

GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE

THIS WEST COUNTRY DERBY DATES BACK OVER 100 YEARS

Gloucester first played Redland Park at Clifton in December 1883 and won by two goals and six tries to nil. After three further comfortable victories for Gloucester over the next couple of seasons, the fixture was dropped. But then in 1888 the Redland Park and Carlton clubs merged to form the Bristol Football Club, which initially played on the Nevil Road County Cricket ground. From the 1888-89 season fixtures were played between the Gloucester and Bristol 2nd XVs, all won comfortably by Gloucester. So, in November 1890, Gloucester 2nd XV played Bristol 1st XV, and still won by four goals and one try to nil.



Gloucester had moved to Kingsholm by the time of the first match between 1st XVs on 24th September 1892, which Gloucester won 15-0, one goal (5), one dropped goal (4) and three tries (6) to nil. The Gloucester Journal reported that "Gloucester scored their first definite point – a goal – in a very unusual manner. A Collins was dribbling the leather towards the Bristol goal when the former got his foot under the ball and lifted it beautifully over the cross-bar." But the feature of the afternoon was a try scored by Jackson, when "the popular centre three-quarter ran from half-way through all the opposing team, and got behind the posts." The return match later that season ended in a draw, with a score which sounds peculiar to modern ears of 2-2, one try apiece. Bristol won both home and away in the following season.

In the early 1900s a County Cup competition was played for several seasons. Gloucester did not enter every season because many members had objected to cup matches in principle as likely to introduce an unwelcome competitive edge to games. But on three occasions Gloucester and Bristol met in the final, Gloucester winning in 1905, and Bristol in 1906 and 1907. After the Great War, Bristol moved to a ground at Radnor Road, Horfield, and then to the Memorial Ground in 1921, where they remained until moving to Ashton Gate in 2014.

For a century Gloucester and Bristol players came together several times a season to represent Gloucestershire, although a few Bristol players usually represented Somerset. When Gloucestershire first won the County Championship in 1910, seven Gloucester

and three Bristol players were selected. The Championship winning side of 1921 was entirely composed of nine Gloucester and six Bristol players; in 1931 there were six Gloucester and five Bristol players. The 1970s/80s was another period of repeated success for Gloucestershire, and for example when they won in 1975 they included ten Gloucester and two Bristol players, and in 1981 it was seven apiece.



Cup rugby went out of fashion until the RFU reluctantly introduced their national Knock-out competition in 1971-72. Having won at Bath in the first round, Gloucester faced a trip to Bristol in the second. Gloucester won 15-4 with a try from Bob Clewes and a conversion and three penalties from Eric Stephens, before going on to win the final at Twickenham against Moseley. The following season again started with a win against Bath in the first round followed by a trip to Bristol, but this time Bristol won 16-11 to inflict Gloucester's first defeat in the competition.

In the John Player Cup Gloucester won 12-3 at Kingsholm in 1977, with John Watkins scoring a last minute try and Peter Butler kicking the rest of the points, and in 1986 they won 7-4, also at Kingsholm, when Tim Ford scored Gloucester's try on his debut. In the Pilkington Cup in 1997, Gloucester won 18-12 with Tony Windo and Scott Benton touching down the only tries of the match.



When national leagues started in 1987-88 Gloucester played their first away game at Bristol, and came away with a 21-16 victory – Dave Spencer, Ian Smith and Jim Breeze scored tries, Nick Marment converted them all and kicked a penalty. Later in the season, Bristol gained their revenge 13-10 at Kingsholm.



The clubs have only once met for a big occasion at Twickenham. Half-way through the 2001-02 season, it was decided that the winners of the playoffs would be crowned champions, but there was a public outcry and Leicester won the league and were crowned as champions. But the next eight teams in the league went into the Zurich Championship to win a wildcard European qualification. Gloucester, having finished third in the league, beat Newcastle and Sale on their way to the final against Bristol at Twickenham. Although Bristol scored two tries to the one by Jake Boer for Gloucester, Ludovic Mercier converted it and banged over seven penalties, so Gloucester finished 28-23 winners of a rather uninspiring game.

Before today, the clubs have met on 236 previous occasions. Gloucester have won 124 matches and Bristol 92, with 19 drawn and one abandoned, which was in 1913 when a fierce storm struck Kingsholm, the match was abandoned at half-time, and “no one questioned the referee’s decision in putting an end to the game.” The total points scored have been Gloucester 2857 and Bristol 2247.

This was the fourth encounter between the teams that season and Gloucester won them all. In the league, Gloucester won 41-40 at the Memorial Ground and 51-17 at Kingsholm, whilst also winning a Powergen Cup tie 37-23 at Bristol, when James Forrester showed wonderful pace and guile as he registered a hat trick of tries.

They met twice in the Powergen Cup. In 2005, Gloucester won 21-0 with tries from Andy Gomarsall and Alex Brown and eleven points from the boot of Henry Paul, and in the following season they won 34-6 in Bristol, with two sparkling tries from James Simpson-Daniell and 14 points from the boot of Ludovic Mercier.

Gloucester registered the biggest win ever between the teams in the EDF Cup at Kingsholm in October 2006, despite a sluggish start in the first half hour. Then they ran amok with tries from John Goodridge (2), James Bailey, Mark Foster, Peter Richards, James Forrester, Ryan Lamb and Rory Lawson; Ludovic Mercier converted seven out of eight and landed three penalties to take the score to 63-25. This completed a clean sweep of eight victories against Bristol in cup matches spread across the previous thirty years. The biggest win for Bristol has been 27-0 at the Memorial Ground in February 1962.