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EUROPEAN RUGBY
CHALLENGE
CUP

BILBAO FINALS 2018



V



SAN MAMES STADIUM, BILBAO
FRIDAY 11 MAY 2018, 21.00

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EPCR WELCOME MESSAGE

Welcome to the splendid setting of Bilbao as the 2018 Finals weekend gets underway at the state-of-the-art San Mamés Stadium with two clubs who have contributed much to the storied history of European tournaments.

Both Cardiff Blues and Gloucester Rugby already have Challenge Cup final wins on their roll of honour. Gethin Jenkins collected the first piece of European silverware for a Welsh region in front of a record attendance against RC Toulon in 2010, whilst Gloucester are looking to match Harlequins' record by winning the trophy for a third time this evening in what is their third appearance at this showpiece match in four seasons.

Congratulations to both the Blues and Gloucester on their qualification for next season's Champions Cup, but even without them, the Challenge Cup will continue to provide a fascinating combination of the continent's heavyweights mixing it with emerging clubs, a trend best illustrated on the first weekend of this season when Russia's Krasny Yar beat the holders Stade Français Paris.

Krasny Yar's Siberian rivals Enisei-STM will return to the Challenge

Cup pool stage in 2018/19 after qualifying for tomorrow's Continental Shield final in Getxo against Heidelberger RK, whose progression represents a major breakthrough for German rugby.

Bringing the outstanding rugby experiences of European competition to new and exciting places for fans is a key EPCR objective and we have done just that in a region that is passionate about our sport. There has been a buzz across the Basque Country about this weekend ever since Bilbao was awarded the finals in April 2017 and we thank the Spanish Rugby Federation (Federación Española de Rugby), Ministry of Sport (CSD), Biscay Province, the Basque Government, the City of Bilbao and Athletic Club, who have all joined forces through Bilbao Ekintza to bring the blue riband event in club rugby to this impressive venue.

Finals weekend will be broadcast in almost 100 countries and we

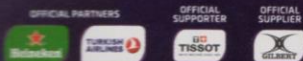
thank our broadcast partners BT Sport, Sky Sports, beIN SPORTS and France Télévisions for their high-quality coverage throughout the campaign. The viewing experience will be strengthened from next season both domestically and globally and whilst we are delighted to be taking the best of European rugby to wider audiences, we would also like to thank Sky for the enormous contribution they have made to the history of European club rugby.

Official Partners Heineken are also long-standing and valuable supporters and we appreciate their backing as well as that of Turkish Airlines, Official Supporter, Tissot, and Official Supplier, Gilbert.

Whoever you support, we hope that you enjoy the match and have a fantastic time in the beautiful Basque Country.

Yours in rugby,

Simon Halliday,
EPCR Chairman



Gloucester and the Challenge Cup connection

By Brendan Gallagher

The Challenge Cup has been very good to Gloucester and vice versa. This evening will be their fourth appearance in a final and if they get the better of the Cardiff Blues they would draw level on Harlequins with a record-equalling third title.

In a recent poll of supporters, the Gloucester faithful reckoned two of their three greatest European performances came in the Challenge Cup rather than the European Cup. Pride of place went to their 16-14 win at la Rochelle last season - where the home side had been unbeaten all season - while in third place was their memorable 36-34 extra-time win over London Irish in the 2006 final. Much more of which anon.

Completing the podium, for those of you who like these things tidied up, was Gloucester's stunning 32-14 away win at Ulster, when they notched the then fastest bonus-point on record with four tries in 21 min 53 sec.

Of course, if push came to shove, Gloucester would rather be playing in the Champions Cup but it's not in their DNA - even in non-vintage seasons - to give anything less than 100% in any

game and that has made them doughty campaigners in the Challenge Cup.

Their fans are also enthusiastic rugby tourists. I remember sheltering in a Biarritz café with some on a pastis-soaked Saturday after all our flights out of the town had been cancelled by a full-blown January hurricane and they have also relished their trips down the road less travelled. The Challenge Cup has taken them to small rugby outposts in Spain, Romania and Italy as well as more mainstream locations all over France, Britain and Ireland.

Gloucester's first big season in the tournament came in 2001/2 when they reached the semi-final before losing to eventual winners Sale 28-27. No cigar, but Gloucester had enjoyed the experience and wanted more

Success eventually came in 2006

after a Challenge Cup season that had included a bit of everything with a trip to Bucharest, a double over then struggling RC Toulon that took in a 74-3 win at Stade Felix Mayol and 66-5 victory back at Kingsholm and a much tougher double against Bayonne before the knockout stage.

In the quarter-finals Gloucester came up against recent Euro giants Brive but dismissed them 46-13 before a 31-23 win over Worcester Warriors set up that high-profile final against London Irish as the Twickenham Stoop

What a game that was with Irish, seemingly dead and buried with 10 minutes remaining, scoring two later tries from Olivier Magne and Robbie Russell to make the score 31-31. Indeed Barry Everitt - normally so reliable - had a touchline conversion to win the match but his attempt was just wide.

Rob Thirby
congratulates try scorer,
Mark Foster, in the 2006
final win over London Irish



So we had the excitement of extra-time - still something of a novelty in rugby - and a match-winning try from James Forrester who chased his own kick ahead to win the touchdown.

Forrester was something of a folk hero at Gloucester, a rangy flanker with the speed of a Test wing. This is the man who 'smoked' Jonah Lomu from 65 yards out to score a memorable individual try on his England debut against the Barbarians and a forward who scored 51 tries in 144 games for Gloucester before he was forced to retire due to injury at the age of 27.

For the next four seasons, the old Heineken Cup occupied Gloucester's thoughts before they found themselves back in the Challenge Cup and doing battle with the French again. In 2011 they lost at home to Clermont in the quarter-final, no disgrace against a side that was beginning to build a head of steam and two years later they fell to Biarritz at the same stage.

Then in 2014/15, with David Humphreys newly installed as Director of Rugby, came a second triumph. In the pool stage there was again a strong French tinge to their travels with doubles over Brive and Oyonnax - but come the knockout stage and Gloucester found themselves up against British opposition.

Connacht didn't go easily in the quarter-finals and it took an outstanding semi-final performance to beat Exeter Chiefs 30-19 before the Twickenham Stoop was again the venue for the final, this time against nuggety Edinburgh side. Former

Edinburgh stalwart Greig Laidlaw was the executioner-in-chief kicking 14 points with skipper Billy Twelvetrees scoring a try in his side's 19-14 win.

