

# BRSC News

December 2022

BRSC—your independent Supporters' Club



## RC Toulon v Bath Rugby – 17th December 2022

### Our Trip

The last trip we joined with Bath Rugby was to Clermont-Ferrand, France to watch our game against ASM Clermont Auvergne, which was pre-Covid, back on 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> December 2019. We had such an excellent weekend then, that I contacted Becky Pocock (Bath Rugby, Head of Ticketing & Hospitality) on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2022, to ask her to put my wife, Debbie and my names down for another trip in 2022, should one be organised.

The draw for the EPCR Challenge Cup was announced on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2022 at 11:00am and we were delighted to see that RC Toulon was in Bath Rugby's group to play both "home" and "away". Season 2022/23 also saw the inclusion of South African sides, for the first time, with both Emirates Lions (Johannesburg) and Toyota Cheetahs (Bloemfontein) making up the 20 sides competing in the competition.





On hearing confirmation that Bath Rugby would indeed be organising an “away” trip to Toulon, I immediately booked two places with Lucy (Bath Rugby, Hospitality Team) on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2022. Lucy subsequently advised there were 100 places available to book and as at the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022, 43 places had been taken.

I received the package giving full details of the trip by return, although the itinerary was subsequently changed twice, the first time because of player commitments when we arrived in Toulon and secondly, due to Toulon Air Traffic Control requirements.

I had also received an email from Manon Cosman, Secretary of RC Toulon Supporters' Club, (Les Corsaires de la Rade) suggesting we meet up ahead of the match for a drink and photos. I confirmed to Manon that we would certainly visit them at their “headquarters”, a local pub called “La B Des Cochons” and after some research, I found that the hotel in which we were staying, the Stade Mayol, the pub and the Harbour front were all within easy walking distance, none being more than a 5 minutes' walk from the other!

EPCR Rules require the visiting team to be in the country, in which they are playing, at least one day in advance of the match – this meant we were to travel over to Toulon on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December and return immediately after the match, on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2022. The excitement mounted as the time drew near and we set the alarm for 5:00am, in time to be ready for our son, Tim, to pick us up at 6:20am to take us to Bristol International Airport. It was an early start, and the weather was very frosty, as you can see from the car roof (pictured opposite), and a bit icy, but clear and bracing.



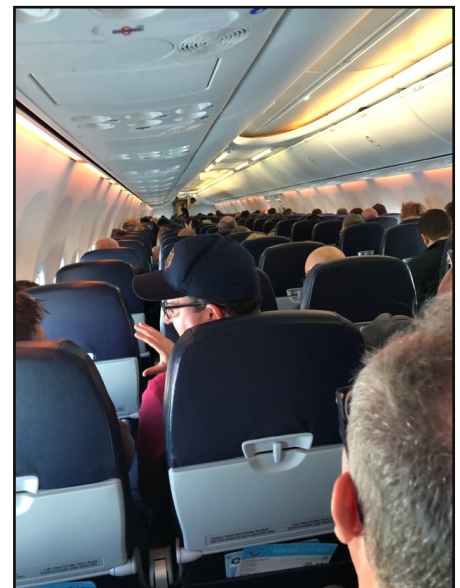
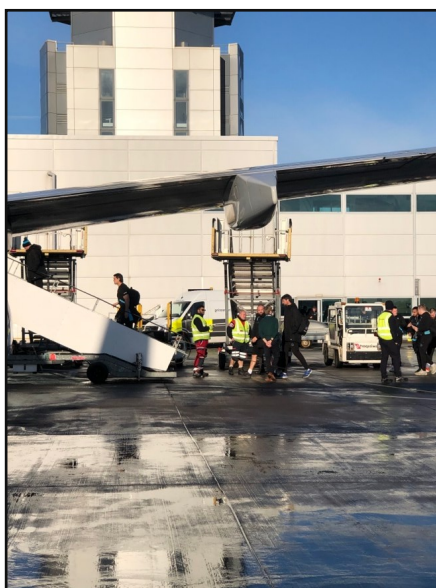
We made our way carefully over the Mendips but did come across one car that had taken a bend too quickly and ended up in the hedge – fortunately, no one was injured and they already had a tow truck on site.

Tim left us at the “Drop & Go” area at 7:10am, outside the “Departures” entrance and we only had a short wait until 7:30am, when Becky and Alex met us at the “Check-In” desk.



Our Flight No. TOM8040 was a Charter with TUI and scheduled to take off at 10:00am. We got through Passport Control and Security without too much trouble but had a wait in the Departure Lounge as the plane was late arriving from Manchester, due to “snow”!

We boarded the plane, a Boeing 737-800 and took off at 11:30am, with Captain Patel at the controls advising we would be flying at 37,000 feet, and by 11:50am we were actually over Jersey. It was an excellent flight, being a beautiful clear morning and fortunately we did not encounter any turbulence. We landed at 2:05pm (local time) and made our way to the Terminal.



