



## A brief history of GRFC

1873-1981



The club was formed in 1873 after a meeting at the Spread Eagle Hotel with the announcement in the *Gloucester Journal*: "A football club (as rugby was then called) has been formed in this city - the season's operations begin at the Spa on the first Tuesday in next month." A team was then organised to play the College school. The match was actually played on the ground of the current Kingsholm.

There were 11 games played during the club's 1876-77 season, the club winning 6, losing 2 and drawing 3. Gloucester Rugby Football Club had a successful run in the coming seasons, playing 15 games in both the 1877-78 and 1878-79 seasons, winning 10, losing 2 and drawing 3 both times. In the 1879-80 season Gloucester RFC played 17 games and lost just two. The

following season was less successful, winning six of their 13 fixtures. In the 1882-83 season the team won 11 of their 14 games. The club was playing more fixtures as the decade continued, contesting 20 games in the 1884-85 season, and up to 34 in the 1891-92 season. The club left the Spa after an argument with the cricket club that they were ground sharing with. During the winter the Rugby Club had used a salt mixture to remove frost from the pitch, resulting in the death of the grass on the wicket. Gloucester RFC were no longer welcome at the Spa ground. They then acquired lands from the Castle Grim Estate for £4,000 in 1891 and have since resided in this place, now known as Kingsholm.

Gloucester RFC were suspended by the RFU for professionalism as a result of the club recruiting players: the "Shewell case". The club responded by adopting a more puritanical adherence to the amateur regulations, and were reinstated. However when the Northern clubs split from the RFU to form the Northern Rugby Union (later known as the Rugby Football League) a number of Gloucester RFC players "went North".

The 1920-21 season became famous for Gloucester RFC when Fred Webb skippered the club to 23 matches unbeaten at home at Kingsholm, with only the United Services and Pontypool clubs being able to defeat them at home. Gloucester RFC defeated Newport 12 to 9 in front of 8,000 spectators. The following season was infamous for the number of footballers that were sent from the field by officials, 14 for fighting, seven for arguing, six for language and one for foul play. Leicester actually cancelled their Gloucester RFC fixture because of this.

## 1972-1995

In 1972 Gloucester RFC won the first ever National Knock-Out Competition. Having overcome Bath, Bristol, London Welsh and Coventry (all away from home) in earlier rounds, they beat Moseley in a Twickenham final that was marred by violence and the sending off of Moseley's Nigel Horton. In 1978 Gloucester RFC won the first ever John Player Cup, defeating Leicester in another final noted for violent play both on and off the pitch at Twickenham.



Despite the two cup wins of the 1970s and a shared trophy in 1982, Gloucester RFC were soon to find themselves in the shadow of Bath, the rising force from down the A46.

Bath finished runners-up in the league in 1989, but the disastrous end to the 1989/90 campaign was to be a prelude to lean years. Closing in on English rugby's first 'Double', Gloucester RFC's last-day collapse handed Wasps the league title before a 48-6 cup final heartbreak at the hands of Bath.

By 1992/93, however, it was a different story. The players called a crisis meeting with club coach Keith Richardson about the perceived lack of player rewards relative to other comparable clubs. A year later, club chairman Peter Ford restated the club's traditional anti-professionalism: "We play by the rules... whatever anybody else does, we'll stick by the rules. If they say we can't pay players, or offer them inducements or cars or flats... then we won't do it."



Richard Hill, former tormentor from fierce rivals Bath and Bristol was instilled as Head Coach.

The arrival of professionalism to the sport in 1995 would signal a change in direction.



## 1995-present



Professionalism finally came in 1995, but Gloucester RFC was without a major investor, and lost ground in terms of player recruitment and revenue acquisition. But this did not prevent the club from transforming itself into a limited company.

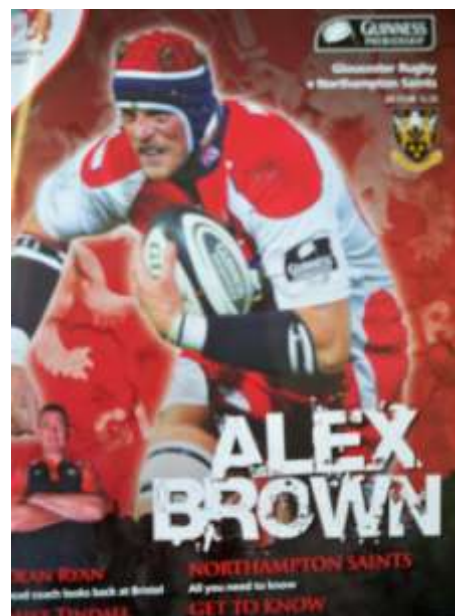
Tom Walkinshaw became the new club owner with a majority shareholding on 29 April 1997. Richard Hill's position would soon be filled by former France captain Philippe Saint-Andre.

In Saint-Andre's first full season, a third-place finish in 1999/2000 took the Cherry & Whites into the Heineken Cup. With Phil Vickery, Trevor Woodman and All Blacks legend Ian Jones forming the basis of a formidable pack, Gloucester RFC marched their way to the last four, where only last-ditch Leicester defending would deny them a final appearance.

