

THE CITIZEN

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GLOUCESTER ARE RIPPED APART

DALLAGLIO'S MEN ARE ON COURSE FOR A DOUBLE

They might burn effigies of him in the dark recesses of the Kingsholm Shed and all manner of opponents may make any number of illegal attempts to stop his grubby mitts getting hold of the ball, but it is going to take a seriously hot team to stop Lawrence Dallaglio's Wasps completing a domestic and European double.

This was a Heineken cup dismemberment on the grandest scale, an emphatic endorsement of Wasps' collective forward muscle, super-sharp brain-power, claustrophobic defence and clinical finishing that left Gloucester in such a state of confusion and disarray, they were every bit as dismantled as they had been in the Zurich play-off final last season.

In the last two major meetings between the clubs – Gloucester's defeat in the Premiership apart this season – Wasps have won by a staggering 73-6 scoreline and Nigel Melville was forced to admit his former club were at least 20 points better than his present one.

Dallaglio and his chums controlled everything of any importance virtually throughout – their platform was based on a ludicrously high level of possession and quality field position, and their mastery of the contact area and driving line-out worked superbly well, to allow them a blanket dominance of the entire shooting match. They also enjoyed the majority of the good fortune from French referee Joel Jutge, particularly at the breakdown, where his Gallic enthusiasm for the whistle left Gloucester clutching for clues at his interpretation of the contact area as they found themselves continually in his bad books.

Dean Ryan, one of Gloucester's leading lights, was far from pleased and fumed : "There was a 10 or 15 minute period when things worked against us. It was a scattergun situation and we didn't know what to do. There was a lot of confusion out there.

"We tried to speak to him at half-time but he refused to talk."

It was not until Dallaglio himself was yellow carded for dispensing a dose of summary justice on the hoof at a ruck in the second half that the tide threatened to change.

Dallaglio thought he had been harshly treated; his coach Warren Gatland didn't agree, but Wasps operated just as efficiently without their talisman and it emphasised the difference between the two teams.

Gloucester were already more than a mountain behind by that stage and their failure to offer the hint of a threat with a man advantage only served to underline the utter control Wasps enjoyed.

Despite slamming themselves into the contact area and scrummaging powerfully, Gloucester muddled their way through after a biting opening quarter.

But Wasps were as sharp as a tack – they do not shy away from the meatier side of the game either – and although they had a good deal of help with their second try, oozed control, threat and composure after scoring a legitimate try of some quality at the end of the first quarter.

Rob Howley, sharper than Andy Gomarsall at scrum-half, swapped a one-two with Stuart Abbott down the short side to race in and score after Trevor Leota had sorted out a malfunctioning maul.

With the relentless Paul Volley and outstanding Leota dragging Gloucester out of their comfort zone – Wasps streamed from ruck to ruck in a draining sequence of play – Gloucester simply had no avenue into the game and without the basic requirements of the ball and territory, ran aground spectacularly under such continued pressure.

Despite a ferocious effort from Phil Vickery, and a typically athletic performance from Alex Brown in the second row and some neat patches from Henry Paul in midfield, Gloucester were a distant second best.

To be fair and despite the problems, they were still in the game as they approached half-time. But when Judge awarded Wasps a penalty try after Gloucester had illegally got bodies into a rolling maul to haul it down, their hopes plummeted.

Unless he had warned Jake Boer and his men a penalty try was a serious option beforehand, it was a harsh decision to say the least and the belief literally drained out of Gloucester at finding themselves unexpectedly 14-3 behind.

And when Chris Fortey was sinbinned for an offence at a driving maul – it was not totally obvious what the combustible hooker had done to warrant a card – Gloucester were down to 14 men and on the back foot.

With the half-time whistle refusing to come, Wasps took advantage and collected their third try.

Simon Shaw was driven close to the line from a catch and drive but it was Dallaglio who emerged with the score.

At 19-3 adrift, Gloucester desperately needed a good start to the second half but it was Wasps who started with more urgency and greater belief.

It took them only four minutes to go in again after Shaw's telescopic reach claimed another damaging line-out. Fraser Waters came on a powerful break that got him beyond the first line of defence and Leota, that Samoan neck on legs, barged over to score.

Dallaglio then disappeared for his swinging right hander, but Wasps closed up, denied Gloucester room and tackled themselves into the ground.

We saw only minimal threat posed by James Simpson-Daniel and Marcel Garvey – Gloucester's chief attacking weapons – simply because they lacked any quality possession and despite the fact Wasps rocked onto the ropes for 10 minutes, swept up brilliantly.

And they had the emphatic final word when replacement Ayoola Erinle picked off Paul's pass and sprinted clear. Boer lay on the ground battered and beaten, his mates having given their all, but it was nowhere near enough.

JC