

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, APRIL 3, 2004

CHERRY AND WHITES STUTTER TO AN UNCONVINCING VICTORY

SARACENS 8 GLOUCESTER 16

SARACENS : R. Kydd; P. Bailey, B. Johnston, K. Sorrell, A. Winnan; N. Little, M. Williams; S. Sparks, J. Parkes, C. Visagie, S. Raiwalui (capt.), C. Yandell, R. Hill, B. Russell, K. Chesney.

Reps: R. Russell, B. Broster, E. Bergamaschi, B. Skirving, R. Peacey, K. Bracken, D. Kirton.

GLOUCESTER : R. van der Bergh; M. Garvey, T. Fanolua, H. Paul, J. Simpson-Daniel; D. McRea, A. Gomarsall; T. Woodman, C. Fortey, P. Vickery, A. Eustace, A. Brown, J. Boer (capt.), A. Hazell, J. Paramore.

Reps: D. Du Preez, R. Roncero, A Deacon, M. Cornwell, P. Buxton, A. Page, R. Todd.

REFEREE : D. Pearson (RFU).

It was tight, very tight, but Gloucester secured a crucial victory over Saracens thanks to Marcel Garvey's first half try.

But it was not the type of performance that would have overly worried the watching Warren Gatland, the Wasps coach, whose side will meet Gloucester in the Heineken Cup next week.

Gloucester were not vintage and in the end they will be thankful for the victory that keeps their play-off hopes alive.

Saracens clung to some sort of life at the break – their solitary first half try eroding some of Gloucester's good early work and a 13-point lead.

But the contest was not a thing of beauty. Saracens were workmanlike up front but more than a little wobbly outside and the shaky kicking of Nicky Little summed up their uncertainties.

He somehow missed a straightforward penalty and also the conversion of Morgan Williams' try – an almost impossible feat with the ball positioned rather nicely in front of the posts.

Gloucester had successfully disrupted them at the breakdown, where the majority of Andy Hazell's impressive work was carried out on the floor and only just inside the laws, but it was enough and very effective.

There were a couple of hefty charges from Simon Raiwalui but nothing of a genuine threat and Gloucester defended with a purpose and force in the contact area.

The Kingsholm pack got through a fair amount of work and it looked they may keep a clean sheet with only five minutes of the half remaining. A Saracens line-out looked to be heading into a bunker before a ricochet off the impressive Andy Gomarsall presented possession to Kevin Sorrell and as Henry Paul tried to support Gomarsall, the Saracens centre raced through the vacant gap and into a vast open space.

He rounded Riaan van der Bergh and looked capable of scoring until James Simpson-Daniel made the cover tackle but WILLIAMS, following up in support, dived over to score.

It was just what Saracens needed after a nervy error-strewn start. They immediately found themselves without Kris Chesney when he was yellow carded for blocking Marcel Garvey's chase onto Gomarsall's kick in the fifth minute, but defended two threatening line-outs with considerable ability.

But from the moment PAUL kicked an 11th minute penalty after a driving maul was pulled down, Gloucester's authority grew.

And they scored a very good try after 25 minutes to confirm their threat. Even though the hard working Jake Boer was held up in midfield, he got his pass away to Paul who fed Terry Fanolua into space. With room opening up, Fanolua and van der Bergh combined to send GARVEY racing home down the right.

PAUL converted and Gloucester were 10-0. And the lead grew when PAUL landed a 30th minute penalty after hands in a ruck.

HALF-TIME :
SARACENS 5
GLOUCESTER 13

Williams' try established momentum for the home side and Gloucester's superiority withered on the vine in the second half.

After a dazzling opening and a series of broken field breaks led by Duncan McRae and involving almost everybody in a cherry shirt, Saracens turned up the temperature to such an extent that Gloucester were forced into almost total third and fourth quarter defence.

Williams, the hub of everything meaningful Sarries produced, was a real handful and in a contest where they would have secretly hoped for a bonus point, Gloucester were not even sure of the victory by the end until a Paul penalty eased them home.

The breakdown became something of a lottery – the commitment ensured plenty of bodies clouded the issue for the referee, but Gloucester found themselves on the smellier end of the stick for the majority of the time.

And Gloucester needed those bodies. Saracens poured every ounce of effort into the recovery and it only just failed.

But there was precious little continuity or cohesion. When they did establish possession, Gloucester lost it again all too easily and Saracens built a platform around Williams and Little, who was given more time to operate at stand-off than he should have been.

And with Sorrell, arguably the most dangerous midfield threat in the game looking for work, the home side sensed a turn around.

The half was still pointless deep inside the last ten minutes but as the mistakes grew, Saracens' belief intensified. Gloucester, through Junior Paramore, Gomarsall and Co., defended well but when the number eight was yellow carded for a wild swing at Williams, the Cherry and Whites faced an anxious last few minutes.

And when Little finally found his accuracy with a 78th minute penalty, a complete turnaround was not out of the question.

Saracens earned a series of late scrums close to the line in a frantic finale and a Paul penalty cleared the danger but they had been more shaken[*sic*].

Gloucester had created almost nothing of note in the second half but eased their up field[*sic*] thanks to a driving maul and Paul's solid kick, but they could not stay there long but when he curled a penalty through the posts, Gloucester's relief was obvious.

JC