Last season saw the previously mentioned 16-14 semi-final win at La Rochelle - an heroic backs-to-the-wall effort, which ranks so highly among the Gloucester

man scoring all 16 points with three penalties and a lengthy interception try which he converted, although in truth it was Gloucester's die-hard defence that took the plaudits

The game had felt like a final but that was still to come, against a highly-motivated Stade Francais Paris who over the years had

'The game had felt like a final but that was still to come'

faithful. A little context is possibly required here. La Rochelle may only have attracted the wider rugby public's attention this season in the Champions Cup but Gloucester had been well aware of their developing talent for some time

In four seasons no less, beginning in 2001, Gloucester found themselves in the same pool as La Rochelle in the Challenge Cup and during those home and away battles they developed a healthy respect for their opponents.

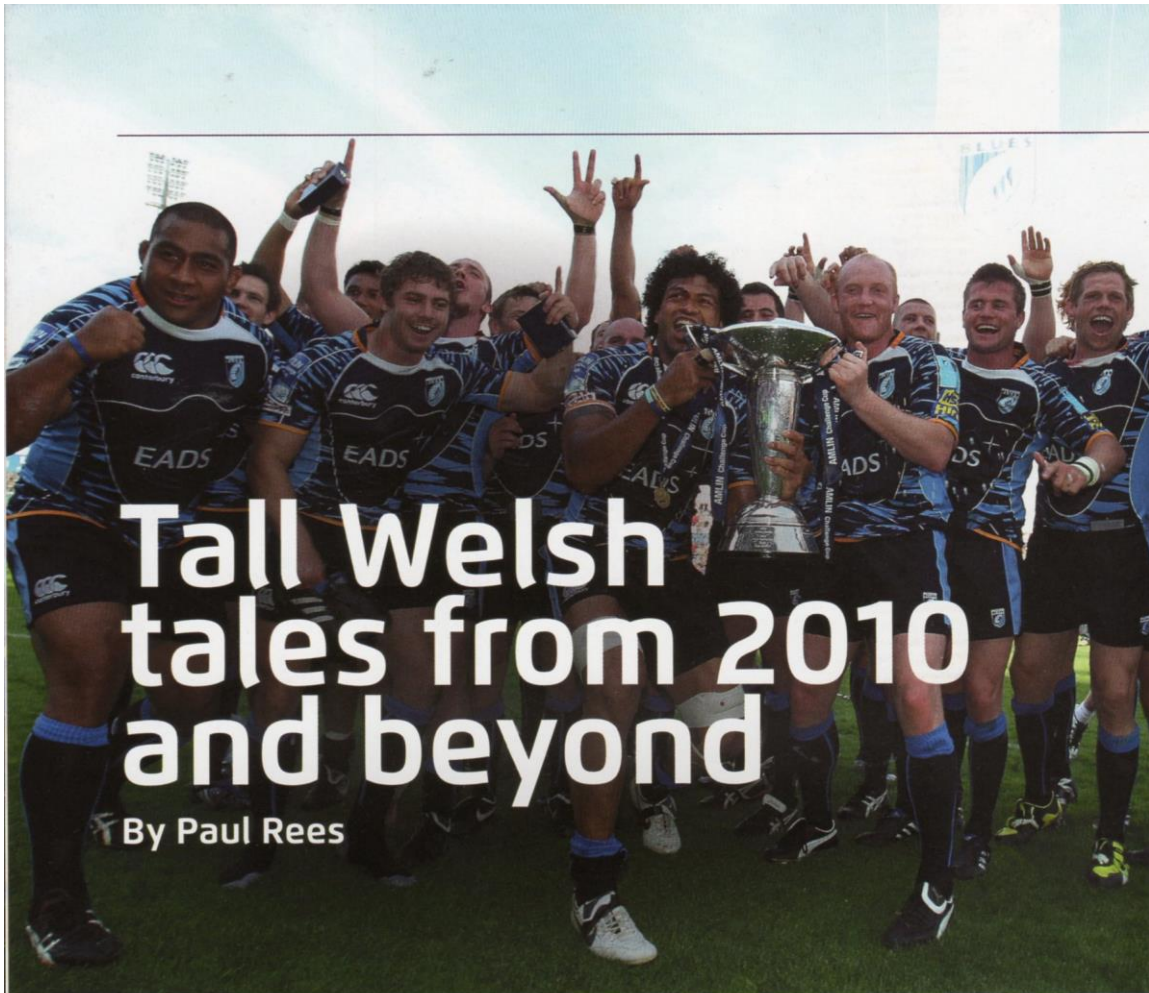
Last season had the feel of a decider between the old rivals. Gloucester won 35-14 at home but got absolutely battered 42-13 away and it was to La Rochelle they had to travel again for the semi-final. Gloucester knew exactly what would be coming their way but come the big day Billy Burns was the main

lost two Heineken Cup finals and two Challenge Cup finals. In a compelling match, the Parisians finally got over the finishing line with a 25-17 win at BT Murrayfield.

And so to this evening's encounter. Gloucester have taken the scenic route to Bilbao, only qualifying for the quarter-finals as sixth seeds after an in-form Pau did the double over them. That didn't dull their appetite for the fray though and an outstanding win in Galway against Connacht set up a home semi-final when they really hit their stride to beat Newcastle Falcons 33-12. All to play for ... but that has always been Gloucester's modus operandi in Europe.

Brendan Gallagher writes for The Rugby Paper





Tall Welsh tales from 2010 and beyond

By Paul Rees

Back in the day when rugby union was an amateur sport and there were no leagues or European competitions, Cardiff and Gloucester used to meet once a season. Anglo-Welsh encounters then tended to be a contrast in not so much style as attitude with teams, and referees, from Wales having a more generous interpretation of what the laws allowed than their English counterparts.

English clubs regularly cancelled matches with Welsh sides citing unacceptable foul

play and the like, but Gloucester happily filled in any gaps in fixture lists. They may have been based in England but they were Welsh in outlook, roared on by the fiercely partisan crowd at Kingsholm.

"The approach of Gloucester and the Cardiffs, Neaths, Newports and Aberavons of this world is remarkably similar," wrote the former Gloucester and England prop, Mike Burton, in his autobiography, *Never Stay Down*, published in 1982. "Genuine respect reached across the River Severn, but

that didn't mean we turned our backs on each other for an instant or that we wouldn't try every move within the laws, and a good few without, to win our games."

Anglo-Welsh rivalry now tends to be played out on the European stage. Since the Welsh professional game turned regional in 2003, Cardiff Blues have met Gloucester five times: in the pool stage of the European Cup in 2004/05 and four years later and in the quarter-final of the Challenge Cup at Kingsholm last season which was won by the Premiership club 46-26.

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Bradley Davies scores in the 2010 final against RC Toulon

The 2008/09 season was the high water mark for the Blues in the European Cup. After doubling Gloucester in the pool and qualifying for the quarter-finals with a 100 per cent record, the region defeated the previous season's beaten finalists, Toulouse, before taking on Leicester in the semi-final at the now Principality Stadium. Tied 26-26 at the end of extra-time, the sides were separated by a shoot-out when the region's flanker Martyn Williams came up short.

