



GLOUCESTER RUGBY
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THE HEYDAY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE RUGBY (PART 2)

Gloucestershire had won consecutive Championships in 1974 and 75. The question now was could they achieve a hat-trick of titles to match the achievement of 1930 to 1932?

1975-76



• JOHN BAYLISS

For the second season running John Bayliss was captain.

Winning the South-West group proved to be no problem apart from a tight game at Redruth against Cornwall (9-6). Devon were beaten 34-6, Alan Morley scoring three tries and Somerset 15-9, Peter Butler kicking five penalties.

The quarter-final opponents were Hertfordshire at Croxley Green. Gloucestershire won easily enough 29-7, with tries from Alan Morley, Mike Burton and Barry Nelmes. Inevitably Peter Butler weighed in with 17 points, made up of five penalties and a conversion.

The semi-final opponents at Bristol were Lancashire, captained

by Tony Neary. Peter Butler again made a big contribution with three penalties and a conversion of Alan Morley's try to see Gloucestershire home 15-7.

The final at Richmond was against Middlesex, and turned out to be a bravura performance by Peter Butler. He scored all the points in the county's 24-9 win, scoring a try, conversion and six penalties. It meant that out of the county's total of 126 points scored in the competition, Butler contributed a remarkable 90. Gloucestershire had won three consecutive titles for the first time since the famous team of the thirties.

The victorious team was: Peter Butler; Bob Clewes, John Bayliss, Chris (C.J) Williams (Bristol), Alan Morley (Bristol); Chris (C.G) Williams, Peter Kingston; Barry Nelmes (Cardiff), John Pullin (Bristol), Mike Burton, Roger Powell (Llanelli), John Fidler, John Watkins, Dave Rollitt (Bristol), Mike Rafter (Bristol)

That was a formidable pack of forwards. Having captained the county to successive titles John Bayliss retired from county rugby. He had played 57 times and scored seven tries.

Was it possible that the county could win yet again in 1976-77; a fourth consecutive win would be a record. The campaign started well enough with the county moving smoothly to a quarter-final against Oxfordshire at Kingsholm which was won 37-12.

This was Gloucestershire's 22nd

consecutive win in championship games, so hopes were high as the team travelled to Vale of Lune to face Lancashire yet again in the semi-final. In a dour game the county's great run ended in a 15-19 defeat. Lancashire went on to win the title against the previous season's finalists, Middlesex.

The following seasons proved very frustrating for the county's supporters. In 1977-78 Gloucestershire moved through to another final against North Midlands. Although being hot favourites the county lost 10-7 at Moseley.

Even worse, in 1978-79, Middlesex knocked out Gloucestershire at the semi-final stage winning 21-13 at Kingsholm. This was the first time the county had lost at Castle Grim since 1971.



• PETER BUTLER

In 1979-80 progress was made to yet another final, this time against Lancashire at the Vale of Lune ground. But Lancashire came out on top 21-15, in front of





a crowd of 10,000.

The 1980-81 season followed a very similar pattern. Gloucestershire lost to Northumberland in the final at Kingsholm. Peter Butler's county career ended with this game. He played 54 times for the county, scoring three tries, 81 conversions, 122 penalties and eight drop goals for a total of 564 points. He had played in eight finals and was on the winning side in four.

There was further disappointment in 1981-82. At the semi-final stage, Gloucestershire lost to Lancashire 24-16 in yet another game at Kingsholm.

1982-83
The county championship was restructured for this season. Out went the former regional group stage, and a league system was set up. Gloucestershire, with Bristol's Mike Rafter as captain, were placed in Division 1 which consisted of two groups.

All the matches were won. Yorkshire were beaten 9-6, North Midlands 37-6 with John Gadd and Nick Price scoring tries, and Lancashire 15-13. The county proceeded to a semi-final against Surrey played at Bristol in thick fog. Gloucestershire took an early 11-0 lead, and although Surrey fought back, the result was never seriously in doubt.

Bristol was again the venue for the final against Yorkshire, already beaten in the group stage. The powerful home forwards set a sound platform for the backs to run at the opposition. Tries were scored by Alan Morley, Phil Cue, Richard Harding and Steve Boyle. David Sorrell kicked a penalty and Gloucestershire won 19-7. In scoring his try Steve Boyle injured his knee, and there was concern that he might not be able to make his international debut against

Wales the following week. In the end he made it.

The Gloucestershire team was: Phil Cue (Bristol); Alan Morley (Bristol), Ralph Knibbs (Bristol), Simon Hogg (Bristol), John Carr (Bristol); Austin Sheppard (Bristol), Kevin Bogira (Bristol), Malcolm Preedy (Gloucester), John Fidler (Gloucester), Steve Boyle (Gloucester), Mike Rafter (Bristol), John Gadd (Gloucester), Bob Hesford (Bristol)

1983-84
Gloucestershire again with Mike Rafter as captain won all their Division 1 group games. They beat Surrey 22-3, despite John Orwin being sent off, Northumberland 19-16 and Yorkshire 25-6 at Kingsholm.

Castle Grim was also host to the semi-final against Middlesex. This was a close affair. Middlesex were at one point leading 12-0. But the redoubtable county forwards finally gained the ascendancy and Gloucestershire sneaked home 13-12. Alan Morley (again) was the try scorer and Stuart Barnes kicked three penalties.

There was now a four month wait before the final, which for the first time was played at Twickenham. Somerset were the other finalists. Fourteen of the Somerset team played for Bath, who at the time were easily the most successful club side in the country. Thus the final was viewed as a test match between the combined strengths of Gloucester and Bristol against Bath.

It was an exciting game watched by 26,000 spectators. Early on Somerset attacked strongly but could only score three penalties. Gloucestershire came back with a try from Ralph Knibbs and two penalties by Barnes. Then in the second half the county ran riot with tries from Alan

Morley (2), Stuart Barnes, Richard Harding and Simon Hogg. The game was won 36-18.

Gloucestershire had appeared in 12 finals in 15 seasons, which was a fine achievement. They had now won the title 15 times.

The team was: Phil Cue (Bristol); Alan Morley (Bristol), Richard Mogg (Gloucester), Ralph Knibbs (Bristol), Nick Price (Gloucester); Stuart Barnes (Bristol), Richard Harding (Bristol); Malcolm Preedy (Gloucester), Steve Mills (Gloucester), Phil Blakeway (Gloucester), John Fidler (Gloucester), John Orwin (Gloucester), John Gadd (Gloucester), Mike Rafter (Bristol), Bob Hesford (Bristol)

The final was John Fidler's last game for the county. From 1971 to 1984 he had made 42 appearances, played in nine finals, and was on the winning side in five.



• JOHN FIDLER

The following season the county again proceeded through the Division 1 games without mishap apart from a 6-6 draw with Somerset, but lost surprisingly to Notts, Lincs and Derby in the semi-final at Bristol, 14-9.

But the 1984-85 season proved to be the last where the major clubs supplied their best players to the County Championship. The competition was downgraded so that counties selected their players from lower leagues.



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