

OFFICIAL SOUVENIR PROGRAMME | £5



GLOUCESTER RUGBY V LEICESTER TIGERS

KINGSHOLM STADIUM

PREMIERSHIP RUGBY CUP FINAL | FRIDAY 15 MARCH 2024 | 7:45PM





WELCOME SIMON MASSIE-TAYLOR



On behalf of myself and everyone at Premiership Rugby, we are delighted to welcome you to the Premiership Rugby Cup Final 2024 – and what better venue to host than the iconic Kingsholm.

Gloucester Rugby and Leicester Tigers are two pillars of English rugby and I'm sure 'The Shed' will be bouncing tonight as two old foes go head-to-head for the first piece of silverware of the 2023/24 season.

For the first time, this season saw a new format for the Premiership Rugby Cup with clubs from the RFU Championship competing alongside ours. This allowed for some old rugby rivalries to be reignited and brought about a few notable upsets along the way.

Despite being two giants of the domestic game, both Gloucester and Leicester Tigers are yet to lift the Premiership Rugby Cup, adding another element to tonight's winner-takes-all contest.

Before the match kicks-off, I would also like to take this opportunity to look to the future.

At Premiership Rugby we realise the need to play to the strengths of our sport.

The quality of skilful, attacking rugby is at an all-time high and we are blessed with phenomenal athletes with the physical ability to create viral

moments and showcase our sport in the best possible way.

You only have to look at the performance of Gloucester Rugby number-eight Zach Mercer in the Cup semi-final against Exeter Chiefs to see some of the action that gets people off their seats and sofas.

Finally, I want to thank all our clubs for embracing a fresh, new format for the Premiership Rugby Cup and especially to Gloucester Rugby for hosting the final as the competition's top seeds.

I truly believe tonight has the potential to be a game for the ages and I hope that all those in attendance with us at Kingsholm, and those tuning in on TNT Sports, enjoy the match.

I wish both clubs the very best of luck as they look to add the Premiership Rugby Cup to their impressive trophy cabinets.

Simon

Simon Massie-Taylor

Premiership Rugby, CEO

A MESSAGE FROM MARTIN ST QUINTON

Good evening and welcome to the Premiership Rugby Cup Final at Kingsholm. It is not every day that a team gets to fight for silverware on their home turf, but that is exactly what is in store tonight.

First and foremost, I would like to welcome our visitors, Leicester Tigers. They, like Gloucester, are a great club with a proud history and a strong fan base. I am sure all the Gloucester fans will join me in extending a warm welcome.

With over 10,000 tickets sold in under a week at the time of writing, and heading towards a sell-out at Kingsholm, it's going to be a terrific atmosphere at the ground tonight.

Gloucester Rugby fans are always loud and proud, but with a trophy on the line, I am sure the decibel levels will be raised even higher.

Tigers and Gloucester fans alike will not just be treated to some high-quality cup final rugby on the pitch, but also there is plenty going on around the ground - from the usual fan zone fun, to the special pre-match show from DJ, Marvin Humes.

George Skivington and his team have been building well on the last few games, and I am really proud to see their approach and attitude going into this game.

I am looking forward to seeing our boys run out tonight and we must give them 100% support, as always.

Come on Gloucester!

Yours,
Martin

Martin

Gloucester Rugby Owner & Chairman



WELCOME ALEX BROWN

Dear Gloucester Community,

Welcome to the highly anticipated Premiership Rugby Cup Final! I am absolutely thrilled to be extending this warm welcome.

Our season to date has been one of frustration, but tonight is a special evening. The privilege to be here at a packed-out Kingsholm, with Gloucester in a 'holm' final, really is a testament to our club, our players and our supporters who all thoroughly deserve this moment. I cannot overstate how grateful we are for the unwavering support that you all provide.

We welcome Leicester Tigers, who have equally performed well in this tournament, and our players are expecting a typically powerful Tigers display.

Amongst all the Guinness Six Nations action, it's been an exciting few weeks at Kingsholm as we've worked towards tonight's game - there has been a tangible energy around the club as our teams have worked tirelessly to deliver this special match. I'd like to thank those teams for their hard work, not just in recent weeks, but for the duration of this season to date. Often members of staff working behind the scenes don't always get the same recognition as those on the pitch. Suffice to say, I'm immensely grateful for all their efforts.

I have been very fortunate to play in the final of this competition, albeit some years ago when it was known as the LV=Cup, and I can testify to the unique environment which finals bring. They clearly come with high pressure and emotion, not least at home, but I know the players and the coaches will be using that to our advantage.

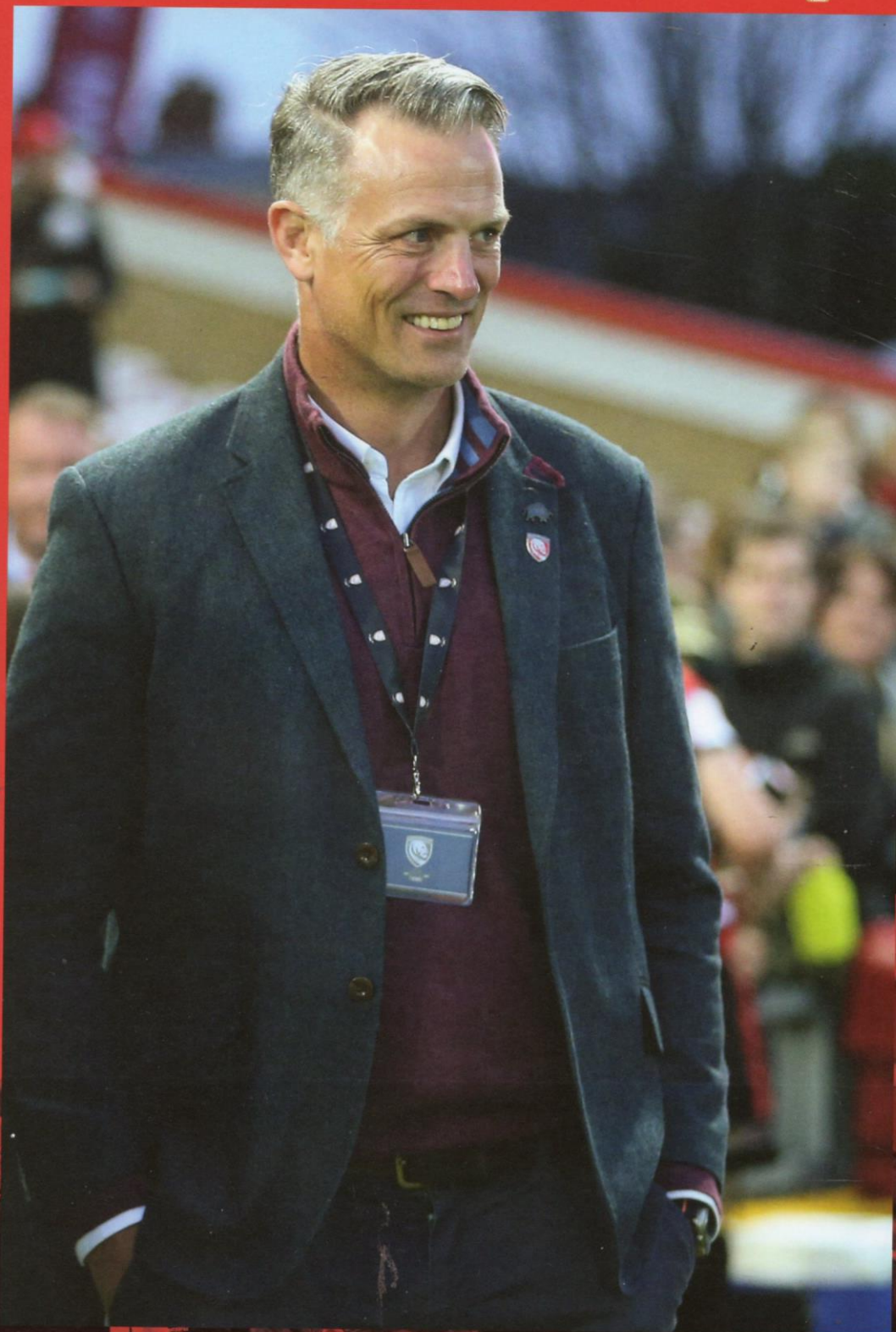
And that is where you come in. We want to hear you loud and proud this evening, from the famous Shed to Stowie, from Malvern to Speedy, let's show everyone why Gloucester really is 'in the blood' for us all.

