

# GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE

## GLOUCESTER V SARACENS

### Saracens Early History

With a history almost as long as that of Gloucester, Saracens was originally an Old Boys club, founded by former pupils of the Philological School in Marylebone in 1876. They played their first match against Blackheath, and their local rivals were the Crusaders, with whom they merged in 1878. The club became peripatetic, playing on nine different grounds in the fifty years up to the Second World War, when they finally settled down at Bramley Road, Southgate. However, the facilities there were so poor that they found it difficult to persuade opponents to accept fixtures.



Mike Teague



Marcus Hannaford



Tim Smith

### First Matches with Gloucester

Gloucester and Saracens first met at Kingsholm on 23rd March 1968. It was not a riveting encounter, ending as a 3-3 draw, Gloucester's points coming from a penalty kicked by their captain, Don Rutherford. Floods and frost delayed the second meeting until December 1971 at Southgate. Dave Owen scored a try, Eric Stephens converted it and kicked a penalty, and Mickey Booth dropped a goal, but it was not enough as Saracens won 20-12.

Thereafter the teams met once per season, alternately home and away, but Saracens were not a strong side in the 1970s and 80s, regularly losing their best players to other clubs. Gloucester won every match between 1975 and 1988.

## **First Cup Encounters**

This included two John Player Cup ties in successive seasons. In 1985, at Kingsholm, the Gloucester pack dominated with Phil Blakeway, Mike Teague and Ian Smith to the fore. Nick Price, Derrick Morgan, Paul Taylor, Laurie Cummins and Ian Smith ran in tries, Tim Smith converting three of them and adding a penalty, as Gloucester won 29-3.

It was the tie of the round in 1986, with Gloucester top of John Smith Merit Table A, having won 18 of their previous 19 games, and Saracens top of Table B. A special train from Gloucester gave Saracens their largest crowd for a decade. Gloucester won a hard-fought game 13-6, courtesy of a try started by Mike Teague and finished by Marcus Hannaford, and three penalties by Tim Smith.

## **League Rugby**

With the introduction of leagues, Saracens won the second division in 1989, and surprised many by finishing fourth in the first division the following season, behind Wasps, Gloucester and Bath. Their first league game against Gloucester resulted in a 21-21 draw, and in subsequent seasons results remained close with two Gloucester wins and another draw.

However, Saracens continued to lose leading players to other London clubs, and were relegated in 1993. They bounced back two years later, but only avoided the drop in 1996 when the RFU decided that there should be no relegation in the first season of professional rugby. Crucially Nigel Wray stepped in to provide the financial backing required for a professional club, and from then on star players joined rather than left the Club.

## **A Different Story in the Professional Era**

Saracens began professional life by again becoming peripatatic, lodging on two football grounds at Enfield and Watford, before opening their own stadium at Barnet Copthall in 2013, initially called Allianz Park and now known as the StoneX. Their playing fortunes have been revolutionised during the professional era, with success both domestically and in Europe, although there was a serious hiccup when they were found guilty of breaking the salary cap regulations



Their results against Gloucester steadily improved during the professional era, but the overall record between the clubs currently stands at 47 wins for Gloucester and 31 for Saracens, with four matches drawn.



## High Scoring Matches

In January 2003, Gloucester registered a big win in the Powergen Cup, 51-20, with eight tries scored by Thinus Delpont (2), James Forrester (2), Terry Fanolua, Andy Gomersall, Adam Eustace, and Rodrigo Roncero; Ludovic Mercier and Henry Paul kicked the rest of the points. It was much closer the following week in a league match at Vicarage Road, where Gloucester won 29-22.

In the league semi-final in May 2007, Gloucester won 50-9. Seven tries were scored, by Peter Richards, Luke Narraway, Anthony Allen, Mark Foster, Andy Hazell and Christian Califano, plus a penalty try; Willie Walker kicked six conversions and a penalty.

The biggest margin of victory for Saracens came in May 2018, when they won 62-12 in the league. The sides have met only once in European competition, a Challenge Cup quarter-final in May 2022, when Saracens cruised home 44-15. And yet that season Gloucester completed the double in the league, winning 25-24 away, and then 54-7 in the last match of the season at Kingsholm.