



GLOUCESTER RUGBY

vs Connacht Rugby

European Rugby Champions Cup Play-off: 24.05.2015

Inside today's matchday programme we have an exclusive interview with Aussie centre Bill Meakes, action replays from Gloucester's final Premiership games of the season and features from our regular contributors Bob Fenton, Ian Randall, The Citizen and the Gloucester Rugby Heritage Project.

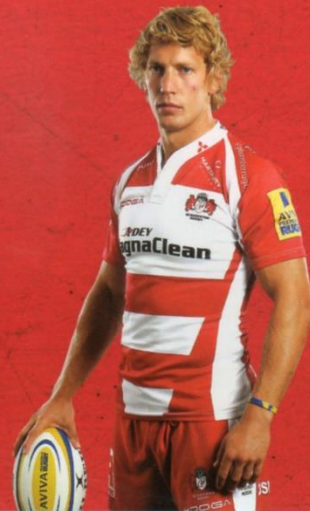
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CAPTAIN'S CORNER BILLY TWELVETREES

GOOD AFTERNOON, WELCOME TO TODAY'S EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS CUP PLAY-OFF AGAINST CONNACHT, AND WELCOME BACK TO KINGSHOLM TO THE PLAYERS, STAFF AND SUPPORT FROM GALWAY.



AT the start of the season, we would've expected a long season to be over by now, but every player would rather still be involved in these big games than putting their feet up and watching other teams in action.

The recent triumph in the European Rugby Challenge Cup will live with us for years to come, and I am massively proud with how we have reacted since then, so as a squad, we are in a really good place.

The coaches have forged what

was a very new-look squad at the start of the season into a real team, and the spirit and buzz in the camp is something we are really enjoying.

David and Laurie made the call last week to make a few changes for the game at the Rec, but the way the young lads performed was something to be admired against a team who were at full strength.

We cannot be ashamed of that, and I felt that every single one of the boys that took the field, did the shirt proud in front of a lot of passionate Gloucester fans

that made the trip down for an important derby game.

As a result of the performance at Bath, there were a number of boys that put their hand up for selection this week. We have been stretched by suspensions and injuries, but boys have been patient and worked hard behind the scenes to put themselves back available for this Sunday.

Connacht gave us a really good game in April, and Pat Lam is a world-class coach, so there is a really tough task lying ahead today.

But, it is a game at Kingsholm, at a place we have really focused our efforts on. Last week, we went to The Rec, and the Cherry and White fans were making the noise, and it goes without saying, other clubs do not have the honour of having that support, and that backing.

Whatever happens today, sadly it will be the last time a few of the squad play at Kingsholm for the club, and for those that are heading for pastures new, it will be an emotional afternoon. So we owe it to those boys to put in a performance for them to take with them and remember.

We still have a job to do this season, we are nearly there and we are massively excited.

Enjoy the game

Billy



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LAST WEEK, WE WENT TO THE REC, AND THE CHERRY AND WHITE FANS WERE MAKING THE NOISE, AND IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING, OTHER CLUBS DO NOT HAVE THE HONOUR OF HAVING THAT SUPPORT, AND THAT BACKING.

