

GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE

LEINSTER RUGBY

The Leinster rugby club was founded in Dublin in 1879, and the first inter-provincial game was played against Ulster. It is now one of the four professional provincial teams along with Munster, Ulster and Connacht. All four provinces play in the United Rugby Championship.

From 1946 to 2001 the four provinces competed in the Inter Provincial Championship, and Leinster won the title 22 times.

Since professional rugby began in 1995 Leinster have been very successful. In 2001-02 they won the inaugural Celtic League, beating Munster in the final. The Celtic League was later renamed PRO12 then PRO14, and finally United Rugby Championship. In all formats Leinster have won the title seven times, including four in a row from 2018-21. They have also had great success in Europe, becoming one of the giant clubs in the competition. They won the Heineken Champions title for the first time in 2009, beating Leicester 19-16 in the final. Further success followed in 2011 when Northampton were beaten 33-22. This was a remarkable win as Northampton led 22-6 at half-time. There was an all-Irish final in 2012 when Ulster were defeated 42-14, and in 2018 Racing 92 were beaten in the final 15-12. Those four European Champions titles are the most by any club save Toulouse, who have also won the same number.

Leinster are indeed formidable opponents. Johnny Sexton is captain of both province and Ireland. The team is made up predominantly of Irish players and established internationals including Robbie Henshaw, Cian Healy and Ross Byrne. Other recent legends include Brian O'Driscoll, Jamie Heaslip and Shane Horgan, who is the club's record try scorer.

Before this season Gloucester and Leinster have only clashed twice, in the 2006-07 season in the Heineken Cup.

21 October 2006: Leinster 37 Gloucester 20 (Pool Stage)



Team: Ian Balshaw; James Bailey, Jack Adams, Anthony Allen, Mark Foster; Ryan Lamb, Peter Richards; Christian Califano, Mefin Davies; Carlos Nieto, Adam Eustace, Marco Bortolami (captain), Peter Buxton, Andy Hazell, James Forrester. Replacements: Olivier Azam, Nick Wood, Jonathan Pendlebury, Jake Boer, Rory Lawson, Ludovic Mercier.



Tries: Foster, Adams; Conversions: Lamb (2); Penalties: Lamb (2).

Gloucester performed well, but against the star-studded Leinster they were eventually well beaten. Brian O'Driscoll and Gordon D'Arcy in the centre were a class act. After only four minutes, D'Arcy latched on to a pass from Felipe Contepomi, to score the opening try. Ryan Lamb responded with a penalty, and then Gloucester scored a lovely try. James Forrester linked with Peter Richards, who looped round Lamb, and sent Mark Foster in. But soon enough O'Driscoll surged through, Contepomi chipped ahead and took advantage of a fumble to score. He added the conversion and three penalties to put Leinster 23-10 up. Gloucester thought Leinster had offended at a line out, but play continued, and eventually Stephen Keogh scored a try. Gloucester were now 20 points adrift. The forwards were though holding their own, and Richards and Lamb combined to give Jack Adams the chance to show what a talent he was, when he stepped inside twice to score a brilliant try. So, at half-time Leinster led 30-17.

Gloucester attacked early in the second-half, and Lamb kicked a penalty. They continued to force Leinster on to the defensive, but errors spoilt things, and no scores came, even after Mal O'Kelly was yellow-carded. Eventually, Leinster broke out through Jamie Heaslip, and Shane Horgan scored a try.

19 January 2007: Gloucester 19 Leinster 13 (Pool Stage)

Team: Ian Balshaw; James Bailey, Jack Adams, Mike Tindall, Mark Foster; Willie Walker, Peter Richards; Nick Wood, Mefin Davies, Carlos Nieto, Marco Bortolami (captain), Alex Brown, Peter Buxton, Andy Hazell, Adam Balding. Replacements: Olivier Azam, Christian Califano, Will James, Jake Boer, Rory Lawson, Ryan Lamb, Rudi Keil.

Tries: Califano, Foster, + penalty try; Conversions: Lamb, Walker.



By this time Gloucester could not qualify for the later stages of the competition, but they said goodbye with a stirring performance. The Cherry & Whites were quickly out of the traps. After five minutes a driving line-out was carried on by Adam Balding and Andy Hazell, before Ian Balshaw with a fine run caused the Leinster extreme difficulty, so much so that Brian O'Driscoll was yellow-carded for killing the ball. Seven minutes later another driving line-out was pulled down and the referee, Nigel Owens, awarded Gloucester a penalty try. Peter Richards followed O'Driscoll to the sin bin, and Leinster nearly scored, but a Willie Walker tackle saved the day. Just before half-time O'Driscoll scored under the posts; so, at the interval the score was 7-7.

Leinster now had the advantage of a strong wind, and when Contepomi kicked a penalty, it was looking good for the Irish. But in the final quarter the Gloucester forwards got on top. Mike Tindall, playing at his best, made an opening for Balshaw, and James Bailey got close to the line. Marco Bortolami won a line-out and Christian Califano was driven over. Olivier Azam and Will James were brought on, which put Leinster under more severe pressure. A Leinster scrum was sent backwards at a rate of knots, and Rory Lawson and Mike Tindall made progress before Ryan Lamb switched direction, releasing Balshaw before Mark Foster chipped over Rob Kearney, and won the race to touch down. It needed a lengthy consideration by the television official before the try was confirmed. Gloucester closed out the rest of the game. Contepomi did kick a penalty but Gloucester had achieved a famous victory.

The Gloucester win meant that Leinster missed out on a home quarter-final, and had to travel to Toulouse where they pulled off a magnificent 41-35 victory, only to lose to 6-30 to Munster in the semi-final.