



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 which 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 only 6 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.

In January 1891, 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. As a result, Gloucester City council, who owned the Spa ground, gave Gloucester RFC notice to quit. In order to find new premises, the club quickly formed a new company and shortly afterwards acquired land from the Castle Grim Estate for £4,000. The new ground, known then and now simply as Kingsholm, opened in October 1891 and the club have resided in this place ever since.

Throughout this time, rugby was an amateur sport and in 1894, Gloucester was suspended by the Rugby Football Union (RFU) for professionalism as a result of the club recruiting players, in an incident known as the "Shewell case". The club responded to the suspension by adopting a more puritanical adherence to the amateur regulations and was soon reinstated to the RFU. However when the Northern clubs split from the RFU to form the Northern Rugby Union (which later became known as the Rugby Football League), a number of Gloucester RFC players left the club and "went North" to turn professional.



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The 1920-21 season became famous for Gloucester RFC when Fred Webb skippered the club to an unbeaten 23 matches at Kingsholm, with only the United Services and Pontypool clubs being able to defeat them at home. One memorable game was when Gloucester RFC defeated Newport 12 to 9 in front of 8,000 spectators. The following season was infamous for the numbers of players that were sent off by officials during play. In total, 28 players were dismissed, with 14 being sent off for fighting, 7 for arguing with the referee, 6 for bad language and 1 for foul play. Leicester RFC 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 Westcountry rivals Bath. Bath finished runners-up in the league in 1989, but Gloucester had a disastrous end to the 1989/90 campaign which was to be a prelude to lean years. While closing in on English rugby's first 'Double', Gloucester suffered a last match defeat that handed Wasps the league title and then lost 48-6 to Bath in the cup final.

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."

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1995-present



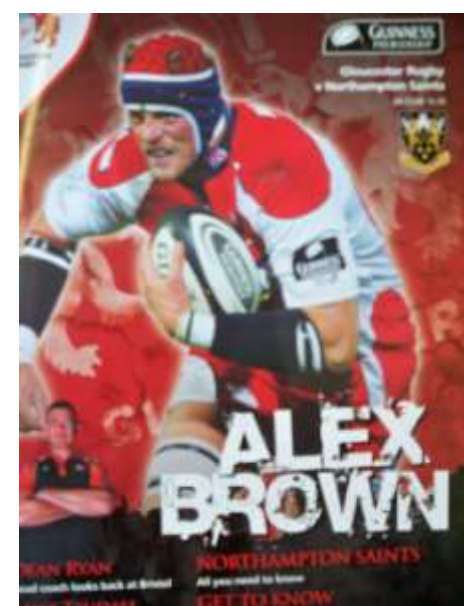
Professionalism finally came to rugby union in 1995, but Gloucester RFC initially found itself without a major investor, and lost ground in terms of player recruitment and revenue acquisition. The appointment of a former Bath player Richard Hill as Gloucester's new Director of Rugby was of note as was the club transforming itself into a limited company. On 29 April 1997, a major investor in the shape of Tom Walkinshaw (of TWR Racing and Arrows F1) was found and he became the new club owner with a majority shareholding.

Midway through the 1998-99 season, Richard Hill position was replaced 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 prestigious European 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.

Though Saint-Andre left after a bitter dispute in 2002, the club earned its first silverware in 25 years in 2003, when Gloucester won the Powergen Cup under new coach Nigel Melville. In addition to the cup, Gloucester seemed unstoppable in the league and 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 their opponents Wasps played regular rugby during the 3 weeks. 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 was an improvement in the club's fortunes, for although they did not qualify for the play-offs, they were strong contenders in the Premiership and only 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 also saw a glimpse of the talent that the club were bringing up from the new-style Gloucester academy.



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The image shows a collage of rugby-related content. On the left, there are several small action photographs from matches. In the center, there is a large photograph of a rugby match in progress. On the right, there is a detailed table titled 'ALLIED DUNBAR GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP' showing the league table for the 2006/2007 season. The table lists teams, their points, and their positions.

Team	Points	Position
Gloucester	71	1st
Leicester	71	2nd
Worcester	60	3rd
Widnes	55	4th
Warrington	55	5th
Widnes	55	6th
Worcester	55	7th
Widnes	55	8th
Worcester	55	9th
Widnes	55	10th
Worcester	55	11th
Widnes	55	12th
Worcester	55	13th
Widnes	55	14th
Worcester	55	15th
Widnes	55	16th
Worcester	55	17th
Widnes	55	18th
Worcester	55	19th
Widnes	55	20th

Gloucester Rugby finished 1st in the 2006/2007 Guinness Premiership table. Leicester and Gloucester Rugby 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. In the Premiership, 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. They then defeated 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 season's Championship final.

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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 Mauer 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.

The 2008 - 2009 season saw Gloucester fail to move out of the Heineken Cup group stage, although they did requalify 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 finished, about 12 players were released or transferred and head coach Dean Ryan was replaced by Bryan Redpath.