

# TOM VOYCE

TOM VOYCE HAD A GREATER INFLUENCE ON THE GAME OF RUGBY UNION THAN ANY OTHER GLOUCESTER PLAYER AS THE FATHER OF MODERN WING-FORWARD PLAY. HE WAS A BRITISH LION, AND HE WON GRAND SLAMS WITH ENGLAND AND COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIPS WITH GLOUCESTERSHIRE.



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He worked tirelessly for his Club, his County and the RFU for more than fifty years, and is the only Gloucester man to have become President of the RFU.

#### **Schoolboy International**

Anthony Thomas Voyce was born in Gloucester in 1897, the son of a lighter captain. Tom attended the National School, Gloucester, where he first made his mark as an exceptional rugby player, and played at fly-half for England Under-15 when they

beat Wales 4-3 at Leicester in 1911.

The Great War then intervened. Tom went to fight in France and was wounded in the eye, which left him with permanently impaired vision for the rest of his life. Despite this he went to Sandhurst and gained a commission.



#### **Meteoric Rise as New Style of Wing Forward**

When rugby resumed at Kingsholm in 1918-19, Tom made his debut for Gloucester. Initially he played in the backs, but switched to wing forward before the end of the season, where he introduced a new style of play. Instead of confining himself to forward play, he took every opportunity to break quickly and hunt down opposing backs.

In 1919-20, Tom's career took off. He played in an England trial, and for Gloucestershire, before he scored his first try for Gloucester on Boxing Day 1919. He made his debut for England

in the 14-11 victory over Ireland in Dublin in February 1920, and was retained for the victory over Scotland.

#### **Grand Slams and County Championships**

Tom started the 1920-21 season as the Club's place kicker and scored tries, conversions and penalties in early fixtures, but was soon called away to enjoy a season of representative rugby which could not have been better.

For the County, he played in all three South West group wins, in the semi-final victory 21-3 over Surrey and in

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their crowning as County Champions with a massive 31-4 triumph over Leicestershire.

He was a firm fixture for England as they secured victories over Wales 18-3, Ireland 15-0, Scotland 18-0 and finally France 10-6 in Paris to complete the Grand Slam.

1921-22 was almost as good. He played in each of the three County group victories, but missed the semi-final draw with Surrey. He was back for the replay, when he scored a try as Gloucestershire romped home 30-0, and for the 19-0 win in the final against North Midlands at Villa Park to seal another County Championship.

He was ever-present for England, starting with a loss in Cardiff, but Ireland and Scotland were defeated, whilst Tom scored his first try for England against France at Twickenham in February 1922 in an 11-11 draw.

In 1922-23, he again started the season with a bang for Gloucester, scoring four tries in the first three matches. The County did not have a good season, but Tom played throughout another England Grand Slam, scoring a try apiece in victories over Ireland and Scotland, and “was generally acclaimed one of the finest forwards in the season’s internationals.”



The following season, there was an England win in Wales, when the Welsh press described Tom as “a grinning, hand-grenade of a flanker, sleeves rolled, arms flailing, arousing the wrath of the crowd by some less than gentlemanly activities,” and later admitted that “although known as the “scourge of the Welsh” older enthusiasts in the Principality still revere and respect him as the really great, tough English forward, the one they liked to hate the most.”

### Lions Tour

Tom went on the 1924 British Isles (Lions) tour of South Africa, where he displayed his remarkable versatility, playing at full-back, centre and wing three-quarter, as well as wing forward. The South African captain, described him as “the second best wing three-quarter in the British team”. He played in two test matches, the 3-3 draw at Port Elizabeth on 13th September 1924, and the 9-16 loss at Cape Town, on 20th September 1924, when he scored a try and kicked a penalty.

### Gloucester Captain

Tom returned to Gloucester as captain, in time to lead them against the RFU President’s XV to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Club - Tom scored a try in a famous 11-9 win. He reached another County Championship final, and continued to be a power for England, playing in the 11-17 loss to New Zealand, and all the Home Nations games, but these teams fell short of the success of previous seasons.

Tom scored a try in his last game for England against Scotland at Twickenham in March 1926, and made his final appearance for Gloucestershire against the Maoris the following



November. He played on for Gloucester for a further year, before making his final appearance away at Oxford University on 3rd November 1927.

For Gloucester, Tom made 171 appearances, scoring 55 tries and kicking 14 conversions, 6 penalties and 2 dropped goals, for a total of 219 points.

For Gloucestershire, Tom won 28 caps, scoring seven tries, one penalty and one conversion, for a total of 26 points, and was in three successive Championship winning sides.

For England, Tom won 27 caps, scored five tries, and won three Grand Slams. He also represented the Army and the Barbarians. For most of Tom’s England career his captain was Wavell Wakefield, who wrote: “Tom had that personality and mental, competitive outlook that makes up a great player.”

Following retirement as a player, Tom threw himself into rugby administration for Club, County and Country for many decades.

He became President of the RFU in 1960-61, the only Gloucester man ever to have achieved this honour.

He was awarded an OBE in 1962 for services to sport and for public services in Gloucestershire.

He died suddenly in January 1980, aged 83, and a congregation of several hundred attended his memorial service in Gloucester Cathedral.