

# THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, APRIL 5, 2004

GLOUCESTER SQUEEZE TO A WIN

GATLAND GIVEN FEW CLUES AT VICARAGE ROAD

SARACENS 8 GLOUCESTER 16

SARACENS : R. Kydd; P. Bailey, B. Johnston, K. Sorrell, A. Winnan; N. Little, M. Williams; D. Sparks (E. Bergamaschi 64), J. Parkes (R. Russell 49), C. Visagie (B. Broster 78), S. Raiwalui (capt.), C. Yandell, R. Hill, B. Russell, K. Chesney (R. Peacey 68).

GLOUCESTER : R. van der Bergh; M. Garvey, T. Fanolua, H. Paul, J. Simpson-Daniel; D. McRea, A. Gomarsall; T. Woodman (R. Roncero 40), C. Fortey (D. du Preez 56), P. Vickery, A. Eustace (M. Cornwell 78), A. Brown, J. Boer (capt.), A. Hazell (P. Buxton 64), J. Paramore.

If this was an attempt at a cunning ruse, then Warren Gatland may well have had the wool pulled over his eyes like everybody else. The Wasps coach, seeking any extra inside titbits on Gloucester's current form and general well-being ahead of their little get-together next Sunday, will have left Vicarage Road on Saturday evening scratching his silvery spiked cranium in more than slight bemusement at their performance.

He will have discovered, if he didn't already know, that the abilities of the defences on show in next weekend's Heineken Cup quarter-final will probably be the difference between two of the meanest teams in the business.

Gloucester will not want to admit it of course, but they already looked to have more than half an eye on Sunday's European assignment at the Causeway Stadium and away from a rigorously outstanding defensive effort, a hugely capable line-out and a first half scrum that operated at almost maximum efficiency. asked far too few questions of a side second from bottom of the Premiership.

Gatland would have seen Gloucester huff and puff without any meaningful possession in the second half – what they did pilfer on the retreat returned to Saracens all too easily – and also score only three points in the final minutes to rubber stamp a victory that appeared to be a formality after half an hour.

It would not have been the sort of warm-up Nigel Melville had planned – Gloucester were patchy, low on confidence and will have to keep the ball far better against perhaps the most frugal side in Europe if they are to progress to the last four, but they escaped with four points that maintains their outside push for a play-off place in the Premiership.

The afternoon was generally a frustrating one.

Much of their best work, carried out by the fidgeting fingers and toes of Andy Hazell on the deck and the hugely impressive Alex Brown in the line-out, went unrewarded by either their own lack of precision or the referee's whistle at the breakdown that reduced the contact area to a free-for-all – to the continued dismay of Jake Boer and his dogs of war.

Saracens, for all their faults, were diligent and resilient but could have been whistled off the field at the rucks where players ran and rolled ahead of the ball to make it nothing more than a lottery for Andy Gomarsall and Morgan Williams, the two willing scrum-halves.

Gloucester will be thankful for a piece of excellent attacking rugby that created a lovely try for Marcel Garvey and Henry Paul's superb kicking display – his match-winning penalty into a blustery wind was of the highest quality – but there were any number of concerns for Gloucester to rectify.

When Trevor Woodman departed to nurse an eye injury, Cobus Visagie, everyone's idea of a seriously horrible scrummager, made a mess of Rodrigo Roncero as the Kingsholm scrum disintegrated in the second half, while Kevin Sorrell outplayed Paul in the centre, a mighty achievement against the best number 12 in the country.

It is not stretching the bounds of possibility to suggest that had Saracens possessed a finisher of any serious class, or a goal-kicker with any reliability, they could have won the game late on.

Gloucester's best work was done in the first half. When Paul and Terry Fanolua found themselves in a bit of room Riaan van der Bergh, for the majority of the time conservative from full-back, raced into the line to send Garvey in for the sort of try he could have finished in his sleep, but it was a lovely score.

Paul kept them rolling with his boot to establish a 13-0 lead but Saracens snuck back into the game late in the half.

Williams, their energetic scrum-half, controlled possession from a line-out and sent Sorrell racing through a gap vacated by Duncan McRae.

Although James Simpson-Daniel and Fanolua came back to cover well, Williams scooped up and scored.

Had Nicky Little displayed any kind of confidence with his kicking, Sarries would have been only three points behind but he missed twice horribly from short range.

The try invigorated the home team and when a frenzied passage of second half play finished without a Gloucester score, Saracens dominated the rest of the game.

With a bucket-load of possession, Williams buzzed around looking for an opening and Visagie and Richard Hill turned up the temperature up front.

But Gloucester are nothing if not organised, particularly without the ball, and had Junior Paramore, Hazell, Gomarsall and anyone else in cherry you care to mention to thank for keeping Saracens away from the line.

With Hazell not getting the reward he deserved for his effort at the breakdown, he was replaced by the weightier Pete Buxton but there was a worrying lack of cohesion and threat.

And when Paramore swung wildly at Williams – he will be thankful for only the whiplash injury he received for getting out of the way – Gloucester spend the last few minutes with only 14 men.

It was all a bit of a mess and from a seemingly comfortable position, Gloucester ended up scrapping all the way to score only three points in the second half.

Considering they possess two of the fastest men in the country, Gloucester will need to use them with greater purpose and accuracy next weekend to give Gatland and Co. really something to think about.

#### MATCH FACTS.

REFEREE : D. Pearson (RFU).

ATTENDANCE : 6,917

STAR MAN : Andy Hazell

FIVE MINUTES : Saracens make a bright start but Gloucester come closest to scoring first. Duncan McRea steals possession from a line-out and Andy Gomarsall kicks ahead for Marcel Garvey to chase. The winger looks capable of gathering possession but is blocked by Kris Chesney who is sinbinned for the offence.

11 MINUTES : Gloucester take advantage of the man advantage and when a driving maul is collapsed, Henry Paul kicks them ahead with a penalty.

SARACENS 0, GLOUCESTER 3

23 MINUTES : Inspired by the score, Gloucester increase their lead with a lovely try. Jake Boer is held in midfield but Paul and Terry Fanolua combine with Riaan van der Bergh who sends Garvey in for the try. Paul converts.

SARACENS 0, GLOUCESTER 10

30 MINUTES : Paul increases Gloucester's advantage when he kicks a penalty after Saracens are penalised for hands in the ruck.  
SARACENS 0, GLOUCESTER 13

35 MINUTES : But their dominance does not last. From a line-out, Sarries' scrum-half Morgan Williams somehow retains possession and after McRea shoots out of the line, Kevin Sorrell races through the gap and 50 metres to the line. Although Fanolua and James Simpson-Daniel get back to make the tackle, Williams picks up and scores. Nicky Little misses the simple conversion.  
SARACENS 5, GLOUCESTER 13

78 MINUTES : The second half remains scoreless until right on time when Little finally finds his range with a long distance penalty to raise Sarries hopes of a bonus point.  
SARACENS 8, GLOUCESTER 13

80 MINUTES : However, Paul caps an excellent effort with the boot with a last minute penalty to ease Gloucester to a deserved but hard working triumph.  
SARACENS 8, GLOUCESTER 16

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