The following season the Blues became the first, and

so far only, Welsh side to win a European trophy. Cardiff had reached the first final of the European Cup, losing to Toulouse at the Arms Park, and they faced RC Toulon in the final of the Challenge Cup in May 2010, when the French club was at the start of their rise under their flamboyant owner, Mourad Boudjellal.

The final was at Stade Velodrome in Marseille, a short train ride from Toulon, and it was expected to be another Welsh hard-luck story. Toulon, who the previous week had lost to ASM Clermont Auvergne in the TOP 14 semi-final, 35-29 after extra-time,

were not at full strength with their then coach Philippe Saint-André saying that he had not considered players who had turned up to training at the start of the week with sore heads having over-indulged at the end of the league campaign, but they still fielded the likes of Jonny Wilkinson, Sonny Bill Williams, Joe van Niekerk and Juan Fernandez Lobbe while the former New Zealand captain, Tana Umaga, was among the replacements.

It was a match Boudjellal expected to win, as he confirmed in an outburst



afterwards when threatening all manner of reprisals on his players who had played with the lack of restraint characteristic of a Barbarian team, or a French side of yore, cavalier and exuberant. The Blues, who supplemented leading Wales internationals Jamie Roberts, Leigh Halfpenny, Gethin Jenkins and Martyn Williams with a trio of New Zealanders, were underestimated despite winning 55-20 at Newcastle in the quarter-finals, the stage they entered the tournament at having failed to make the last eight of the Heineken Cup, and then, more meritoriously, 18-15 at Wasps in the semi-final.

Toulon led 13-6 at the break but six minutes into the second-half lost Wilkinson, who collapsed to the ground after attempting a long-range penalty. The Englishman had been the one steadying influence in his side, holding on to his head while his colleagues were scrambling around trying to find where they had put theirs, and when he went off his England and former Newcastle colleague Tom May, a centre, switched to the unfamiliar position of outside-half.

The Blues scented an opportunity. Jamie Roberts's try levelled the scores and after an exchange of penalties between May and Ben Blair, the Welsh side silenced the near-49,000 crowd with two tries in five minutes, both created by the New Zealand No 8 Xavier Rush. Umaga was brought on but Toulon left their response too late and a

try two minutes time merely reduced the Blues' winning margin to seven points.

It was an era when the Welsh regions enjoyed their best period in Europe. Ospreys made three successive European Cup quarter-finals from 2008, the Scarlets reached the semi-final in 2007,

Wales are looking to use Europe to fertilise interest in the professional game as Ireland did from the end of the 1990s when crowd numbers soared and the heightened interest was transported into league rugby. Attendances in Wales have largely been frustratingly low in the regional era, but the Scarlets

'They may have been based in England but they were Welsh in outlook, roared on by the fiercely partisan crowd at Kingsholm.'

the year the Dragons made the last four of the Challenge Cup. As the recession started to bite and a cold war frosted relations between the regions and the Welsh Rugby Union, the four struggled to compete financially with rivals from England, France and Ireland and their impact in Europe this decade, until this season, was little more than negligible.

The difference is that the regions and the WRU are now working together. Playing budgets remain relatively low, but the Scarlets, Blues and, in the last few months, Ospreys, are playing expressively again. The Scarlets reached the semi-final of the Champions Cup, a tournament the Blues will be playing in again next season after a four-year absence, after winning six of their final eight matches in the Guinness PRO14.

have enjoyed a bounce this season after their European exploits and the Blues attracted a bigger crowd for their Challenge Cup semi-final against Pau last month than Gloucester did for Newcastle.

Big crowds were a feature of Welsh club rugby. Fans unable to get into grounds like the Gnoll, St Helen's or the Arms Park used to shin up floodlight pylons, clamber over iron gates or storm turnstiles. Gloucester used to pack them into Kingsholm for the visit of Cardiff every other year, usually in April. The ground tended to be hard and so did the rugby and in a corner of Spain, old tales will be replayed.

Paul Rees is a rugby writer with The Observer





When Johan Ackermann says it's Christmas, you start singing carols

Ackermanns keep it in the family

By Alex Lowe

Johan Ackermann did not consider a career in coaching after he retired from playing in 2008, having earned 13 South Africa caps during a 12-year career that bridged the amateur and professional eras. A white-collar future beckoned for the 6'5" former lock forward who was working in consultancy and cut an imposing figure as he walked in to businesses and boardrooms.

"He's the biggest man I've ever seen in my life," Stephen Vaughan, the Gloucester Rugby Chief Executive, said after Ackermann was recruited to replace Laurie Fisher as the club's Head Coach. "When he says it's Christmas, you start singing carols."

Ackermann was persuaded to swap the suit for the tracksuit and join the coaching staff of the Johannesburg-based Lions by Dick Muir, who went on to be part of the South Africa management team.

When John Mitchell was forced out of the Lions by a player revolt, Ackermann was given the top job and over four years he instigated a dramatic transformation in the fortunes of the franchise.

He first got them back into Super Rugby, courtesy of a two-leg victory over the Southern Kings, and he then guided the Lions into consecutive finals, playing a brand of rugby that was both thrilling and effective. It was easy last year to see why Gloucester went for him, and

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clear now that he was the ideal choice.

The Cherry and Whites had not been as low as the Lions but they had been punching well below their weight for too long. Gloucester had finished ninth in the Aviva Premiership in four of the previous six seasons and eighth once.

Their Challenge Cup final victory over Edinburgh at the Twickenham Stoop in 2015 was a rare occasion for Shedheads to hang out the bunting but it did not act as the catalyst for greater success that the club had hoped.

Fisher quit his post in March 2017 after Gloucester had shipped 15 points in the last eight minutes to lose 30-27 to Harlequins. The Australian posted on Twitter: "Unbelievable capitulation. Clearly not good enough. My responsibility. Time to make room for someone else."

It did not take Gloucester long to realise that someone else had to be Ackermann. This evening, at the end of his first season in charge, Gloucester have a chance to win the Challenge Cup for the second time in four years. With Champions Cup rugby already secured for next season, there is a sense that Gloucester are finally being roused from the doldrums.

"When Laurie left we talked about what we needed in a Head Coach because we have some very good young

"He has a fantastic manner and he commands respect. It is about relationships."

English coaches here at the club," David Humphreys, the Director of Rugby says. "Johann's name came up and from a distance, with everything he had done with the Lions and their style of play, it made him the one we wanted to talk to. We found out he had a break clause in his contract and I flew out to South Africa with Martin St Quentin.

"I am not exaggerating when I say that after our first meeting, we said, 'This is the man we want, the man we believe can help drive Gloucester forward'. Gloucester are a club who have underachieved for a long time but we also believed it would not take a huge amount to move us considerably forward. He would bring huge credibility and rugby knowledge to the club."


