

GLOUCESTER RUGBY
HERITAGESOUTH AFRICANS
WHO HAVE
PLAYED FOR
GLOUCESTER

Most Gloucester supporters would think that it is only since the game went professional that any South Africans played for the Club. However, as far back as the 1952-53 season a second row forward, Freddie Steinhobel, played in six games. He was better known as a Cheltenham player (1948-52) who appeared 12 times for Gloucestershire, and got as far as an England trial game in 1950.

Then there is long gap. Cape Town born, Jake Boer made 190 appearances for the Cherry and Whites between 2000 and 2010, scoring 32 tries. He was a fierce tackler, and speedy in attack. Jake was a great favourite of the Shed, respected for his total commitment to the cause. In 2003 his form was so outstanding that he was made Premiership Player of the Season. That year he captained the team

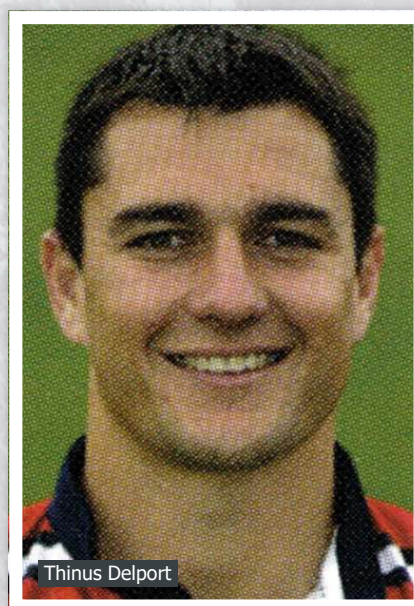


Jake Boer

which beat Northampton 40-22, to win the Powergen Cup before 75,000 spectators at Twickenham. It was Gloucester's first major trophy in 20 years. In that 2002-03 season he scored 14 tries, and he was made club captain for the following two seasons. Jake returned to South Africa after the end of the 2006-07 season, but was persuaded to return to Kingsholm two years later to help out because of an injury crisis involving back-row forwards.

Thinus Delpoit also played in the Northampton game, and scored a try. He was a fine full-back gifted with great pace, which he used to advantage. He won 18 Springbok caps. He only had one full season at Kingsholm, appearing in 30 games and scoring six tries. He played for South Africa in the 2003 World Cup, and on his return to Gloucester in November appeared in five games before a bad knee injury when playing against Harlequins ended his season. Possibly because the Club was worried about the long-term problems that could arise from the injury, his contract was not renewed. However, Thinus moved on to Worcester where he played from 2004-08, making 79 Premiership appearances, and stayed largely injury free.

Several other South Africans appeared for Gloucester in the noughties. Christo Bezuidenhout, a prop, made 19 appearances in the 2004-05 season. In 2004 Delarey Du Preez was a hooker who made five appearances, and



Thinus Delpoit

the same year Riaan van der Bergh appeared six times. He was a full-back. Quinton Davids played seven times in the 2005-06 season in the second row, and in the next season Rudi Keil played 17 times in the centre, and merited more.

When Johan Ackermann became Head Coach in August 2017, he soon set about bringing South African players to the Club. Gerbrandt Grobler (2018-20) was an uncompromising second row forward who made 33 appearances and scored seven tries. In the back-row, Jaco Kriel (2018-19) made 20 appearances. He won 11 South Africa caps. He played in the Premiership Semi-Final play-off against Saracens in May 2019. Also in that team was Franco Marais (2018-20), who was a hooker. He made 39 appearances for Gloucester. A third

South African in the play-off was Franco Mostert (2018-20), a fine second row forward, who made 29 appearances. So far, he has won 50 Springbok caps, and was a World Cup winner in 2019.

Two more South Africans played a few games for Gloucester. Dom Coetzer, a fly-half, made four appearances from 2018-19, and prop Jaco Visagie seven appearances over the same period of time. When Johan Ackermann left the Club in May 2020 to coach in Japan, any South African still at Kingsholm soon departed, except for one, Johan's son Ruan.

Ruan Ackermann made 33 appearances for the Lions in South Africa in the 2016-17 season, before coming to Gloucester with his father. He made his first appearance as a replacement against Exeter on 1 September 2017, and started in the next game against Harlequins. In his early games he played on the blind-side flank, but soon moved to No.8 to fill the space left by injury to Ben Morgan. He scored his first try on

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12 October 2017, in a European Challenge Cup game against Pau. Ruan quickly made an impression and in November he was the Premiership Player of the Month. He played in the final of the European Challenge Cup against Cardiff Blues, when Gloucester lost unluckily to a penalty in the last minute. Ruan started the 2018-19 season well, scoring two tries against Bath, but was side-lined by injury for a lot of the season. On his return he scored tries in four successive games in March, against Harlequins, Wasps, Northampton and Bath. He played in the Premiership Play-off game against Saracens, after Gloucester had finished third in the table. The 2019-20 and 2020-21 seasons were disrupted by the

Coronavirus pandemic, but Ruan's form was consistent. Yet it was his outstanding displays in the current season that have made people really take notice. He has been in rampaging form. His barnstorming runs are often only stopped by three tacklers attempting to bring him down. On 2 January 2022 Ruan made his 100th appearance, against Harlequins and celebrated with a try. He was made BT Man of the Match in successive games against Newcastle and London Irish, scoring two tries in the latter game. Having qualified for England selection through residence, there has been a lot of speculation that Eddie Jones might make the call, but so far that has not happened. There's plenty of time yet.



Ruan Ackermann