

GLOUCESTER RUGBY
HERITAGE

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GREAT PLAYERS FROM THE GLOUCESTER BACK ROW

PART ONE

The period immediately before and after World War I



1.

1. SID SMART

Born at Kingsholm, Gloucester in 1888, Sid Smart was a No 8 with a real turn of speed who was working as a driller at Gloucester Wagon Works when he joined Gloucester RFC from Gordon League in 1911.

He quickly established himself in the senior side and within a few months was playing County Championship Rugby for Gloucestershire. His meteoric rise continued the following year when the selectors took note and after two successful trials he was picked for England against South Africa.

He went on to play throughout England's 1912-13 Grand Slam season and was an ever-present for Gloucestershire, winning the first of his four County Championship Winners medals. The success continued in 1913-14 when he represented England throughout a second successive Grand Slam.

After war service in the army, Sid returned to further rugby success, gaining three more England caps and helping Gloucestershire to win three successive County Championships in 1920-21-22.

In 1920-21, his England career now over, he played for Gloucester in rare victories over all four leading Welsh clubs. He was made club captain the following season.

In all, Sid made 196 appearances for his club, 32 for his county and won 12 England caps. But for the war, the totals would surely have been much higher.

A life member of the Gloucester club, Sid Smart was still acting as a steward in the grandstand at his beloved Kingsholm when he collapsed and died aged 81.



2.

2. ARTHUR "TART" HALL

The son of a coalminer from Ruspidge in the Forest of Dean, "Tart" Hall was an outstanding half back for Cinderford, Bristol and Gloucestershire before the 1914-18 war, partnering the great Adrian Stoop in an England trial in 1911 and winning a County Championship Winners medal in the 1912-13 final against Cumberland. He joined Gloucester from Bristol in 1913 to play his rugby closer to his home in the Forest, continuing to play at half back.

After the war "Tart" Hall rejoined Gloucester and, at the age of 33, moved to the back row of the pack where he was to play for a further 9 seasons and 200 games. He went on to gain a second England trial in 1920 and three more County Championship Winners Medals in 1920-21-22.

The legendary hard man from the



3.

Forest retained his pace and fitness to the end of his career and played his final match at the age of 41.

The Citizen paid this tribute, "A keener enthusiast never stepped on the playing field...a more popular player has never donned a Gloucester jersey."

FRANK AYLIFFE

Born in Gloucester in 1892, Frank Ayliffe had just broken into the Gloucester side when World War I brought his playing career to a halt. He was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Worcestershire Regiment and wounded in both arms while fighting in France but was able to resume playing after the war and went on to make 239 appearances for Gloucester and 28 for Gloucestershire.

In 1919-20, he played in 30 of Gloucester's 33 fixtures and, playing alongside Smart and Hall, won the first of three Championship Winners medals for Gloucestershire. Athletic News described Frank as "a strong young fellow who has very good hands but also does his share of work in the pack." He retained his county place to win medals in each of Gloucestershire's three successive 1920-21-22 victories.

In 1922-23 he took over from Sid Smart as club captain and proved a popular leader of a successful team which equalled the club record of 27 wins. Ending his county career with a fourth Championship final in 1924-25, he went on to play a final season for Gloucester, appearing in 31 of their 37 fixtures.

3. TOM VOYCE

Was Tom Voyce the greatest player ever to put on a Cherry and White jersey? Dubbed the "King of Gloucester," he appeared in every match for England's Grand Slam winning teams of 1921, 1923 and 1924 and when he retired with 27 caps was second only to his friend and captain Wavell Wakefield in the list of most-capped England players.

A British Lion in South Africa in 1924, he was forced through injuries to play many of his games outside the scrum and was described by the South African captain as "the second best wing three-quarter in the British team." With his ferocious tackling and pace around the pitch, he set new standards for back row play.

Tom was born in Gloucester in 1897 and played his early rugby with Gordon League. His career was all the more remarkable because of a serious eye injury he sustained while serving in World War I.

On leaving the army he joined Gloucester RFC and, within six months of his first senior club game, made his England debut against Ireland at Lansdowne Road. A reserve for the 1920 County Championship Final, he won Championship Winners medals in 1921 and 1922 and played 27 games for his county.

Tom Voyce captained Gloucester for four seasons from 1924 to 27 before retiring the following year, having played 171 games (a total limited by representative calls) and scored 55 tries. He went on to become President of the RFU in 1960 and was awarded the OBE two years later. He was President of Gloucester from 1970 to 1978.

Wavell Wakefield paid this tribute, "The name of Tom Voyce is synonymous with that of Gloucester...for he was a great player from a great club - a wonderful inspiration to any side."

4. GEORGE MCLWAIN

South African born George McIlwaine came to Gloucester in 1925 while at Cambridge, having failed to get into the University side. Coached by Tom Voyce, he quickly developed into a top class wing forward and became a favourite with the Kingsholm crowd. The following season he gained his first blue in an overwhelming Cambridge victory by 33 points to three and was described as the finest forward on the field. He



played for Gloucestershire against the New Zealand Maoris, Yorkshire and Devon and scored two tries in a rare Gloucester victory over Swansea.

That summer his outstanding performances won him a place on the British Isles tour of Argentina in which he took part in all four unofficial tests. He came home to win a second blue and to play for Western Counties against New South Wales Waratahs.

In 1928-29, his final season, he played in a third successive Cambridge victory and represented the Barbarians at Leicester. His last game was for Gloucestershire against Devon in the South West Championship play-off.

In his brief 33 game career with Gloucester, McIlwaine had made a great impact and many friends at the club and it came as a great shock when it was reported on 1 November 1930 that he had died in Calcutta at the age of 25.