

GLOUCESTER MATCHES AGAINST AMERICAN TEAMS

TOUR TO USA, Summer 1977

This was the first end-of-season tour to foreign parts, was long in the planning and fund-raising, and anticipated with much excitement. The Club went into the tour on the back of a very successful season, which had seen a number of records broken with 185 tries and 1147 points.

Both team manager Peter Ford and coach Mike Nicholls were unable to travel. The Club Chairman, Gordon Hudson, was appointed Tour Manager; the Club's Team Secretary, George Edmunds, was the Team Manager; Alan Brinn was Chairman of the Tour Committee; and John Watkins was Team Captain. Almost all of the key players in the Club at the time were available to tour and included in the 45-strong party.

Various patrons of the Club contributed £1,008 to the cost of the tour. Local firms which provided sponsorship were the Winget Group (Babcock & Wilcox & the Gloucester Foundry), Permali Ltd, Gloucester Saro, the Dowty Group and Sutcliffe Catering. Fred Reed, a player and chief training instructor with the Babcock and Wilcox Group was looking forward to meeting up with Fred Lavender, a keen rugby man and managing director of an American foundry with which Babcock & Wilcox did business.

A pre-tour meeting was held on 25th May and a send-off steak supper was devoured at the New Inn. All members of the tour party were issued with tour blazers displaying the Gloucester City coat-of-arms and an inscription "USA-77". Bowler hats were supplied by travel agent, John Hall, and each player was issued with a GRFC song book, although Mike Burton saw no need, declaring "if I don't know all the songs after 15 years, I never will". The party took with them 100 Prinknash Abbey Jubilee plates and 50 copies of the Declaration of Independence as gifts for their hosts.

The Citizen Pink 'Un of 14th May displayed a photograph of the tour party being seen off by the Mayor of Gloucester, Councillor Terry Wathen, and the Sheriff, Councillor Roger Langston.

The President of the Chicago Lions, Tyke Nollman played a large part in the organisation of the tour, liaising with the Gloucester Fixture Secretary, Doug Dawe, to put the necessary arrangements in place. Reassuringly Nollman wrote to say that Gloucester just needed to arrive at O'Hare airport at 1635 on 14th May and leave at 2008 on 4th June and everything inbetween would be looked after by their American hosts. Following the flight to Chicago, Gloucester flew on to Columbus for their first fixture, but the remaining 1,000 miles of travel on the tour was by coach. Each player was billeted with five different families during the three weeks of the tour.

The following fixture list was arranged:

16 May Gloucester v Columbus Area Select XV

18 May Gloucester United v Indianapolis Reds A

19 May Gloucester v Indianapolis
21 May Gloucester v All Michigan Select
26 May Gloucester v Blackhawk Select
28 May Gloucester United v Chicago Lions B
30 May Gloucester v Mid-West RFU Select
1 June Gloucester v Chicago Lions A

Chicago Lions had some form in that they had defeated London Welsh. The itinerary meant that the tourists would fly the 3,700 miles to Chicago and play a total of eight games in the Mid-west involving a further 1,000 miles of travel.

19th May Indianapolis Select XV 6 Gloucester 29

From the Citizen:

Glo'ster Victorious in a Torrential Downpour

Gloucester overcame quagmire conditions following a torrential thunderstorm, to defeat an Indianapolis Select XV in the second match of their United States programme. In fact, despite the atrocious conditions at the Keystone ground, Gloucester put up a finer display than in their match at Columbus Ohio, with passing often superb. The Cherry and Whites were well on top and were until the final minute, not seriously threatened until the final minute, when Indianapolis scored their only try. A good quality side, the Select XV showed dogged determination from start to finish, but John Watkins' men controlled the ball brilliantly up front and the backs were used in an attacking role at every opportunity.

Bob Clewes scored two tries, the first after six minutes when he raced over in the corner. Peter Butler was off target with that one for the first time on the tour, but he landed three penalties in the first half – one of them from 30 yards – and two conversions after the interval, bringing his match tally to 13 points. Simonett, Fidler and Brinn often jumped brilliantly in line-outs against the big Americans and the Gloucester front row was superior in the scrums.