Looking ahead, we have another knock-out fixture at Kingsholm in a few weeks, taking on Castres in the European Rugby Challenge Cup Last 16 on Friday 5 April. We hope you will return for that fixture as we continue our campaign for silverware.

Before that, of course, we face our fellow West Country rivals, Bristol Bears at Kingsholm on Saturday 30 March. Tickets for both fixtures are available via our website.

Have a wonderful evening and as ever, thank you for your support.

Alex Brown
Chief Executive Officer



LEWIS LUDLOW PREVIEW

LEWIS LUDLOW IS LOOKING TO EMULATE THE SUCCESS OF GLOUCESTER-HARTPURY, WHO WON THE PREMIER 15S TITLE LAST YEAR IN FRONT OF A RECORD CROWD AT KINGSHOLM – REBRANDED QUEENSHOLM FOR THE DAY.

The women's team became the first non-London club to win the competition with a 34-19 triumph over Exeter. And Ludlow, who came through the Cherry and Whites' academy, wants to experience the euphoric feeling that co-captains Mo Hunt and Zoe Aldcroft had that day.

"The atmosphere was incredible and to see what it meant to everyone, not only the girls on the pitch, was amazing," said Ludlow.

"There was a huge crowd at Kingsholm that day, and it must have felt fantastic to run out at home and get the win.

"Being at home you get the chance to celebrate with your friends and family – you have those memories forever and it's a brilliant feeling."

With more than 10,000 tickets snapped up within just a week of them going on sale for tonight's match, Ludlow believes the fans deserve cup success.

"There is silverware on the line, and for the game to be at home, these are the situations that you can only dream of," said Ludlow, who admits to being inspired by the Cherry and Whites' trophy haul of yesteryear.

"For us, it is a necessity to win cups. You only have to walk around Kingsholm to see the history and tradition of the club.

"I actually walked past a picture from the 2015 European Rugby Challenge Cup final victory the other day.





“FOR US, IT IS A NECESSITY TO WIN CUPS. YOU ONLY HAVE TO WALK AROUND KINGSHOLM TO SEE THE HISTORY AND TRADITION OF THE CLUB.”

“I was a travelling reserve for that game, and the feeling that everyone experienced that day, is something I want more of –

the supporters deserve to enjoy some success.”

Proud to be leading his charges into a home cup final, Ludlow added: “It rarely happens in

your career where you have a semi-final and a final at home.

“Normally they are at neutral grounds, so the chance to have a final at home in front of your



■ Gloucester-Hartpury co-captains Mo Hunt and Zoe Aldcroft lifting the Premier 15s title at Kingsholm last year



home crowd on a Friday night, is what dreams are made of and I can't wait.

"It's got to happen where we are winning trophies, and tonight we're the lucky ones who can make it happen. We've got a talented squad, and everyone at the club has put a huge amount of hard work in, from the coaches, physios and staff.

"A piece of silverware will be justice for all the work that we have put in."

Gloucester won all five of their pool matches to progress through to the knockout stages where they defeated Exeter in the last four to book

their place in tonight's showpiece.

Reflecting on his side's route to the final, Ludlow admits the pool matches initially acted as part of an extended pre-season.

He said: "It was a bit of a strange one at the start of the season because of how the competition was run in terms of the schedule.

"The pool matches were almost like warm-up games and then we had a big break, before the season restarted.

"Normally, this competition would be utilised as a development competition, but we wanted to win this trophy right from the start.

"Once we knew that we were in the semi-finals, we were like 'this is it now, we're going for it.' When you get to the knockout stages of a competition, you go for it all in.

"We played against Exeter in the semi-final, a team who have proven in the Premiership, that no matter who wears the Chiefs shirt, they are well-drilled.

"Winning has been a habit for them, so it was a big thing for us to get a win over them – they are a very good team."

The 29-year-old was part of the Gloucester squad that reached consecutive European rugby Challenge Cup finals against Stade Français in 2017 and Cardiff Blues in 2018.

The back-row believes the mix of young and more experienced players like him, bodes well for the future.

"We have fielded a mix of young and old players in the cup competition, and that's nice to see because these games are different to

“A PIECE OF SILVERWARE WILL BE JUSTICE FOR ALL THE WORK THAT WE HAVE PUT IN”

the Premiership games,” added Ludlow.

“It’s great to see the boys expressing themselves and doing well – you’ve got the young boys impressing and that’s great for the future of the club.”

The Gallagher Premiership fixtures between Gloucester

and Leicester are now named the Slater Cup after Ed Slater, who captained both teams.

Tigers lifted the trophy following a 38-20 victory at Kingsholm when the two sides last met, with Ludlow expecting another stern test.

“Every game against Leicester is extremely tough and there

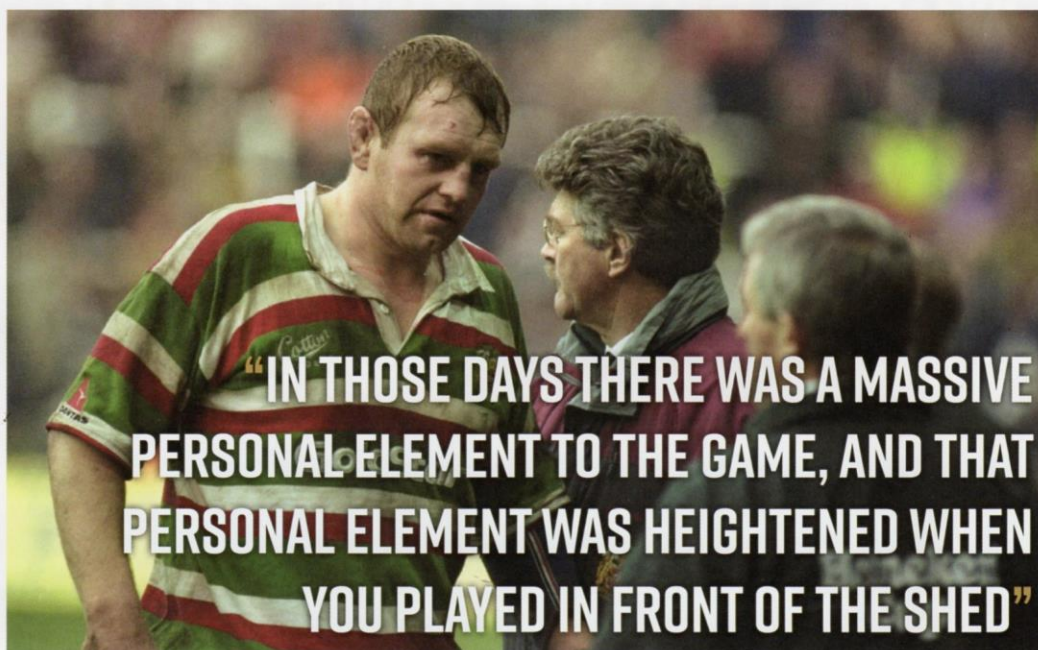
is never going to be an easy game,” said Ludlow.

“We’re going to have to be right at our best to win the game. I would love to be a lot of points up with 10 minutes to go, but I can see it being a tight game, and will come right down to the wire.”



■ Lewis Ludlow playing in the 2018 European Rugby Challenge Cup Final against Cardiff Blues in Bilbao

DEAN RICHARDS: I RELISHED PLAYING AT KINGSHOLM



"IN THOSE DAYS THERE WAS A MASSIVE PERSONAL ELEMENT TO THE GAME, AND THAT PERSONAL ELEMENT WAS HEIGHTENED WHEN YOU PLAYED IN FRONT OF THE SHED"

As a player and coach, Leicester Tigers legend Dean Richards has relished his trips to Kingsholm down the years. None more so than on a cold December night in 1982 when a good old-fashioned tussle with second-rows John Fidler and John Orwin had the 'Shed Heads' in full voice.

That evening, a 19-year-old Richards was experiencing the famous Shed roar for the very first time as a youthful Tigers side got the better of the Cherry and Whites.

"Because of illness, we had a lot of youngsters in the side that night, who all had a point to prove," Richards recalled.

"Kingsholm was renowned for being one of the most feared places to visit in those days and in the tenth minute a fight broke out, and I had a bit of a tête-à-tête with Fidler and Orwin.

"As was normally the case with altercations like that, there was a lot of handbags going on, with a couple of split eyes and bloody noses – things like that, but nothing of a serious nature.