Gloucester looked to Ackermann to toughen up a team that had developed a soft underbelly, epitomised by that Harlequins defeat and another to Newcastle Falcons, but also to marry that resolve with an attacking game that was fast-paced,

fluid and ambitious, the style that had carried the Lions to consecutive Super Rugby finals.

Ackermann only arrived in Gloucester four days before the first pre-season friendly but there were early signs of his imprint on the opening day of the Premiership campaign when they defeated Exeter Chiefs with a last-gasp try from Jason Woodward.

"Johan knew from his experiences with the Lions that it wasn't going to happen in the short term and we have seen that this season, with some brilliant performances and then, when the pressure comes on, reverting back to the tam we were. But we have definitely grown. We are probably ahead of where we thought we would be," says Humphreys.

"All the teams he has been in and coached have had a hard edge. It was a balance of marrying that hard edge with the style of rugby that had been a success with the Lions.

"We wanted to bring someone in who was going 





Ruan Ackermann in action in the quarter-final win over Connacht Rugby

to play the style of rugby that the supporters wanted to see. We have most wonderful supporters and of course they want to win but they also appreciate good rugby."

Any team in Europe would miss Johnny May, who was allowed to join Leicester Tigers, but Gloucester's end of the deal saw Ed Slater arrive Welford Road; exactly the kind of hard-edged forward the Cherry and Whites needed.

When Carl Fearn's decided against moving to Kingsholm, Gloucester recruited Ruan Ackermann, a powerful loose forward who understood exactly the style of rugby his father was trying to implement.

With Ackermann at No 8, Gloucester have brought through the likes of Jake

Polledri and Lewis Ludlum, two teak-tough, hard-hitting, heavy-carrying forwards. "History is not weighing heavily on their shoulders," Humphreys adds.

Next season, Jaco Kriel, the Springbok flanker, is heading to the west country.

Behind the scrum, Billy Burns is thriving and Billy Twelvetrees at inside centre is looking like the player who won 19 England caps and enjoyed a taste of the 2013 Lions tour. Woodward has been one of the most potent back three players in the Premiership.

Ackermann's experiences of life outside of rugby, which began with a career in the police force during the amateur days, have infused his management style. He

did not know he had the qualities required until Muir gave him the opportunity. Nor could he ever have imagined being cast as rugby's Father Christmas, but he has certainly succeeded in bringing joy and hope for the future to Gloucester and their long-suffering supporters.

"Johan had unique experiences before he came into professional rugby," Humphreys says. "He has a fantastic manner and he commands respect. It is about relationships. That win with the last play of the game against Exeter on the opening day of the season really set the tone for the whole year. Johann has brought back a real fun element and that reflects in our performances."

Alex Lowe is Deputy Rugby Correspondent of The Times





CARDIFF BLUES

Probable Team

- 15 Gareth Anscombe / Full Back
- 14 Blaine Scully / Wing
- 13 Willis Halaholo / Centre
- 12 Rey Lee-Lo / Centre
- 11 Owen Lane / Wing
- 10 Jarrod Evans / Outside Half
- 9 Tomos Williams / Scrum Half
- 1 Gethin Jenkins (capt) / Prop
- 2 Kristian Dacey / Hooker
- 3 Taufa'ao Filise / Prop
- 4 Seb Davies / Second Row
- 5 Josh Turnbull / Second Row
- 6 Josh Navidi / Flanker
- 7 Ellis Jenkins / Flanker
- 8 Nick Williams / No.8

-
- 16 Kirby Myhill / Replacement
 - 17 Rhys Gill / Replacement
 - 18 Dillon Lewis / Replacement
 - 19 Damian Welch / Replacement
 - 20 Olly Robinson / Replacement
 - 21 Lloyd Williams / Replacement
 - 22 Matthew Morgan / Replacement
 - 23 Garryn Smith / Replacement

Friday, 11 May
San Mamés Stadium,
Bilbao (21.00)
Referee: Jérôme Garcès (Fra)

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GLOUCESTER RUGBY



Probable Team

Full Back / Jason Woodward	15
Wing / Tom Marshall	14
Centre / Billy Twelvetrees	13
Centre / Mark Atkinson	12
Wing / Henry Trinder	11
Outside Half / Billy Burns	10
Scrum Half / Callum Braley	9
Prop / Josh Hohneck	1
Hooker / James Hanson	2
Prop / John Afoa	3
Second Row / Ed Slater (capt)	4
Second Row / Mariano Galarza	5
Flanker / Jake Polledri	6
Flanker / Lewis Ludlow	7
No.8 / Ruan Ackermann	8

Replacement / Moti Matu'u	16
Replacement / Val Rapava Ruskin	17
Replacement / Fraser Balmain	18
Replacement / Freddie Clarke	19
Replacement / Ben Morgan	20
Replacement / Ben Vellacott	21
Replacement / Andy Symons	22
Replacement / Tom Hudson	23

Assistant referees:

Romain Poite (Fra), Pascal Gauzère (Fra)

TMO: Philippe Bonhoure (Fra)

Citing Commissioner: Maurizio Vancini (Ita)



Gloucester Rugby

Road to the Final



Round 1

12/10/17
Stade du Hameau

ATT: 8,600

Referee
George Clancy (Ireland)

Pau 27 (14)

T: F Halai, Ramsay, C Slade
C: C Slade 2, B Fajardo
P: C Slade 2

Gloucester Rugby 21 (0)

T: H Purdy, Ackermann, B Vellacott
C: O Williams 3

Pau: R Buros; F Halai, J Fumat, B Stanley (F Nicot 28), B Pourailly (C Lebail 68); C Slade (B Fajardo 51-53, 56), T Daubagna (captain); G Moise (J Hurou 61), L Rey (L Bouchet 55), L Adriaanse (M Hamadache 61), D Foley (M Tutaia 71), M Tutaia (F Metz 61), D Ramsay (S Dougall 55), B Mowen, P Butler



Gloucester Rugby: T Hudson (B Burns 49); H Purdy, B Twelvetrees (H Trinder 74), M Atkinson, D Halaifonua; O Williams, C Braley (B Vellacott 51); P McAllister (G Denman 44), M Matu'u (J Hanson 44), J Hohneck (V Rapava Ruskin 61), T Savage (captain, L Ludlow 71), T Denton (R Ackermann 28), J Polledri (T Savage 78), J Rowan, F Clarke

Match Points:
Pau 4 Gloucester Rugby 1

Heineken Man of the Match:
Romain Buros (Pau)

Round 2

19/10/17
Kingsholm Stadium

ATT: 9,489

Referee
Dan Jones (Wales)

Gloucester Rugby 61 (28)

