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BOOTH & HOPSON

GLOUCESTER RUGBY'S GREATEST HALF BACK PARTNERSHIP



he fully deserved the international cap that somehow always eluded him. Nicknamed "The General" by sections of the press, primarily because of his name, he lived up to that nickname on the pitch.

Terry Hopson was a mercurial genius, one of the most naturally gifted footballers ever to play for Gloucester. He was noted for his prodigious touch kicking and his ability to break with real pace. Although a match winner on many occasions, his lack of consistency sometimes frustrated his many admirers.



Early Days

Mickey Booth and Terry Hopson were born within a few months of each other, within a stone's throw of the Kingsholm ground and both attended the local St Marks Infants' School, before Mickey went on to Sir Thomas Rich's and Terry to Central School.

On leaving school, Mickey Booth played first for the newly formed Longlevens club and then for Spartans before joining Gloucester early in the 1956-57 season. He quickly impressed and, after three games for Gloucester United, made his debut at scrum half against Oxford University a few days before

his eighteenth birthday.

After leaving school Terry Hopson joined Gordon League, where he played in his preferred position of outside half. He moved to Bristol with his family in 1957 and joined Bath RFC, where he played for two seasons in the centre.

In 1958-59 he played against Gloucester both home and away, scoring a try at Kingsholm and making the scoring pass for his side's only try in the return at Bath. The matches were both drawn, 8-8 and 3-3, with Mickey Booth playing for Gloucester in the game at Bath.

ON match day in the 1960s, the first priority for a Gloucester supporter would be to secure a place in the Shed, open the programme, and scan the team list anxiously to check that Mickey Booth and Terry Hopson had been selected to play as the half back pairing that day.

Mickey Booth was a wily tactician who could control a game from an early age. His sniping runs, sound tactical kicking and fine service marked him out as one of the very best scrum halves of his generation, and many sound judges believed that



The Partnership Begins 1959-60

The Hopson family returned to Gloucester in 1959 when Terry's father, the former Gloucester hooker Joe Hopson, took over the Talbot Hotel. Terry joined the Gloucester club at the start of the 1959-60 season.

By this time, Mickey Booth was already well established as the Gloucester scrum half, having played over 90 1st XV games and ten for Gloucestershire and appeared in an England trial the previous season at the age of 19.

Terry played his first game at centre in a 17-14 home defeat by Stroud on 10 September (Mickey was playing in a county friendly in Bristol) but moved to outside half to play a further three games in ten days alongside Mickey Booth.

All three games were won and the reports on the new half back pairing were glowing. The Booth and Hopson partnership had arrived.

The two 20 year old half backs went on to play 35 games together in that first season, the best of the five seasons under Peter Ford's captaincy.

Doubles were achieved against Coventry, Bath and Moseley and there were notable wins against Cardiff, Leicester, Neath, Aberavon and both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. When Gloucester beat London Scottish 11-0 at Richmond on January 2, they had completed 13 successive victories – a club record.

The RAF Intervenes 1960-62

The partnership was broken the following season when Mickey Booth was called up for service in the RAF, which limited his Gloucester appearances. He

played in the RAF side which won the 1962 Triangular Services Tournament at Twickenham and played for the RAF against Gloucester in two narrow defeats at Kingsholm. He played in France with Combined Services in 1961 and toured South Africa in 1962.

Gloucester's team performance was disappointing in 1960-61 but Terry Hopson scored 16 tries and in 1961-62 caught the eye of the county selectors for the first time.

For Club and County 1962-66

Booth and Hopson played their first County Championship game in tandem against Somerset in October 1962 and for the next four seasons were the regular county pairing at half back.

On 17 December 1963, just three days after an off-key performance by Terry Hopson in a desperate 3-0 scrambled victory over Somerset at Kingsholm, the Hopson-Booth partnership put on perhaps their best display playing for Western Counties against the All Blacks at Bristol. The New Zealanders were run desperately close in winning 22-14 and considered Booth and Hopson to be the best half back pairing that they had met on tour.

Calls for the pair to be considered for international selection were ignored, although Mickey Booth was a travelling reserve for the final trial. This was the peak of the partnership with both players at their best. In four seasons they played 106 games for Gloucester and 13 times for the county.

The Later Years 1966-70

The 1966-70 period brought mixed

fortunes for Booth and Hopson and the opportunities to play together were more limited. Their final game in tandem was against Newbridge on 23 February 1970. The partnership had spanned eleven seasons and 206 games.

Terry Hopson had an outstanding game in Western Counties' 9-0 win against the Wallabies in January 1967 but had difficulty getting into the Gloucester side. In February 1968 he resigned and was approached by Bath. The following month he returned to Kingsholm with Bath and featured in a rare bitter-sweet 18-6 Bath victory over Gloucester.

He rejoined Gloucester for 1969-70 and had another fine season, playing for Western Counties who drew 3-3 with the Springboks in December and for Gloucestershire in the County Championship final.

Returning for Gloucester United at Kingsholm in January 1971, following a thigh injury which had sidelined him all season, he suffered a broken leg, which ended his career.

Mickey Booth also had his problems with the Gloucester committee and as a result played few games in Hopson's final 1969-70 season. He played on with great success for a further two years however, striking up a fine partnership with Tom Palmer and ended his career at Twickenham in Gloucester's 1972 Cup Final victory over Moseley.

Hopson on Booth:

"Mickey Booth....a very, very good player.....good at protecting an outside half....he was deadly accurate with his passing....he was an immaculate chip kicker....if his pack wasn't going forward, he'd make sure it was... he'd do little sniping breaks to break the game up.... he could win a game without an outside half."

Booth on Hopson:

"Terry Hopson was so gifted....he had the biggest kick I've seen in my life....pace, an eye for an opening.... when he was on form he was a magnificent player."

Interviews with Terry Hopson and Mickey Booth may be heard on www.gloucesterrugbyheritage.org.uk.