



GLOUCESTER RUGBY
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THE HEYDAY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE RUGBY (PART 1)

For the younger rugby fan it must be difficult to appreciate quite how popular the County Championship was, attracting crowds far in excess of any club game.

Gloucestershire were always a major force in the competition, being able to call on the players of Gloucester and Bristol.

Between 1910 and 1922, Gloucestershire won the competition five times, and attained a hat-trick of titles from 1930 to 1932. One more win in 1937 ended that golden age. Although the county played in three finals between 1947 and 1959, they were all lost.

In 1970 Gloucestershire were red-hot favourites to win the title against relative newcomers Staffordshire at Burton-on-Trent. It was not to be, for Staffordshire deservedly won the final 11-9.

The following season the county moved smoothly through the group stage beating Devon, Somerset and Cornwall. Dorset and Wilts were beaten in the quarter-final and Northumberland

in a very tough semi-final, setting up a Kingsholm final against Surrey, watched by a crowd of 18,000. There was bitter disappointment when Surrey won comfortably 14-3.

It seemed that Gloucestershire were doomed to never win another title, but things were about to change.

1971-72

The county started the campaign with a sweeping 36-17 win over Somerset at Bath. Peter Knight the Bristol wing scored a hat-trick of tries and Eric Stephens kicked three conversions and two penalties.

However, the next game was against Cornwall at notorious Redruth, and Cornish fire saw their team home 13-10. Devon were beaten at Bristol 14-4, which meant there had to be a play-off with Somerset to decide the South-West group winners. The game was played at Kingsholm and Gloucestershire won 24-0. Unusually, there were only four Gloucester players in the team: Eric Stephens, Robin Cowling, Nigel Jackson and Dick Smith.

In the quarter-final Berkshire were beaten 38-19 at Bristol and in the semi-final played at Richmond, Middlesex were defeated 19-16.

The final was against Warwickshire who had won the title seven times between 1958 and 1965. A big factor was that Warwickshire consisted almost entirely of Coventry players (there

were 13 in the final), and the club was at that time just about the strongest in the country, with an awesome pack of forwards. In addition the final was played at Coventry, so not surprisingly they were favourites to win.

The Gloucestershire team was captained by Dave Watt of Bristol, a rock hard second rower, who, when he played for his club at Kingsholm, was one of the players the Shed loved to hate.

The team was: Peter Knight (Bristol); Alan Morley (Bristol), Richard Jardine (Gloucester), John Gabitass (Bristol), Eric Stephens (Gloucester); Bob Redwood (Cheltenham), John Cannon (Clifton); Mike Burton (Gloucester), John Pullin (Bristol), Robin Cowling (Gloucester), Dave Watt (Bristol), Alan Brinn (Gloucester), Charlie Hannaford (Bristol), Dave Rollitt (Bristol), Dick Smith (Gloucester).

Dave Duckham scored an early try for the home county, which was converted, but that proved to be their only score. Alan Morley scored a try before half-time. After the interval, Eric Stephens kicked a penalty, and to wrap up the win Charlie Hannaford scored a try. Gloucestershire won 11-6 and had their first title for 35 years.

1972-73

Hopes were high that Gloucestershire could win back-to-back finals. A draw in the group stage against Devon necessitated a play-off against the same opponents.

This resulted in a 22-19 win at



Kingsholm, Peter Butler kicking a conversion and four penalties. Oxfordshire were well beaten 39-12 again at Kingsholm, before a very tight game against Eastern Counties, which was won 7-6, set up a final against Lancashire at Bristol. The surface was treacherous following heavy rain, and Lancashire coped the better and deserved to win 17-12.

1973-74
The county, now captained by John Pullin of Bristol, who also captained England, made no mistake this time round in the group stage, defeating Devon 21-9, Somerset 10-6 and Cornwall 9-7. All the points apart from an Alan Morley try against Somerset were scored by Peter Butler who kicked 12 penalties.

