



# Toulouse on the march

The co-operative Championship

**Featherstone Rovers 24**  
**Toulouse Olympique 26**

Dave Storey at Bigfella's Stadium

**T**OULOUSE continued their surge by staging a magnificent fightback to wreck Featherstone's 100 per cent league record.

Championship leaders Rovers looked to be heading for a ninth successive league victory when they led 24-10 early in the second half, but the French side turned the game on its head in the last 30 minutes.

Toulouse's third straight win, and their second at Featherstone in nine months, underlined the fact that they are a major force. Even without five first-choice players, they looked an impressive unit, well marshalled by Aussie half back Nathan Wynn.

Their tactics were spot on in the second half when they monopolised possession and kept Rovers under sustained pressure, culminating in Vincent Duport's winning try three minutes from time.

Man of the Match Wynn said: "Our defence was excellent. We had good line speed and I thought we really bashed them."

"There was too much sloppy ball control in the first half. We made too many mistakes and gave away too many penalties."

"But we knew if we could complete our sets in the second period and hold the ball we would win."

Proud Toulouse coach Gilles Dumas said: "We are getting stronger all the time and showing we can win against tough opponents. Our performance against Featherstone showed that."

"At half-time, I told the players they were perfectly capable of winning if they stuck to their task and that's exactly what they did."

Featherstone coach Daryl Powell felt there were lessons to be learned after Toulouse adapted better to the wet conditions.

"We have to play better in poor conditions," he said. "We made too many errors and put ourselves under pressure."

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that we didn't really get field position in the second period.

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"Overall it was just a disappoint-

ing display. We need to learn from it and move on."

Rovers started badly with a forward pass under their own posts straight from the kick-off. Toulouse capitalised when Nathan Wynn sent in Yoan Tisseyre but Featherstone quickly bounced back with two tries in four minutes to

lead 12-4.

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The visitors replied when clever play by Sylvain Houles and Rory Bromley saw Sebastian Planas cross

**PICTURE:** www.rhphotos.com

| FEATHERSTONE     | TOUNOUSE               |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Ian Hardman      | 7 Rory Bromley         |
| Zak Hardaker     | 6 Andre Olari          |
| Jesse Joe Parker | 6 Sebastian Planas     |
| Danny Allan      | 6 Vincent Duport       |
| Tommy Saxton     | 6 Carlos Mendes Varala |
| Kyle Briggs      | 6 Sylvain Houles       |
| Liam Finn        | 7 Nathan Wynn          |
| Tony Tonks       | 6 Brendan Worth        |
| Ben Kaye         | 6 Matthew Griffith     |
| Stuart Dickens   | 7 Yoan Tisseyre        |
| Dave Manning     | 6 Antoni Maria         |
| Janne Field      | 7 Eric Anselme         |
| Matty Dale       | 7                      |
| Subs             | Subs                   |
| Andy Kain        | 7 Tim Wynn             |
| Ross Dvority     | 6 Keiri Larroyer       |
| Ian Morrison     | 6 Tell Peto            |
| Tim Spears       | 6 Yohann Gigord        |
|                  | 7                      |

T. Hardman 5, 42  
Hardaker 9, 35  
G. Briggs 4/6  
Referee: Warren Turley / HT: 18-10 / Pens 12-11 / Weather: Rain / Sin Bin: None / Sent off: None / MOTM: Nathan Wynn (Toulouse) / Attendance: 2,233 / Match rating: 9/5.

but they fell further behind again five minutes before the break when Finn supplied another slick pass to set up Hardman's second touchdown.

Early in the second half, Toulouse's Planas fumbled Bromley's pass with a try begging and they were made to pay when Andy Kain and Briggs linked to put in teenager for Hardaker for his second try and his eighth in only his fifth first-team appearance.

Briggs kicked his fourth goal to put Rovers 14 points ahead but Toulouse rallied superbly to cut the gap with two tries in three minutes. Martin Mitchell forced his way over from close range before Bromley scored from acting half as Rovers were caught out twice near their own line.

Toulouse applied almost constant pressure for the rest of the game and Rovers did well to hold out as long as they did.

Olympique failed to snap up several chances and Bromby looked a certain scorer until Hardman denied him with a magnificent tackle.

