

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF GLOUCESTER AND WASPS

A BIT OF HISTORY

Wasps were founded in 1867, six years before the foundation of the Gloucester club and four years before the foundation of the RFU itself. Legend has it that they failed to become founder members of the RFU in 1871 because, although they were invited to send a representative to the meeting, their man went to the wrong pub! However, by March 1872 they had become one of the 12 member clubs.

For many years, Wasps led a nomadic existence, playing a restricted fixture list on rented pitches, and it was not until 1928 that the club were able to purchase their own ground at Sudbury with help from the RFU. During the thirties they strengthened their fixture list and were running as many as ten sides. They were one of the clubs fortunate enough to be able to play throughout WWII, and their sides featured many overseas servicemen. It was after the war when, seeking to improve their fixture list still further, they first visited Kingsholm. Gloucester won that first fixture between the two clubs, 8-5, on 19th October 1946.

The following season Gloucester won 17-0 on their first visit to Sudbury and, from then on, the clubs played once a season, alternately home and away.

Gloucester had much the better of the results for some 40 years but, since the introduction of leagues and professional rugby, the boot has been on the other foot, so much so that Wasps have come to be regarded as Gloucester's Nemesis. This fact made the Premiership double over Wasps last season all the more satisfying for Gloucester supporters!



John Gadd

Marcus Hannaford



GLOUCESTER'S NEMESIS

In the 32 seasons since the introduction of the national league structure in 1987-88, Gloucester have never been champions, although they have come desperately close on several occasions. Twice, during the years before the downgrading of the domestic cup competition, they came within an ace of completing the coveted league and cup double. On both occasions it was Wasps who finished the season as league champions.

1989-90

This was the third season of the John Courage league. Gloucester had responded to the new challenges of league rugby from the off, finishing 5th and then 3rd in the first two seasons and were expected to be contenders for the title.

The Gloucester side was built around a formidable pack, which featured a rampant back row of Mike Teague, Ian Smith and John Gadd at the peak of their form. Outstanding half backs Marcus Hannaford and Mike Hamlin, a prolific three-quarter line featuring the evergreen brilliance of Richard Mogg and the pace of Derrick Morgan, and the goal kicking and counter-attacking skills of full back Tim Smith completed a winning combination.

Coming into their last game, at Beeston against Nottingham, Gloucester the strong favourites for the title, had only lost once in the league, to Wasps at Adams Park, and had already won at Beeston that season in the quarter final of the Pilkington



Cup. Wasps were one point behind Gloucester, and were playing at home to Saracens, who were lying fourth. Nottingham played superbly and were unrecognisable from the team that had lost to Gloucester in the cup two months before. Wasps, who had not topped the table all season, turned in their best performance when it most mattered to beat Saracens 24-6 and the title was theirs by one point. A week later Gloucester were unable to pick themselves up and were soundly beaten by Bath in the Pilkington Cup Final at Twickenham.

Perhaps Gloucester's most memorable match of that season was their third round Pilkington Cup victory over Wasps at Adams Park. A weakened Gloucester had lost the league match three months before by 29 points to 4, but now at full strength they took the game to the opposition. The Times correspondent said of Gloucester, "Their red-blooded assaults, launched from almost every corner of the pitch, helped produce one of the most exciting cup games seen at Sudbury for years." In the first half Tim Smith, who had a superlative game, kicked two penalties, and John Gadd and Jim Breeze scored tries, but Gloucester found themselves 19-14 down at half time, against the run of play. With the wind behind them the Gloucester half backs bombarded the Wasps defence. Wasps went offside to concede a penalty kicked by Tim Smith but somehow held out until the dying minutes when Richard Mogg went over in the corner for the match winning try which was converted by Tim Smith from the touchline to seal a magnificent victory 23-19.

2002-03

Gloucester had won the Powergen Cup in a magnificent 40-22 victory over Northampton at Twickenham in which their young stars James Simpson-Daniel (2), Marcel Garvey and James Forrester had all scored tries. At the end of the regular season they topped the Zurich Premiership table, 15 points ahead of the runners-up Wasps, and in previous years would have taken the title. However, this was the first year of the Premiership play-offs, and the only season in which the runner-up played the third-placed team for the right to play the leaders in the Premiership Final. In subsequent

seasons full semi-finals (1st v 4th and 2nd v 3rd) have been played.

When Gloucester took the field in the Premiership Final at Twickenham, they had been assured of their place as unassailable league leaders for five weeks and had not played for three. Their opponents Wasps, on the other hand, had spent the previous two weeks playing in the Premiership play-off and the European Challenge Cup Final.

This 39-3 defeat was a game which Gloucester supporters will never forget, however hard they try. Gloucester, disorganised behind the scrum and sluggish in the forwards, played as though they were already on their summer holidays, and Wasps thoroughly deserved their win. Alex King at outside half controlled the game and Simon Shaw and Lawrence Dallaglio dominated up front.

Earlier in the season at Kingsholm in January, Gloucester, who were already nine points clear in the Premiership, took on Wasps who were then in 4th place. Eyebrows were raised when a full-strength Wasps team took the field, bearing little resemblance to the team announced to the press by Warren Gatland two days before, when he suggested that the trip to Kingsholm was unwinnable and that he was resting players for the Stade Francais game the following week.

When the mind games were over, a tense battle ensued. Wasps, with their back row of Dallaglio, Worsley and Volley outstanding and Shaw dominating the line-outs, clearly had no thoughts that Gloucester were unbeatable and for long periods the home side were on the back foot. They were not helped by some uncharacteristically poor kicking by Mercier and, when Waters scored a try early in the second half to give Wasps an 11-8 lead, things looked precarious indeed. Todd's pass off the ground gave Cornwell his second try to make the score 13-11 but when Mercier failed again with the conversion, Henry Paul took over the kicking duties. Gradually Gloucester gained the upper hand and two Paul penalties, plus a Paul try which finished a move started with a Junior Paramore charge down the wing, sealed the victory 24-17. To quote Nigel Melville, "It was not pretty but it was the right result."