The quarter-final was played at Aylesbury against Buckinghamshire, where Gloucestershire won 10-0, tries being scored by Dave Pointon, then at St. Paul's College, Cheltenham, and Alan Morley, plus a conversion from Peter Butler. It was not a convincing display.

Old enemies Warwickshire now stood in the way of another final. Again played at Coventry, the county ran out winners by 27 points to 15. Not playing their usual tight game, Gloucestershire threw the ball about resulting in five tries, Alan Morley and Bob Clewes each scored two and Richard Jardine the other. Butler made two conversions and kicked a penalty. Much credit for the display must go to Richard Harding the Cambridge University Blue at scrum-half who prompted many attacks.

The final meant a trip to Blundellsands to play Lancashire who were captained by the England player, Tony Neary. In the event Gloucestershire ran out comfortable winners 22-12, Peter Butler again making a big

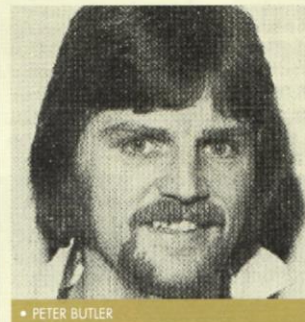
contribution with four penalties and a conversion. Alan Morley inevitably scored two tries. In all Butler had kicked 59 points out of the 99 scored by the county.

The winning team, containing ten Gloucester players, was: Peter Butler (Gloucester); Bob Clewes (Gloucester), John Bayliss (Gloucester), Richard Jardine (Gloucester), Alan Morley (Bristol); Bob Redwood (Cheltenham), Richard Harding (Bristol); Mike Burton (Gloucester), John Pullin (Bristol), Robin Cowling (Gloucester), John Fidler (Gloucester), Alan Brinn (Gloucester), John Haines (Gloucester), Charlie Hannaford (Bristol), John Watkins (Gloucester)

1974-75
Again Gloucestershire swept the board in the South-West group, defeating Somerset at Kingsholm 14-3, Cornwall 9-6 and Devon 23-6. There were no fewer than 12 Gloucester players in the team which played Cornwall. John Bayliss captained the team this season and the next. Little trouble was expected from Hertfordshire, the county's opponents in the quarter-final at Bristol.

The game was very close in fact, and much thanks had to go to Peter Butler who scored all the points with five penalties in the 15-12 victory. Hertfordshire scored the only try of the game. To add to the county's worries Mike Burton was sent off when they were still 9-12 behind. Thanks to Butler indeed.

Gloucestershire now seemed to be getting the measure of Warwickshire, opponents yet again in the semi-final at Kingsholm, for they won 28-3, Peter Kingston scoring two tries and John Watkins the other. Peter Butler again scored heavily, weighing in with two conversions



PETER BUTLER

and four penalties.

Kingsholm was yet again the venue for the final against Eastern Counties. It was a very wet day and conditions were difficult. It must have affected Butler because he missed six penalties before scoring with his seventh attempt. Alan Brinn and Stewart Dix scored tries. The 13-9 score would suggest a close contest, but Gloucestershire won comfortably enough.

Peter Butler's contribution of 69 points to the campaign was again immense

The team for Gloucestershire's twelfth Championship win, again containing ten Gloucester players, was: Peter Butler (Gloucester); Alan Morley (Bristol), John Bayliss (Gloucester), Richard Jardine (Gloucester), Stewart Dix (Gloucester); Dave Pointon (St. Paul's College, Cheltenham), Peter Kingston (Gloucester); Mike Burton (Gloucester), Dave Protherough (Moseley), Barry Nelmes (Bristol), John Fidler (Gloucester), Alan Brinn (Gloucester), John Haines (Gloucester), Dave Rollitt (Bristol), John Watkins (Gloucester).

Alan Brinn had appeared in five consecutive finals and been on the winning side three times. This was his 48th and last appearance for the county.

Gloucestershire had now won two titles on the trot. Could they make it a third? Part 2 will continue the story.

