

# THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 2004

FIVE-STAR SALE SEE OFF GLOUCESTER

SALE SHARKS 38 GLOUCESTER 20

Sale scored five cracking tries as they unpicked a depleted Gloucester side that looked short on attacking ideas until it was too late to clinch victory at Edgeley Park.

Sale dominated the opening exchanges with full-back Vaughan Going knocking on to squander an early opportunity but Gloucester hit back when a driving line-out carried them into the Sharks' 22.

The hosts defended aggressively though and when Gloucester allowed lock Adam Eustace to become isolated, the ball squirmed loose and was pounced upon by winger Steve Hanley, who sprinted over from his own 22. Fly-half Mike Hercus converted.

Scrum-half Nicky Walshe then went close when he chased up his own clever kick-through but it was Mark Cueto who increased their cushion, bursting down the wing out of his own half and through two half-hearted tackles from debutant winger Riaan van der Bergh and full-back Jon Goodridge to touch down. Hercus converted for a 14-0 lead after 20 minutes.

Two minutes later, Gloucester centre Henry Paul cut the gap with a penalty.

He and McRae looked to punch holes in midfield with some impressive switches but Gloucester lacked invention outside the pairing.

Sale, by contrast, built up their attacks patiently and were rewarded with a Hercus penalty three minutes before the break.

In first-half injury time, Cueto skipped through some weak tackling around the fringes of a ruck and as he was about to be wrapped up, offloaded to Hanley to complete his brace. Hercus converted for a 24-3 half-time lead.

Paul slotted a superb penalty from the halfway line only a minute into the second half and when they opted for the pick and go tactic, they began to make good headway.

Sale's drift defence was working magnificently though and flanker Hugh Perrett would have scored after a break out of his own half had he possessed more pace.

The Sharks maintained the momentum with some incisive rucking and Hercus burst on to a beautiful inside pass from replacement Stuart Turner to touch down between the posts. Hercus converted for a 31-6 advantage.

Gloucester went agonisingly close to a swift response when Paul and McRae interpassed in midfield to open up a gap but the move was halted inches short.

But the Cherry and Whites were handed a boost as Cueto was sinbinned and when some fisticuffs broke out, Turner was then sent to the bin.

But still the Cherry and Whites could not break through, being held up three times when they had crossed the line while centre Robert Todd twice went close after some powerful bursts.

Gloucester forwards dogged it out in a period of sustained pressure with replacement Delarey du Preez eventually sniping over from a line-out for a debut try. Paul converted.

He then converted a late try from Alex Brown after the lock chased down a McRae chip through to cut the gap to 31-20 but the late flurry of pressure will act as little consolation to Gloucester.

Fittingly, it was Sale who had the last word when Perrett fed Hanley for the winger to complete his hat-trick. Replacement fly-half Charlie Hodgson converted.

SALE: V. Going; M. Cueto, C. Mayor, J. Baxendell, S. Hanley; M. Hercus (C. Hodgson 79), N. Walshe (S. Benton 78); K. Yates (A. Sheridan 52), A. Titterell (J. Roddam 78), B. Stewart (S. Turner 52), I. Fullarton, D. Schofield, P. Anglesea (capt.), H. Perrett, A. Sanderson (P. Davies 27).

Replacements not used: C. Briers.

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge (M. Foster 52); R. van der Bergh, R. Todd, H. Paul, T. Fanolua; D. McRae, A. Page; R. Roncero, C. Fortey (D. du Preez 63), A. Deacon, A. Eustace (M. Cornwell 68), A. Brown, P. Buxton (A. Hazell 50), J. Boer (capt.), J. Paramore.

Replacements not used: P. Johnstone, J. Frape, A. Frost.

REFEREE: Chris White (RFU).

ATTENDANCE: 6,487

STAR MAN: Henry Paul

JC