

GLOUCESTER v TOULOUSE: WE'VE MET BEFORE

If tonight's match comes anywhere close to the quality and excitement of the last visit by Toulouse to Kingsholm, we are in for a real treat. The teams have met three times previously, with two of those matches coming, as tonight, in the European Champions Cup, but the first encounter was way back in history.

THE LONG JOURNEY TO TOULOUSE

In 1911, Gloucester accepted an invitation to travel to Toulouse "in order to give the French experience in what to them was a new sport". Everyone was eager to be involved in what was seen as a great adventure, but it meant a long and arduous journey.

A makeshift team played against Abertillery on Saturday 25th February (and lost 3-13), because nearly all of the first team had already set off from Gloucester by train that afternoon. They stayed in London overnight, before spending Sunday getting to Paris, and finally arrived in Toulouse on Monday evening, where it was reported that their presence "has greatly excited the people, and the whole town has been talking of nothing else for weeks".

28TH FEBRUARY 1911 STADE TOULOUSAIN 13 GLOUCESTER 18

The match was played on Tuesday afternoon, and tried from George "Biddy" Halford, Fred Pegler and Willie Hall, together with a conversion and a penalty kicked by Charles "Ninnie" Cook, secured victory.

The party were royally entertained to dinner that evening, and departed Toulouse at 1pm on Wednesday. After another night in Paris, they eventually arrived back in Gloucester on Thursday evening, after a trip which had covered 1,794 miles and taken six days. A hundred years later, the teams met again.

13TH NOVEMBER 2011 TOULOUSE 21 GLOUCESTER 17

At the Stade Ernst Wallon, Gloucester came within touching distance of causing a major upset against a team which had established itself as one of the giants of European rugby, having won their fourth Champions Cup title in 2010.



George "Biddy" Halford, Fred Pegler and Willie Hall



Against the run of play, when Toulouse heeled from a defensive scrum, Gloucester stole the ball and Jonny May put Charlie Sharples over in the corner. Stunned silence greeted this score. Freddie Burns converted and kicked a penalty, but Luke McAlister struck with a penalty and then his grubber put Timoci Matanavou in for a neat try. So, Gloucester turned round into the wind two points to the good at 10-8.

Early Toulouse pressure in the second half led to McAlister and Beauxis kicking penalties, but Glawster Dawg started to show, Sharples latched onto a loose ball, Tindall broke through, and Trinder cantered home for a stunning try. Burns converted, and les Toulousains were worried, but Matanavou offloaded in the tackle to Clement Poitrenaud, whose majestic sidestep created the winning try.

THE MOST MEMORABLE MATCH 20TH JANUARY 2012 GLOUCESTER 34 TOULOUSE 24

Nobody who had the privilege of seeing this match will ever forget a breath-taking, magical night under the Kingsholm floodlights. Gloucester already knew they could not progress in the competition, but no less an authority than Peter Ford described this as the greatest performance he had ever witnessed by a Gloucester team.

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. Thierry Dusautoir then scored a classy try, and Matanavou added another. With Beauxis converting both and adding a penalty, the lead was extended to 17-7. But before the break May set Charlie Sharples clear, the ball was fired wide, and Akapusi Qera strolled over. 17-14 at half-time.

Mike Tindall set up the first attack of the second half with a delightful grubber kick, sending May and Sharples in hot pursuit. 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 with a second try for Matanavou 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 plenty of cover, but he produced a burst of speed which left despairing defenders clutching at thin air. As he went over the line the roar must have woken up children across half of Gloucestershire. "Can we play you every week" chanted a delirious Shed at the shell-shocked Frenchmen.

The winning team was: J May; C Sharples, M Tindall, E Fuimaono-Sapolu, J Simpson-Daniel; F Burns, R Lawson; N Wood, S Lawson, R Harden, J Hamilton, A Brown, A Strokosch, A Qera, L Narraway (captain); Replacements: D Dawidiuk, D Murphy, S Knight, W James, M Cox, D Lewis, R Mills, H Trinder

