



NIGEL'S NOTES...

Nigel Melville

Director of Rugby

"For today's opponents, Rotherham Titans, this match has been a long time coming!"

It gives me great pleasure to welcome everyone to Kingsholm for our opening game of the 2003-04 Zurich Premiership season.

For today's opponents, Rotherham Titans, this match has been a long time coming!

Having won the First Division Championship in 2001-02, the Yorkshire Club were denied their place in the Premiership on a technicality. Last season brought yet another First Division title, no red tape and automatic promotion to the Premiership.

I would like to welcome Rotherham and wish them an enjoyable season.

Today has also been a long time coming for the Gloucester players, pre-season can be a mind numbing experience, weights, running, defence, continuity, skills but precious few games. When the games come they don't usually manage to replicate the intensity of the Premiership, however, last weekend's 'friendly' against Northampton was just the type of game we needed to prepare for our Premiership campaign.

It was fast and physical, the skill levels were high and the defences tested to the full. There was real desire to win, and no little physical confrontation. Wayne Smith told me in the days leading up to the game that he was going to reduce his team to 14 men at some point during the afternoon to replicate a yellow card situation. This was not necessary as both teams suffered double yellow cards during the afternoon!

Our fourth win out of four against Northampton was a great end to an excellent afternoon of rugby!

The final World Cup squad announcements this weekend

have stimulated plenty of conversation this week. I would like to congratulate Andy Gomarsall, Phil Vickery, Trevor Woodman, Rodrigo Roncero, Thinus Delport and Terry Fanolua on their selections and wish them every success.

England's selection was always going to throw up a few surprises such was the competition for places. The major surprise was the fact that England are taking only four props and three locks - Simon Shaw is surely the unluckiest of them all.

James Simpson-Daniel's non-selection was another disappointment, but time is on his side, there will be more World Cups to come for 'Sinbad', we look forward to having him back.

Last weekend, our annual 'Open Day' was another big success. It is a great opportunity for the players, coaches and management to spend some time socially with our supporters.

Favourite events on the day were Stadium Tours with Terry Fanolua and coaching sessions with Henry Paul and Jake Boer. Comment of the day came from Andy Deacon, 'surely everyone in Gloucester has got my autograph by now!' (it's just a whole new generation Andy!).

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for the fantastic support they have given to the younger players who have pulled on the Gloucester first XV shirt for the first time in recent weeks. Your support has ensured that they have taken huge steps forwards during pre-season. I know they are immensely proud to be representing Gloucester and will give 100% to the cause in the coming weeks.

Have a fantastic day, get behind your 'Cherry and Whites' and let's have another fantastic season.



The start of the season is finally here. This is what everyone has been working towards for the last nine or ten weeks, and what better way to start the new campaign than at Kingsholm in front of all the fans.

Pre-season has gone well, if I were to measure it, I'd say we've earned a seven or an eight out of ten with our performances, as there is always room for a little bit extra.

This year's warm-up schedule was different to last season. Nigel Melville and Dean Ryan organised a much tougher series of fixtures that have been played at a high standard. Leinster home and away followed by last Saturday's trip to Northampton has proved a real test.

Of course, games like these allow you to build up the intensity gradually and I believe that we'll hit the season a little more prepared than before.

All the pre-season work followed on from a five-week break in South Africa for myself, when I did a bit of scuba diving. Although it's hard to get the game totally out of your system, the break was very enjoyable.

We're back into the big stuff today, and Rotherham will prove a big game. We look at every game on an individual basis and they've got a bunch of very tough guys with some real experience. As the newly promoted team, Rotherham will want to put their stamp on the Premiership from an early stage and they'll be out to impress today.

Every single side will want to impress on the opening weekend, and working during the pre-season and being with the Gloucester guys each day, everyone

CAPTAIN'S CORNER

Jake Boer
Club Captain

"We're back into the big stuff today, and Rotherham will prove a big game."

wants to improve on last year.

Fitness is key and you never want to let anyone down. As with our pre-season, we'll want to develop game by game and it starts today.

Although I've captained the team before, it's going to be superb to lead out the guys for the first game of the season at Kingsholm. Now September 13th is here, it is time to respond.





