

From The Citizen, Thursday 10th March 1921:

FOURTH TIME CHAMPIONS

BRILLIANT GLOUCESTERSHIRE TRIUMPH

LEICESTERSHIRE PLUCKY BUT OUTCLASSED

Regarded in the West as second only in importance to an International encounter, remarkable interest was centred in the meeting of Gloucestershire and Leicestershire in the final for the County Rugby Championship at Kingsholm this afternoon. This was the fifth occasion Gloucestershire had figured in the final, and the third time the event had been decided at the City Club's headquarters. In 1902 the Westerners failed against Durham in their endeavour to secure honours, but no mistake was made eight years later in the match with Yorkshire, the Northerners being defeated handsomely by 23 points to nil. Twice since that great achievement Gloucestershire had annexed the championship – at Carlisle against Cumberland in 1913, and again last season at Bradford, when Yorkshire were victims for the second time.

To-day new opponents were met in Leicestershire, who made their initial appearance in the competition as an individual County; previously they had been allied with the Midland Counties, to which combination they contributed the major portion of the Fifteen. What were the chances of the rival contestants for the 1921 Championship? Gloucestershire on their form in the group matches, and in the semi-final against Surrey, and the fact that the County were playing at home, were generally considered as possessing a fine chance of repeating last year's brilliant triumph over Yorkshire; but Leicestershire were regarded as anything but mean opponents. Both Counties had the advantage of combination, for whereas the Gloucestershire selection consisted of nine Gloucester City players and six from Bristol, the visiting Fifteen was composed of practically the Leicester Club team.

In reaching the final Gloucestershire had the stiffest proposition, for Devon, Somerset and Cornwall are among the strongest of the Counties, and Surrey, with the call on International players of England, Scotland and Ireland, presented a stiff obstacle. The Westerners, however, Successfully disposed of all four of their opponents, the hardest tussle taking place at Camborne, where Cornwall were only beaten in the last few minutes. Leicestershire had also won all their preliminary games, but the Midlanders found tough opponents in Yorkshire, and in more than one quarter they were regarded as a trifle fortunate in surviving that test.

Any doubt as to whether the playing of the match in mid-week would detract interest was quickly removed. Even before the date and venue were fixed applications for reserved seats poured in from all over the County and outside, and the grand stand was booked out in a day. A second row of seats was provided inside the rails, and these were snapped up rapidly, so that some days before the match all the reserved accommodation was allotted. In expectation of a record crowd, Mr R A Roberts, the County Hon Secretary, conceived the happy idea of improving the field accommodation, and by a process of banking at the Dean's Walk end of the ground and other improvements at various points, it was estimated extra provision was made

for some 3,000 spectators. This work had Mr Roberts' personal supervision, and was undoubtedly of great advantage.

It was hoped that the presence of the Prince of Wales might have been secured at the match, but a prior engagement prevented this. The Civic authorities of towns in the County, however, lent their patronage, and the Mayors of Gloucester and Cheltenham and the Lord Mayor of Bristol all booked seats and intimated their intention of being present.

The day turned out gorgeously fine, quite summer-like, and from the point of view of the spectator the conditions were perfect. The gates at Kingsholm were opened two hours before the time fixed for the kick-off, but keen enthusiasts were there waiting for admission, and a constant stream of visitors followed. The Wagon Works Silver Band was in attendance and played popular selections of music during the waiting interval. At 2.30 the enclosure was well filled, but the crowd was considerably augmented before the start, and the attendance must have reached some 12,000 when the rival Fifteens took the field.

The Teams

Gloucestershire fielded as selected, but there were two important late-hour changes in the ranks of the visitors. Neither A M Smallwood (the English International wing), or Norman Coates (centre), were able to play, and the vacancies were filled by J R Markham and F Mellor respectively. These alterations weakened Leicester behind the scrum.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Back: *R C W Pickles (Bristol) (capt)

Three-quarters: T Spoor (Bristol), *L J Corbett (Bristol), *****Stanley Cook (Gloucester and Cambridge University), and H Feltham (Bristol)

Half-backs: *W Dix and *T Millington (Gloucester)

Forwards: ***G Holford (Gloucester and England), T Voyce (Gloucester and England), **S Smart (Gloucester and England), *F W Ayliffe, **A Hall, J Harris (Gloucester), *J S Tucker and P J Williams (Bristol)

* Played v Yorkshire 1920.

