

THE CITIZEN

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SIMPSON-DANIEL KEEN FOR REVENGE AT WASPS

JAMES NOT AFRAID OF PHIL AS PAIR INDULGE
IN BIG MATCH BANTER

He will be one of the smallest men in a Cherry and White shirt on Sunday, but will carry with him the greatest levels of expectation.

As a seriously genuine match-winning threat, James Simpson-Daniel has learned the precious art of being able to look after himself, but he took his life in his hands even before Gloucester had uttered the words 'Heineken Cup' in anger this week by entering into a verbal confrontation with one of the bigger members of the side.

He offered the sort of comeback to a barbed Phil Vickery comment only those people who have the ability to run very quickly dare risk – the sort not printable in a family newspaper – but it emphasised Gloucester's relaxed off-field approach to their task in downing the form team in the country.

As the leading try scorer in this season's European Cup – Simpson-Daniel managed six tries in the pool stages – the winger called 'Princess Precious' will lead Nigel Melville's attacking options in a contest almost too tight to call against the reigning Zurich Premiership champions.

But he will go into the biggest encounter of Gloucester's season with only one full game behind him in seven weeks – 30 fleeting minutes for England apart – which means he is hardly at the sharp end of his form just when he needs it most.

"I don't want to talk this game up as being a different level from the Premiership," Simpson-Daniel said of the magnitude of the occasion.

"We are looking at every game as a knockout game. If we lose, that's it; it is as simple as that.

"But it does feel different because it's Wasps and they beat us on the final day of last season.

"We can have that rivalry in the back of our heads but we cannot take it out on to the pitch because we have to go out and play the way we normally do.

"I have had some pretty bad days in my career but the game against Wasps was almost blurred.

"It was just unbelievably hard to take. They deserved to win and we played badly, but I certainly found it extremely tough at the time.

"We had the whole circumstances of the points difference, of finishing top of the table and this will be the same, live on TV, a knock-out game with a lot at stake.

"For me, if we win at the weekend, it will certainly be one of the biggest victories we have had, particularly if you consider the history of Gloucester versus Wasps and what has happened between us."

If Gloucester are to emerge from the Causeway Stadium with a defining victory, they are almost certain to require a piece of attacking genius from their little maestro.

He will be by some distance their most creative attacking threat and will be hoping for some room and a slice of possession during the chess match.

However, Simpson-Daniel is aware that opportunities will be at a premium, increasing the pressure on both sides.

"We know we are not going to get double figure chances against sides in European rugby and for us to go through, we have to take our chances," he said.

"Our decisions have to be effective and we need to make the most of our opportunities with the ball.

"We cannot afford to mess up once because if we do, we will lose. A missed tackle or a missed chance could cost us the game.

"We can analyse them all we want but on the day we will need something a little bit extra to go through.

"In the past, we have had the Munster games that were massive, but this is right up there and even bigger.

"This is the biggest of the lot, we know that and we cannot wait for the chance."

And with that, Simpson-Daniel and Vickery continued their running spat with big grins on their faces.

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