PRE-SEASON FRIENDLY

FRANKLIN'S GARDENS SATURDAY of SEPTEMBER 2003



N'HAMPTON SAINT 31

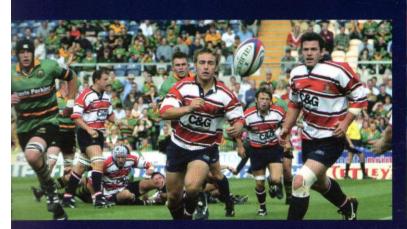
TRIES: SLEIGHTHOLME (2), HOWARD, HYNDMAN, BUDGEN CONVERSIONS: DRAHM (3)



GLOUCESTER 37

TRIES: PAUL (2), FANOLUA, GARVEY

CONVERSIONS: PAUL (4) PENALTIES: PAUL (3)

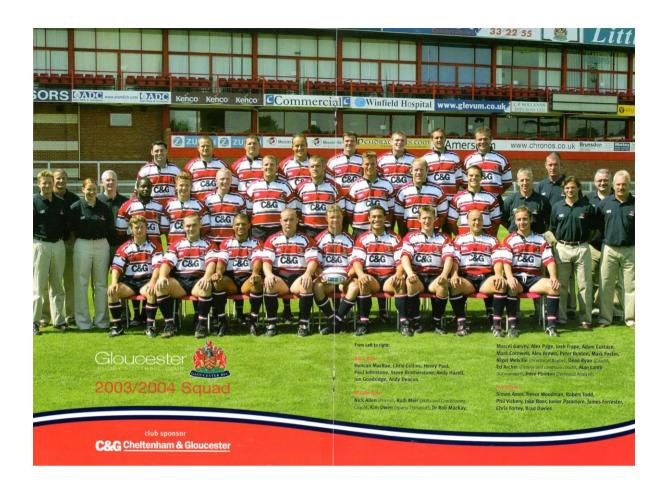


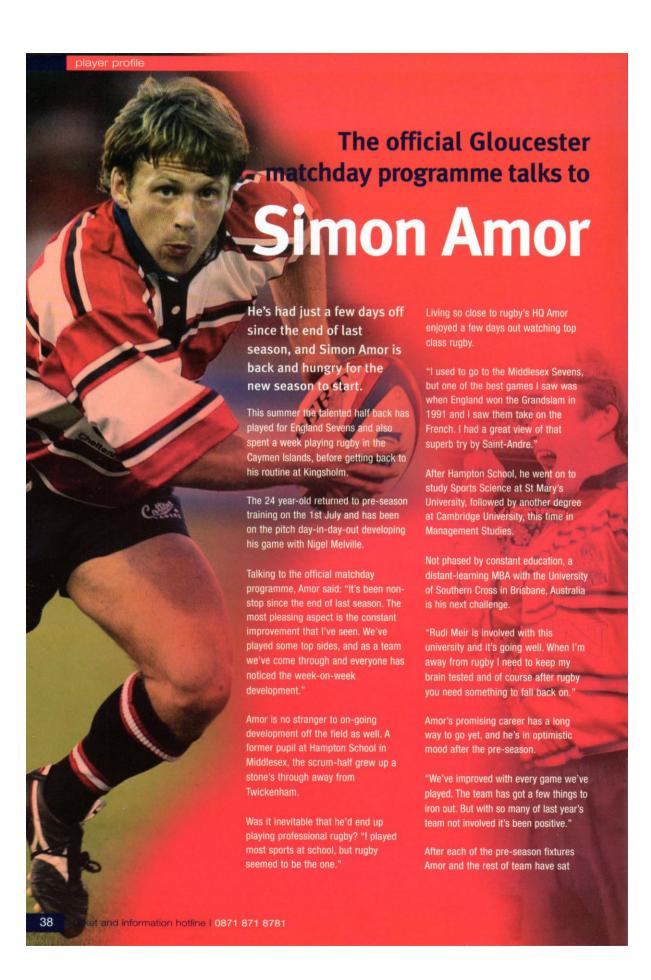
ft: Steve Thomas. top right: Peter Buxton wins a line out.





