

# THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, APRIL 10, 2004

## GLOUCESTER RUGBY

### WASPS BIDDING TO DISCARD THEIR UNWANTED CUP RECORD

Wasps will make history if they beat Gloucester in an all-English European showdown – and finally discard their status as Heineken Cup under-achievers.

Lawrence Dallaglio and company have won five major trophies – two league titles, two English knockout cups and last season's Parker Pen Challenge Cup – since the Heineken Cup was launched eight years ago.

But the nearest they have come to conquering Europe was in 1998 and 2000, when their Heineken Cup hopes disappeared at the quarter-final stage both times.

Wasps have played 36 games in the competition, losing more than a third of those encounters, and rugby director Warren Gatland concedes it is time they delivered.

"The Heineken Cup is a competition in which Wasps are the first to admit they have not performed that well," said Gatland.

"We certainly have not achieved what we've been capable of doing.

"We have let ourselves down in the past, but now we've qualified from the pool stages, we are desperate to progress beyond the quarter-finals.

"There is a lot of expectation on us after what we've done over the last 12 months, and we don't want to let ourselves down again.

"Having home advantage is a big plus, and it could make all the difference because there is a lot of history between us and Gloucester. We know each other so well," he added.

"We would have preferred a team from a different country, so that the side and their fans would have had further to travel and the players would not be so familiar with our ground.

"It is going to be an extremely tough game, but I guess on the positive side, at least an English team will go through to the semi-finals."

Gatland has retained the side that thumped Zurich Premiership rivals Northampton 31-5 last weekend.

Perhaps the only unknown factor about Sunday's contest is how French referee Joel Jutge will perform.

Jutge has sufficient experience – he controlled the 2001 Heineken Cup final between Leicester and Munster in Cardiff – but Gloucester's sensible request for an English referee to take charge this weekend was ignored.

Wycombe's compact Causeway Stadium will be packed to the rafters for the first English quarter-final clash since Wasps were beaten by Northampton at Franklin's Gardens four years ago.

JC