

## GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE

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THE PRIDE THE PASSION THE HONOUR THE HISTORY

# FRENCH CONNECTION II

**As the match today is the first visit of Mont-de-Marsan to Kingsholm, the occasion provides the opportunity to look back at four more of the great French players who have played for Gloucester.**

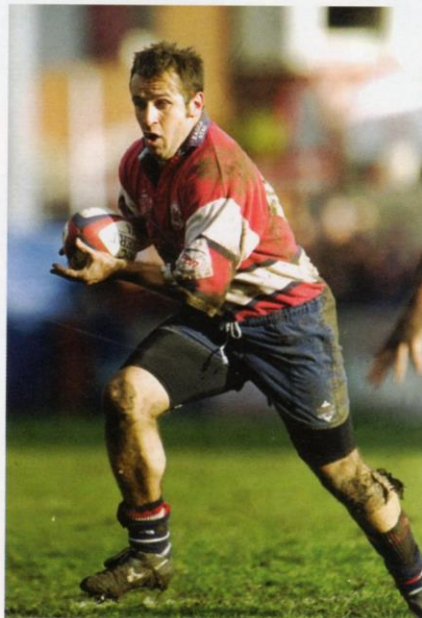
There is only one place to start of course and that is with the arrival at Kingsholm of the legendary wing Philippe Saint-André on 23 August 1997.

From that first match (a 35-13 demolition of Bristol in which Saint-André scored two tries), he became a hero in the Shed and the Marseillaise rang out on match days from the red-bereted fans.

Saint-André had been capped 64 times by France (29 as captain) when he made his debut for Gloucester; he gained 5 further caps as a Gloucester player. He played 41 games for Gloucester between 1997-99, scoring 21 tries, but his influence on both team and fans can't be measured in mere figures.

In February 1999 he took over as Head Coach from Richard Hill and retired from playing at the end of that season. Saint-André's three years

Philippe Saint-André



as coach had their fair share of controversy, but he took Gloucester to the semi-final of the Heineken Cup for the only time in their history in 2001 and at the time of his departure in February 2002 they were lying second in the Premiership.

Following his success in coaching Bourgoin, Sale and Toulon, Saint-André is now the head coach of the French national team.

When Saint-André recruited hooker Olivier Azam from Montferrand for the 2000-2001 season it was the start of another Gloucester legend.

Capped 10 times by France, Azam



went on to make 240 appearances for Gloucester. He played in all eight games of the 2000-2001 Heineken Cup campaign, was an integral part of the 2002-2003 side which topped the Premiership and won the Powergen Cup, and played in both the 2006 European Challenge Cup and 2011 LV= Cup winning teams.

He was a huge favourite for his aggressive, hard-hitting mentality and was the ultimate impact player. Formidable in the loose,

he was capable of using his 115kg to turn matches, his characteristic charges accompanied by chants of "Ol-lie, Ol-lie" from the Kingsholm faithful. Azam is currently forwards coach with Toulon.

Another Saint-André recruit to make a lasting impact was Ludovic Mercier who joined Gloucester from Aurillac.

In his debut season, 2001-2002, he scored 508 points, including 17 dropped goals, and followed this with 394 points in the 2002-2003 season. In 105 games for Gloucester, he scored a total of 1325 points.

Another favourite with the Shed, Mercier's prodigious touch-finders and remarkable goal-kicking raised the chant of "Ludo-o-o" at every opportunity. When his place kicking was on song, he got so much elevation that the goalposts at Kingsholm had to be extended.

He might not have been the quickest or most creative of outside halves, but his kicking was remarkable.

In a career spanning the whole professional era (he made his debut for Angoulême at 16), he has played for no less than nine clubs in France, England and Italy. At 36, he currently plays for Saint Étienne in the third tier of French rugby.

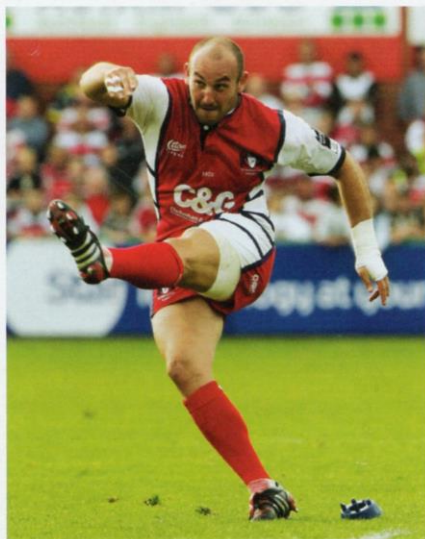
Like Saint-André, Christian Califano was



one of the great names of French rugby, when he joined Gloucester from Agen in September 2006.

The tight head prop had won 69 caps for

Ludovic Mercier



Tom Beim



France and had a reputation as one of the most destructive scrummagers in the game, on either side of the scrum. He became the first Frenchman to play Super 12 rugby when he made his debut for Auckland Blues in 2002.

Winning five French Championships and a Heineken Cup while with Toulouse meant that his experience of European club rugby was almost unparalleled. Although in the twilight of his career, he made a major contribution in his first season when Gloucester topped the Premiership and reached the play-off final at Twickenham.

He was a formidable opponent from the start of a match, but even more so when coming off the bench against a tiring pack. His performances earned Califano one last recall for France and he played in the two autumn internationals against the All Blacks in 2007.

He played 36 games for Gloucester in his two seasons with the club, announcing his retirement in February 2008.

A motorcycling enthusiast, he competed for three successive years (2009-10-11) in the Dakar Rally.

#### FOUR OR MORE TRIES IN EUROPEAN COMPETITION

**When you saw Shane Monahan running in those four glorious tries against London Irish recently, did you realise that he is the fourth Gloucester player to achieve this distinction in European competition? The others are:**

**Tom Beim** who scored 5 of the 6 tries in Gloucester's 52-12 victory over Roma in the Heineken Cup at Kingsholm on 15 October 2000.

**Darren O'Leary** who scored 5 tries in Gloucester's 99-0 victory over Gran Parma in the Parker Pen European Shield at Kingsholm on 5 January 2002.

**James Simpson-Daniel** who scored 4 tries in Gloucester's 106-3 victory over Steaau Bucuresti in the European Challenge Cup at Kingsholm on 29 October 2005.



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