T: B Vellacott 2, R Hibbard, H Trinder, B Morgan, T Savage, O Williams, H Purdy, P Polledri
C: B Burns 6, O Williams 2

Agen 16 (9)

T: B Holder
C: J Russell
P: H Verdu 3

Gloucester Rugby: J Woodward (B Twelvetrees 51); H Purdy, H Trinder (C Braley 70), O Williams, D Halaifonua; B Burns (W Heinz 59), B Vellacott; J Hohneck (C Orr 56), J Hanson (R Hibbard 46), G Denman (J Afoa 53), T Savage (captain, F Clarke 70), C Beckett, J Polledri, L Ludlow, B Morgan (F Clarke 32-40, J Rowan 48)



Agen: Loris Tolot; Lucas Tolot (V Saur 42), A Conduche, R Dubois (P Fouyssac 56), B Holder, J Russell, H Verdu (F Lanave 67); M Ahaouche (C Farah 72), C Martinez (J Peyri 65), K Tufele (C Chabeaudie 46), C van der Merwe, C Braendlin (captain), J Jegerlhener (C Touchkaieff 53), Y Tanga, L Ghirard (P Fouyssac 29-36, K Tufele 61)
Yellow Card: C Chabeaudie (61)

Match Points:
Gloucester Rugby 5 Agen 0

Heineken Man of the Match:
Ben Vellacott (Gloucester Rugby)

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Round 3

09/12/17
Stadio Lanfranchi

ATT: 2,500

Referee
Mike Adamson
(Scotland)

Zebre Rugby Club 26 (19)

T: T Boni, R Giammarioli, J Meyer, C Gaffney
C: C Canna 2, G Palazzani

Gloucester Rugby 33 (14)

T: O Thorley 2, R Hibbard, O Williams, R Ackermann
C: O Williams 4

Zebre Rugby: M Minozzi; C Gaffney, M Bellini, T Boni, G Venditti; C Canna (S Bordoli 56), M Violi (G Palazzani 56); A Lovotti (C Ah-Nau 53), O Fabiani (L Luus 56), D Chistolini (E Bello 53), D Sisi (L Krumov 51), G Biagi (captain), M Mbanda, J Meyer (J Sarto 51), R Giammarioli
Rep Unused: M Praticchetti
Yellow Card: M Bellini (54)



Gloucester Rugby: T Hudson (O Thorley 34); C Sharples, A Symons (B Twelvetrees 60), M Atkinson, H Purdy; O Williams, B Vellacott (W Heinz 79); P McAllister (J Hohneck 64), R Hibbard (H Walker 71), J Afoa (C Orr 69), T Savage (captain), M Galarza (J Thrush 60), F Clarke, J Polledri (L Ludlow 53-58), R Ackermann (L Ludlow 60)

Match Points:
Zebre Rugby Club 2 Gloucester Rugby 5

Heineken Man of the Match:
Jake Polledri (Gloucester Rugby)

Round 4

16/12/17
Kingsholm Stadium

ATT: 8,927

Referee
Pierre Brousset (France)

Gloucester Rugby 69 (45)

T: O Thorley 4, D Halaifonua 2, C Sharples, C Orr, M Matu'u, F Clarke, W Safe
C: B Twelvetrees 6, O Williams

Zebre Rugby Club 12 (0)

T: G Biagi, S Bordoli
C: S Bordoli

Gloucester Rugby: C Sharples; O Thorley, B Twelvetrees (H Purdy 47), M Atkinson, D Halaifonua; B Burns (O Williams 41), B Vellacott; C Orr (P McAllister 67), M Matu'u (R Hibbard 67), J Hohneck (G Denman 44), E Slater (captain), M Galarza, J Polledri (C Beckett 44), W Safe, F Clarke
Reps Unused: T Savage, W Heinz
Yellow Card: F Clarke (61)

Zebre Rugby: C Gaffney (M Azzolini 41); M Praticchetti, G Bisegni, F Afamasaga, G Venditti (M Minozzi 26-32, 41); S Bordoli, G Palazzani (R Raffaele 68); C Ah-Nau (A de Marchi 41), L Luus (T D'Apice 41), R Tenga (D Chistolini 67), L Krumov (G Biagi 67), G Biagi (captain), V Bernabo 41), J Sarto (L Luus 47-56), D Minnie, M Mbanda
Yellow Card: C Gaffney (10), T D'Apice (45)

Match Points:
Gloucester Rugby 5 Zebre Rugby 0

Heineken Man of the Match:
Ollie Thorley (Gloucester Rugby)



Round 5

12/01/18
Stade Armandie

ATT: 2,870

Referee
Frank Murphy (Ireland)

Agen 24 (5)

T: A Qera, J Jegerlhener, M Kotze, J Sadie
C: H Verdu, J Russell

Gloucester Rugby 45 (28)

T: H Purdy 2, E Slater, M Atkinson, C Braley,
J Woodward
C: O Williams 6
P: O Williams

Agen: V Sauris; Loris Tolot, A Conduche,
P Fouyssac (J Sadie 41), B Holder; H Verdu,
P Abadie (R Januarie 52); M Phelipponneau
(G Tetrashvili 45), M Barthomeuf
(C Martinez 31-60), V Akhobadze
(C Chabeaudie 52), D Marchois, C Braendlin
(captain, C van der Merwe 52, J Russell
60), M Kotze (P Muarua 48), J Jegerlhener,
A Qera



Gloucester Rugby: J Woodward; C Sharples
(T Marshall 32), H Trinder, M Atkinson
(B Twelvetrees 63), H Purdy; O Williams,
C Braley (B Vellacott 72); C Orr (J Hohneck 72),
M Matu'u (R Hibbard 58), F Balmain
(G Denman 60), E Slater (captain), J Thrush,
R Moriarty (L Ludlow 63), J Polledri
(T Savage 72), F Clarke

Match Points:
Agen 1 Gloucester Rugby 5

Heineken Man of the Match:
Owen Williams (Gloucester Rugby)

Round 6

19/01/18
Kingsholm Stadium

ATT: 12,489

Referee
John Lacey (Ireland)

Gloucester Rugby 24 (7)

T: C Braley, J Thrush, J Polledri
C: B Twelvetrees 3
P: B Twelvetrees

Pau 34 (13)

T: S Armitage, F Halai, D Ramsay, L Adriaanse
C: C Slade 4
P: C Slade 2

Gloucester Rugby: J Woodward; H Purdy,
B Twelvetrees, A Symons (O Williams 71),
O Thorley; B Burns, B Vellacott (C Braley 60);
J Hohneck (C Orr 60), R Hibbard (M Matu'u 60),
J Afoa (F Balmain 50), T Savage (captain),
J Thrush (E Slater 60), R Moriarty (J Polledri 60),
L Ludlow, B Morgan (F Clarke 60)

