

Sport and business scrum down together at Gloucester

Professional rugby clubs might only play at home as few as 20 times a year, so Gloucester Rugby, one of a small number of non owner-subsidised clubs in the Aviva Premiership, is turning to the MICE sector in order to balance its books and make use of its costly stadium infrastructure. **Philip Cooke** reports

Using Kingsholm Stadium just 20 times a year makes no business sense, says Gloucester Rugby chief executive Stephen Vaughan. “So, when the late Tom Walkinshaw rebuilt the main grandstand in 2007 he designed a highly-adaptable stadium that would also provide us with a huge amount of built-in income earning potential.

“Tom wanted Kingsholm to be a business brand as well as a sporting citadel. It was a far-sighted strategy as our non-rugby activities don’t just generate significant revenues for the club, they also bring us new supporters, attracted by this philosophy.”

The Kingsholm Conference Centre

Up to 16,500 spectators squeeze into Kingsholm for Gloucester’s home games, but on every other day of the year the huge Mira Showers Grandstand turns around and becomes the Kingsholm Conference Centre.



Conference and events manager, Patrick Morris, says: “Between match days, our bars and restaurants become conference venues and banqueting suites, our hospitality boxes are used daily as market research assessment and interview rooms and the rest of the stadium gets used for all kinds of business-related events, including car shows, product launches and industrial exhibitions.

“Kingsholm is also used for civic events,

charity receptions and civil weddings. Lots of our fans start their married lives here and they love being photographed on the pitch still in their wedding clothes.”

Sir Elton comes to Kingsholm

Gloucester’s hallowed turf also earns its keep. Records show that in 1895 the pitch was used for hot-air balloon launches and in 1938 the legendary boxer, Dick Turpin, twice fought open-air boxing tournaments on a ring erected in front of the old grandstand.

“Most summers, we turn the whole stadium, including the pitch, into a 16,000 capacity open-air music venue,” says Morris. “Sir Tom Jones, Ronan Keating and McFly played here in 2012 and 2013 and we have just signed a huge contract for a Sir Elton John concert here in June 2015.”

Family values

Current club chairman, Ryan Walkinshaw, the 26-year-old son of Tom Walkinshaw, who sadly passed away in 2010, is following in his father’s footsteps and, under his leadership, Gloucester Rugby Ltd has stayed in profit for the last four years.

“Not so long ago, this club required regular investment from our family,” says Ryan Walkinshaw. “But that’s all changed now.

“We have shown that by staying true to our core values we can compete at the highest level in English rugby, operate as one of the region’s best conference and event venues and still deliver an operating profit each year.

“Perhaps this is also why we have been selected as one of only two club grounds in the UK to host four Rugby World Cup matches this autumn.” **CN**