"At the end of the game, John Fidler came over to me and said, 'rumour has it you're a policeman?' I said I'd just joined, and he replied, 'we need people who can punch like you in the police team.'"

Combining an illustrious playing career with his job as a Hinckley policeman, Richards was a league title winner with Tigers in 1988 and again as captain in 1995 as well as lifting the Pilkington Cup in 1993 and 1997.

Capped 48 times by England, a world record for a number-



■ Dean Richards escapes the attention of Craig Chalmers of the Barbarians during the annual Boxing Day clash at Welford Road. Leicester won the game 41-23.

eight at the time, Richards enjoyed Grand Slam triumphs in 1991 and 1992.

Casting his mind back to the years before breaking into the Leicester squad, one of his earliest memories of a Gloucester versus Leicester clash was as a spectator at the 1978 John Player Cup Final.

"I first saw Gloucester as a young lad in the John-Player Cup, and the passion that both clubs had back then hasn't diminished in any way shape or form," added Richards.

"I had the fortune to start my playing career with some of the players who featured in that game such as Dusty Hare, Barry Evans, Paul Dodge, Clive Woodward, Les Cusworth, Steve Kenney, and Nick Youngs.

"Then Rory Underwood came into the team, and we had a near full international backline.

"In the pack there was only Peter Wheeler who was a recognised international, but after one of the Redfern's was capped, I was then capped, and we soon got a bit of a pack together."

It was a change of the guard within the coaching structure at Welford Road in the mid 80s, which set the platform for a Tigers revolution according to Richards.

"We had a change of coach and some of the older lads in the pack soon dropped out. The pack became more powerful, and we had virtually a full international forward line, with less so of a backline," said Richards, who pulled on the famous green, red, and white jersey 314 times.

"It was a flip of what it was like when I started playing. We enjoyed great success as a team and I finished off my playing career with the likes of Backy,

Jono, Garth, Nobby and Wellsy – those sorts of boys you'd go to battle with."

Taking charge as Director of Rugby in 1998, three years after the game turned professional, Richards guided Leicester to the Premiership title in his first season and defended the title four years in a row. He also won two Heineken Cups, defeating Stade Français 34-30 in 2001, and Munster 15-9 in 2002.

"It's fair to say that when the game turned professional, we didn't have the biggest budget in the world, but we had a great team spirit and a great culture," said Richards.

"The culture that was created through the history and expectation that the club had down the years, really shone through. Those expectations ensured that the players stood up and played for the right reasons."

With Tigers making the trip down the M5 for this evening's mouth-watering cup final, you would be forgiven for thinking that 'Deano' would love to be on the coach as a player, rolling back the years.

"I relished going down to Gloucester, whatever the competition," he said.

"Whether it was going up against Mike Teague, John Gadd or Ian Smith in the back-row, or Steve Mills and Phil Blakeway in the front-row – those battles are what rugby was made of in those days.

"There was a mindset, which has almost gone out of the game now. Back then, it was you against your opposite number and you were not playing by stats, which is the case in the modern game.

"In those days there was a massive personal element to the game, and that personal element was heightened when you played in front of the Shed."

Enjoying a number of cup battles with the Cherry and Whites as a player and coach, Richards is pleased to see the preservation of a cup competition in the modern era and has ideas of how it could be developed.

He said: "It would be great to develop the cup so that you could have all tiers taking part at the start of the season.

"You could by January, February or March, have a good minnow side playing against a National One team, and then you get the inclusion of the Championship and Premiership teams later in the competition.

"It would be amazing to do that – it really would. Back in my day, you had two cup competitions – the Midlands Cup and the John Player Cup.

"As soccer was years ago, the John Player Cup was like the FA Cup. As time wore on, the prestige of winning the league became the most important thing, similar to soccer."

Previewing tonight's cup showdown, Richards is looking forward to watching a number of key battles, adding: "If Jasper Wiese and Zach Mercer both play, then it will be a fascinating duel – I always love to see a back-row battle.

"You've got two teams in Gloucester and Leicester, who have quite contrasting ways of playing and with a lot of potential in their ranks.

"Both teams have been blighted by a huge number of injuries, but a lot of those players will be coming back, and if both sides are close to full strength, it will be a really interesting game.

"I think the loss of Louis Rees-Zammit will make a difference to a point, but having said that, there are a lot of talented local youngsters coming through at the club."

As well as key battles on the pitch, the focus will be on coaches George Skivington and Dan McKellar to make key decisions at crucial stages of the game. McKellar took up the Tigers hotseat last summer following a stint as Wallabies Senior Assistant Coach, while Skivington made the move to Kingsholm in 2020 as Head Coach before making the transition to Director of Rugby.

"Dan [McKellar] is obviously incredibly knowledgeable, but also very well-liked by the players which is very important," said Richards.

"The same goes for George [Skivington] and with him, it's great to see a talented English coach coming through. With the number of injuries that he's had to contend with, it has been a tough year for them.

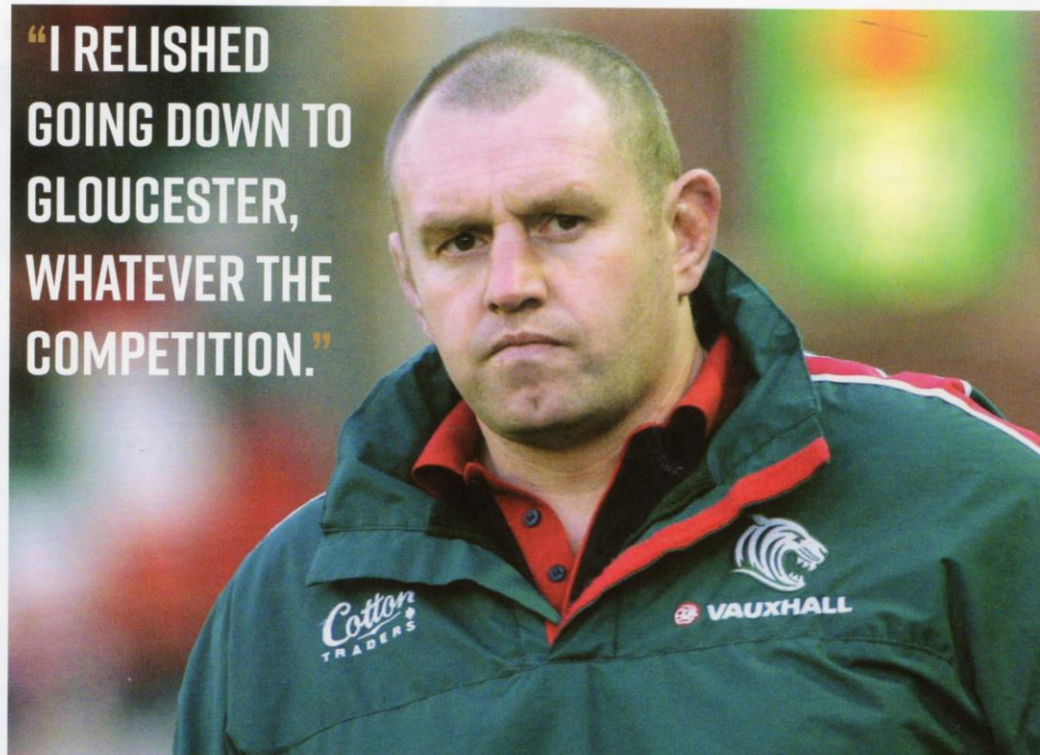
"I've been there with Newcastle, when you haven't got the same budget as some of the other clubs. Also, with the injuries that they have had, it makes life as a coach incredibly difficult.

"Testament to the boys that the spirit is high in Gloucester's camp, and they now find themselves in a cup final, which is fantastic."

Since leaving his role as Newcastle Falcons Director of Rugby, Richards and his son Will, have been working on a new business venture which



**"I RELISHED
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they've called The Players Platform. Due to launch in the coming months, the bespoke site is designed to enable sports men and women play at the highest level possible, with a

sharp focus on football and rugby clubs lower down the pyramid.

Richards also fields the odd call from young aspiring coaches who want advice.

With much more to offer the game, he is keen to embark on a consultancy role.