Pau: C Malie; F Halai, C Smith, J Vatubua
(F Nicot 17), W Votu; C Slade (A Hastoy 74),
T Daubagna (captain, C Lebail 74); T Domingo
(I Calles 50), L Bouchet (L Rey 65), L Adriaanse
(M Hamadache 60), F Metz (M Tutaia 60),
D Ramsay, B Mowen, S Dougall (P Saili 72),
S Armitage



Match Points:
Gloucester Rugby 0 Pau 5

Heineken Man of the Match:
Daniel Ramsay (Pau)





Quarter-Final Connacht Rugby 28 (10)

31/03/18
The Sportsground

ATT: 8,129

Referee
Romain Poite (France)

T: K Marmion, M Healy, N Adeolokun, B Aki
C: C Ronaldson
P: J Carty, C Ronaldson

Gloucester Rugby 33 (17)

T: J Afoa, H Trinder, T Marshall, J Hanson
C: O Williams 2
P: O Williams 2, B Twelvetrees

Connacht Rugby:

T O'Halloran; N Adeolokun, B Aki, T Farrell, M Healy; J Carty (C Ronaldson 57), K Marmion; D Buckley (P McCabe 67), T McCartney (D Heffernan 57), F Bealham (C Carey 61), Thornbury, Q Roux (U Dillane 57), E McKeon (E Masterson 71), J Butler, J Muldoon (captain)
Reps Unused: C Blade, D Leader
Yellow Card: J Butler (76)



Gloucester Rugby: J Woodward; C Sharples, H Trinder (B Burns 72), M Atkinson, T Marshall; O Williams (B Twelvetrees 71), W Heinz (captain, C Braley 77); V Rapava Ruskin (J Hohneck 50), J Hanson (M Matu'u 67), J Afoa (F Balmain 67), E Slater, J Thrush (T Savage 71), R Moriarty (R Ackermann 60), L Ludlow, B Morgan
Yellow Card: B Morgan (15), L Ludlow (67)

Heineken Man of the Match:
Henry Trinder (Gloucester Rugby)

BALBAO
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Semi-Final

20/04/18
Kingsholm Stadium

ATT: 10,857

Referee
Pascal Gauzère (France)

Gloucester Rugby 33 (15)

T: B Burns, T Marshall, M Matu'u, B Vellacott
C: B Twelvetrees 2
P: B Twelvetrees 3

Newcastle Falcons 12 (5)

T: S Lawson 2
C: J Hodgson

Gloucester Rugby:

J Woodward; T Marshall, B Twelvetrees, M Atkinson, H Trinder (C Sharples 73); B Burns (A Symons 69), C Braley (B Vellacott 70); P McAllister (J Hohneck 55), M Matu'u (J Hanson 66), F Balmain (J Afoa 30), E Slater (captain), M Galarza (F Clarke 63), R Ackermann, J Polledri, B Morgan (Ludlow 63)



Newcastle Falcons: S Hammersley; C Harris, M Mermoz (A Radwan 52), J Matavesi, Z Kibirige; J Hodgson (T Penny 76), M Young (captain, S Stuart 69); S Lockwood (R Vickers 58), S Lawson (S Socino 54), S Wilson (T Davison 69), C Green (W Witty 52), S Robinson, E Olmstead, G Graham (M Wilson 52), R Burrows

Heineken Man of the Match:
Jason Woodward (Gloucester Rugby)



Meet the Coaches

Danny Wilson (Cardiff Blues)



Danny Wilson will sign off as Cardiff Blues Head Coach in Bilbao having earlier in the season turned-down a contract extension to take up a role as Forwards Coach at Wasps where he will be working with another former Blues Head Coach, Dai Young. He has already delivered a return to the

Champions Cup next season and is now hoping to end on a high by securing a second European title for the Blues following their Challenge Cup success in Marseille in 2010.

He took over at the Blues in 2015 following the departure of Mark Hammett. It was the third Welsh region at which he had coached, having previously been Forwards Coach at both the Dragons and the Scarlets. He joined the Blues from Bristol where he worked under Andy Robinson

In 2012, he was Head Coach of the Wales Under 20 side that beat New Zealand 9-6 in the pool stage of the Junior World Championship in South Africa. Wales went on to reach the semi-finals, where New Zealand gained their revenge. Wilson's side did, however, beat Argentina to claim third place.

Tonight will also be the last game for Attack Coach, Matt Sherratt, before he heads to the Ospreys in the summer. Sherratt previously worked with Wilson at Bristol. Wales Defence Coach, Shaun Edwards, has also had a part to play this season assisting Richard Hodges with the defence. Edwards was one of the coaching team at Wasps when they won the European Cup and Challenge Cup.

Johan Ackermann (Gloucester Rugby)



Last year Johan Ackermann led the Lions to the Super Rugby final and now he is hoping to end his first season at Gloucester Rugby by winning European silverware. His son, Ruan, played at No 8 in the Lions' defeat to the Crusaders in 2017 and has become a vital recruit in the back row this season.

A former Springbok international, winning 13 caps and being part of the 2007 World Cup-winning squad, he played for Blue Bulls, Lions, Griquas and the Sharks, as well as Northampton Saints and Calvisano, during a long and distinguished career. He retired from playing in 2008 and was appointed Forwards Coach of the Lions in Super Rugby in 2010. Three years later he took over as Head Coach for both the Super Rugby and Currie Cup competitions.

He led the Lions back into the Super Rugby fold in 2013, steered the Golden Lions through an unbeaten Currie Cup season in 2015 and took the Lions to back-to-back Super Rugby finals in 2016 and 2017. He was named South African Coach of the Year in 2014, 2015 and 2016 and was appointed as Head Coach of the South Africa 'A' team for the two-match series against the England Saxons in June, 2016.

With Gloucester assured of Champions Cup qualification for next season, his back room staff includes a former European Cup winner in Jonny Bell (Ulster 1999) as Defence Coach and a World Cup winner in Trevor Woodman (England 2003) as Forwards Coach. Director of Rugby, David Humphreys, also won the European Cup with Ulster in 1999.



Tonight's Referee

Jérôme Garcès (France)



Jérôme Garcès will tonight join Welshman Nigel Whitehouse when he referees his third Challenge Cup final having previously been in charge of the games between Northampton Saints and Bath Rugby in 2014 and Gloucester Rugby v Edinburgh in 2015.

He became only the sixth French official to referee a major European final at the Cardiff Arms Park in 2014, following in the footsteps of Patrick Robin (1997), Joel Dumé (1999) and Christophe Berdos (2008) who have all taken charge of a Challenge Cup decider. Dumé (2000), Joel Judge (2002) and Romain Poite (2011) have also all refereed a European Cup Final.