Saint-Andre's acrimonious departure couldn't stop them winning their first cup triumph in 25 years in 2003, under new coach Nigel Melville.

Unstoppable in the league, Gloucester RFC reached the inaugural Championship final 15 points clear of their nearest rival. However, under the new league system Gloucester RFC were 'rewarded' with a 3 week lay-off, while Wasps played regular rugby during this period. As a result, Gloucester RFC lost their momentum and were crushed emphatically by Wasps at Twickenham.

During the next few seasons Gloucester RFC failed to build on the success of the 2002-03 season. Things became worse in the 2004-05 season when they failed to qualify for the Heineken Cup. Nigel Melville left the club and was replaced by Dean Ryan for the 2005-06 season.





The 2005-06 season saw an improvement in the clubs fortunes. Although they did not qualify for the play-offs, they were strong contenders and lost out on the last day of the regular season. They also won silverware in the European Challenge Cup, defeating London Irish in a tense final that went into extra time. This season was also a glimpse of the incredible talent Gloucester RFC were bringing up from their academy.

Gloucester Rugby finished 1st in the 2006/2007 Guinness Premiership table. Both Leicester and Gloucester Rugby had tied with 71 points, Gloucester Rugby gaining first place with more games won. They also demonstrated their level of skill and vision in the Heineken Cup, against sides such as Leinster and Edinburgh despite not progressing past the group stage,



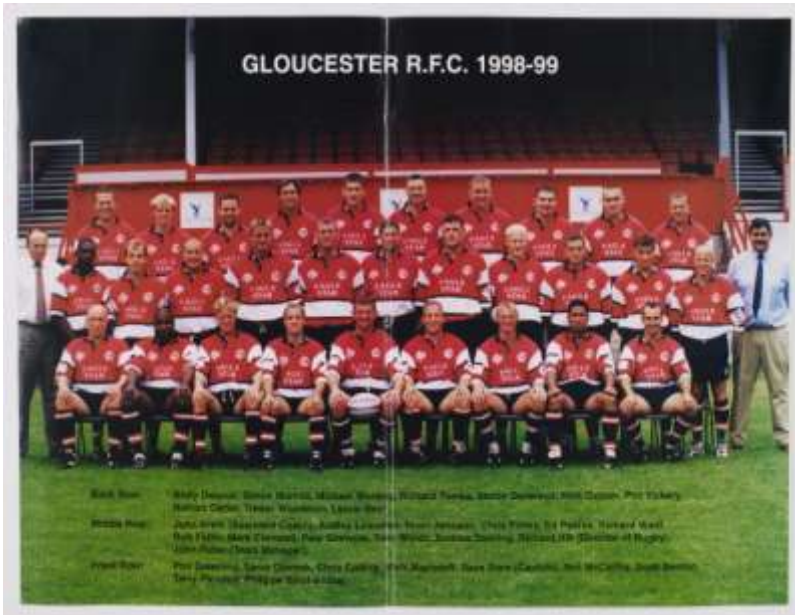
Gloucester Rugby defeated the Saracens in the semi-final at Kingsholm, 50-9, to move into the Twickenham final where they faced Leicester Tigers. However, Gloucester Rugby were beaten heavily by the Tigers with the final score being 44-16, Gloucester Rugby again being defeated by the play-off system.

Gloucester Rugby began the 2007/08 Guinness Premiership campaign as favourites, and started the season strongly, winning their first five games before defeat away to London Irish. Dean Ryan's main focus for the 2007/08 season was for Gloucester to establish themselves in Europe, but despite coming top of their group they lost to Munster in the Quarter Final. After the Heineken Cup exit Gloucester overcame their poor mid-season form with a series of victories, capping it off with their first away win against Wasps for 18 years, and then defeating Bath in an intense encounter at Kingsholm to win the league for the second year running, and book a home semi-final in the Championship Play-off against Leicester Tigers in a repeat of last seasons Championship final.

The result was the same, although a closer affair. The Tigers won 25-26 courtesy of an Andy Goode drop goal 3 minutes from time but Gloucester had seemed in control. They led 12-3 at half-time and 22-13 at one point in the second half. However, a sliced box kick from Gloucester fly-half Ryan Lamb (on his birthday), followed by a catastrophic error by Ian Balshaw who passed metres behind Willie Walker, allowed Leicester's former All-Black Mauger to score under the posts and close the gap to 22-20. An Andy Goode penalty gave them the lead and a drop goal for each team in the last ten minutes (in which Lamb also missed a penalty) meant that the Leicester Tigers became the first team in Premiership history to win a semi-final away from home, and once again left Gloucester's fans heart-broken.



# Learning Zone



The 2008 - 2009 season saw Gloucester fail to move out of the Heineken Cup group stage, although they did qualify for the Heineken Cup for the following season. A poor end of season meant that they did not make any of the top four spots for a play-off semi final. After the season had finished about 12 players were released or transferred and head coach Dean Ryan was replaced by Bryan Redpath.