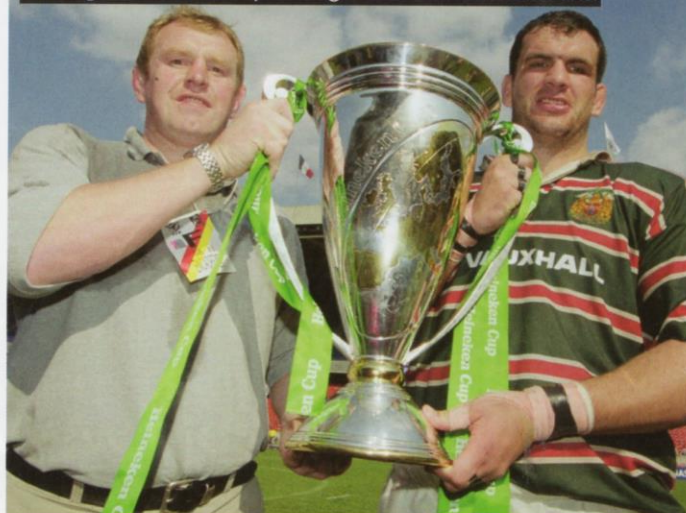
He said: "I miss the game and I miss my involvement in it. I'd love to embark on a consultancy role, mentoring a young coach because my experiences have been broadened over the years.

"I've experienced everything that the sport has thrown at me, and I would have a huge amount to offer the game.

"I'm currently on the after dinner speaking circuit too and there are crossovers where I meet up with old teammates and players that I had as a coach.

"Those boys that I toured with and played with - we had some wonderful times. You reflect back on your career and remember those magical moments."

■ Dean Richards (left) and Captain Martin Johnson celebrate after winning the Heineken Cup Final against Stade Francais in Paris.



CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS

GLOUCESTER 6 - 3 LEICESTER

JOHN PLAYER CUP FINAL | SATURDAY 15 APRIL 1978



BURTON



SARGENT



SIMONETT



HOWELL

With thanks to Gloucester Rugby Heritage for the editorial

Five special trains took Gloucester supporters to the Twickenham final. Many more travelled by car or coach, and it was estimated that 2,000 Cherry and White supporters were in the crowd.

The outstanding Gloucester pack put Tigers under extreme pressure. Both Peter Butler and Leicester's ace kicker Dusty Hare missed with penalties, and the game was pointless, until the 36th minute when Gloucester scored the only try of the game.

Inevitably, the forwards started the drive courtesy of Mike Burton and Gordon Sargent.

A charge to the left by John Simonett and Paul Howell allowed fly-half Chris Williams to gain further ground, before Steve Boyle carried the move on to release winger Richard Mogg. The flyer broke two tackles to cross in the corner. Butler kicked the conversion from the touchline.

In the second half, Leicester endeavoured to turn the game through their backs, and caused Gloucester some concern. Hare missed two more penalties, before succeeding with his fourth effort. Gloucester attacked moments later, and almost scored through Bob

Clewes, but he was bundled into touch.

In the end, Tigers got on top and only a superb tackle from Mogg stopped a try from Bob Barker. The pressure was still intense to the end, but there were no further scores.

The victorious Gloucester team was honoured with a civic reception at Gloucester Guildhall. Gloucester's MP, Sally Oppenheim, who had been at Twickenham, hosted a celebratory dinner at the House of Commons.

"We are the Gloucester boys" was heard ringing around the Palace of Westminster.

GLOUCESTER: Peter Butler, Bob Clewes, Richard Jardine, Brian Vine, Richard Mogg, Chris Williams, Paul Howell, Gordon Sargent, Steve Mills, Mike Burton, Steve Boyle, John Fidler, John Watkins (c), John Simonett, Viv Wooley

LEICESTER: Dusty Hare, John Duggan, Paul Dodge, Brian Hall (c), Bob Barker, Bledwyn Jones, Steve Kenney, Dave Forfar, Garry Adey, Steve Johnson, Arthur Hazelrigg, Nick Joyce, Steve Redfern, Peter Wheeler, Ray Needham

GLOUCESTER: Tries: Mogg Conversions: Butler | **LEICESTER:** Pens: Hare



GLOUCESTER 32 - 30 LEICESTER

PREMIERSHIP | TUESDAY 8 APRIL 1997



Gloucester had a dreadful start to the season, losing their first five games, but had recovered to mid-table security. Meanwhile Leicester were challenging at the top of the table.

The game was played mid-week under the Kingsholm floodlights, usually a guarantee of a dramatic contest. This one certainly was. Early on, Joel Stransky kicked two penalties to Mark Mapletoft's one, and then after 14 minutes, Stransky broke clear to send in Craig Joiner for a try.

Mapletoft kept Gloucester in the hunt with a penalty,

before a John Liley try took Tigers further ahead. There was an exchange of penalties just before the break to put Leicester 18-9 up.

In the second half, Mapletoft kicked his fourth penalty, before Audley Lumsden picked up and ran in a spectacular try from 50 metres out.

Mapletoft's conversion put the Cherry and Whites ahead for the first time. He stretched the lead with yet another penalty, before Aadel Kardooni scored a short range try, and Stransky's conversion put Tigers 25-22 up.

Mapletoft kicked yet another penalty to square the scores.

But with time running out, Leicester appeared to have won the game with a try from Rory Underwood. Only a couple of minutes remained when from a 15-metre lineout, the Gloucester pack hurled Tigers back, and Phil Greening was driven over.

Mapletoft converted from the touchline to signal wild celebrations, with everybody expecting the final whistle to blow. But no, several minutes more were played, which eventually saw Leicester win a five-metre lineout. However, somehow Gloucester kept Tigers out, and the end of the game signalled a pitch invasion.

GLOUCESTER: Audley Lumsden, Eral Anderson, Craig Emmerson, Martin Roberts, Mike Peters, Mark Mapletoft, Scott Benton, Andy Deacon, Phil Greening, Tony Windo, Rob Fidler, Dave Sims (c), Nathan Carter, Simon Devereux, Andrew Stanley

LEICESTER: John Liley, Stephen Hackney, Niall Malone, Craig Joiner, Leon Lloyd, Joel Stransky, Aadel Kardooni, Graham Rowntree, Richard Cockerill, Darren Garforth, Martin Johnson, Matt Poole, Eric Miller, Dean Richards (c), Neil Back

GLOUCESTER: Tries: Lumsden, Greening Conversions: Mapletoft (2) Pens: Mapletoft (6) | **LEICESTER:** Tries: Joiner, Liley, Kardooni, Underwood Conversions: Stransky (2) Pens: Stransky (2)

LEICESTER 41 - 41 GLOUCESTER

PREMIERSHIP | SATURDAY 16 APRIL 2011



This was an exciting game of ten tries, divided equally between the two teams. Gloucester were first off the mark within three minutes when Olly Morgan sliced through the backs for a try but, as so often was the case in his career, he suffered a shoulder injury almost immediately after scoring.

On seven minutes Leicester were level after Scott Hamilton crossed, and then Toby Flood

took Tigers into the lead with a penalty. Gloucester were soon back in front when Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu scored the first of his tries, and by half-time the Cherry and Whites led 17-13.

Soon after the break it looked as if Leicester had wrestled the game back when Alesana Tuilagi scored a hat-trick of tries in 14 minutes to put the Tigers 14 points up. But back came Gloucester with

tries from Andy Hazell and replacement Tim Molenaar to square things up.

Again, Leicester appeared to have won the game when Billy Twelvetrees crossed, but with the last move of the game Fuimaono-Sapolu intercepted and ran in from his own 22 to score a glorious try. Burns converted, as he had all the tries, to gain a thrilling draw.

LEICESTER: Scott Hamilton, T Horan, Manu Tuilagi, Billy Twelvetrees, Alesana Tuilagi, Toby Flood, Ben Youngs, Boris Stankovich, Rob Hawkins, Martin Castrogiovanni, Steve Mafi, George Skivington, Tom Croft, Ben Woods, Thomas Waldrom

GLOUCESTER: Olly Morgan, Tom Voyce, Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu, Henry Trinder, Jonny May, Freddie Burns, Dave Lewis, Rupert Harden, Scott Lawson, Alasdair Dickinson, Will James, Dave Attwood, Matt Cox, Brett Deacon, Andy Hazell

LEICESTER: Tries: Hamilton, Tuilagi (3), Twelvetrees Conversions: Flood (5) Pens: Flood (2) | **GLOUCESTER:** Tries: Morgan, Fuimaono-Sapolu (2), Hazell, Molenaar Conversions: Burns (5) Pens: Burns (2)



HEAD-TO-HEAD *IN BRIEF*

In all, Gloucester and Leicester have met on 232 occasions, with the Cherry and Whites winning 109, Leicester 115, and eight games have been drawn.