** Played v Cumberland 1913 and Yorkshire 1920

*** Played v Yorkshire 1910 and 1920

***** Played v Cumberland 1913

LEICESTERSHIRE

Back: J Wilkinson (Leicester)

Three-quarters: E Haselmer (Leicester), J R Markham (Leicester), P W Lawrie (Leicester and England), and F Mellor (Leicester)

Half-backs: G W Wood and F M Taylor (Leicester and England)

Forwards: G Ward, F Taylor (Leicester and England), W J Allen, C W Cross, D J Norman, W Buckler, J Wickson, and E Ward (Leicester)

Referee: Mr Helliwell (Yorkshire)

The Game

Percy Lawrie led the Leicestershire team into the field punctually to time, followed a minute later by Reg Pickles and the home players. Gloucestershire lost the toss, and Holford kicked off against the strong sun, and there being no reply Gloucestershire gained a footing in their opponents' half. From the first scrum Dix got the ball away beautifully, and Millington, Cook and Corbett handled nicely. The latter gave the "dummy" to Lawrie and passed to Spoor, who, however, was well tackled. The ball getting loose, a visitor picked up and punted to touch at the centre. Immediately after there was another clever bout of passing amongst the home backs. Cook cut through smartly, but was collared from behind when looking dangerous. A penalty to Leicester saw the visitors find touch at the home 25 flag. Gloucester cleared nicely, but for off-side there was another penalty against the home county. Lawrie took a shot for goal, but it failed, and Cook punted out to touch.

Cook came into the picture just after with a fine run and pass to Corbett, who yielded to Spoor. The wing man dashed right away and went over the line after a 40 yards' run, but he was called back for a forward transfer. On resuming Dix and Millington opened out cleverly, and Feltham ran hard and cross-kicked over the line, but a visitor kicked dead.

Following the drop out, Gloucester were awarded a free, but though Pickles made a fine attempt for goal, the ball went just wide of the posts. A rush and kick by Leicester on the restart sent the ball past Pickles, but the captain got back and put in a clever clearance. Inside their own 25 Gloucestershire started passing, and Spoor made a good effort on the right. His kick, however, was well taken by Wilkinson, who punted to touch at midfield. Fast play ensued at the centre until Leicester broke away. Pickles, however, robbed them of the ball and returned finely to touch. A brilliant dash by Stanley Cook was loudly applauded, the City player shaking off a couple of would-be tacklers and getting in his kick when sorely pressed.

In subsequent play Leicester twice got the ball out, and after neat passing Markham punted high, but found Pickles safe. Gloucestershire replied, Dix, Millington and Corbett passing neatly, but Spoor, when he received, stepped into touch, and the movement ended. Using their feet well, Leicester gave trouble in a loose dribble, but they were eventually checked. Then from a line-out Hall served his backs, but the ball went astray. Taylor picked up and punted to Pickles, and a kicking duel ensued, ending in the ball going to touch inside the Leicester half. Here Dix received from a scrum, and fed Millington; and Feltham receiving from Cook the Bristol man made a desperate attempt to beat the defence, but fell victim to Wilkinson and another.

There was spell of even play after this, but Gloucestershire were clearly on top. Dix again opened out in clever style, and Millington taking a low pass in wonderful style, there was a nice opening. Cook ran strongly, but when within half a dozen yards of the line he was pounced upon from behind. He, however, let the ball go, and Feltham gathering neatly ran over and behind the posts amidst loud cheers. Pickles added the goal points.