To the accompaniment of thunder and lightning, Gloucester attacked for much of the second half. A series of moves culminated in a Watkins' try after 14 minutes. Simonett slithered over following a lineout and Butler added the points with his best conversion of the match. Clewes rounded off the scoring with a characteristic try in the corner nine minutes from the end. Select full-back Drummond missed an easy 25-yard penalty, but flanker Mike Chase scored in the last minute and Drummond added the points.

The Americans, representing several of the state's clubs, played with great dedication, but failed to win set piece balls. Passing was wild and the fiery tackling would often have been penalised in Britain. Gloucester backs deserved credit, Birchley and Correia combining well, with the fly-half's tactical kicking gaining vital ground. Dix made several good runs and Butler was often in the line.

The match was watched by a small crowd, but some of those present had travelled 100 miles to be there. They included a family from Porthcawl, now living in Louisville, Kentucky. Indiana RFU vice-president Gordon Inglis said after the match : "Considering about half our players have never played together before, they did tremendously well. Coaching would help to improve our game tremendously."

South Illinois Select 18 Gloucester 40

From the Citizen, 28 May:

Etheridge Outstanding in the Best Game Yet

Ron Etheridge with three first half tries was outstanding for Gloucester in their win over South Illinois Select at Huff Field, Champaign. Etheridge was frequently in the line creating an overlap which bewildered the U.S. team. Opposition get stronger with every game of the tour and the Select XV with seven University of Illinois representatives trained by New Zealand students, was easily the best game yet, a strong physical encounter which Gloucester won easily in the end.

Apart from the beginning of each half, Gloucester kept almost constant possession and were always on the attack with a dazzling display of moves. Dave Pointon, who returned to the team after a shoulder injury hit top form straight away. John Bayliss put in powerful crash runs, and Paul Williams ran strongly on the right wing. Select's huge locks Pete Callaghan and basketball player Dennis Laker won some of the early lineout play but an injury to prop Stu Pipple, who left the field for ten minutes sparked off the Gloucester scoring spree.

Etheridge streaked in for an unconverted try and five minutes later fly half Rod Correia sent him over again. Bob Light was next over followed by Steve Mills, whose try was the first to be converted by Correia. Etheridge's third try, again converted by Correia made it 24-nil. Select came back strongly just before the interval when Robert Russell broke through and put centre Dave Horton over for a try. Full back Don Gurik added the points as the half-time whistle blew.

Gloucester were slightly less impressive in the second half, although they won plenty of ball. A penalty by Gurik was followed by a try for Gloucester as Bayliss blazed his way over wide out. Further tries followed from Keith Richardson, Light and Pointon. Rob Schuldt scored a late try for Select which was converted by Gurik.

The ground was so hard that the ball had to be held for the kickers. The Mayors of Champaign and Urban presented a proclamation to tour manager Gordon Hudson declaring May 26, "Rugby Day."

From the Citizen, 4 June:

In his final message from America Clifford Smith writes about an attractive brunette who is first on the field but not with a cold sponge when anyone is injured; how the Gloucester rugby players took time off to watch baseball, and of a reunion with former Matson chairman, Eddie Green, now living in America.

A Brunette with No Time for the Cold Sponge

A 24-year-old brunette keeps the rugby players of South Illinois Select XV on their feet. When anyone is injured, and it happens all too often on the concrete-like grounds, trainer Ellie Wolf runs on to give them emergency treatment. Ellie, a master of sports medicine, has been patching up rugby players for the past four years, and more often the men, let alone Ellie herself, consider it unusual that she is doing the job. "I help out all I can with sport at the University of Illinois," she said. "The fact that I am a woman makes absolutely no difference. It is the quality of my work that counts." Her qualifications, which she describes as being higher than those of a nurse, enable her to apply advanced first aid. More serious injuries have to be referred to a doctor. She is not, however, in favour of the cold water sponge treatment. "It seems rather unhygienic," she said. In the humid conditions so common in Champaign, where Gloucester beat the Select XV 40 pts.-18, she finds an ice-bag preferable.

