

GLOUCESTER'S HISTORY AGAINST THE FRENCH

GLOUCESTER HAVE NEVER PLAYED AGAINST TODAY'S OPPONENTS, CASTRES, BUT THEY DID HAVE SOME EARLY EXPERIENCE OF FRENCH CLUB OPPOSITION WHEN THEY WENT TO PLAY IN FRANCE IN THE EARLY 1900S. BUT IT WAS THE INTRODUCTION OF EUROPEAN CLUB RUGBY COMPETITIONS WHICH HAS REGULARLY BROUGHT FRENCH CLUBS TO KINGSHOLM.

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EARLY ENCOUNTERS

In February 1911, Gloucester spent a week travelling 1,794 miles to Toulouse. Before the days of easyJet, this involved three days on a train, with overnight stops in London and Paris, and a Channel crossing when there were "...no serious losses owing to manager's promptitude in having all breakfasts screwed down". In Toulouse, it was said that Gloucester's arrival "...has greatly excited the people, and the whole town has been talking of nothing else for weeks".

Gloucester beat Stade Toulousain 18-13, with tries from Holford, Pegler and Hall. The players would remember this trip for the rest of their lives.

Encouraged by the success of this first foray into France, in March 1912 Gloucester made their way to Paris, where they defeated Stade Francais 13-3 with tries from "Father" Dix and Arthur Hudson. The dinner afterwards was sumptuous.

The first French club to play at Kingsholm was Racing Club de France on Christmas Eve 1908. They lost 0-39



to a Gloucestershire side containing eleven Gloucester players, amongst whom Frank Smith scored a hat trick of tries, "Father" Dix two, and Welshman kicked six conversions.

Gloucester played their first game against a French side at Kingsholm when French Universities came to play a warm-up game in March 1965, a few days before they beat British Universities. With the great Pierre Villepreux at full-back, they had warmed up well, winning 17-0.

The first match against a French club followed in September 1975. John Bayliss, Alan Brinn and Eddie Pinkney scored tries for Gloucester, but Begles squeezed home 21-20.

START OF EUROPEAN CUP RUGBY

It was not until the advent of European Cup rugby that Gloucester came up against French opposition regularly,

In October 1996, Gloucester's second match in European competition, in the Challenge Cup, was a scrappy, error-strewn game against Bordeaux Begles. It was a chastening experience for Gloucester, who were awarded a penalty try, and Mark Mapletoft kicked the conversion and a



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penalty, but they went down 10-17. Later the same month, Gloucester went down 9-24 at home to Bourgoin.

Things started to look up the following season, when neither side scored a try, as four penalties and two dropped goals by Mark Mapletoft saw Gloucester win 18-15 against Toulon.

Gloucester's first match against French opposition in the Champions Cup was a 22-22 draw with Colomiers in October 2000. The French were seven points ahead in the final minutes but repeatedly offended to keep Gloucester out. The referee finally decided he had seen enough, and awarded a penalty try.

Gloucester had to wait until December 2002 to enjoy their first win against a French side in the Champions Cup at Kingsholm, when Perpignan were defeated 33-16. Marcel Garvey ran in two tries, and a Frenchman, Ludovic Mercier, scored the rest of Gloucester's points with a try, three conversions and four penalties.

RECORD AT KINGSHOLM

Overall the Gloucester record at Kingsholm against French opposition in European Cup rugby is comfortably on the plus side:

	W	D	L	F	A
CHAMPIONS CUP	7	1	2	287	201
CHALLENGE CUP	16	0	5	737	335
TOTAL	23	1	7	1024	536

BIGGEST WIN

In the days before Jonny Wilkinson propelled Toulon to the top of the European tree, they came to Kingsholm and were thrashed 74-3 in December 2005. Utterly dominant up front, Gloucester ran in ten tries, with Mark Foster, Peter Richards and Jake Boer leading the way with a brace each. The following week in Toulon, Gloucester were just as irresistible with another ten tries in their 66-5 victory.

MOST MEMORABLE MATCH

Nobody who was at Kingsholm on 20th January 2012 will

ever forget a magical night under the floodlights against Toulouse, four times champions of Europe. It was a thrilling, high-quality game, rated by no less an authority than Peter Ford as the greatest performance he had ever witnessed by a Gloucester team.

Toulouse tried some mind games by muscling in on Gloucester's traditional foray in front of the Shed at the end of their warm-up, but they succeeded only in firing up both the home team and supporters, and Gloucester chests were thrust out fit to burst.

In a bizarre start, Nick Wood went into the sin bin in the first minute, and Jonny May charged down a clearance kick with his nose, but still had the wit to pounce on the ball to score. Toulouse then imposed themselves and built a 17-7 lead, before Akapusi Qera scored to make it 17-14 at half-time.

Mike Tindall set up the first attack of the second half with a delightful grubber kick, sending Gloucester's speedsters, May and Sharples in hot pursuit. They were too fast for the Toulouse defence, May won the race to the ball and sent Sharples over for a mesmerising try. Burns converted and kicked a penalty, but back came Toulouse to tie it up at 24-24. Burns landed a penalty and then came the move which made history.

James "Sinbad" Simpson-Daniel left Matanavou for dead on the left flank, drew the cover and fed the ball to May just over the halfway line. There seemed to be sufficient cover, but he produced a burst of speed which left terrified defenders clutching in despair. As he went over the line the roar must have woken up children across half of Gloucestershire.

"I'll remember that moment for the rest of my life" said May afterwards. "Can we play you every week" chanted a delirious Shed at the shell-shocked Frenchmen.