Leicester restarted, and a forward was prominent with a strong run, which took the visitors inside the home quarter. Harris led a fine rush out, and Leicester were lucky in effecting a save. Taking full advantage of the wind, Leicester did some big kicking which enabled them to hold their own territorially for a time. Gloucestershire, however, with good back work, set up another attack, but the passing went wrong with the men well placed. Leicester, by the aid of Mellor, sent the ball to Spors, who replied with a fine run down touch and kick to Wilkinson, who had to punt straight to touch. From the throw-out Williams gathered, and with a strong dash reached Wilkinson. Side stepping the full-back cleverly, the Bristolian crossed the line with a good try, which Pickles converted with a fine kick. A ten-points' lead for Gloucestershire was thoroughly deserved on the play.

Resuming, Spors and Pickles came in for hearty cheering for some fine work under difficulties and Holford and Tucker also shone in loose rushes. Mistakes in handling spoiled a couple of promising movements by Gloucestershire, and it also enabled the visitors to maintain a footing in the home quarter. Spors and Cook came to the relief of their side when matters looked dangerous, especially following a clever solo dribble by one of the Leicester forwards. The game eventually got out to the centre, where Dix snapped an opponents' pass and went clean away to the full-back. He then passed to Tucker, but Haselmere proved too fast and overhauled his man. After this Corbett forced a minor with a splendid effort to drop a goal.

Twice after the drop-out the home halves opened out brilliantly, and all went well till the critical moment; then a knock-on or forward pass occurred. These mistakes lost two certain tries. Gloucestershire continued to attack in fine style. Stanley Cook, taking advantage of a wild pass by F M Taylor, raced to Wilkinson, and waited to give the ball to Feltham with an open field. The pass was given and taken all right, and Feltham went over easily, but the whistle went for a forward pass. Immediately after Feltham was only stopped a yard from the line from a pass from Dix. The interval was then sounded.

HALF TIME;

GLOUCESTERSHIRE.....2 goals
LEICESTERSHIRE.....Nil

Leicestershire restarted, and early on Ayliffe broke away straight up the centre of the field. Voyce was in attendance, but the International failed to accept the transfer. Gloucestershire rushed well and made good headway, but they were sent back to the centre. Here Dix got the ball away sweetly to Millington, who sent to Corbett. The latter missed Cook, and transferred wide to Feltham, who being hemmed in passed to Cook. The latter seized upon an opening at once, and, never being touched, scored behind the posts for Pickles to again convert. This try came within four minutes of the resumption.

On the restart Tucker showed up with a lovely dribble, which took Gloucestershire beyond mid-field. A passing movement broke down at Corbett, who passed behind Cook and Feltham; and Leicester cleared from a dangerous situation. A fine bout of passing by the Leicester backs ended in Haselmere sending to Pickles in the home 25. From this point the visitors attacked resolutely, and from an opening by Fred Taylor,

Markham should have scored, but he knocked-on badly with the line at his mercy. Smart headed a dribble out, and Wilkinson being collared, centre play followed. A clever run by Corbett appeared likely to secure a perfect opening, but the Leicester tackling was great, and Feltham could not get through. Millington from the next scrum whipped out a sharp pass to Feltham, but the ball was intercepted by an opponent, who made off and kicked down the field. Corbett, however, got back and easily cleared.

Gloucestershire were now doing all the attacking and a brilliant series of exchanges by the backs looked promising. A splendid tackle of Corbett, however, saved the situation. In the next minute, however, Gloucestershire added to their lead. Voyce, gathering in the open, started passing, and the ball being got out quickly to Feltham, the right wing raced over and behind the posts with his second try. Pickles kept up his record by again converting, the ball hitting the upright and going over.

Leicester were a well-beaten side now on points, but they played up pluckily. Corbett was off the field for some few minutes, but Gloucestershire continued to monopolise the play. Dix and Spoons combined in a pretty bit of work down touch which put Gloucestershire in a good position. Holford and a colleague missed a soft try through over-running the ball, but a little later Hall opened out and after clever passing and inter-passing Stanley Cook scored the fifth try. Pickles missed the goal points, a Leicester man apparently touching the ball in its transit over the bar. On the drop out Leicester made a brief incursion to the home half, but the Gloucestershire backs came away with lovely passing, only to see Spoons pushed out of play.

