the same.

"It is good to get some players back at this stage of the season and we have picked a very good side."

Melville's back line is the same as the one that dismantled Bourgoin – which gives the chance for the nine-10-12 combination of Andy Gomarsall, Duncan McRae and Henry Paul to flourish again.

Paul is currently the Heineken Cup's leading points scorer with 85, while James Simpson-Daniel has five tries in five games.

"I think we are more settled and a better side than the first time we played them, which is where we want to be," Melville said.

"We have played well in the last few weeks but we must continue it against Treviso because it is a huge game."

Todd remains at outside centre after a barnstorming effort last weekend, which means Terry Fanolua is on the bench, while Jon Goodridge and Marcel Garvey complete an imposing back division.

GLOUCESTER v. TREVISO, Kingsholm, tomorrow 5pm:

J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, R. Todd, H. Paul, J. Simpson-Daniel; D. McRae, A. Gomarsall; T. Woodman, C. Fortey, P. Vickery, A. Eustace, A. Brown, J. Boer (capt.), P. Buxton, J. Forrester.

Reps: C. Collins, A. Deacon, R. Roncero, M. Cornwell, J. Paramore, A. Page, T. Fanolua.

ALL TO PLAY FOR IN FINAL POOL STAGES

THE Heineken Cup pool stages are set to reach a thrilling conclusion this weekend, with all six groups still undecided.

The race for quarter-final places could hardly be more intense, as there are four winner-takes-all showdowns at Leicester, Toulouse, Biarritz and Northampton.

The quarter-finals, which take place in April, will feature six pool winners and the two best runners-up.

Going into the final round of pool games, there are still 13 teams who could progress.

POOL ONE (Leicester, Stade Francais, Ulster, Gwent Dragons):

Leicester tackle French champions Stade Francais in a straight shoot-out at Welford Road tonight, when a win or draw will be good enough for the Tigers to progress as pool winners, but if Leicester lose, then Stade march on. Ulster and the Dragons, who are already out, meet in Belfast.

POOL TWO (Edinburgh, Toulouse, Leeds, Neath-Swansea Ospreys):

Edinburgh are the only unbeaten team left in this season's tournament, and victory in Toulouse tomorrow would see them qualify as top seeds. A defeat though, and they could slip to eighth seeds, which would mean an away quarter-final tie. Toulouse know that a win for them means a likely home draw, but Leeds and the Ospreys are out.

POOL THREE (Leinster, Biarritz, Sale Sharks, Cardiff Blues):

Leaders Leinster need a win or draw away to Biarritz tomorrow, and they will progress. Biarritz, meanwhile, must either win with a try-scoring bonus point or win and not concede a bonus point to top the pool outright. Sale Sharks and Cardiff Blues have already been eliminated.

POOL FOUR (Llanelli Scarlets, Northampton, Agen, Borders):

Llanelli require a win or draw against Northampton at Franklin's Gardens on Sunday to reach the quarter-finals. If they lose, even with a bonus point, then they are likely to struggle. Northampton must make home advantage pay with a victory over the Scarlets to progress. If they lose, even with a bonus point, then they will be out, joining earlier casualties Agen and the Borders.

POOL FIVE (Munster, Gloucester, Bourgoin, Treviso):

Munster and Gloucester are at home, hosting Bourgoin and Treviso respectively. If both Munster and Gloucester achieve five points, they will be level on 24, which means that Munster progress because of their superior number of match points gained (five) in two fixtures against Gloucester. However, 24 points will be good enough to guarantee the second-placed team a runners-up spot. So too will 23 points if one or other of the teams fails to get a bonus point in victory. Just as with Edinburgh, both teams could finish as the top seeds, or seventh or eighth. Bourgoin and Treviso are out.

POOL SIX (Wasps, Perpignan, Celtic Warriors, Calvisano):

The tightest pool of all, with three teams – Wasps, Perpignan and Celtic Warriors – still mathematically in the hunt. the trio could all end up with 20 points on Sunday if the Warriors pick up a bonus point and win in Calvisano, Perpignan do the same at home against Wasps, and Wasps get a bonus point in defeat. That would mean the decision on who finishes top would first be made on the number of match points scored in the games between the three teams. After that, it goes to the number of tries scored in the matches between the three teams. If Wasps win or draw in Perpignan, then they will win the pool. If Perpignan win with a bonus point, and stop Wasps from taking a bonus point, then they will win the pool even if the Warriors snap up five points in Italy, because of their superior match points and tries-rating over the Welshmen. Warriors will win the pool if they take a bonus point in winning in Italy, and Perpignan beat Wasps without either side getting a bonus point. Calvisano are out.

POSSIBLE LAST EIGHT:

Leicester, Toulouse, Leinster, Llanelli, Munster, Wasps, Gloucester, Edinburgh.

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