



Vol 1/14
£1.50

SALE v
GLOUCESTER
Saturday 12th April 1997

**FEW SHOCKS
FOR THE BOKS**





If there were to be a prize for the team that made the most improvement during the season, then there could be few who could challenge our West Country visitors today. If we look back at the early autumn, Gloucester had made a disastrous start to the season, beginning with the mistake of fielding effectively a second XV at The Stoop and getting a 75-19 drubbing for their pains. Sale's win by 16-12 followed at Kingsholm and the next few weeks that brought further defeats by Bath, Leicester and Saracens meant five straight losses and apparently the prospect of struggling against relegation.

The turning point came on October 6th when the Cherry and Whites were host to current leaders Wasps, who went to Kingsholm with five wins under their belt, including away at Bath and home to Leicester. Gloucester turned the form book upside down to win by 28-23 and set off on a run of victories which, instead of staring relegation in the face, has brought the club on the verge of qualifying for Europe. Add the fact that they made it through to the semi-finals of the Pilkington Cup, then the club's resurgence under coach Richard Hill has been quite remarkable.

Sale supporters who have watched the four matches between our two sides since we got back into the first division will know that for some strange reason, Gloucester have played better against us at Heywood Road than at Kingsholm. So far it is four wins out of four to Sale, but I expect us to have a very hard encounter this afternoon with the resurgent Gloucester pack, prompted by Mark Mapletoft at fly-half, sure to bring us a very hard and uncompromising encounter. If Gloucester could start a season in the form that they seem to complete it, then they would be challenging for titles themselves and no doubt this consistency is one of the main aims for Hill and his colleagues.

Rather like ourselves, Gloucester have few big names in their ranks and make up for the lack of star players with guts, teamwork and playing for each other that only come from having a significant number of home-grown players, it must have been a big blow to lose the recently capped Richard West to the lures of Ashley Levett's monies at Richmond, leaving Scottish flanker Ian Smith as the only current international on their books. No big names have joined the club and the side that has been doing so well in the last few months is essentially drawn from the same squad that struggled right at the beginning of the season. Recent weeks has brought some disruption for Gloucester, with the home game against Leicester in the League scheduled for March 22nd postponed, apparently because of the number of players from Leicester who were representing England in the World Cup Sevens in Hong Kong. Meeting the Tigers in the semis on March 29th meant the game planned against Bath had to be delayed and like Sale and probably most clubs, our visitors will have a heavy list of fixtures to complete before the season is out.

Gloucester have been ever present in Courage League Division One since the Leagues began in season 1987-88. They finished a creditable fifth on that occasion, while they have twice been pipped at the post for the Championship title. In 1988-89, they were runners-up behind Bath, when their 19-9 defeat at the Recreation ground was a crucial four-pointer, while the following season it was Wasps who beat them to the top spot. This title race was much tighter, with Wasps just winning through by one point over the Cherry and Whites. Again crucially, Wasps won the head-to-head game, by 19-4 and that one result will have ultimately divided the winner and runners-up positions.



HOTLINE
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SALE
Blue & White

GLOUCESTER
Cherry & White

15	JIM MALLINDER *	Full Back	AUDLEY LUMSDEN	16
14	CHRIS YATES	Right Wing	MIKE PETERS	15
13	STEVE VERBICKAS	Centre	CRAIG EMMERSON	14
12	JOS BAXENDELL	Centre	MARTIN ROBERTS	12
11	JOHN O'REILLY	Left Wing	MIKE LLOYD	11
10	SIMON MANNIX	Outside Half	MARK MAPLETOFT	10
9	DEWI MORRIS (I)	Scrum Half	SCOTT BENTON	9
1	PHIL WINSTANLEY	Prop	TONY WINDO	1
2	STEVE DIAMOND	Hooker	PHIL GREENING (I)	2
3	ANDREW SMITH	Prop	ANDY DEACON	3
4	DAVID BALDWIN	Lock	ROB FIDLER	4
5	JOHN FOWLER	Lock	DAVE SIMS *	5
6	DAVID ERSKINE	Flanker	ANDY STANLEY	6
7	JOHN MITCHELL	Flanker	NATHAN CARTER	7
8	DYLAN O'GRADY	No.8	SIMON DEVEREUX	8

16		Replacements	
17			
18			
19			
20			
21			

Referee

Touch Judges

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