

FIFTY YEARS OF BATTLES AGAINST THE SARACENS

The Saracens club was founded as long ago as 1876, by the Old Boys of the Philological School in Marylebone, London. They played home games at several grounds until taking up residence at Bramley Road, Southgate, just after WW2. For six seasons they ground shared at Vicarage Road, Watford, with the football club, before moving to Allianz Park, Hendon in 2013.

Gloucester and Saracens did not play each other until March 1968 at Kingsholm. The result was a 3-3 draw, Gloucester's points coming from a Don Rutherford penalty.

To date the two clubs have met 76 times, with Gloucester winning 45, losing 27, with four games drawn. However, of the last twenty encounters, Saracens have won 13!

Down the years there have been some memorable battles.

27 APRIL 1996: LEAGUE GAME: GLOUCESTER 17 SARACENS 10

The 1995-96 season had been a poor one for both clubs. By the time Gloucester and Saracens met in the last game of the season, the situation was that West Hartlepool were already doomed to relegation having lost all their matches. Gloucester

and Saracens were both on ten points having won five games each. This game, before a sell-out crowd of 12,000, was therefore a relegation shoot-out to decide which team would go down. In the autumn of 1995 Richard Hill had taken over as Director of Rugby, and his influence had turned a situation which had looked doomed, to one of hope.

Gloucester were captained by Dave Sims, and his powerful line-out work was invaluable throughout the game. The forwards got on top and scrummage power gave fly-half Martin Kimber the opportunity to dictate proceedings with some astute kicking. Despite an outstanding game by Saracens' Richard Hill, the Gloucester forwards were well in command, with Pete Glanville and Andrew Stanley putting in fine performances. Of Stanley, the Times reported, "His form had persuaded Richard Hill to omit Ian Smith, the Scotland flanker, but the move was justified by Stanley's tireless foraging."

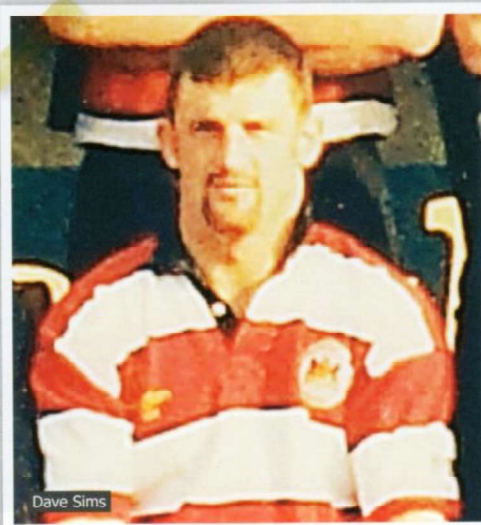
Mark Mapletoft kicked two early penalties, and Martin Kimber dropped a goal, but the game was settled either side of half-time. Tony Windo ploughed through for a classic Gloucester forward's try, and then early in the second half Mapletoft added another penalty for a 17-3 lead. Richard Hill's late try for Saracens was too little too late.

As things turned out Saracens were not relegated, as the league was extended by two, and even West Hartlepool survived.

25 JANUARY 2003, PILKINGTON CUP: GLOUCESTER 51 SARACENS 20

Only a week before this game Gloucester had lost to Munster in the "miracle game", where all the Cherry & Whites had to do was lose by no more than 26 points to proceed from the group stage of the Heineken Cup. Munster won by 27 points. The team needed to restore shattered morale.

After only three minutes James Forrester, as the Times put it, "...driving low on the narrow side, crashed a couple of tackles and dived over in the corner." Gloucester were up and running. After ten minutes, Thinus Delport chased an Andy Gomarsall grubber kick, caught the ball and streaked home. For Saracens Adryan Winnan, following a good run, kicked ahead, and regathered to score. This merely



seemed to encourage Gloucester more, and Terry Fanolua, with little room weaved his way in. Delpont added another before half-time when Gloucester led 23-8. In the second half with the wind at their backs, Gloucester ran riot scoring tries through Gomarsall, Adam Eustace, Rodrigo Roncero, and another from Forrester.

Wayne Shelford, the Saracens coach said, "I don't think anyone would have stopped Gloucester today."

That was the season Gloucester went on to win the Pilkington Cup, defeating Northampton 40-22, before 75,000 spectators at Twickenham.

2 FEBRUARY 2003, PREMIERSHIP: SARACENS 22 GLOUCESTER 29



Only a week later the two teams met again at Vicarage Road, Watford. This time Sarries provided much sterner opposition. Richard Hill scored a try after three minutes, and Nicky Little converted. Ludovic Mercier started the score-board for Gloucester with a penalty, but Saracens were well on top at this point. Little kicked two more penalties, one of which was for a high tackle by Robert Todd on Kyran Bracken. Sarries were now 13-3 up, but Gloucester upped their game. First, Andy Gomarsall kicked ahead and regathered after the ball hit a Saracens heel, and he was able to send Terry Fanolua over unopposed. Then Mercier intercepted a Kevin Sorrell pass to run in from 40 metres. Suddenly Gloucester were leading 17-13. Little pulled back a penalty before half-time.

In the second half Gloucester's forwards got right on top and pinned Saracens back. Despite two more penalties from Little, Mercier went one better with three. He also kicked a drop-goal to total 24 points in the game.

Gloucester went on to top the league by 15 points. But in the inaugural

Premiership play-off season, they were hammered 36-3 by Wasps in the final.

5 MAY 2007, PREMIERSHIP PLAY-OFF SEMI-FINAL: GLOUCESTER 50 SARACENS 9

Saracens supporters will contend, quite correctly, that the last two times Gloucester qualified for the play-offs, Sarries put them out both occasions, 12-10 in 2011, and 44-19 in May this year. However, it was a different story in 2007. Gloucester had once again topped the Premiership, narrowly from Leicester.

Andy Hazell, who had just been voted "player of the season", had an outstanding game, making one wonder, not for the first time, why he had not won more England caps. He suffered an injured leg after only three minutes, but soldiered on, only in the second half, to injure a swollen arm that left him nauseous. Undeterred, he was instrumental in setting up a try for Luke Narraway.

Gloucester had taken the lead early on through a penalty try, awarded because Thomas Castaignede, tackled Mark Foster without the ball, when the latter was winning the race to the touch-down. Just before half-time Kameli Ratuvou was yellow carded for upending Iain Balshaw, as he chased a Ryan Lamb cross-kick. Gloucester quickly took advantage, when from a driving maul, Narraway fed Peter Richards on the blindside who scored. Willie Walker made his second conversion, and the Cherry & Whites led 14-3 at the break.

Saracens had little option but to attack in the second half, and Jackson kicked his second penalty of the game. But almost straight away, James Simpson-Daniel made a break, and eventually Ryan Lamb found Hazell with a beautiful pass, and he in turn sent Narraway away for the try.

Jackson kicked another penalty, but from the restart, Anthony Allen streaked away for a brilliant try. The game was effectively over, but Gloucester scored further tries through Mark Foster and Hazell.

Just before the end Simpson-Daniel and Balshaw moved the ball between them into Saracens territory. Ryan Lamb found Pete Buxton with a long pass, who in turn passed to the wing, where he found the unlikely form of Christian Califano, and the prop dived over. Gloucester had scored five second half tries in an exhilarating display. In all Willie Walker kicked six conversions and single penalty.

A week later Gloucester met Leicester in the Premiership Final, who with the considerable help of Alesana Tuilagi, hammered Gloucester 44-16!

