

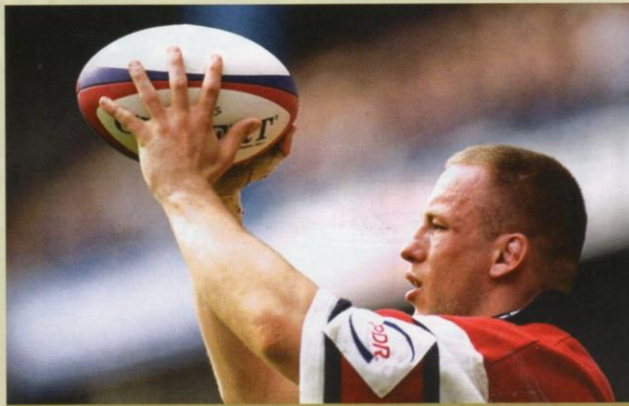


GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE

www.gloucester rugby heritage.org.uk

GLOUCESTER HOOKERS PART 3

FOR MANY YEARS, POSITIONS IN A RUGBY TEAM, ESPECIALLY THE FORWARDS, WERE NOT DEFINED. IN THE VERY EARLY DAYS, AS A SCRUM WAS FORMED THE FIRST PLAYERS TO ARRIVE WOULD FORM THE FRONT ROW AND SO ON.



• NEIL McCARTHY

NEIL McCARTHY
NEIL McCarthy won caps at every England level, Under 16, Under 18, Under 21 and Senior. In his youth he played as a prop. A combative and dependable hooker, he made 65 appearances for Gloucester from 1997-2000.

Neil was born on 29 November 1974 at Slough. His early rugby was played in the Bath Academy team, and he went on loan to Bedford for the 1996-97 season, just as professionalism was starting, before making his first appearance for Gloucester off the bench against Bristol on 24 August 1997, the game in which Philippe Saint-André played his first game for the club.

His first start was a fortnight later against Petrarca Padova on 7 September. He had to fight hard for his hooking spot against stiff opposition, first

from Phil Greening and then Chris Fortey. However, he was in the team which won the C&G Cup against Bedford in 1998.

He soon after broke through to international recognition and won three England caps, all as a replacement, the first of which was against Ireland in March 1999. In 2000 Neil left the club for Bristol where he played until 2002, when a knee injury in October of that year ended his career at the Mem and he moved north to join Orrell.

From 2008 to 2015 Neil was Academy Manager at Leicester Tigers, but in March this year he returned to Kingsholm as head of Gloucester's Academy.

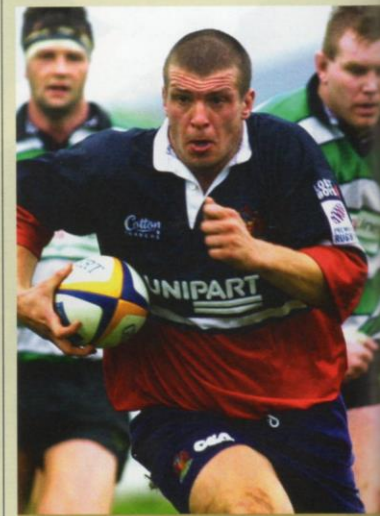
CHRIS FORTEY
CHRIS Fortey was born on 25 August 1975 and first played for Gordon League before making his debut for Gloucester on 19 March

1996 against Lydney, a game which proved to be the last one played against the Forest club.

He started his Gloucester career as third choice hooker behind Phil Greening and Neil McCarthy. But he was hooker in the winning C&G Cup Final team in 1999, and by the 1999-2000 season he was sharing the top spot with Neil McCarthy.

The next season he attracted national recognition by touring with the England 'A' squad to Canada and USA.

Ollie Azam arrived at the start of the 2000-01 season, which further restricted Chris's appearances, but he did have one undisputed season as first choice in 2003-04 when Ollie returned to France.



• CHRIS FORTEY



GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE



Ollie's return the following season prompted a move to Sale, but early in the season he broke an ankle. He moved on to Worcester where he played for several seasons. Chris appeared in 185 Gloucester games from 1996 to 2005.

OLLIE AZAM

OLLIE Azam must rate as one of the most popular players ever to pull on the famous Cherry and White jersey. The Kingsholm crowd loved his complete commitment to the cause (some referees thought he was a little over-committed), and the sight of him barging upfield with perhaps three tacklers trying to subdue him would bring loud calls of "Oll-ie, Oll-ie" from the Shed.



• OLLIE AZAM

No matter that he was French, he had become an adopted Gloucesterian, appearing in 240 games from 2000 to 2011.

Ollie was born on 21 October 1974 in Tarbes. He played at No.8 initially for the local club, before moving to the front row. He then played for Montferrand (now known as Clermont-

Auvergne, a club some may have heard of).

In 1995 at the age of 21 he was awarded his first two French caps against Romania and Argentina. Several France 'A' appearances followed, but it would not be until 2000-02 that he gained his other eight full caps.

It was Philippe Saint-André, with whom Ollie had played at Montferrand, who brought him to Kingsholm for the start of the 2000-01 season. He was an immediate hit with the home supporters, who loved his aggressive performances.

Referees tended to take a different opinion, and Ollie was no stranger to yellow cards and some lengthy suspensions, none of which diminished the adoration of the Shed.

In 2000-01 Gloucester had a long run in the Heineken Cup, and only lost in the semi-final to Leicester. Ollie was present in all eight games. He was there in the successful Zurich League Championship Final against Bristol in 2002, the winning Powergen Cup team against Northampton in 2003, and a few weeks later in the team which lost the Premiership Final to Wasps. In 2006 Gloucester won the European Challenge Cup final against London Irish, and Ollie came off the bench in that game.

Ollie did leave Kingsholm for one season (2003-04) and returned to Montferrand, but the lure of Gloucester was too great and he was back the following season. In 2008-09 he was voted the Supporters' Player of the Year, and in 2010-11 he was awarded a Club Testimonial.

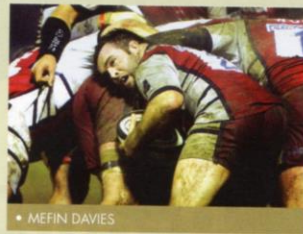
As time went on, the one flaw to Ollie's game, throwing in to the line-out, became more apparent, but it was still a shock when he was not retained after the 2010-11 season. He did

have the satisfaction though, of being in the team which won the LV= Cup Final against Newcastle that season.

Ollie then became Forwards Coach at Toulon, and in 2013 was named coach at Lyon, where he guided them into the French Top 14. Olivier is now Director of Sport at French side Oyonnax.

MEFIN DAVIES

MEFIN Davies was a seasoned Welsh International well before coming to Kingsholm. He was first capped in 2002 whilst a Pontypridd player, and captained Wales against Romania in 2003. He won 38 caps from 2002-07.



• MEFIN DAVIES

When rugby in Wales was regionalised, Mefin played for Celtic Warriors, the amalgamation of Pontypridd and Bridgend. Unfortunately, the region folded in 2004, and Gloucester adroitly offered Mefin a contract, in order to cover for injury to Ollie Azam and the exit of Chris Fortey to Worcester.

He was a good investment, a solid and reliable hooker, and went on to make 65 appearances from 2004-07. He was in the winning European Challenge Cup Final against London Irish in 2006.

In 2007 he signed a contract with Leicester and, ironically, his final game for Gloucester was against Leicester in the Premiership Final of 2007, when he came off the bench.

Mefin is now part of the coaching set-up at Worcester.