On 3 August 1880, at a meeting at the George Hotel in Leicester, three local clubs amalgamated to form Leicester Rugby Club. Those three clubs were Leicester Societies AFC, Leicester Amateur FC and Leicester Alert.

12 weeks later, on 23 October, the first game was played, against Moseley and the result was a 0-0 draw. The match was

played at the Belgrave Cricket and Cycle Ground. Later, some games were played at Victoria Park, before Leicester found their true home at Welford Road. From the earliest days Leicester were already known as the Tigers.

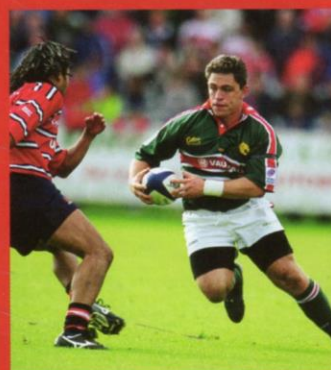
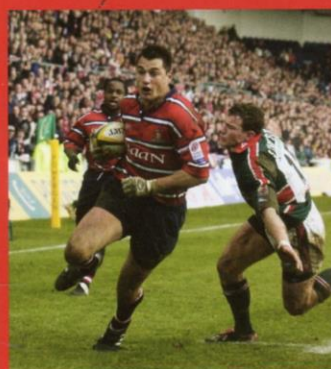
Gloucester first played Leicester on 31 October 1891 on the Belgrave Ground where Gloucester triumphed 15-0. Tries were scored by Walter Jackson, Trevor Powell and Walter Taylor, with Jackson converting all three tries.

In the late nineties and early noughties, Tigers were the

Cherry and Whites' nemesis. In 1997 Leicester won a semi-final in the Pilkington Cup at Kingsholm. In 2001, the first time Gloucester had qualified for the Heineken Cup and made it to the semi-final, there was another defeat to Tigers.

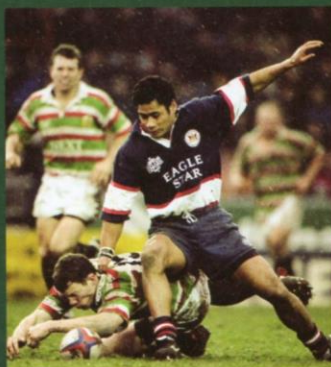
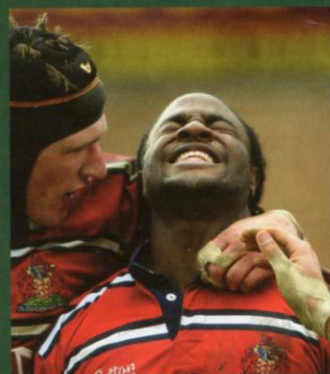
Then in 2007, Gloucester topped the Premiership but were thrashed in the league final 44-16 by Alesana Tuilagi and his colleagues. The following season Gloucester again finished first and had a home semi-final only to lose to a last-minute Andy Goode drop goal.







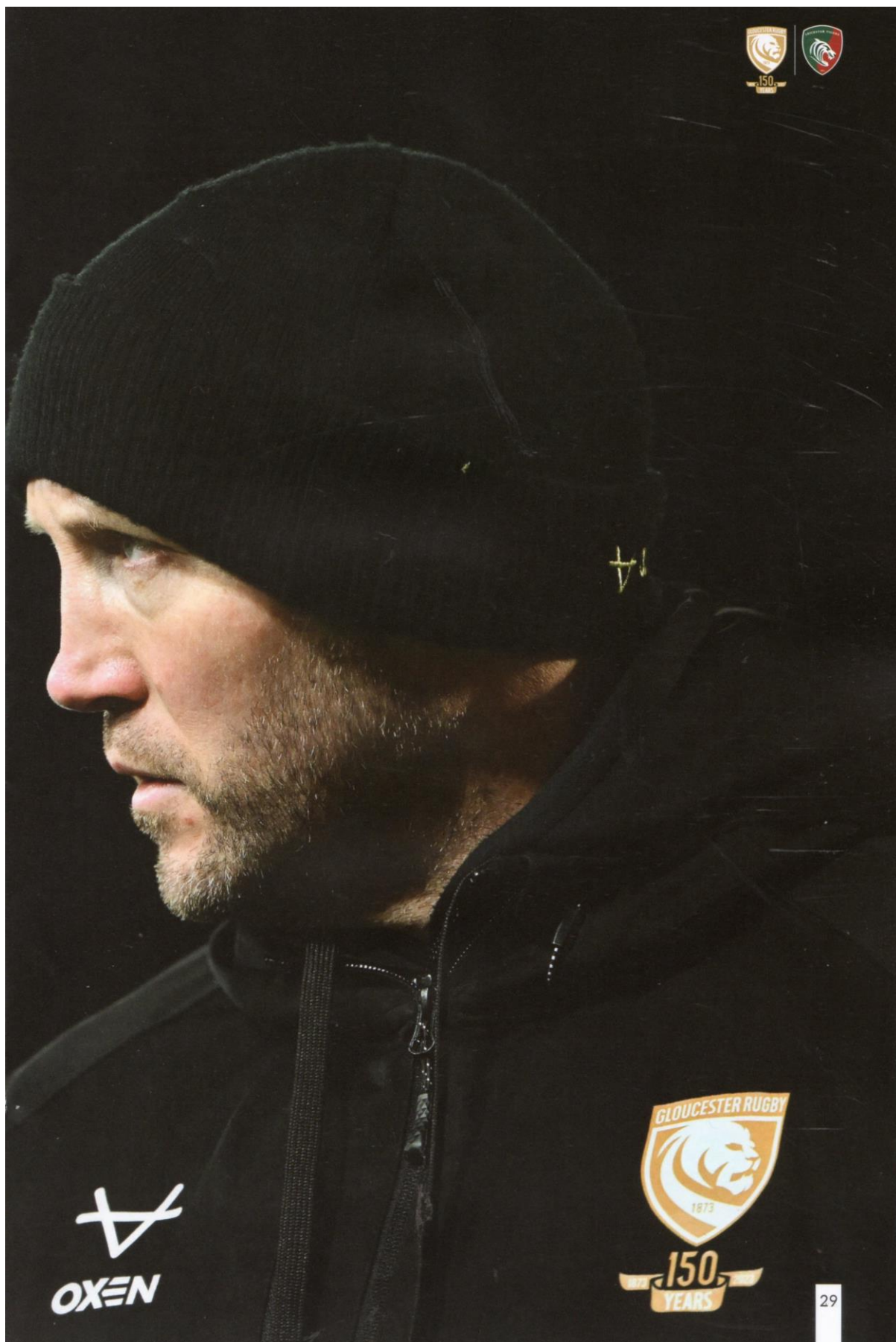
GLOUCESTER V LEICESTER THROUGH THE YEARS



GEORGE SKIVINGTON | THIS IS FOR THE FANS

GEORGE SKIVINGTON: THIS IS FOR THE FANS

**“THE GLOUCESTER SUPPORTERS ARE
UNBELIEVABLE, AND TO PLAY THE
FINAL HERE IS INCREDIBLE.”**



GEORGE SKIVINGTON SAYS HIS SIDE'S APPEARANCE IN TONIGHT'S PREMIERSHIP RUGBY CUP FINAL IS FOR THE FANS.

The Cherry and Whites are through to their first final since 2018, with tonight's showpiece taking on an extra special feeling in front of the Kingsholm faithful, according to Skivington.

"To be playing a final here at Kingsholm is a privilege and we would love to give back to everyone who turns up to watch us week in, week out," said Gloucester Director of Rugby Skivington.

"We're very excited to be playing at home, and it is a real privilege to be playing in a final here in front of our fans.

"Regardless of our form this season, our supporters have bought their tickets and turned up every week, and we're aware that we have an opportunity to pay everyone back with a performance tonight.

"The Gloucester supporters are unbelievable, and to play the final here is incredible."

Gloucestershire has been a hive of activity this week, with thousands descending on Cheltenham for the annual festival – culminating in today's Gold Cup.

And with tonight's final kicking-off what promises to be a fascinating weekend of Guinness Six Nations action, the rugby-mad people of Gloucester are sure to be out in force.