However, Toulouse finally got the breakthrough when Duport went over from Bromley's pass and Wynn added the winning conversion.

There was a minute's applause before the game in memory of Rovers first-team squad member Gareth Swift, who recently died in a road accident.

## Convincing French looked like league leaders on this evidence

IT'S a funny old game, isn't it?

Unbeaten league leaders Toulouse Olympique gave the gallant but unremarkable Featherstone a handsome lead, then spurned half a dozen crystal-clear opportunities to wrap up the points before finally winning the game late.

In the end Featherstone were glad of a bonus point in their hopes to make the end-of-season play-offs.

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But for long stretches of this game you could be forgiven for wondering exactly who were the runaway league leaders.

With the clock ticking down I was planning on writing about how Gilles Dumas and his TOXill men would be heading home for the south of France wondering how on earth they had contrived to lose a game they

had dictated so convincingly, despite seeing their hosts produce some champion-style stuff in the early stages.

When Daryl Powell's men ran the ball in their own red zone in the fashion we might expect to see 70 metres downfield, and scored through Zak Hardaker, when Liam Finn displayed a magician's sleight of hand not once but twice, this looked all over and like business as usual.

But Toulouse had already shown signs of muscling up to the unbeaten leaders in quite unequivocal fashion, Brendan Worth and Matthieu Griffi punching holes in midfield with impressive abandon. They wouldn't let up either.

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LOCKWOOD

in the end Toulouse won despite blowing more surefire chances than a gambler with a stacked deck. Vincent Duport and Seb Planas showed themselves two of the biggest, strongest centres in the division – and Varela Mendes similarly on the wing – and they probably all have hands the size of shovels. They certainly catch the ball like they have shovels instead of hands at times.

The ever-reliable Rory Bromley had looked certain to grab the winner – and if referee Warren Turley had gone to the video official he may have – only to have it ruled out rather hastily. At least Mr Turley was nothing if not consistent. Not always consistently good and he awarded some petty penalties, but consistent nevertheless.

For long enough Toulouse had

looked like coming off worst from his whistle, though both teams could hardly excuse the miserable weather for some of their frankly poor discipline and ball control.

Critically, as the visitors applied a bit more self control and extra appetite for the fray – with the Post Office Road slope and gusty breeze aiding their efforts – Rovers suddenly started giving needless penalties and coughing up cheap possession.

Zak Hardaker's petty arm flapping while in possession was as embarrassing as it was costly. Liam Finn, on the day he was selected as Co-operative Championship Player of the Month, knocked a dolly on at the back of the scrum, Ian Morrison gave a couple of possessions away, and suddenly Featherstone had forgotten how to re-write a script once it wasn't going their way.

That they didn't go behind until very late in the game, in spite of struggling to find form, was down to their complete professionalism.

The defensive line was magnificent at times, Ian Hardman's stop on Bromley reminding me of Kris Radlinski at his best. Despite a size and power battle they struggled to contain, the midfield was never conceded by the Featherstone pack.

They just came second best on the night.

All in all this was another flawed Thursday night offering with too many poor mistakes to be a classic, it was one nevertheless which provided some tremendous viewing.

It also proved once again, as if proof were needed, that this competition is choc-a-bloc with talent, entertainment, and not a few surprises. Magnifique!





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| Iain Morrison 6    | 6 Yohann Gigord           |
| Tim Spears 6       | 7                         |
| T. Hardman 5, 42   | T. Tisseyre 2, Planas 16, |
| Hardaker 9, 35     | Mitchell 48, Bromley 51,  |
| G. Briggs 4/6      | Duport 78. G: N Wynn 3/5. |

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**MATCH ANALYSIS**  
 with League Weekly publisher DAN WYNN  
 LOCKWOOD

results if the opposition don't meet it head on. Ultimately, Rovers didn't – or at least not sufficiently.

In the battle of the playmakers, Nathan Wynn had shown nothing like the craft and guile of Liam Finn who created a couple of gems of tries for Ian Hardman. But Wynn grew in passion and influence as the game grew tighter and more tense, while Finn – and not a few of his comrades – failed to impose themselves.

In the end Toulouse won despite blowing more surefire chances than a gambler with a stacked deck.

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