

GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE

GLOUCESTER & NEWCASTLE

Newcastle – too far to go for a long time

Soon after the Gloucester club was formed in 1873, two rugby clubs were founded in Newcastle - Northern RFC in 1875 and Gosforth RFC in 1877. Gloucester being located at the other end of the country, entailing many hours of travel, there was little incentive for the clubs to meet in the days of friendly fixtures.

Early cup encounters

It was the advent of cup rugby which finally brought Gloucester and Gosforth together in March 1977. The first match was a quarter-final of the John Player Cup when Gloucester were drawn away to Gosforth, who then played on the Great North Road ground and were the reigning cup champions. The Cherry and Whites started brightly, but the Gosforth defence held out, and both teams were warned about the level of violence. Peter Butler missed several penalty attempts and when he did finally kick one, the Gloucester touch judge signalled it was over, the Gosforth touch judge signalled a miss, and the judge ruled in favour of the home team. Malcolm Young finally landed a penalty to break the deadlock, and Gosforth, in their centenary season, won 3-0 and went on to win the cup for the second successive season.

In February 1978, the clubs again met in the JP Cup, but this time at Kingsholm. Gloucester opened the scoring when Bob Clewes kicked ahead and Viv Wooley followed up to crash over; Butler converted and added a penalty before half-time. Gloucester extended their lead when John Watkins fed Steve Mills for a try in the corner, and Chris Williams had a long run to score next to the posts. Paul Howell at scrum-half had been instrumental in the moves which led to all three tries. Young was having a day similar to that which Butler had suffered at Gosforth, with a string of penalty misses, but Gosforth finished strongly to score two tries and reduce the final deficit to 19-10.





The clubs were drawn together twice in the Pilkington Cup, with Gloucester having to make the long trek north for both. By 1990, Gosforth were in the Second Division and the difference in class showed in the second half as Gloucester, one point ahead at half-time, ran out 26-15 winners, with tries from John Gadd, Jim Breeze, Kevin Dunn and Mike Hamlin. Marcus Hannaford was man-of-the-match.



It was a different story in 1992, when Gosforth were the unbeaten leaders of Courage League Division Two, whilst Gloucester came into the game on the back of six wins on the trot. Although Gloucester turned round 10-6 ahead thanks to a Tony Windo try and a conversion and penalty kicked by Martin Roberts, they could not add to their score, although a Neil Matthews dropped goal missed by a whisker, and a Gosforth try, the grounding of which was disputed, settled the match 13-10 in Gosforth's favour.

The league and professional era

By 1993-94, when the teams met for the first time in league action, Gloucester were suffering a mediocre season, but fought out a 12-12 draw with four penalties split between Tim Smith and Paul Beech, at Newcastle Gosforth. In the return at Kingsholm, a try from Paul Holford, a penalty try and a conversion and penalty by Tim Smith, were sufficient to see Gloucester home 15-9.

In 1991, Gosforth had been renamed Newcastle Gosforth, and then, in 1995, Sir John Hall, Chairman of Newcastle United FC, took over the club as part of his sports empire in the city. He appointed Rob Andrew to run things on and off the field, dropped Gosforth from the name, the Newcastle Falcons became a professional club, and their colours were changed from the green and white hoops of Gosforth to the black and white of Newcastle. However, the amateur players refused to accept the loss of their club, and formed a new Gosforth club, which, along with Northern, continues to prosper.

The Falcons won the Premiership at their first attempt in 1997-98, enabled in part by a controversial 29-27 victory at Kingsholm near the end of the season. The following season, Chris Catling scored a hat trick of tries in an unusually high scoring game which was won 41-32 at Kingsholm, but Newcastle romped home 39-15 in the return fixture.

The teams appeared to be very closely matched in 2001-02, when Newcastle won 18-16 at home, and Gloucester won 29-25 at Kingsholm, so it was a surprise when the teams met in a Zurich Championship play-off game at Kingsholm towards the end of the season and Gloucester won 60-9. Tries were spread around the team with Robert Todd, James Forrester, Ludovic Mercier, Tom Beim, Junior Paramore, Darren O'Leary, Henry Paul, Phil Vickery and Terry Fanolua all touching down. This remains the biggest win by either team in the series between the clubs.

Another Zurich Wild Card match at Kingsholm in 2005 resulted in a much closer 23-16 win for Gloucester, with two tries from James Forrester and one from Adam Balding, and the rest of the points from the boot of Duncan McRae.

In 2011 the teams met for the first time on a neutral ground, at Northampton, in the final of the LV Cup. A Tom Voyce try and a Nicky Robinson conversion and penalty were the only scores in the first half, with the Gloucester pack keeping a stranglehold on possession. There was not much in it until the final quarter, when a stylish move by Matt Cox, Robinson and Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu opened the floodgates. Further tries from Charlie Sharples and Darren Dawidiuk, and 14 points kicked by Nicky Robinson, completed a 34-7 triumph.



In April 2018, the teams met in the semi-final of the European Challenge Cup at Kingsholm, not long after Newcastle had won there in the league. But a dominant scrum and some electrifying attacks by the backs, spearheaded by Jason Woodward, saw Gloucester home. Tom Marshall, Motu Matu'u, Billy Burns and Ben Vellacott scored the tries, and Billy Twelvetrees kicked 13 points in a comprehensive 33-12 victory.

Overall there have been 60 matches, of which Gloucester have won 37, lost 20 and drawn 3, with points for 1,432 and against 1,145. Both teams continue to find it difficult to perform at their best after the long journey. At Kingsholm, Gloucester have won 25 and lost only four of the 30 matches.