"It will be unbelievable to have a full house at Kingsholm and it is testament to what the rugby club does in the area and throughout the region," added Skivington.

"This is such a community club, and everybody is tight-knit

it's something that we never take for granted and it is a real privilege to be part of this club at every level.

"It's something that we reference regularly, and we never take it for granted – the support base and the noise that is created here on a game day is special.

"It's not the same at other clubs. When you get to game day, in terms of atmosphere and the environment, it is very special for everybody.

"I'm sure that it will be absolutely buzzing here – it always is, but with it being a final, there will be that extra edge and the boys will appreciate, enjoy it and embrace it.

"The boys have worked really hard to create this situation where we are in a final at Kingsholm, so we're very excited."

Zach Mercer played a starring role in Gloucester's 17-14 semi-final victory over last season's cup winners Exeter Chiefs as the Cherry and Whites staved off a late fight-back from the Devon outfit.

Exeter are arguably the perfect example of a club, who used the domestic cup competition as a platform for success on a grand scale. Winning the 2014 LV= Cup – incidentally on home soil – Exeter went on to be crowned Gallagher Premiership champions in 2017 and 2020 as well as conquering Europe.

Reflecting on his side's semi-final triumph over Chiefs, Skivington said: "Exeter came into the game with a similar

attacking mindset to us, and it was a really hard-fought game.

"They scored a couple of good tries in the second half which made it very tight at the end, but I was pleased with the boy's attitude, in particular the moments when things went against us – we rallied around and found a way through it.

"The guys have worked unbelievably hard throughout the competition to get us to this final. It was a close, hard-fought game against Exeter in the semi-final, and the players showed a lot of character to close the game out.

"It feels like a long time since we played that first pool match – we set out with a target of doing well in the competition, and the boys have earned the right to be playing in a final."

Recording wins in all five of their pool matches with try bonus points in all but one, Gloucester have used their cup form to turn the tide in the league.

The Cherry and Whites ended a club record losing run of nine Premiership games with a 32-20 bonus point victory over Sale.

"We know what our identity is, and we strayed away from it a bit, but I think the way in which the boys have anchored back to who we are in the last couple of months, has been testament to them," said Skivington.

"Regardless of the result in our recent games, you can see the character of the team and I'm really pleased with how we've got back on track.

"Tonight, we'll be looking to do the things that we know work



■ Talented English coach: George Skivington took charge of England A last month

**“TONIGHT, WE’LL BE
LOOKING TO DO
THE THINGS THAT
WE KNOW
WORK WELL”**

well. Obviously, there is more riding on this game, and it is important that we focus on what we are good at.

“Our cup form has helped us this season in many ways, and the boys have worked unbelievably hard to get us to this final.”

This evening’s opponents Leicester survived a scare against Ealing Trailfinders in the other semi-final, with Matt Scott crossing for a try in the 79th minute to seal Tigers’ place in the final.

Skivington added: “Leicester are a very physical team and they are a team who have never lost their identity over time.

“They’re playing well, and they have got a number of

strong players. From that point of view, it is always a tough game against Tigers, and I don’t expect any different this evening.”

Skivington joined Gloucester as Head Coach in 2020 before making the transition to Director of Rugby, having been Forwards Coach at London Irish - firstly under Nick Kennedy and then legendary Irish coach Declan Kidney. Part of the Exiles’ coaching set-up which gained promotion back to the Premiership on two occasions, Skivington has detailed knowledge of the English game.

A talented young British coach, the RFU came calling for his services earlier this year, with the 41-year-old asked to lead England A against Portugal

at Welford Road. Joining his coaching set-up were familiar faces including Gloucester coach Dom Waldouck and Northampton Saints’ Sam Vesty as rugby HQ look to aid players with their transition to senior rugby.

“It’s a good opportunity for me and Dom to step out of Gloucester, step into a different environment and challenge ourselves somewhere different,” Skivington told BBC Radio Gloucestershire following his appointment.

“It’s obviously a massive honour, but you always learn from any of these experiences.”

GLOUCESTER RUGBY'S ROAD TO THE PREMIERSHIP RUGBY CUP FINAL

GLOUCESTER RUGBY HAVE A FIRST PREMIERSHIP RUGBY CUP TRIUMPH IN THEIR SIGHTS WHEN THEY TAKE ON LEICESTER TIGERS IN TONIGHT'S FINAL.

The Cherry and Whites have a storied history in cup competitions, including victory in the inaugural RFU Knockout Cup in 1972, before going on to win it a further four times alongside two European Challenge Cups.

They are yet to get their hands on the Premiership Rugby Cup, but hope that the familiar setting of Kingsholm for this year's decider can help seal silverware.

It would cap a remarkable run for George Skivington's side in the competition.

START AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON

The Premiership Rugby Cup can be ruthless, with just the top team progressing from each of the four pools.

It means near-perfection is required in order to secure a place in the knockouts, but that is exactly what Gloucester provided with five wins from five in Pool A.

The campaign got off to a flyer, with the visit of Northampton Saints in Round 1 ending in a comprehensive 42-14 victory. Jack Clement was

at the double across the whitewash as the hosts secured a bonus point before half-time.

A strong start is only as good as what follows, but the Cherry and Whites duly delivered with a 29-20 bonus point victory away at Saracens to put them in pole position in the pool.

This time the damage was done after the interval, with tries from Clement, Seb Blake and George Barton enough to seal maximum points after both sides traded two tries each before the break.





FIVE FROM FIVE SEALED AT THE DEATH

Two wins from their opening two matches provided Gloucester with the perfect platform to progress to the semi-finals for the second time, and victory against Harlequins in their third fixture only further solidified those foundations.

The visit of Quins to Kingsholm proved the only time in the pool phase that Gloucester would fail to secure a bonus point, but three quick-fire first-half tries from Jack Reeves, Matty Jones and Jake Morris proved enough to seal a 25-17 win even with the visitors hitting back with two tries before half-time.

A fourth victory was sealed in simpler fashion against neighbours Hartpury, despite Bradley Denty crossing for the Championship side inside a minute.

A hat-trick from Clement would prove the decisive factor as the Cherry and Whites ran out 40-14 winners, leaving them one win away from a perfect set of results.

Their near-flawless showing was sealed in dramatic fashion as Ollie Thorley scored a 79th-minute try to beat Coventry 32-31 after the Championship side had launched a stunning comeback.

A further two tries from Clement, plus scores from Louis Hillman-Cooper and Alex Hearle looked set to wrap up a convincing victory, before the visitors hit back with three tries in 12 second-half minutes to lead 32-27, only for Thorley to seal a fifth win at the death.

PREMIERSHIP RUGBY CUP - POOL A

	TEAM	P	W	D	L	PD	TBP	LBP	BP	FORM	PTS
1	 GLOUCESTER RUGBY	5	5	0	0	72	4	0	4	W W W	24
2	 HARLEQUINS	5	3	1	1	63	3	0	3	L W W	17
3	 COVENTRY	5	2	2	1	29	4	1	5	W D L	17
4	 SARACENS	5	2	0	3	72	3	1	4	W L W	12
5	 NOTTINGHAM RUGBY	5	0	1	4	-100	2	1	3	L D L	5
6	 HARTPURY	5	1	0	4	-136	0	0	0	L L L	4

CHIEFS PUT TO THE SWORD IN SEMI-FINAL

Top spot in Pool A set up an enticing clash with Exeter Chiefs at Kingsholm, with a place in the final on the line.

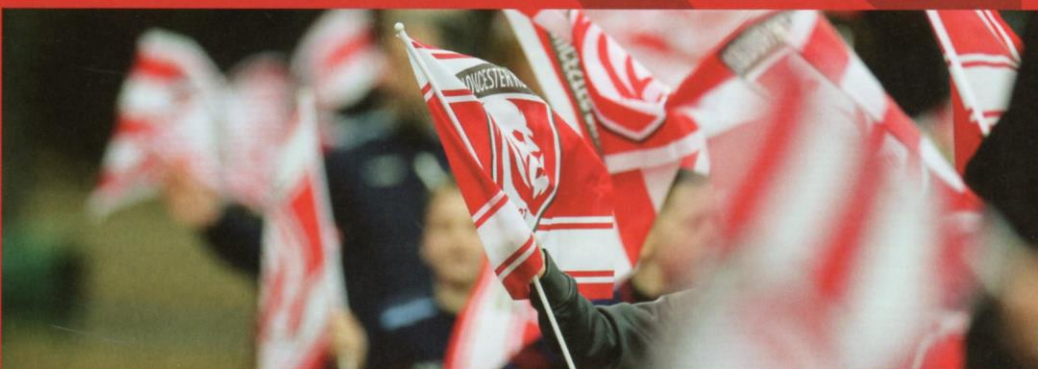
The hosts could hardly have wished for a better start, as Lewis Ludlow and Max Llewellyn both crashed over inside 11 minutes to leave the scoreboard at 12-0.

