

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1903

SATURDAY'S FOOTBALL

GLOUCESTER v. DEVONPORT ALBION

Gloucester's splendid performance at Devonport on Saturday came as a welcome surprise to the club's supporters. The Albion had been going so strongly at home this season that the City's chances of escaping defeat were not particularly bright. The visitors, however, played up in fine style, and succeeded in making a creditable draw.

Commenting on the game, our Plymouth correspondent says : "From start to finish it was mud-larking, good football being impossible. The whole going was like a mud-lake within a few minutes of the start, and combination was useless, but an interesting game resulted.

The Albion were undoubtedly the better side, and were attacking for a large portion of the game. Gloucester owed their draw entirely to the grand defence shown by the back division, notably Romans, Hudson, Vears, and Morgan. The play was chiefly confined to the forwards.

Although not equal to Albion in the scrum the Gloucester vanguard's display in the loose was highly meritorious, Goulding, Hawker, Purton, and Vears being best of a hard working eight. They depended entirely on footwork, whilst Albion on several occasions tried to open the game, but the ball was in such a greasy state that little or no ground was gained by these manœuvres."

The "Western Independent" remarks that considering the state of the ground the game was a wonderfully good one. After about ten minutes' play the ground was in a terrible condition, and most of the players were covered from head to foot with mud, so that mistakes were excusable. But they were comparatively few, and although the game resolved itself principally into a forward contest, it was nevertheless worth watching.

The run of the play favoured Albion, whose forwards did splendidly on the heavy ground, and held the pull over their rivals, who, however, put in clever dribbling at times. With Albion controlling the scrums, the ball came out more often to the home halves, who were thus enabled to set their third line in motion.

But open play, although indulged in occasionally, was not the game to play under such conditions, and was not tried too often. When it was, however, it proved to be of considerable assistance, the Albion 'quarters as a rule making good use of their opportunities. But try as they would, they found the Gloucester defence an impregnable barrier, and although Albion were the better team, the visitors' defence was so sound that the home team could not pierce it. On a dry ground possibly the tale might have been a different one to tell, but as it was the result was a true criterion, defence prevailing against attack.

Individually, Vivyan was in surprising form, and was certainly the most prominent player on the field. He dodged and kicked in magnificent style, and on his day's play could not be left out of the county team. Unfortunately, however, he is erratic in his form, and this no doubt accounts for his being left out. Skinner was also in good trim, but Hoskings was not too sure. Clarke did a lot of useful work, and required a deal of watching. Coombes and Beaton had more opportunities than the opposing pair, and thus shone better, but Morgan and Stephens both did their best behind a practically beaten pack, and accomplished a good deal under the circumstances. Williams, Willcocks, Gilbert, and Evans were the most prominent of a spanking set of forwards, Williams especially being in International form.

Of the visitors' vanguard, Goulding, Hawker, Purton, and Vears were continually to the fore, Goulding particularly playing grandly. The 'Cestrian three-quarters, as before mentioned, were splendid in defence, but their attacking powers were not so evident. Hudson was the best of the line, Vears and Smith being not far behind. Foulkes also did well, and no fault could really be found with any of the quartette.

The opposing backs were in excellent trim. Romans had more work to do, and came out of the ordeal with considerable credit. Irvin was as usual safe, and at the same time brilliant.

"Argus" ("Football Herald") says "Albion versus Gloucester – and the mud" fitly describes the contest, in which what would have been a fine exhibition of football was spoiled by the prevailing conditions. Five-sixths of the match through the locals were heeled cleanly[sic], and the halves sending out nicely, but it was utterly impossible by skill to command success.

The home team got within striking distance, only again and again to be baffled by the ball suddenly performing some unexpected trick in the way of slipping, or rather shooting, out of the grasp of the holder. The three-quarters showed really splendid resource, but it was all to no avail, and by half-time everyone had settled down to the inevitable draw – bar flukes.

The referee (Mr. Ben Lewis, Pontypridd) was distinctly smart, but on one occasion, ten minutes from the end, a Gloucester knock-on occurred, and Vivyan took it at full speed, all over a scorer. He had only the full-back to race across to get in at the corner, and it is certain that it would be impossible to have stopped him. The referee, however, not noticing Vivyan shooting through, blew his whistle, consequent on the knock-on, and so the chance was nullified.

Vivyan was easily the best 'quarter on the field, his all-round work being excellent. In fact it may be said, without any fear of contradiction, that in every respect Albion were better and yet they could not score. Passing play was absolutely at a discount owing to the dreadful state of the ground.

At full-back Romans kicked well, but was eclipsed by Irvin, who fetched a great length, and gave his forwards heaps of help. Hudson, for Gloucester, was the only 'quarter up to Albion's standard, and he displayed plenty of dash.

I pitied Albion's halves; it would have been just as well to have played the "goose game," as the other pair did, and not attempted to pass out. Opening out the game simply meant giving the opposition an opportunity for a kick away and follow up after the inevitable slip upon transfers. One of the 'Cestrians – evidently a bit of a humorist – observed that the state of things were all against them.

Had the ground and ball been decent, something like half-a-dozen tries would have been scored, and by the side that showed real skill and finesse under such adverse conditions. Folks may say : "If the weather had been dry!" Just so! But the "if" on this occasion was such an obvious obstacle to good footer that it was patent to every onlooker that there was no comparison in the abilities of the sides.

Forward, Gloucester made their best fight, but even here they were not as good as the home brigade. Albion heeled four times out of five, and were just as good in the rushes, Williams leading the way in style. Goulding was most prominent of an energetic octette, and to them, aided by the circumstances, the draw must be ascribed.

"Whacker" Smith did some smart things, and the 'quarters generally worked hard, but were obviously not a special combining lot. In conclusion, I have no desire to depreciate Gloucester's powers, but Albion were distinctly unfortunate in having to play a game governed by such conditions – these conditions proved Gloucester's greatest aid.

Another "Herald" critic remarks : For a game played in mud it was an interesting contest. The Albion forwards were superior in the scrums, and sent the ball out, but in the loose rushes Gloucester gained most ground.

This was a style of game which seemed to suit them best, and they certainly made the most of it. In the tight scrums and at half Gloucester did not hold their own, and at three-quarter they proved quite capable of paying back all they received in the way of punting from the home quartette.

The two backs had plenty to do, and they performed well. Romans appeared to have lost none of his old cleverness, but his kicking was not quite so long as Irvin's. The home back had to play his part under very difficult conditions to those of last Saturday, but in all his movements he showed that his good form was maintained.

The home centres had the bulk of the outside work for the homers, but to judge their efforts on such a day would be unreasonable. Passing was as uncertain as it well could be, and it was remarkable that the fielding was so successful as it was. Gloucester defended sturdily, and repulsed attack after attack on the part of the homers.

RESULT :

Gloucester Nil
Devon Albion Nil