Mike Burton, who captained the Cherry and Whites, said afterwards that he had been impressed by the opposition's physical approach. "Although they were very strong, they lacked the basic techniques in scrummaging, line-out and loose play," he said. "Once our backs had the ball they used Ron Etheridge to full advantage and ran in the tries."

A proclamation declaring May 26 "Rugby Day," and a key, were presented to tour chairman Gordon Hudson by the Mayors of the twin cities of Champaign and Urbana. Among mementoes received by the Gloucester party at a banquet afterwards was an Illinois state flag which it is hoped to fly at Kingsholm. Then the tourists were off by bus to Chicago next day for the final, and toughest, stage of the visit.

Gloucester were to play a Mid-West representative side and there were Senior, and United XV games against Chicago Lions, the region's top club. The Lions have been Mid-American champions three times since they were founded in 1964, and have been coached by well known players from Britain. Chicago is a breath-taking city. As the Gloucester bus drove in from the south there were sky scrapers filling the landscape to their left and the calm blue waters of Lake Michigan on the right, with thousands of people sun bathing on the sandy beaches. There were also more police cars in the space of three miles than had been seen on the whole tour previously.

Medical officer Dr. Tom Durkin was highly amused to discover that the Lions have their headquarters at a bar called Durkins – and immediately had his photograph taken under the sign. And while waiting to be collected by their hosts families Mike Burton and Jerry Herniman played another backgammon championship rubber. Herniman won 3-2. Most of the players found they were staying well outside the city – several as far as 30 miles. So getting them all together for training was an added problem.

Reunion Time in USA

A day at the Wisconsin lakeside home of Chicago Lions' president J. "Tyke" Nollman gave [the] Gloucester RFC party a chance to meet former Matson chairman, Eddie Green, now living in America. With him were his wife Jill, daughter Jackie (15) and son Stephen (14). Another daughter, 18-year-old Christine, is back in Gloucester. Mr. Green quickly established himself as a top Rugby referee after emigrating in February of last year. Previously he was a member of the Gloucestershire Referees' Society. He was in charge of the Midwest Select XV v. London Welsh game last year in which the Welsh lost by a point, and recently travelled to Denver, Colorado, for the national trials. He was named as referee for Gloucester's match against Midwest Select on Monday. A tool maker by trade, he works for a large American company, Johnson Marine, which makes outboard motors.

Also at the lake was the former Joyce Kear, of St. Briavels, near Sydney, whose husband, Stan Hookway, works for an Avon Rubber Co. subsidiary called Avon Illinois. They have been in America since 1974. Her father, Mr. Stan Kear, lives at East View, Cold Harbour, St. Briavels, and her sister, Beryl, is a police woman based in Bristol. Beryl's son, Steve, plays for Chosen Hill RFC. "It is a great country and the people are very friendly," said Mrs. Hookway. Her 17-year-old daughter, Jo-Anne, is in her final year at high school and also works part-time for a local bank.

Medical officer Dr. Tom Durkin's second cousin, Jim, travelled from Racine for their first meeting in 17 years, married with two children aged 16 and 13.[sic]. Dr. Durkin had earlier met Mrs. Mary Freeman, daughter of Dr. John Campbell, of Gloucester. Her husband, Peter, had been working for the Continental Bank in Chicago for the past three years. "They live only two blocks away from the headquarters of the Chicago Lions RFC," said Dr. Durkin. "I had Mary's telephone number from her father before I left England, but I had no idea she would live so close.

