

## GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE



**GLOUCESTER  
RUGBY**

### HEART- BREAKING END TO A SEASON THAT PROMISED SO MUCH

**2007-08**

**Captain** Peter Buxton

**Played** 33

**Won** 21

**Lost** 11

**Drawn** 1

**For** 820

**Against** 596

**Position** 1st

#### **PREMIERSHIP**

**Played** 22

**Won** 15

**Lost** 7

**For** 551

**Against** 377



**U**nder Director of Rugby, Dean Ryan, Gloucester topped the Premiership table for the second season running. Indeed, they were top for 21 of the 22 rounds.

Players making their debuts included Lesley Vainikolo, Alasdair Dickinson, Alasdair Strokosch, Akapusi Qera, Chris Paterson, Gareth Delve, Charlie Sharples and Henry Trinder.

These newcomers, together with the already established personnel such as Mike Tindall, James Simpson-Daniel (voted Premiership Player of the Season), Anthony Allen, Luke Narraway, Ryan Lamb, Iain Balshaw, Ollie Azam, Alex Brown and the captain, Pete Buxton, suggested that this might be Gloucester's year.

Lesley Vainikolo made an immediate impact in the first game of the season at Leeds

when he scored five tries in a 49-24 win. He would go on to win five England caps that season. In October the Cherry and Whites won 30-17 at Leicester, accompanied by the warming sight of Tigers fans walking out long before the final whistle. The first five Premiership games were all victories, the others being Saracens (away), Worcester and Sale. However, at the end of October, on Chris Paterson's debut, London Irish defeated Gloucester 15-10.

In the Heineken Cup, there was a famous win in Ireland against Ulster. Gloucester, playing flowing rugby, had the try bonus point in the bag after only twenty minutes and went on to win 32-14, tries being scored by Vainikolo, Tindall, Lamb, Simpson-Daniel and Balshaw.

A comfortable win against Ospreys followed and back-to-back wins over Bourgoin 31-7 and 51-27, with Ryan Lamb scoring 42 points over the two games, saw the



team top of their group. The only slip-up came in the away fixture in Wales when Ospreys won 32-15. However, the group was settled when Gloucester beat Ulster at Kingsholm 29-21, with Akapusi Qera scoring two tries.

An eagerly anticipated home quarter-final against Munster was the result. The game was a bitter disappointment, as Munster, never having to get out of second gear, won 16-3. Chris Paterson, who could not miss when playing for Scotland, failed with three kicks, two of them in front of the posts, until Ryan Lamb's penalty secured Gloucester's only points.

The Premiership campaign continued to prosper, until in early spring, the Cherry and Whites lost at home to Leicester, 13-20, in what turned out to be Adam Balding's final game for the club. It was the first Premiership defeat at Kingsholm since May 2006.

Four more defeats, all away to Bristol, Harlequins, Sale and Worcester, out of the next six games, meant that Gloucester's top spot was in danger, but a late season flourish included a 39-15 home win (and the double) over Saracens, with Ryan Lamb scoring 19 points, and a fine 25-17 victory away to Wasps. Top place was clinched in the last regular game of the season with an 8-6 win over Bath at Kingsholm, with Simpson-Daniel scoring a brilliant try.

Leicester had finished fourth, and so travelled to Kingsholm for the play-off semi-final. Mike Tindall failed a fitness test, but it did not seem to matter as Gloucester stormed through the first half completely on top.

James Simpson-Daniel scored a try and, with Ryan Lamb kicking a conversion and five penalties, it meant with 15 minutes to go, Gloucester were two scores ahead at 22-13. But at this point panic in defence undid Gloucester.

With a desperate attempted pass, Iain Balshaw only succeeded in hitting a post, and Aaron Mauger pounced to score a try. Andy Goode duly converted and almost at once, kicked a penalty to put Leicester 23-22 ahead.

Even then Gloucester had a chance to redeem the situation. With three minutes remaining Willie Walker kicked a drop goal via an upright, to restore the lead, 25-23. Unfortunately, a steady drive from Leicester took Andy Goode to within drop goal range and, with time up, he did the deed to win the game 26-25. It was a heart-breaking moment for the Cherry and White supporters, having twice seen their team nine points ahead, but still unable to close out the game.

So, for the second year running, a season that had promised so much ended in bitter disappointment.