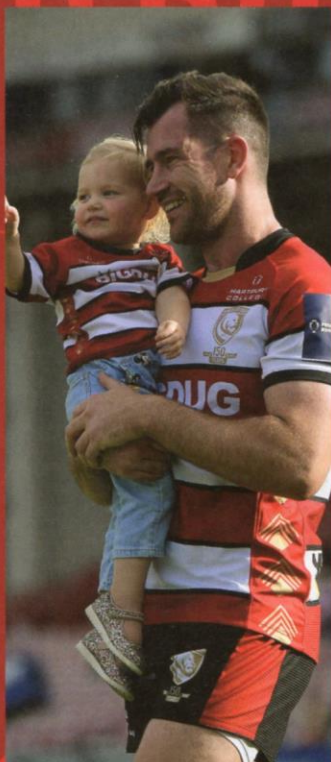
That advantage was further extended before the break as Josh Hathaway added a third try nine

minutes before half-time to put the Cherry and Whites in control.

But Chiefs hit back through Jacques Vermeulen, who started the fightback 20 minutes from time, before Ross Vintcent added another seven minutes later to create a grandstand finish.

However, the home side managed to hold off any late Chiefs heroics and book themselves a place in the final.





Hartpury v Gloucester



Gloucester v Coventry





GLOUCESTER AT A GLANCE

DIRECTOR OF RUGBY GEORGE SKIVINGTON

George Skivington was appointed Gloucester Rugby's Head Coach in July 2020 following four seasons as Forwards Coach at London Irish, where he ended his playing career as captain.

After steadying the ship at Kingsholm, Skivington guided the Cherry and Whites to a top six finish in his second season, which qualified them for the European Rugby Champions Cup.

In 2023, the former second-row was promoted to the position of Director of Rugby as part of a reshuffle of the hierarchy at Kingsholm.

A well-respected British coach amongst his peers, Skivington was announced as England A Head Coach for their international against Portugal at Mattioli Woods Welford Road last February. A Cadan Murley hat-trick spearheaded a 15-try 91-5 demolition of the visitors in front of England Head Coach Steve Borthwick.

As a player, Skivington made more than a hundred appearances for Wasps between 2003 and 2010, before making the switch to this evening's visitors Leicester Tigers where he spent two seasons, culminating in an appearance in the 2011-12 Premiership Rugby Final.



ZACH MERCER

POSITION | BACK ROW

AGE | 26

BIRTHPLACE | LEEDS

HEIGHT | 1.91M (6' 3)

WEIGHT | 108KG (17ST)

Leeds-born Zach Mercer has rugby heritage coursing through his veins, his father Gary having appeared in three rugby league Challenge Cup finals with Warrington and Leeds during the 1990's as well as representing New Zealand.

A no-nonsense ball-carrier like his father, Mercer came off the bench to make his England debut against South Africa and started against Japan during the 2018 autumn internationals.

Mercer, who was a product of Glasgow Warriors' academy, spent five seasons at Bath before joining Montpellier where he spent two seasons – helping them to the French Top 14 league title.





OLLIE THORLEY

POSITION | WING

AGE | 27

BIRTHPLACE | LONDON

HEIGHT | 1.85M (6'0)

WEIGHT | 97KG (15ST 2LBS)

Ollie Thorley made his professional debut for Gloucester at the age of 17, partnering Mike Tindall in the centres against Northampton Saints in the Anglo-Welsh Cup.

Scooping the RPA Young Player of the Year Award as well as the Premiership Rugby Try of the Season at the end of the 2018-19 season, Thorley went on to become the Gallagher Premiership's top try scorer the following season.

Representing England at under-18 and under-20 level, Thorley made his full international debut in the Red Roses' delayed final Six Nations match against Italy in 2020.

Thorley has played a key role in Gloucester's run to this season's Premiership Cup Final as well as helping his side get back to winning ways in the league with a try against Sale Sharks last month.



JAMAL FORD-ROBINSON

POSITION | PROP

AGE | 30

BIRTHPLACE | BRISTOL

HEIGHT | 1.78M (5'10)

WEIGHT | 115KG (18ST 1LBS)

Operating on both sides of the scrum, Jamal Ford-Robinson joined Gloucester from Northampton Saints in the summer of 2019.

A Bristolian, Ford-Robinson was part of the Bristol squad that achieved promotion to the Gallagher Premiership in 2016 and made nearly 50 appearances in all competitions for the West Country club the following season.

Making the move to Northampton ahead of the 2017-18 campaign, Ford-Robinson returned to the West Country in 2019 and has since emerged himself into the community in and around Gloucester.

His international experience extends to being part of the England team that defeated the Barbarians in a non-cap friendly at Twickenham in May 2017 and the same summer, he was named in Eddie Jones' touring squad that travelled to Argentina.



GLOUCESTER *News*

MARK ATKINSON ANNOUNCES HIS RETIREMENT FROM PROFESSIONAL RUGBY

Gloucester Rugby centre and fan favourite, Mark Atkinson, has announced his retirement from rugby due to injury.

Atkinson, who has been at the club for over a decade, suffered a serious knee injury early last season, ruling him out for the 2022/23 campaign.

After a lengthy rehabilitation period, 'Aki' began his return to rugby at the start of the 2023-24 season, starting against Hartpury in the Premiership Rugby Cup. He went on to make three Gallagher Premiership appearances, before being forced to retire from the game following medical advice.

Atkinson joined the Cherry and Whites in 2014, after impressing in the Championship for Bedford Blues, and went on

to play 168 times over his ten years at Kingsholm.

His performances in cherry and white led to call-ups for the Barbarians and England, for whom he was capped against Tonga in 2021.

Atkinson was awarded a testimonial this year for his decade service to Gloucester Rugby.

Whilst the 34-year-old is stepping back from his playing responsibilities, Atkinson will remain with the club, taking up a role on matchdays and with the commercial team.

"Having to retire from a sport I love, has been very difficult," he said.

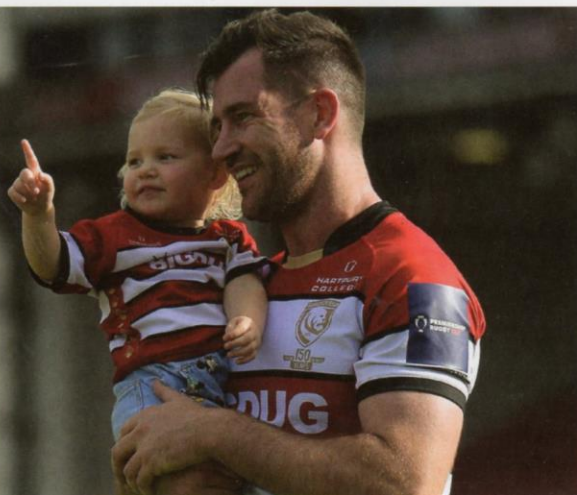
"I felt optimistic at the start of the season that I was in a

good place with my knee, but it became apparent quite quickly that a full recovery wasn't on the cards.

"Like many players who suffer career-ending injuries, my priority is my family and being able to run around with my young daughter, Sydney. Following medical advice, it was clear that continuing playing wasn't an option, so in the end, the decision was taken out of my hands.

"I want to take this opportunity to thank my teammates who I've played with over my 10 years at Kingsholm. I've had many highs and some pretty low lows during that time, and my teammates have been there for all of it. I'm very grateful to them."

"HAVING TO RETIRE FROM A SPORT I LOVE, HAS BEEN VERY DIFFICULT"



ANSCOMBE SIGNS FOR GLOUCESTER



Experienced campaigner Gareth Anscombe has put pen-to-paper on a deal with Gloucester Rugby for the 2024-25 season.

Anscombe, born in New Zealand, made his senior debut for Auckland Rugby in 2010, before going on to play for Super Rugby franchise, Auckland Blues in 2012. He went on to sign for Super Rugby rivals, Chiefs, the following year.