Pictures courtest of Bruce Seabrook - GPA Images





down with the coaching staff to talk through all aspects of the game.

"Nigel and Dean have been positive about the pre-season as we've followed instructions with regards to patterns and plays. It has shown with the new players we're able to play as a team."

With Gomarsall away at the World Cup Amor, along with new recruit Alex Page, are keen to make the most of their chance.

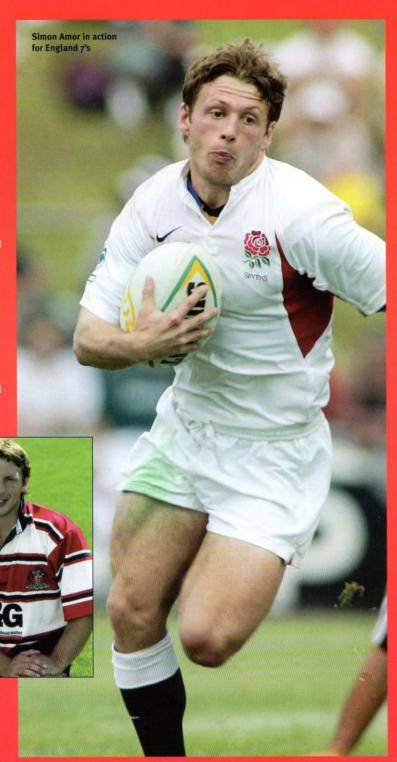
The MBA scholar is a big fan of the international game and his thoughts will also be over in Australia following the England side during the Autumn.

And his predictions? "I think England will win the World Cup. Although with a knock-out tournament, any team can perform on any given day and there are be very dangerous, but as long as there are no major set-backs I expect England to be playing New Zealand in the final."

Should his prediction come true, there'll be three Gloucester players returning with winner's medals.

"That would be fantastic. It would be great for them, for the fans and the Club. I'd be over the moon for them, and what a great atmosphere it'd be here.'

With so much to look forward to, starting with today's clash against Rotherham, Amor has an interesting time ahead of him this season.



Peter

As for the previous 25 years, Gloucester Rugby Club's Peter Arnold, the fountain of all knowledge on local rugby, returns to the official matchday programme. This week Peter looks at the World Cup and the recent sad loss of local media man Peter West.

BEST OF LUCK - AND HARD LUCK.

It's just as well that I wasn't relying on Teletext to inform me about Clive Woodward's World Cup selections last Sunday. Even well into Monday, the rugby pages were still displaying the previous Saturday's news, which wasn't exactly what thousands of people must have been looking for.

However, I was gratified to learn that

Messrs Vickery, Woodman and Gomersall had secured their seats on the plane. It

would have been a major shock if either of the props had missed out, but Andy's place was by no means as certain.

We obviously congratulate them and send them all our best wishes, and we mustn't forget, either, that Messrs Roncero, Fanolua and Delport will be representing Argentina, Samoa and South Africa, respectively.

That means that we have players in four distinct and separate World Cup squads. Can any other Premiership club say the same? It says a lot for the coaching available here at Kingsholm.

We should also commiserate with those who narrowly missed out. It's particularly hard on Junior Paramore who has probably seen his last chance slip away.

At least James Simpson Daniel, and Andy Hazell, who both came agonizingly close to selection, can look forward to other opportunities. 'Jango' Forester would almost certainly have been in the frame, too, if it hadn't been for his nasty wrist injury.

On the upside, it does mean that all four players will be available to us through the World Cup period - which sounds ominous for the opposition.

Is Australia ready for that many 'Glaws'

players arriving all at once, I ask myself?

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

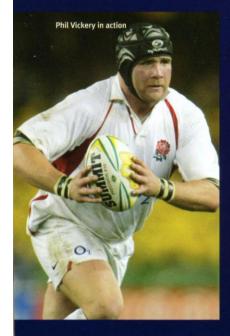
Not a hell of a lot, apparently. After all, you'd think that a chap with a name like 'Boer' would commend himself to the people responsible for getting a South African World Cup squad together, wouldn't you?

