

GLOUCESTER RUGBY
HERITAGEwww.gloucesterrugbyheritage.org.ukTOUCHING
GREATNESSGLOUCESTER AND TOULOUSE
IN 2011-12

The 2011-12 season will be remembered by the Gloucester faithful as one in which a talented Gloucester side, who had been tipped to make the Aviva Premiership play-offs, lost their last six games to finish eighth. However, the season was also notable for one glorious highlight – the home and away Heineken Cup ties against the all-conquering Toulouse.

Gloucester had been drawn in a strong group with Toulouse, Harlequins and Connacht. The opening match could not have been more daunting. The opposition was Toulouse, the French champions and the only club to have won the cup four times, on their home turf, the Stade Ernest-Wallon.

Gloucester, reeling after the expulsion of Mike Tindall from the England squad, following incidents at the 2011 World Cup, and the suspension of Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolo, following an outburst on Twitter, had had the worst of weeks in preparation and were very much the underdogs.

TOULOUSE 21 GLOUCESTER
17, STADE ERNEST-WALLON,
SUNDAY NOVEMBER 13 2011

Given no chance by the pundits, Gloucester rose to the occasion and, in an effort of heroic proportions, almost won the game.

Man of the Match Mike Tindall had a towering game. In a match in which the eyes of the rugby world were upon him he turned in one of his best performances in a Gloucester shirt, creating tries for Charlie Sharples and Henry Trinder and making a number of try-saving tackles.

Tindall inspired his young back-line in which Jonny May, a late replacement for Olly Morgan at full back, Henry Trinder, coming in for the suspended Fuimaono-Sapolo, and Charlie Sharples were also outstanding.

The Telegraph commented:

"Right wing Sharples should have been in New Zealand with England – his omission remains baffling – and

was a constant threat on Sunday... Trinder is one of the most instinctive young players in England and he clearly demonstrated that in the second half when he appeared on Tindall's shoulder at exactly the right time and then showed a fair turn of speed to score a well-worked try. Who knows who is selecting England squads these days but hopefully somebody out there noticed."

The visitors had led 10-0 after Freddie Burns landed a penalty and converted a try from Charlie Sharples, created by Mike Tindall, but Toulouse came back through a penalty by Luke McAlister who then put a beautifully weighted chip into the right corner for wing Timoci Matanavou to touch down.

McAlister missed the conversion, but was on target with a simple penalty 11 minutes into the second half after Alasdair Strokosch was sin-binned for slapping the ball out of Matanavou's hands. The Toulouse pack were now dominant with Australian scrum half Luke Burgess giving a powerful display.

Burns missed a relatively straightforward opportunity to put Gloucester back in front minutes later, and Toulouse should have gone further ahead when a rampaging burst from flanker Yannick Nyanga split the visitors' defence, but they wasted a huge overlap on the left when Yves Donguy dropped Poitrenaud's pass with the line gaping.

The hosts then had another try disallowed for a forward pass from Matanavou, and their frustration grew when Lionel Beauxis, on as a



replacement for McAlister, sliced a drop-goal attempt wide from inside the Gloucester 22.

Beauxis was successful from the tee when Gloucester were penalised at a scrum, to make the score 14-10 but then Toulouse attempted to attack from deep only to lose the ball thirty metres out, allowing Tindall to make a half-break and send Trinder bursting through to score, Burns converting to make it 17-14 with 10 minutes left.

A famous victory was now on the cards, but it was not to be. Full back Clement Poitrenaud gathered a pass from his winger Matanavou that appeared to be forward, but referee Peter Fitzgibbon ruled that the ball had come back off a Gloucester hand and Poitrenaud went over for the winning score.

GLOUCESTER 34 TOULOUSE 24, KINGSHOLM, FRIDAY JANUARY 20 2012

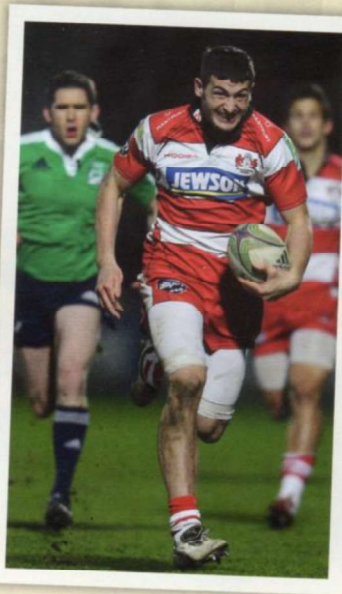
By the time Gloucester came to play the return match against Toulouse, they had lost both home and away to Harlequins and put themselves out of contention for a place in the last eight. Their opponents still had everything to play for, but Gloucester were playing to avenge their defeat in November in the south of France.

Once again Gloucester confounded the pundits with easily their most accomplished performance of the season. They scored tries through Jonny May (two), Akapusi Qera and Charlie Sharples and played with a spirit that suggested that the second half of the domestic season would be significantly more prolific than the first.

The Telegraph commented:

"On the evidence of this, the Heineken Cup quarter finals will be a poorer place without the Cherry and Whites."

A man down in the first minute when Nick Wood was yellow-carded, Gloucester found themselves in front less than 90



seconds later, thanks to Charlie Sharples and Jonny May, who was again at full-back. The pair chased a speculative punt from Freddie Burns and forced Timoci Matanavou into a clearance kick that Sharples charged down behind the Toulouse line. May was on hand to touch down and Burns converted.

It was a lead that lasted five minutes. Toulouse created a platform in midfield and with Gloucester short on numbers, Thierry Dusatoir gathered in centre field and raced 40 metres for a try. Lionel Beauxis added the points from in front of the posts.

The outside half edged the visitors in front with a penalty after 14 minutes and shortly after, Matanavou made up for his earlier gaffe, with a try that highlighted the quality of the visiting three quarters. Beauxis, Florin Fritz and full-back Clement Poitrenaud created the opportunity with three exquisite passes and Matanavou had the simple task of touching down.

Gloucester struck back with a tremendous try from Qera who powered over after Burns had delivered the scoring pass with Toulouse back-peddalling in front of their own posts.

Then Mike Tindall kicked ahead and May delivered the perfect pass for Sharples to score a try that Burns converted. A Burns penalty increased the lead, but Matanavou's second try, 17 minutes from time, was converted by Beauxis to bring the scores level.

24-24 and anybody's game but then Burns, with a penalty from close in and May with a second try after James Simpson-Daniel had shown a clean pair of heels to half the Toulouse pack, put the seal on a wonderful night for Gloucester rugby.

No less a judge than Peter Ford believed this to be the best performance that he had ever seen from a Gloucester team.