Born in Pau, the 44-year-old Garcès made his European debut in Italy in 2012, when he took charge of Saracens' 36-16 win over GRAN Parma. His European Cup debut came just over a year later in Round 5 when he was once again in Italy for Glasgow Warriors' 18-15 win over Viadana.

He graduated to a Challenge Cup quarter-final in 2010, when he was in the middle for Cardiff Blues' 55-20 triumph at Newcastle Falcons. His first European Cup knockout game came the following season when he was in charge of Munster's win at Harlequins in the quarter-finals.

He made World Rugby's elite panel in 2010, a year after he made his representative bow at the Junior

World Championship in Japan. His international debut came in England's game against the Barbarians at Twickenham.

He was an assistant referee four times and a reserve referee at the Rugby World Cup in 2011 and took charge of a quarter-final and semi-final at the 2015 tournament. In 2013, he refereed two matches on the British & Irish Lions 125th anniversary tour to Australia against Queensland Reds and the Brumbies. He was also on duty during the last Lions tour in New Zealand, dismissing the All Blacks centre Sonny Bill Williams for a shoulder charge on Anthony Watson in the second Test in Wellington.

This season he has taken charge of five Champions Cup fixtures, including the quarter-final win by tomorrow's finalists Leinster Rugby over the reigning champions Saracens at the Aviva Stadium. He refereed two matches in the 2018 6 Nations, the Round 2 clash at Twickenham between England and Wales and the Round 4 fixture in Cardiff between Wales and Italy, and he was also on the touchline for the games between Italy and England and Scotland and England.

European matches 2017/18

21/10/17	Rd 2	Champions Cup	Glasgow Warriors	18 - 34	Leinster Rugby
09/12/17	Rd 3	Champions Cup	Munster Rugby	33 - 10	Leicester Tigers
12/01/18	Rd 4	Champions Cup	Bath Rugby	17 - 35	Scarlets
21/01/18	Rd 6	Champions Cup	Wasps	26 - 7	Ulster Rugby
01/04/18	QF	Champions Cup	Leinster Rugby	30 - 19	Saracens

European Record

Champions Cup	52
Challenge Cup	11
Overall	63



Top Performers 2017/18

Cardiff Blues v Gloucester Rugby

Jake Polledri



Defenders Beaten

Player	Team	Matches	Defenders beaten
Jake Polledri	Gloucester Rugby	7	28
Jarrold Evans	Cardiff Blues	7	18
Rey Lee-Lo	Cardiff Blues	7	17
Jason Woodward	Gloucester Rugby	5	13
Mark Atkinson	Gloucester Rugby	6	11

Tackles

Player	Team	Matches	Tackles	Missed Tackles
Josh Navidi	Cardiff Blues	7	96	7
Freddie Clarke	Gloucester Rugby	7	75	6
Josh Turnbull	Cardiff Blues	7	70	10
Tom Savage	Gloucester Rugby	6	70	5
Ed Slater	Gloucester Rugby	5	68	7

Lineouts

Player	Team	Matches	Lineouts Won (inc. steals)	Lineout Steals
Josh Turnbull	Cardiff Blues	7	19	1
Seb Davies	Cardiff Blues	6	18	1
Jeremy Thrush	Gloucester Rugby	4	17	1
Macaulay Cook	Cardiff Blues	5	16	1
Damian Welch	Cardiff Blues	5	15	2

BILBAO
FINALS 2018

Leading Scorers 2017/18

Cardiff Blues v Gloucester Rugby

Points

Rank	Player	Team	Matches	Points
1	Owen Williams	Gloucester Rugby	7	55
2	Jarrod Evans	Cardiff Blues	7	43
3	Billy Twelvetrees	Gloucester Rugby	8	37
4	Ollie Thorley	Gloucester Rugby	3	30
5	Gareth Anscombe	Cardiff Blues	6	22
6	Ben Vellacott	Gloucester Rugby	7	20
6	Henry Purdy	Gloucester Rugby	6	20
6	Billy Burns	Gloucester Rugby	6	17
6	Tomos Williams	Cardiff Blues	8	15

Tries

Rank	Player	Team	Matches	Tries
1	Ollie Thorley	Gloucester Rugby	3	6
2	Ben Vellacott	Gloucester Rugby	7	4
2	Henry Purdy	Gloucester Rugby	6	4
4	Tomos Williams	Cardiff Blues	8	3
5	Callum Braley	Gloucester Rugby	6	2
5	David Halaifonua	Gloucester Rugby	3	2
5	Gareth Anscombe	Cardiff Blues	6	2
5	Henry Trinder	Gloucester Rugby	5	2
5	Jake Polledri	Gloucester Rugby	7	2



DID YOU KNOW?

VETERAN GETHIN

Cardiff Blues skipper Gethin Jenkins will be looking to take home a third European winners' medal tonight in what will be his fourth final. Wales' record cap holder with 129 appearances (he has also played in five Tests for the British & Irish Lions), he made his first final appearance in 2002 when he packed down in the Pontypridd front row in their 25-22 Challenge Cup final defeat to Sale Sharks in Oxford. He led the Blues to victory in the 2010 Challenge Cup final against RC Toulon in Marseille and came off the bench in 2013 to help RC Toulon win the European Cup for the first time in Dublin. Today will be his 98th European appearance (60 European Cup, 37 Challenge Cup to date).

FATHER AND SON CHASE FINAL GLORY . . . AGAIN!

Nine months ago the Gloucester Rugby duo of Johan and Ruan Ackermann suffered heartbreak when they were involved with the Lions Super Rugby final defeat to the Crusaders at Johannesburg's Ellis Park. Johan then joined Gloucester as Head Coach and his son, the Lions No 8 Ruan, quickly followed.

ANGLO-WELSH RIVALS

The first meeting between Cardiff and Gloucester was at Spa Park, Gloucester on 21 October, 1882. Gloucester won that game, scored a goal and seven tries to nil. The last time Cardiff Blues and Gloucester Rugby met in a cup final the game ended up in a runaway victory for the Welsh region. That was in the 2011 Anglo-Welsh Cup decider at Twickenham in front of a crowd of 54,899. The Blues ran in seven tries and conceded only two and the only survivors from that game are Gethin Jenkins in the Blues squad and Charlie Sharples for Gloucester.

Gloucester Rugby v Cardiff Blues in Europe

Challenge Cup QF 16/17

Gloucester 42-26 Cardiff Blues

European Cup Rd2 08/09

Cardiff Blues 37-24 Gloucester

Rd5 08/09

Gloucester 12-16 Cardiff Blues

European Cup Rd3 04/05

Gloucester 23-19 Cardiff Blues

Rd4 04/05

Cardiff Blues 16-23 Gloucester

European Cup QF 00/01

Gloucester 21-15 Cardiff Blues

FINAL FAREWELL FOR AFOA

John Afoa will don the Cherry and White of Gloucester Rugby for the final time tonight after a four-year stint in the West Country. The former All Blacks prop is hoping to make a fourth European final appearance having been in the Ulster Rugby team that lost in the European Cup final at Twickenham in 2012, the winning Gloucester team in the 2015 Challenge Cup final and the losing team last season. He has made 104 appearances for Gloucester and is due to join newly-promoted Bristol next season.