In addition, we're always hearing that the Premiership is now regarded as one of the strongest leagues in the world, so a player, universally acknowledged by players, public and press alike, to be one of the finest in that competition would at least find himself in the frame.

And don't give me the old malarkey about Jake Boer being based in England. If that were a genuine factor, then Thinus Delport wouldn't be in the squad, either.

Our inspirational captain usually likes to do his talking on the field, and isn't one to wear his heart on his sleeve, but even he has gently expressed his regret that he's never been given a chance to show what he can do in the top flights of the game. All I can say is that if the Springboks have six back-rowers better than Jake Boer, then they must have one hell of a pack.

Still - South Africa's loss is Gloucester's





gain, I suppose.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? PART TWO

I'm always a bit worried when an oldestablished local pub decides on a name change. Look what happened to the Northfield/Retreat. However, the news that we must now learn to call the White Hart 'Teague's' doesn't quite fall into that category. After all, with 'Iron Mike' and his family running things, what can go wrong?

We certainly wish the enterprise all the very best, and like many other people, I look forward to supping a pint or three there when I'm in the area.

There is a precedent. We used to have another White Hart, in Bell Lane (when we had a Bell Lane), and that was always known as 'Harry's' after the popular and highly individual landlord, Harry Hewlett.

Just so long as Mike and his family keep that lovely plasterwork White Hart which can be seen on the frontage of the pub at first-floor level. If that ever disappeared, so would one of our pleasanter legends.

It used to be said that, when Gloucester scored a try, that White Hart dances. I've never seen it myself, and neither has anyone else. After all, when Gloucester scores a try, no one in their right mind is going to be staring at the pub across the road, are they?.

Ah well! A myth is as good as a smile, they say.

PETER WEST

Many people at Kingsholm will have been

very sorry to hear of the death of distinguished broadcaster and journalist, Peter West, who joined GRFC when he retired to Duntisbourne Abbots.

He moved to the Cotswolds from Surrey, where he obviously supported his local clubs. I recall writing at the time that his switch of allegiance must have been 'like a shandy drinker suddenly discovering real ale.'

I well remember the first time I spoke to him. I was up at the bar, getting a round in, when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned, and there was Peter West.
"Excuse me, " he said, "You're Peter Arnold, aren't you?" I pleaded guilty to the charge, and he then shook my hand and remarked, "I just though I'd like to meet the fellow who writes the words!"

I took that very kindly indeed. After all, here was a man regarded as one of the best sports journalists in the world, going out of his way to talk to a fair-to-middling local scribbler like me. That story tells you quite a lot about the sort of man he was.

And he was a great writer, even in retirement; always keeping his eyes open for a quirky sports-related story. For example, he expressed great delight when I informed him that famous cricket umpire, David Shepherd, also a great bloke, but not exactly a stick-insect of a man, had played rugby for Bideford – at scrum half! Peter laughed heartily at that.

When Gloucester narrowly beat Coventry in the Semi-final of the Cup. In 1973, Peter started his report in the Times with the immortal phrase "They don't play rugby like this in West Wittering".

You don't get much sports writing like that, these days, more's the pity.

A nicer man never walked than Peter West, and the world is just a little the worse for his passing. Our sincere sympathies go to his wife, Pauline and all his family

Fans Zone

with Bob Fenton

Bob Fenton, former editor of Shed Head, is ready and waiting for the start of the new season, and will be offering his opinions and views in his regular article for the Gloucester matchday programme.

Well, that's the pre-season friendlies out of the way, (played four, won two, drawn one and lost one) and now it's down to the real stuff

Talking of the friendlies, what can you say about Tezza's hair!!! Man, he's surprised us with a few in the past – Elvis look, sort of 1970s Michael Jackson, braids, dreadlocks and post-cup final Vickery crop. This one is certainly different.

"Talking of the friendlies, what can you say about Tezza's hair!!! Man, he's surprised us with a few in the past ..."

He gave our resident half-way line referee ('No Rob, you cannot be offside in open play!') a headache trying to figure out if your hair can stand in an offside position while your feet are several metres onside!

