

# GLOUCESTER v NEWPORT AN ANCIENT RIVALRY

TODAY WE WELCOME THE NEWPORT GWENT DRAGONS AND TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LOOK AT OVER A HUNDRED YEARS OF RIVALRY BETWEEN THE CHERRY AND WHITES AND NEWPORT RFC, THE MIGHTY "BLACK AND AMBERS", FROM 1878 TO 1995 IN THE AMATEUR ERA.

Always one of Gloucester's most respected opponents, the playing record tells the story:

**1878-1995:**  
PLD 195 W 56 L 119 D 20  
Gloucester Win Percentage: 28.71%

Compare this with Gloucester's playing record against Bath in the amateur era:

**1882-1996:**  
PLD 180 W 112 L 49 D 19  
Gloucester Win Percentage: 62.22%

or even against Leicester:

**1891-1996:**  
PLD 167 W 89 L 72 D 6  
Gloucester Win Percentage: 53.29%

**THE FIRST MATCH:  
NEWPORT 0  
GLOUCESTER 0**  
Rodney Parade, 7 December 1878  
GLOUCESTER first played Newport on 7 December 1878, five years after the Gloucester club was formed. Newport, formed a year later in 1874, had acquired the Rodney Parade ground the previous year. Both sides were unbeaten. It was Gloucester's first match against Welsh opposition and the first of countless trips across the Severn into Wales. The trail-blazing captain was Frank Brown, who did much towards establishing Gloucester as a first class club.

The match was played in fine weather in front of a large crowd. As in so many future contests between the two sides, Gloucester had the edge up front but had to defend stubbornly to keep out the Newport backs. The Gloucestershire Chronicle described the match as "one of the best ever seen at the Newport ground", a view shared by the Western Mail whose correspondent said that "the match was the hardest that Newport has had to play all season, and the pleasantest by far."

A return game was played at the Spa Ground Gloucester on 15 February, which Newport won by a try to 0. It was Gloucester's only defeat of 1878-79. Newport remained unbeaten.

**A CLEAN SWEEP:  
GLOUCESTER 12  
NEWPORT 9**  
Kingsholm, 29 January 1921  
WHEN Newport came to Kingsholm on 29 January 1921 they were undefeated that season and had not lost to Gloucester for 13 years. The Gloucester Citizen commented, "Not since the famous All Blacks came to Gloucester in 1905 has a match aroused such tremendous interest as the visit of the Invincible Newport XV to Kingsholm this afternoon."

The match lived up to



• "FATHER" DIX

expectations, Gloucester winning a tense contest largely through superlative performances by their half backs Dix and Robbins who controlled the game. "Father" Dix scored a try and Robbins kicked a conversion and dropped a goal; a try from forward Joe Harris completed the scoring. Welsh international scrum half Tommy Vile instigated the best of the Newport moves, scoring a try himself and creating tries for Holland and Plummer.

The Citizen said, "A notable day for Gloucester football. I doubt if a more exciting match has ever been seen at Kingsholm." and the South Wales Daily News summed up, "The record has gone; it has found a last resting place like so many other Welsh records at Kingsholm. All Wales will sympathise with Newport."

The players were each presented with an inscribed silver cigarette case to commemorate the victory and Gloucester went on to defeat all four top Welsh clubs (Newport, Cardiff, Swansea





and Llanelli) at Kingsholm that season.

**THE DOUBLE:  
NEWPORT 6  
GLOUCESTER 10**

**Rodney Parade, 14 January 1933**  
THIS was the second time that Gloucester had achieved the double over Newport, the first being in 1881-82. The Cherry and Whites had not won at Rodney Parade for 50 years and arrived on a foggy day with a three quarter line missing Kit Tanner and Roy James, but their young replacements Bob Hook and Francis Edwards, at the start of long and distinguished careers with the club, both had outstanding games in attack and defence. In the pack, England international back row Peter Hordern, an ex-Newport player, gave one of his storming performances.

Gloucester's tries were scored by Vernon Sheppard and John Brooks and converted by Bob Hook. Conditions were slippery underfoot but the Citizen rated Gloucester's victory as "one of the best exhibitions of football a Gloucester side has given on Welsh soil for many years."

Gloucester went on to complete the double with a 10-0 win at Kingsholm in March. It was an outstanding period in the club's history, under the captaincy of Fred Wadley.



• BOB HOOK

**A "DING-DONG THRILLER":  
GLOUCESTER 17  
NEWPORT 13**

**Kingsholm 18 October 1975**  
IN 1975 the Anglo-Welsh rivalry was still at its height at club level and nowhere more than at Kingsholm where, throughout the seventies, Gloucester had an outstanding record against Welsh sides. This close and thrilling game was headlined in the Citizen, "Gloucester win the big one – a ding-dong thriller".

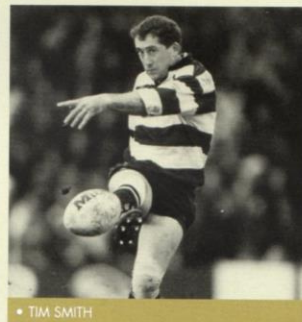
After Gloucester had taken an early lead through two Peter Butler penalties, Newport's right wing Ken Davies scored in the corner. Back came Gloucester with a try from Dick Smith in which he sold an outrageous dummy to go over to the delight of the crowd. Newport replied with a Fuller penalty and then right on half time went ahead with a try from Richard Taylor which Fuller converted to make the score 10-13.

Gloucester regained the lead in the second half when a kick ahead by Peter Kingston was taken by Richard Mogg who eluded several tackles to put Eddie Pinkney away, Kingston taking the final pass to go over in the corner. Victory was secured when Peter Butler landed a 40 yard penalty to make the score 17-13.

**THE LAST MATCH:  
GLOUCESTER 44  
NEWPORT 19**

**Kingsholm, 17 March 1995**  
IN an era of national cup and league competitions with the game about to turn professional, the "friendly" matches between English and Welsh clubs on the traditional fixture list had started to lose their relevance and teams were rarely at full strength.

For entertainment value,



• TIM SMITH

however, this match could not be faulted. With almost an hour gone, the Cherry and Whites were 19-12 down from tries scored for Newport by no. 8 Mark Workman and centre Simon Enoch and were now playing into a strong wind.

But, having struggled to win quick possession all night, the home team suddenly sparked into life and ran in five tries – some from deep in their own half. Man of the Match Mike Roberts, Pete Miles, Chris Dee, Robin Saltmarsh and Tim Smith all scored against a tiring defence. Gloucester were running penalties from everywhere – even in front of their posts. Hylton Brown had scored for Gloucester in the first half.

Sadly, this was to be the last fixture played between the two clubs. When hostilities ceased in 1995 one of the longest standing rivalries in senior club rugby worldwide came to an end after 117 years and 195 games.

For the next eight years Newport RFC continued to compete in European competition, but the two sides were never drawn together. Then, with the formation of the Newport-Gwent region (the "Dragons") in 2003, the opportunity to continue the ancient rivalry was gone perhaps forever, although the Black and Ambers do continue to thrive in the Premiership of the Welsh Principality League and share their Rodney Parade headquarters with the regional side.