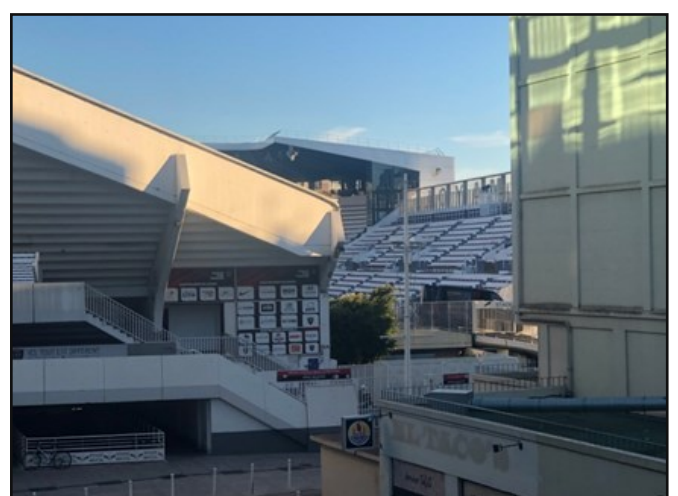
When we left Bristol, the temperature was -4, the outside air temperature whilst flying, was -64, but on arrival at Toulon it was a balmy +11 and the coach was waiting for us.



After a short coach journey, we arrived at the Ibis Styles at 3:30pm, checked in and saw the entrance to the Stade Mayol was less than 75 yards from the hotel. We dropped off our luggage and went for a walk along the Harbour front, again less than 5 minutes from the hotel, which was full of bars and restaurants and chose where we would eat in the evening.



We had a drink, met up with some of the non-playing players and sat sunbathing for a couple of hours, watching the world go by and looking out over the Mediterranean.



A cheese and wine Reception had been arranged at the Ibis for 6:45pm which was hosted by some of the coaches and non-playing players. Here, we had the first real chance to meet, introduce ourselves and chat to other travelling supporters. What a small world! - we met a couple from a village 5 miles from our home in Somerset and lots of others, all Bath Rugby crazy, and made some good friends. We spent a lovely 1 ½ hours, with like-minded people, all talking "Rugby"!

We left the Reception and returned to the Harbour front, which was now all lit up, found our chosen restaurant, which was packed with locals, and ordered our dinner, in French!

Back to the hotel by 10:30pm and straight to bed, after a long but brilliant day.



The next morning (match day - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2022), we woke at 7:45am to another glorious day. After a typically French breakfast, we checked out, leaving our bags at Reception and walked into Toulon making for the Christmas Markets, but en route saw some stunning buildings, statues and fountains.



Debbie and I had agreed to meet Manon (from Les Corsaires de la Rade) at 12:00 noon at Le B Des Cochons, which is the pub where they gather before all “home” matches. We spent a pleasant 30 minutes, chatting (in French, they didn’t speak much English) and taking photos.



(Above pictures L-R –Manon {Secretary}, “Headquarters” Le B Des Cochons, and President).

We made our way to the Stadium, stopping off to take more photos, listen to the “Oompah” Band and took our seats in the “Tribune BONNUS” Stand, on the halfway line, just 4 rows back from the pitch – excellent seats from which you could see the whole pitch.



In the minutes before kick-off, three separate parachutists landed on the centre spot, one bringing with him the match ball. We managed to spot where the local Supporters' Club we had visited, were seated in the Stadium and the match began. It is true to say, in the first half, overall, we were outplayed but Bath Rugby's defence offered strong resistance with some flowing attacking moves to enjoy - one man was immense, Sergio Parisse (still at 39).



At half time, both sides supporters were asked to bring and throw onto the pitch, small stuffed toys (pictured above), which were destined to raise money for local Charities.

The second half saw an improved performance from Bath Rugby and our highlight was the try by Tom Doughty. We had spoken to Tom at Bristol Airport and he was really excited about playing in a European match, his first game at the Stade Mayol and against such giant names as Dan Biggar, Beka Gigashvili, Charles Ollivon, Sergio Parisse and Dany Priso. So, we were really concerned to see Tom writhing on the ground, in obvious extreme pain, shortly after he scored – fortunately, after a few minutes, he was able to get to his feet and walk off the pitch. We did get some great action shots, including the lap of appreciation, at the end.



Immediately after the match we made our way back to the Ibis and left on the coach for the airport, at 5:00pm. When we arrived, there were no other passengers to be seen in the airport and we were able to go straight through Passport Control and Security to the Departure Gate. Here, we met up with the players again and I was able to have a chat with most, especially Tom Doughty who had been to Hospital and fortunately been told, there was no bleeding from the eye, so he could fly home with us – he will have to see a Specialist.

As a Charter flight, the plane had remained, at Toulon, in the waiting bay, for us to return and we boarded at 7:27pm, taking off at 7:45pm (local time). It was the same Captain Patel who flew us back, announcing the flight time was 1hr 50mins, flying at a speed of 475mph (1 mile every 7 seconds) and at an altitude of 38,000 feet.

The flight path home was up to Paris, then to Dover, over London and then back to Bristol. At 8:46pm Captain Patel announced, via the intercom, that we were flying over Paris. Debbie and I happened to look out of the window and caught a clear sight of the Eiffel Tower – unfortunately the picture below was taken very quickly and was blurred by the angle, so impossible to make it out but another highlight of a great weekend.

We landed back in Bristol at 8:45pm (GMT) and again we were fortunate to go straight through Passport Control and Customs. We said our farewells to our fellow supporter passengers, by now good friends, and made our way out through “Arrivals” where Tim and our two Labradors were waiting to welcome and drive us home.

Everyone enjoyed a fantastic couple of days and I have to say a huge thank you to Becky Pocock, the Hospitality team and all at Bath Rugby for making all the arrangements which passed off seamlessly, and enabled the travelling supporters to experience another epic “away” trip – perhaps next year to South Africa?

Allez-bath.

**David Harrington**

**Secretary**

**Bath Rugby Supporters' Club.**