Tour Results

May 16 Columbus Area Select 11 Gloucester 57
Tries: J.Dix (3), R.Clewes (2), J.Watkins (2), E.Pinkney, P.Howell
Conversions: P.Butler (9)
Penalty: P.Butler

May 19 Indianapolis Select 6 Gloucester 29
Tries: R.Clewes (2), J.Watkins, J.Simonett
Conversions: P.Butler (2)
Penalties: P.Butler (3)

May 21 Michigan Select 0 Gloucester 46
Tries: M.Longstaff (2), R.Morris (2), R.Clewes, J.Watkins, P.Howell
Conversions: P.Butler (6)
Penalties: P.Butler (2)

May 27 South Illinois Select 18 Gloucester 40
Tries: R.Etheridge (3), R.Light (2), S.Mills, J.Bayliss, K.Richardson, D.Pointon
Conversions: R.Correia (2)

May 30 Midwest Select 4 Gloucester 28
Tries: E.Pinkney (3), R.Clewes, J.Watkins, V.Wooley
Conversions: P.Butler (2)

June 1 Chicago Lions 6 Gloucester 29
Tries: J.Watkins, M.Burton, P.Howell, J.Dix
Conversions: P.Butler (2)
Penalties: P.Butler (3)

Reunion in 2017

On 5th May 2017, 40 years on from the tour to the USA, the players attended a reunion lunch in the Legends Lounge at Kingsholm – they came from far and wide to reminisce about a tour which still lives on as a wonderful experience in their memories.

OTHER MATCHES AGAINST AMERICAN TEAMS

Gloucester 60 Philadelphia University 0, 1st September 1969

Despite the name under which they travelled, these American tourists were drawn from clubs in Baltimore, Philadelphia and Washington as well as from a number of colleges. They had been the first American team to tour England four years previously. This was the opening match of Gloucester's season, and it attracted some 4,000 spectators.

They ended up speculating whether the home side would declare at some stage. Arthur Russell reported in *The Citizen* that *"A computer or other electronic devices of which the Americans are so fond, might have been useful as Gloucester indulged in so many intricacies that they occasionally became entangled in a web of their own creation. But for minor handling infringements the century mark could have been a reality rather than an impossible dream. In a scoring list that reads like a telephone directory it would be imprudent, even unfair, to try and nominate players who might conceivably have topped the bill, as it were. In such a pleasant late summer romp they all excelled."*

Gloucester: E J Stephens; R Clewes, T Palmer, R Jardine, J Dix; T Hopson, J Spalding; M Burton, F Reed, K Richardson, J Jarrett, N Jackson, G White, M Potter, R Smith (captain)

Philadelphia: F Brick; F Johnson, J Norman, A Smith, J Schwartz; T Swift, J Bartek; W Howard, D Mills, B Kane, A Wampler, G Earle, J Logan, M Bush, T Will

Referee: Mr J R Abbott (Warwickshire)

The competent, cultivated Tom Palmer scored the first try, whirling his way over wide out following a loose maul; Eric Stephens converted from the touchline for the first of his 18 point haul. Dick Smith, Gary White and Eric Stephens scored before Terry Hopson *"weaved his way through, graceful as a gazelle"*. John Dix running with electrifying pace from his own 25, and Richard Jardine employing a neat side step, both scored before half-time to establish a 29-0 lead.

In the second half, the American line continued to fall at regular intervals to Mike Burton, Jardine, John Spalding, Bob Clewes, Stephens, Mike Potter and White. Stephens converted two of these, before handing over the kicking duties to Spalding, who converted three of the last four. Briefly it seemed as though Gloucester's season would be a breeze, but two days later, it was back to reality with a bump; away to Cardiff, a Spalding penalty was the only consolation in a 3-22 defeat.

Gloucester United 41 MARS 4, 12th September 1977

The Mid-Atlantic Rugby Side from the Philadelphia region gave a strong Gloucester United team a minor scare before finally caving in to five second half tries. The Americans made a

whirlwind start, but could not maintain the pace and full-back Steve Barnes dived over in the corner to open the scoring, Longstaff kicked a penalty and Dix went over for a try before half-time. Reinvigorated by the break, MARS centre, Bob Carroll galloped half the length of Kingsholm to score his side's only try. The United romped in for five further tries in the last 25 minutes, with Barnes completing a hat trick, Phil Pritchard registering a brace and Steve Baker one, Longstaff converted all of them. After the match, the Gloucester captain, Dave Spencer, presented the American captain, Harry Higgins, with a Gloucester Club pin as a memento of the game; Harry wore this with pride for almost forty years and was devastated to lose it whilst on a visit to New York in 2015; a replacement lapel badge was sent to him.