

GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE

GLOUCESTER V BORDEAUX-BÈGLES

In 1880 Northampton played their early games under the name of Northampton St. James, which soon gave rise to the well-known nickname “Saints”.

Bordeaux-Bègles Early History

Rugby has been played in Bordeaux since the late 19th century, but loyalties were divided for several generations between two clubs in the city - Stade Bordelais and CA Bordeaux-Bègles-Gironde. Each enjoyed periods of success, Bordelais winning seven national titles before the Great War and Bègles two in 1969 and 1991.

First Match with Gloucester

A tour by Bègles in September 1975 included a midweek game under the floodlights at Kingsholm, which became a feast of sparkling rugby. Bègles started strongly and built a healthy lead in the first half, but Gloucester stormed back in the second half, with Alan Brinn and John Bayliss scoring tries. The game finished with Eddie Pinkney crashing over in the corner, but the conversion was missed and Bègles won 21-20.

First European Cup Opponents at Kingsholm

During the first season of the European Conference, which later evolved into the European Challenge Cup, Gloucester played their first home game against Bègles in October 1996. An uninspiring and error-strewn game was level with only a few minutes to go, but Gloucester had failed to convert territorial domination into points, and paid the price when a long-distance try at the death gave Bègles a 17-10 win.

First Gloucester Trip to Bègles

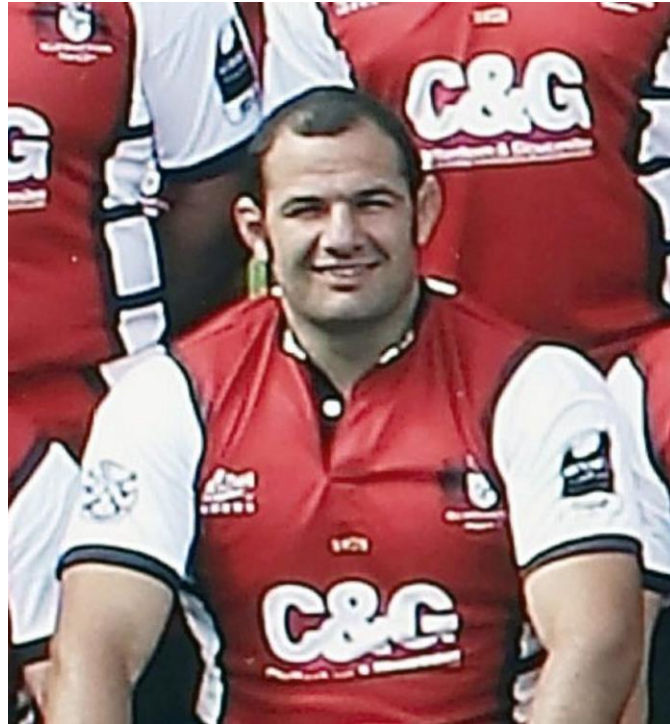
In August 1999, the teams met for the first time in Bordeaux, for a pre-season match. The Gloucester front row of Trevor Woodman, Neil McCarthy and Phil Vickery had plenty of motivation to perform, because Clive Woodward travelled out to watch them ahead of finalising his Rugby World Cup squad. There was only one point in it with a few minutes to go, but this time it was Gloucester who scored in injury time. Brian Johnson chipped ahead, gathered and scored, and Gloucester won 19-11.

Bègles Imports to Kingsholm

Serge Simon, former star at Bègles, came out of retirement to join Gloucester in 1999. In a short time he made a huge impact both on opponents and with the Gloucester faithful. A man of many talents – doctor, artist, philosopher and powerful and violent prop – his tough uncompromising style and savage enthusiasm for the game quickly earned him cult status in the Shed. It was a pity that he made only 18 appearances for the Club, but he will never be forgotten.

He was soon followed at Kingsholm by another prop from Bègles, Patrice Collazo, also a French international, and accomplished in both tight and loose play. In two stints with Gloucester, 2001-03 and 2005-08, he made 78 appearances and won two finals with the

Club - the Zurich Championship against Bristol in 2002 and the European Challenge Cup against London Irish in 2006.



Patrice Collazo

Unification as Bordeaux Bègles

The first decade of professional rugby saw both clubs based in Bordeaux suffering playing and financial problems, so a merger was proposed. Supporters were fiercely tribal and not in favour, but influential former players, notably Serge Simon and Bernard Laporte, pushed for a joint club. They were supported by local companies, previously reluctant to provide sponsorship, because they knew they would antagonise as many supporters as they would please by supporting one club or the other.

However, neither club was prepared to compromise on the name of the new joint club, so it started life in 2006 as "Union Stade Bordelais-C.A.Bordeaux-Bègles Gironde". Two years of trying to cope with this mouthful resulted in the name being changed to "Union Bordeaux Bègles". Both clubs have continued separately as amateur clubs.

The Amlin Cup

Gloucester and Bordeaux Bègles were drawn in the same group of the Amlin (European Challenge) Cup in 2012-13. The first leg was played at Kingsholm in October, when two tries from Charlie Sharples, one from Will James and a try, a conversion and a penalty from Billy Twelvetrees, saw Gloucester 22-0 ahead at half-time and eventually win 25-13. It was much tougher going at the Stade Andre Moga in January. A traffic accident caused Gloucester to arrive late, the kick-off was delayed and they were caught cold from the start. But a try by Darren Dawidiuk and the boot of Freddie Burns helped Gloucester to turn round only 19-20 down. The second half was tense, but Burns kept kicking the penalties to finish with eight to secure a fine 31-26 victory. This contributed to Gloucester winning all six of their games in the group, and Bordeaux Bègles losing all

six of theirs. A home tie in the quarter-final did Gloucester little good as they lost 31-41 to the Amlin Cup holders, Biarritz.



Charlie Sharples

In 2014-15, Gloucester again won all six group games in the Amlin Cup, before beating Connacht and Exeter in the knock-out rounds and then Edinburgh in the final. In previous season this would have guaranteed automatic qualification for the following season's Champions Cup, but the powers that be decided play-offs were necessary this time.

The Play-off Final

Having beaten Connacht (again) in the first play-off match, Gloucester then had a home tie against Bordeaux Bègles for the final play-off on 31st May 2015. However, Kingsholm was already booked for a concert, so the match was moved to Worcester. A try by Henry Purdy and the boot of Greig Laidlaw enabled Gloucester to build a lead of 16-0, but this narrowed to 19-13 by half-time. The French went ahead in the second half, but a Laidlaw penalty appeared to have settled the game with a couple of minutes to go. One more ruck would have won the game, but Gloucester were penalised with 15 seconds left, the French went down-field and kicked a last gasp dropped goal to win 23-22. So it was back to the Amlin Cup for Gloucester the following season.

Overall Record

Including the pre-season game, Gloucester and Bordeaux Bègles have met on six occasions, with three wins apiece. The points difference favours Gloucester 127-111, but all the matches have been close. The biggest winning margin for Gloucester has been 25-13 and for Bordeaux Bègles 17-10.