

THE IRISH ARE COMING

Gloucester Rugby and Munster Rugby seem to be attracted to one another in Champions Cup draws, and this usually results in "Monster Mashies" - stirring and passionate affairs. But they are only the latest chapter in a long history of encounters between Gloucester and Irish sides.

BACK IN THOSE AMATEUR DAYS

It all started on 7th November 1881, when Irish Rovers came to play on the Spa and defeated Gloucester by two tries to one, although the Irish, generous as ever once the game was over, then admitted that their first try was not legal. They were followed in 1885 by Queen's College, Cork, who were defeated by two goals and two tries to nil. But Kingsholm then had to wait until 1955 for the next Irish visitors, Dublin Wanderers, who were seen off 12-3.

In the 1960s and 70s, the Wolfhounds, who started as an Irish Barbarians side and evolved into the Ireland A team, and Bective Rangers, based in Dublin and the home club of Johnny Sexton, each played four matches at Kingsholm. They were generally close encounters, but Gloucester prevailed in all but the first match against the Wolfhounds.

Immediately before their participation in the Rugby World Cup in 1991, and as part of Gloucester's celebrations of 100 years at Kingsholm, the Ireland team came, saw and were conquered 14-13. They were captained by Phil Matthews, born in Hucclecote, but were outplayed by a Gloucester side which tackled ferociously and dominated up front. A famous win for the Cherry and Whites featured tries by Jerry Perrins and Simon Morris.

THE MUNSTER CONNECTION

Although Gloucester have played against the other Irish provinces, Leinster, Ulster and Connacht in European matches, the matches against Munster have been more frequent and more explosive. They are also the only Irish province to have played against Gloucester in pre-European days, coming to Kingsholm in 1986 and winning 28-16.

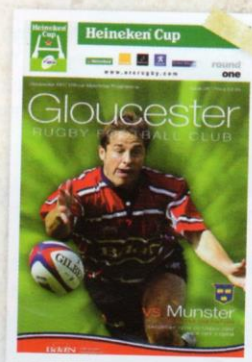
2002-03

The first encounter in the European Cup was played at Kingsholm in October 2002. Gloucester went into

this match unbeaten for the season and six points clear at the top of the Premiership.

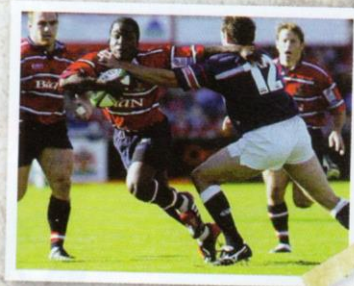
They proceeded to maintain their form against formidable opposition, and inflicted Munster's worst defeat in Europe.

The tries came from Jake Boer with two, Marcel Garvey and Ludovic Mercier, who was also in imperious form with the boot. Ronan O'Gara and Peter Stringer scored all the Munster points, as Gloucester romped home 35-16. Andy Gomarsall was the man-of-the-match, a performance which put him firmly in line for England selection ahead of the following year's Rugby World Cup.



It was a very different story in the return match at Thomond Park. Known as the "miracle match" in Irish circles, it still seems like

a nightmare to Gloucester supporters. Gloucester went into this game needing only to avoid conceding four tries and losing by 27 points to ensure qualification for a quarter-final. They managed just that, falling apart in the face of a feisty and determined Munster side, riding a wave of super-charged emotion from the packed terraces and stands, and losing 6-33. Perpignan, Munster and Gloucester all finished on eight points in the group, but Gloucester went out and Perpignan went on to win the Cup.



2003-04

In back-to-back games, the first was at Kingsholm. "Sinbad" streaked through to score from a Henry

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Paul grubber, and Anthony Horgan replied for Munster, but it was Paul who kicked Gloucester to a 22-11 victory with four penalties, a conversion and a dropped goal.

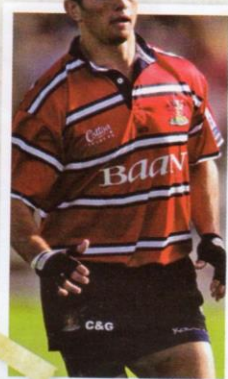
Munster were a different side in Limerick a week later, full of desire pace and power. Gloucester refused to cave in, but were swept aside by a staggeringly good performance by the home side, who were roared home 35-14. Horgan scored two more tries amongst four for Munster, with only one from Jon Goodridge on the other side of the ledger.

5TH APRIL 2008

Gloucester earned a home quarter-final, and the game was played in front of a sell-out crowd, who created a wonderful atmosphere, with the chants of "Glawster, Glawster" competing with the strains of "The Fields of Athenry" throughout. However, Gloucester had one of those days, wasting attacking positions with turnover ball, and Chris Paterson had a nightmare afternoon with his boot, pulling three easy penalty chances wide in the first quarter. On the other hand, Munster showed all their European experience with an impregnable defence, aggressive determination at the breakdown, and a ruthless ability to seize scoring chances. They inflicted on Gloucester only their second defeat of the season at Kingsholm, 16-3.

2013-14

Gloucester put in plenty of effort and showed a good deal of "Glawster Dawg", but they had several players out following the previous week's success



against Perpignan, and paid the price to the tune of a 26-10 defeat. So, Thomond Park continued to be a graveyard for Gloucester hopes, a smart try by Charlie Sharples, following a break by Jonny May, being outdone by tries from Varley and Murphy.

The return at Kingsholm was again played in front of a capacity crowd, and an attacking game which swung from one end to the other inspired plenty of noise. Keith Earls and Charlie



Sharples swapped tries, and Gloucester were right in it at 7-10 during the half-time breather. Gloucester increased their tempo still further after the break and pounded away at a Munster defence which tackled everything that moved. They held out magnificently and struck the telling blow when lengthy consideration by the television match official confirmed that the Munster captain, Peter O'Mahony, had got over for what was to prove the decisive score.

The final score of 20-7 meant Munster had won the group with a match to spare, but Gloucester, apparently down and out, had a magnificent victory in Perpignan a week later, to finish second.

2018-19

It somehow seemed appropriate that Gloucester Rugby's return to the top table, after several seasons in the Challenge Cup, should be against old foes in Munster. As previously, it didn't go Gloucester Rugby's way in Ireland, and 22-36 was a hefty defeat. But to lose Danny Cipriani so early, and yet to come close to securing an unlikely bonus point suggests this evening's match should be another thriller.