NORTH / SOUTH DOUBLES

Cardiff Blues centre Willis Halaholo will be aiming to add a Challenge Cup winners' medal to the Super Rugby title he won with the Hurricanes in 2016 to become the ninth North / South Double winner. Last season Stade Francais Paris duo Will Genia and Morné Steyn joined the list. Three Blues players have already completed the double – Xavier Rush, Casey Laulala and Ben Blair – following their triumph in 2010. Gloucester Rugby hooker James Hanson was a winner of the Super Rugby title with the Reds in 2011 and is also seeking the double.

Super Rugby / Challenge Cup Winners

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Casey Laulala

Crusaders 2005, 2006, 2008 / Cardiff Blues 2010

Xavier Rush

Blues 2003 / Cardiff Blues 2010

Ben Blair

Crusaders 2002 / Cardiff Blues 2010

David Wilson

Queensland 1994, 1995 / Harlequins 2001

Garrick Morgan

Queensland 1994 / Harlequins 2001

Pierre Spies

Bulls 2007, 2009, 2010 / Montpellier 2016

Morné Steyn

Bulls 2007, 2009, 2010 / Stade Francais Paris 2017

Will Genia

Reds 2011 / Stade Francais Paris 2017

REPEAT FINALISTS

Gloucester Rugby will match the record set by Aviva Premiership rivals Harlequins and Bath Rugby of reaching four Challenge Cup finals tonight. They won the title in 2006 and 2015 and were beaten in last season's final by Stade Francais Paris. Harlequins have won the title a record three times – 2001, 2004 and 2011 – and were beaten finalists in 2016.

Most Challenge Cup final wins

3 – Harlequins
2 – ASM Clermont Auvergne, Gloucester Rugby, Northampton Saints, Sale Sharks

Most Challenge Cup final appearances

4 - Bath Rugby, Harlequins
3 – ASM Clermont Auvergne, Bourgoin, Gloucester Rugby, Stade Francais Paris
2 - Castres Olympique, Northampton Saints, Pau, RC Toulon, Sale Sharks
1 – Agen, Biarritz Olympique, Cardiff Blues, Colomiers,

Edinburgh, Leinster Rugby, London Irish, Montpellier, Narbonne, Pontypridd, Wasps, Worcester Warriors,

CHALLENGE CUP FINAL RED CARDS

Four players have been dismissed in the final in the past. The first was the Bath Rugby captain, Danny Grewcock, in the 2003 record defeat to Wasps at the Madejski Stadium. Grewcock would go on to win the Man of the Match title when Bath beat Worcester Warriors to win the title for the first time in 2008. In 2015, the Australian centre Billy Meakes became the first player to be sent-off for the winning team. There have been 21 yellow cards issued in the finals, two of them totting up to a red card for the Montferrand centre Raphael Chanal in 2004.

CHALLENGE CUP FINAL MAN OF THE MATCH WINNERS

Gloucester Rugby wing Jonny May was the Heineken Man of the Match in the 2015 Challenge Cup final and he followed in the footsteps of fellow England international Andy Hazell in taking the award back to Kingsholm after his success in 2006. The earliest winner of a Man of the Match award in a final was Harlequins flanker Pat Sanderson in 2001. The award has been awarded continuously since 2004 with a player from the winning side carrying off the title in all but two seasons – 2004 and 2010. The full list (2004-2017) is:

2004: Olivier Azam (Montferrand)
2005: Charlie Hodgson (Sale Sharks)
2006: Andy Hazell (Gloucester Rugby)
2007: Julien Malzieu (ASM Clermont Auvergne)
2008: Danny Grewcock (Bath Rugby)
2009: Dylan Hartley (Northampton Saints)
2010: Sonny Bill Williams (RC Toulon)
2011: Nick Evans (Harlequins)
2012: Dimitri Yachvili (Biarritz Olympique)
2013: Johnny Sexton (Leinster Rugby)
2014: Stephen Myler (Northampton Saints)
2015: Jonny May (Gloucester Rugby)
2016: Paul Willemsse (Montpellier)
2017: Sergio Parisse (Stade Francais Paris)



Challenge Cup Leading Scorers 2017/18

Points

Rank	Player	Team	Matches	Tries	Cons	PGs	DGs	Points
1	Jack Carty	Connacht Rugby	4	2	11	8	0	56
2	Owen Williams	Gloucester Rugby	7	2	18	3	0	55
3	Adam Radwan	Newcastle Falcons	8	10	0	0	0	50
4	Sam Hidalgo-Clyne	Edinburgh Rugby	6	2	9	7	0	49
5	Matt Healy	Connacht Rugby	6	9	0	0	0	45
6	Blair Kinghorn	Edinburgh Rugby	5	4	12	0	0	44
7	Matthieu Jalibert	Bordeaux-Begles	4	3	10	3	0	44
8	Toby Flood	Newcastle Falcons	5	2	14	2	0	44
9	Jarrod Evans	Cardiff Blues	7	0	11	7	0	43
10	Carlo Canna	Zebre Rugby Club	3	0	8	8	0	40

Tries

Rank	Player	Team	Matches	Tries
1	Adam Radwan	Newcastle Falcons	8	10
1	Matt Healy	Connacht Rugby	6	9
3	Ollie Thorley	Gloucester Rugby	3	6
3	Niyi Adeolokun	Connacht Rugby	3	5
3	Solomoni Rasolea	Edinburgh Rugby	6	5
3	Ben Vellacott	Gloucester Rugby	7	4
3	Blair Kinghorn	Edinburgh Rugby	5	4
8	Geoffrey Cros	Bordeaux-Begles	4	4

Goalkicking

Rank	Player	Team	Goals Kicked	Goals Missed	Total Attempts*	% Kicked
1	Joel Hodgson	Newcastle Falcons	13	1	14	93%
2	Colin Slade	Pau	10	1	11	91%
3	Yury Kushnarev	Enisei-STM	10	1	11	91%
3	Lionel Beauxis	Lyon	9	1	10	90%
5	Carlo Canna	Zebre Rugby Club	16	2	18	89%
6	Gaetan Germain	Brive	14	2	16	88%
7	Matthieu Jalibert	Bordeaux-Begles	13	2	15	87%
8	Blair Kinghorn	Edinburgh Rugby	12	2	14	86%
9	Julien Audy	Oyonnax	11	2	13	85%
9	Sam Hidalgo-Clyne	Edinburgh Rugby	16	3	19	84%