A well-conceived attack by Gloucestershire had the defence apparently beaten, but there was muddling at the critical moment. An interception by Leicester changed the venue, but the visitors were not allowed to stay long. Dix got the ball clean away, and Millington, Corbett, Cook, and Spoons handled in turn. Lawrie, however, effected a grand tackle and saved a try. Subsequent play was keen, Leicester putting in some good work. The Gloucestershire backs, however, were too good. There was another perfect piece of handling initiated by Dix, but with only Wilkinson to beat, Corbett made a poor pass. Leicester were hard pressed for a time, but some good kicking gained relief. Dix, beating the opposing halves, started Ayliffe on the move, but the pass was ruled forward. Williams shone in a dashing burst which gave Gloucestershire an advantage, and following an opening by Hall, and in which Dix took part, Corbett registered the sixth try. Pickles failed at goal.

Despite the heavy score against them, Leicester resumed pluckily, and they attacked with a loose rush. From a scrum close in Lawrie was given possession, and with a neat kick the visiting captain dropped a goal. The success of the visitors was very warmly applauded.

The end was near, but there was time for another score, and this was credited to Spoons after a clever individual effort, in the course of which he beat several opponents very cheaply. Pickles kicked his fifth goal.

RESULT

GLOUCESTERSHIRE.....5 goals, 2 tries (31 pts)
LEICESTERSHIRE.....1 goal (d) (4 pts)

Remarks

To the Champions – worthy of the honour in every respect – congratulations all round. It was a triumph more pronounced than the most optimistic supporter of the Gloucestershire team anticipated, but the heavy score did not exaggerate the run of the game. Leicestershire played up pluckily, but they were overpowered by a side far too clever in every department. It commenced forward, and went right through to full back, where Pickles played a game right up to International standard. The captain was never at fault in fielding, his kicking even against the stiff wind was well-judged, and the few occasions on which he was pressed he cleared in a style that was the admiration of the crowd. To complete a fine afternoon's work Pickles accomplished a capital goal-kicking record – five out of seven attempts – and he has every reason to be proud of his personal achievements and those of the gallant team under his command.

The Gloucestershire forwards gave a brilliant all-round display. In the scrums Holford proved his worth as a hooker, and rarely this season has a pack done so much clean heeling as to-day. The International kept his forwards well in hand, and the eight worked together as one man. There were many fine individual efforts – notably by Holford, Williams, Voyce, and Harris – but all gave of their best, and the standard reached this afternoon equalled anything seen in either of the other Championship matches.

At half-back, Dix and Millington worked harmoniously together, and nothing better in the way of opening out could have been wished for. Dix outpointed Wood time and again, and the City scrum-worker initiated passing movements from almost impossible positions. He brought the reverse pass into play like the born tactician he is and one or two of his breaks-away were particularly clever. Of Millington, one cannot pay the Gloucesterian a better compliment than to say he fitted in admirably with his partner. All sorts of passes he accepted with a perfection that could not be improved upon, and he judged his transfers with equal facility. It was a notable day for Millington, and he fully justified the confidence reposed in him.

The Gloucestershire three-quarters enjoyed a real good time. They were given chances innumerable, and though there were occasions when the attacks went wrong, much fine work was got through. The straight running and passing were admirably carried out, and the Leicester backs were kept busily employed in checking the repeated onslaughts on their line. Stanley Cook and Corbett were brilliant in the centre, and Spoors and Feltham combined with a success which is measured in the try getting record.

Leicestershire undoubtedly suffered through the absence of Smallwood and Coates, but the presence of these players could not have affected the result. The visiting forwards were seen at their best in the loose, Taylor, Ward, and Norman being seen to advantage. Wood and Taylor displayed a good understanding, but the pair did not get the chances that fell to Dix and Millington. Lawrie did an immense amount of tackling and saving for his side, and his efforts kept the scoring down. Markham was useful, and Mellor and Haselmere, on the respective wings, were good in parts.

Wilkinson rendered useful service at full back. He had a very warm time of it, and could not be blamed for the heavy score against him.