Whilst in New Zealand, Anscombe represented their youth sides, claiming the accolade of top points scorer in the IRB Junior World Championship in 2011, a competition his side won.

The fly-half, who has also turned out on multiple

occasions at full-back, moved to the Northern Hemisphere in 2014, joining Cardiff Blues. In 2015, owing to his Welsh mother, he made his full international debut for Wales.

He departed Cardiff in 2019 to join fellow Welsh region, Ospreys, where he spent four years.

Anscombe has gone on to win 35 international caps, including man-of-the-match performances against Ireland in Wales' 2019 Guinness Six Nations Grand Slam campaign, and for his side's win over Australia in the 2023 Rugby World Cup.

During his time with Cardiff and with Wales, Anscombe has formed an impressive partnership with scrum-half

Tomos Williams, who will link up with him once again, having also committed to the Cherry and Whites for next season.

Gloucester Rugby Director of Rugby, George Skivington said: "We're really pleased to bring a player with Gareth's club and international experience to Kingsholm.

"He's one of the top fly halves in the Northern Hemisphere, and we feel he'll complement our other options at fly-half and full-back well.

"We're looking forward to him joining us in the summer."

LUKE NARRAWAY:

Remembering The big moments

Luke Narraway was Gloucester Rugby skipper the last time the Cherry and Whites got their hands on a domestic trophy.

Narraway, 40, who spent nine seasons at Kingsholm, held aloft the LV= Cup trophy in 2011 after his side defeated Newcastle Falcons 34-7 at Franklin's Gardens.

And the England capped back-row admits the 2010-11 season was the most enjoyable time of his career.

"When I look back at it, it was probably my most enjoyable season," said Narraway, who came through Gloucester's academy.

"The squad that we had that year was extremely tight, and we spent a lot of time together off the pitch, which showed when we played on the pitch.

"The result of that was the 11 games unbeaten that we strung together towards the end of the season, culminating in the final."

Franklin's Gardens was awash with cherry and white as tries from Tom Voyce, Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu, Charlie Sharples and Darren Dawidiuk sealed silverware for then Head Coach Bryan Redpath.

"We took a massive amount of confidence into the final," added Narraway.

"There was a lot of press coverage going into the game, talking about the hoodoo of always being the bridesmaids

when it came to finals, and how we were looking to get the monkey off our backs.

"We were really comfortable in our skin that year and we had a pretty settled team. Going into the final, we knew that if we put our best game on the field, we'd have a good chance of coming away with the cup."

Narraway and his Gloucester teammates tasted cup final heartache two years earlier, coming up short to Cardiff Blues in the EDF Energy Cup.

The Worcester-born forward says the landscape at Kingsholm was much different in 2011, adding: "It was a different group and a different place too – we came up against an incredibly good Cardiff side in 2009, and they probably don't get the credit that they deserve in that era.

"We were also scratching around for form, and we had a few injuries. In 2011 we had different players and there was a completely different feel.

"I think everyone would say the same. We were a tight unit and as I said, it was probably the most enjoyable time of my career."

Gloucester blew Newcastle away in the 2011 final, with a team that included the likes of Jim Hamilton, Olivier Azam, and current Chief Executive Alex Brown.

"I was incredibly proud of our performance," said Narraway.

"There were some nervy parts of the game, and I remember coming out for the second half and things were a bit sloppy.

"The momentum could've shifted, but we had confidence in our ability and accuracy in attack. We showed that in a lot of our tries, and we knew that if we could get our multi-phase game going, we knew that we could cause them problems.

"We had a lot of experience in the squad, and we had some younger players – we had all been there and done it and that helped us get over the line."

Making the switch to Perpignan in 2012, Narraway spent two seasons in the south of France before signing for London Irish in 2014, and then ending his career with Coventry three years later.

Picking up a European Rugby Challenge Cup winners medal in 2006 and winning the Championship title with London Irish in 2017 following a two-legged play-off final tussle with Yorkshire Carnegie, Narraway looks back on his career with a smile.

As well as an illustrious club career, Narraway represented England at the 2008 Six Nations and went on to be capped seven times.

"You don't remember a lot of the games, but you do remember the big moments and the people that you share them with," he said.

"I have photos up on the walls in my house from 2006 and 2011, and they remind you of the reasons why you played the game."

With this evening's match taking place on home soil, George Skivington's side can use it to their advantage according to Narraway.

He added: "I remember Franklin's Gardens being packed full of Gloucester fans back in 2011. I remember doing a lap of the pitch before the game, and it felt more like a game at Kingsholm than in Northampton.

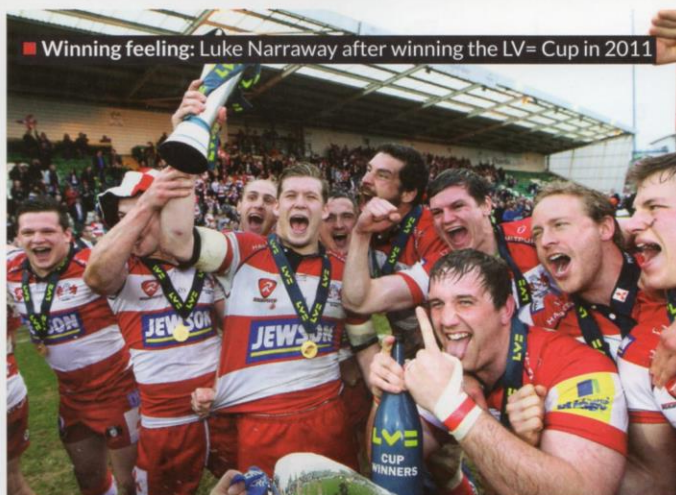
"There'll be the usual nerves, anxiety and excitement, but I'd like to think the way that the season has gone in the cup competitions, both on the domestic and European stage, Gloucester can enjoy success.

"This club is a bit like Liverpool FC in the sense that it is born for these cup competitions. Any given day when you have this crowd behind you, you can achieve anything.

"I hope the boys are excited to get out there in front of a home crowd, and make sure that they do everything possible to bring home the cup."



■ Crossing the line with Toby Flood in close attention



■ Winning feeling: Luke Narraway after winning the LV= Cup in 2011



■ With his Gloucester teammates in 2006 following their 36-34 victory over London Irish in the European Rugby Challenge Cup at Twickenham

GLOUCESTER RUGBY v LEICESTER TIGERS

PREMIERSHIP RUGBY CUP FINAL | KINGSHOLM STADIUM

FRIDAY 15 MARCH 2024 | 7:45PM



LLOYD EVANS 15
ALEX HEARLE 14
MAX LLEWELLYN 13
SEB ATKINSON 12
OLLIE THORLEY 11
GEORGE BARTON 10
CAOLAN ENGLEFIELD 9
JAMAL FORD ROBINSON 1
GEORGE MCGUIGAN 2
KIRILL GOTOVTSEV 3
FREDDIE CLARKE 4
CAMERON JORDAN 5
RUAN ACKERMAN 6
LEWIS LUDLOW (C) 7
ZACH MERCER 8

REPLACEMENTS

SEB BLAKE 16
HARRY ELRINGTON 17
CIARAN KNIGHT 18
ARTHUR CLARK 19
JACK CLEMENT 20
CHARLIE CHAPMAN 21
LOUIS HILLMAN-COOPER 22
JOSH HATHAWAY 23

OFFICIALS

REFEREE:

Jack Makepeace

ASSISTANT REFEREE 1:

Harry Walbaum

ASSISTANT REFEREE 2:

John Meredith

FOURTH OFFICIAL:

Ian Bibey

TMO:

Dan Jones

15 MIKE BROWN
14 MATT SCOTT
13 DAN KELLY
12 PHIL COCKANASIGA
11 OLLIE HASSELL-COLLINS
10 JAMIE SHILCOCK
9 TOM WHITELEY
1 FRANCOIS VAN WYK
2 FINN THEOBALD-THOMAS
3 DAN RICHARDSON
4 HARRY WELLS
5 KYLE HATHERALL
6 HANRO LIEBENBERG (C)
7 MATT ROGERSON
8 OLLY CRACKNELL

REPLACEMENTS

16 16 CHARLIE CLARE
17 JAMES WHITCOMBE
18 TIM HOYT
19 SAM CARTER
20 EMEKA ILIONE
21 SAM EDWARDS
22 KIERAN WILKINSON
23 JOSEPH WOODWARD



PREMIERSHIP
RUGBY CUP