We have a lot to look forward to this season. Quite a few players will be heading off to Australia with various World Cup squads, Vixter, Dougie and Gommers with England, and only Clive Woodward can explain why Sinbad has not gone with them. England's loss is very definitely our gain. Tezza will be off with Samoa in a few weeks, and our two Trotters — Delboy and Rodders - will be with South Africa and Argentina. Congratulations and good luck to all concerned.

That means we will get a chance to see some of our younger players in action. We've had a glimpse of them in the preseason friendlies, but now it's time to take a step up in the quality of the opposition. Of course there is bound to be some nervousness about the ability of these guys to handle the intensity of the Premiership, but remember it wasn't that long ago that the relatively unknown — and certainly untested at the highest level — James Forrester and James Simpson-Daniel made their way out onto the Kingsholm turf. They kind of did all right, didn't they?

We also have the little matter of the Heineken Cup to take care of, and a chance to put right that nightmare display at Thomond Park. We've also got the great pleasure of welcoming back Philippe Saint Andre' and his Bourgoin side to Kingsholm. A chance for all those old berets to be dusted off and dragged back into service. He'll get a hero's welcome for sure. But more importantly, anyone who attended the GRSA-organised send off for him at the Montpellier Wine Bar will remember that he all invited us for a free drink at his bar if we were ever down his way. Bet at the time he said that he never thought that several hundred would be arriving all at once - mine's a Guinness when I get there, Philippe!

It's great to welcome Rotherham to Kingsholm today, and only right that they have finally made it into the Premiership after all sorts of skulduggery appeared to keep them from taking their rightful position when they won the first division title the season before last. All credit to them for not falling apart after such a blow, and for getting the job done last term to take their place with the big boys.



Rotherham will not only bring their loyal fans with them today, they will also bring Gloucester old boy 'Jinking' Joe Ewens. Joe holds a special place in the memories of many Gloucester fans, especially those who travelled to Newcastle for a midweek fixture about four years ago – he was on hand to finish off a last gasp move that gave us an early away win and set us on the road to European qualification that year. Good to see him back in the Premiership, and let's hope he has a great season. He can have a 'mare today though, if that's okay.

Also in the Rotherham squad is one Jason Keyter. Surely this bloke is the most travelled player in Rugby history. How many clubs has he turned out for? It must be hundreds by now and it's probably easier to list the clubs he hasn't played for. Last time he was at Kingsholm he was playing for (I think) an Italian side in one of the European competitions. Fair play to him, though, he keeps going.

Rotherham are also likely to field one Luke Gross. Now before all the girls (or young women now) start screaming, I should point out that this is not one of the blondhaired ex-teenyboppers who formed Bros with his brother Matt a few years back. He's quite the reverse in fact — a hulking great second row, who used to be a bit of

a whiz on the Basketball courts in the States before realising that the ball he was using was a bit of an odd shape and electing to take up a proper sport.

In the dim and distant past Luke used to turn out at West Hartlepool, along with the legend that was – and still is – Mike Brewer. The last time Glaws played up there I got invited by the matchday sponsors to join them in the hospitality box (well I did work for the same company at the time), where I was promptly taken prisoner by several West players and their press officer and held to account for christening them 'Tarty Fools' in an early edition of Shedhead.

Having suitably paid for my sins (despite trying to recruit an injured Vixter to save me) before the match, I was frogmarched around the town after the game by Mike, Luke and a few others and forced to drink gallons of beer.

I don't suppose I am giving any secrets away when I say that Hartlepool is not the err... most salubrious of places (apologies to Peter Mandleson if he's reading this), and outside one bar Mike stopped me and said "It's a bit rough in here." Luke added "Yeah, there's usually a fight, and if not we'll start one..."

at this point I made my excuses and left!

Last weekend saw not only the last preseason friendly, but also the annual open day. These are great occasions for those with young kids. My lad has been looking forward to it for ages and after completing his second training session up at Hucclecote RFC (under 10s now, contested scrums and lineouts!) it was straight down to Castle Grim with autograph pen, miniball and posters.

It's great that the players give up their time to do this, and to give so much pleasure to their younger (and not so young) fans. This year the boy was collecting three lots of autographs, one for him, one for his brother and one for his new pen friend who lives in Murmansk. They met on holiday and despite the obvious language difficulties — the lad spoke a little English, Matthew speaks mainly gibberish — they got on like a house on fire.

Very shortly a young lad in the ice-cold depths – he says the temperature there is now only 5° - of northern Russia will receive a Gloucester shirt and an autographed ball, and given the weather conditions will probably wear it all the time. If you are ever there, look out for him.

BY IAN RANDALL BBC RADIO GLOUCESTERSHIRE



BBC Radio Gloucestershire's Ian Randall is back for a new season with his news, views and opinions

We all like something for nothing, and that was never better illustrated than at last Sunday's Open Day. The queues for free Pink Un's and BBC Radio Gloucestershire merchandise were both consistently long as fans once again showed their support for the Club with a big turn out.

Having also broken through the 6,000 season ticket barrier for the first time as well, large crowds are sure to be the norm at Kingsholm again this season.

It is worth remembering, however, that rugby, like most sports, is cyclical. I have spent the summer researching and writing a book about the Club, which is due for publication in early November. It is not so long ago that league crowds were barely 5,000, but success draws in the more casual fan on a regular basis, and it is in these times that Gloucester must lay the foundations to extend this upward spiral as long

as possible.

Nigel Melville tells me that he already has a short list of players he wants to bring through behind the current crop that are in the Academy, which shows the long term planning he has to look at whilst still trying to deliver a winning team.

We now know of course, that Gloucester will have six players away at the World Cup, and losing a full back, a centre, a scrum half and three props along with the other summer departures to new clubs is the spine of a good side. However, on the basis of what I saw in a feisty (but what some called brutal) friendly at Northampton last week, the determination of the current squad to cover for those losses is intense.

Having seen Brad Davies against Glasgow and again seven days ago, he was visibly more confident at



Open Day.



outside half as the immediate replacement for Ludovic Mercier, and choosing between Rory Teague and Jon Goodridge at full back will be an unenviable job - perhaps Nigel may accommodate Goodridge on the wing, as Phillipe Saint-Andre did with Chris Catling four seasons ago. Simon Amor and Alex Page will be hard to split at scrum half too. At least the front row, deprived of Woodman and Vickery, will not lack experience with Johnstone, Brotherstone and Deacon being first choice in the short term.

Talking of Vickery, he signed endless autographs and posed for numerous photographs at the Open Day with no hint of security. A supporter told me he recently stayed in a hotel in Essex on a business trip, only to go down to breakfast and find David Beckham (and a minder) three tables away. The England team were staying there before their recent international with Croatia at Ipswich. The accessibility of the Gloucester's international players is refreshing against that climate.

For some of you, this will be your first visit to Kingsholm this season. My father, who is 70 next year, has never been a fan of pre-season games, so much so that I don't recall him attending more than a handful down the years. For Nigel and Dean however, they are essential to reach the first Zurich Premiership match at the right level. From what I have seen, look out for Alex Brown in the loose as well as in the line out, and the growing influence of Henry Paul, who seems to have finally found his niche in the team at inside centre.

Today we welcome Rotherham for a fixture that most objective supporters will feel should have taken place last season. The Yorkshire club are to be commended for the way in which they took the knock back over their promotion on the chin last year, and went out and proved they deserved to be in the Premiership by winning National Division One for a second successive season. Chief Executive Jim Kilfoyle and coaches Schmid and Umaga have made wholesale changes since promotion was achieved, and playing them first, I've no doubt Gloucester will face an enthusiastic and committed team. The Cherry & Whites will need to match that before they can exert any sort of authority on the scoreboard.



"Today we welcome Rotherham for a fixture that most objective supporters will feel should have taken place last season.."

Finally, don't forget we're with Gloucester at every Premiership, Powergen Cup and Heineken Cup fixture this season, so you can get commentary on BBC Radio Gloucestershire (104.7 FM & 1413 AM) and on the official club website,

www.gloucesterrugbyclub.com.