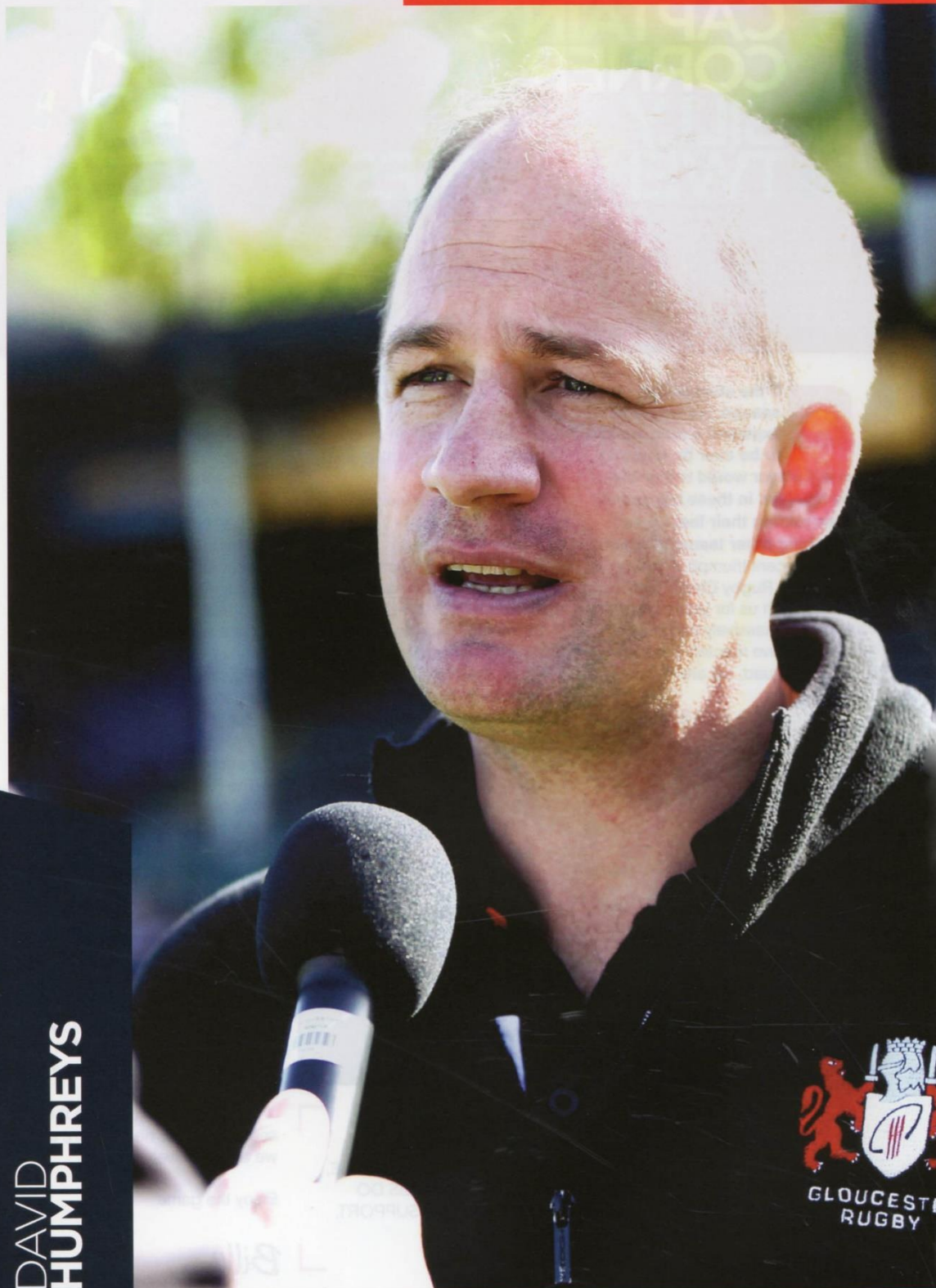
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DIR. OF
RUGBY

DAVID
HUMPHREYS



DAVID
HUMPHREYS

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GOOD AFTERNOON, AND I'M DELIGHTED TO WELCOME EVERYONE BACK TO KINGSHOLM FOR THE 21ST AND FINAL TIME THIS SEASON. AS ALWAYS, I'M SURE THE VISITING PLAYERS, MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORTERS FROM CONNACHT WILL RECEIVE THE CUSTOMARY KINGSHOLM WELCOME!

TODAY'S match is a hugely important game for the Club as we take the first step in trying to claim the final position in next season's Champions Cup. Everyone involved with the team wants to be playing in Europe's Premier competition next season, but are fully aware of the challenge Connacht will pose this afternoon.

Once again, we find ourselves in a knock-out scenario, with a French team awaiting the winner, but our successful Challenge Cup experiences over the last couple of months mean that we are well prepared for another big game. Winning the Challenge Cup has given us the confidence and belief in our ability to perform well and win high pressure matches.

At this stage of the season, many squads are stretched due to injuries and, in our case, unfortunate suspensions.

However, that has



coaches.

We had three players making their very first Premiership starts, two more made debuts off the bench, two made their first starts of the season and there were eight Academy players in the 23.

Taking all that into account, for us to push Bath so hard for so

are a team determined to close the gap on their Provincial rivals in Ireland.

It would be wrong of me to finish these notes, however, as we run out at Kingsholm for the final time, not to thank you for the incredible support you've given us all season.

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YOUR BACKING HAS BEEN UNWAVERING, ALL THE MORE IMPRESSIVE GIVEN THE NUMBER OF EXTRA FIXTURES THAT WE'VE PLAYED IN RECENT WEEKS. THIS SEASON HAS BEEN A ROLLERCOASTER AT TIMES, BUT THE ONE CONSTANT HAS BEEN YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT.

provided opportunities for other players to get game time and as we saw last weekend against a full strength Bath side, many of them have taken the opportunity to impress the

long, and to secure a try-scoring bonus point was quite some achievement. It shows how far we've come as a group since the start of the season and bodes very well for the future.

However, today is all about Connacht, a team who made it a very difficult Challenge Cup quarter-final for us here at Kingsholm only a few weeks ago. Under Pat Lam's direction, they came very close to automatic qualification for the Champions Cup in the Guinness Pro12, and

Your backing has been unwavering, all the more impressive given the number of extra fixtures that we've played in recent weeks. This season has been a rollercoaster at times, but the one constant has been your encouragement.

On behalf of all the squad and management, a very sincere thank you.

David

THE VIEW FROM The Citizen



**SCAN THE
CODE FOR
MORE NEWS
AND STORIES
FROM OUR
WEBSITE**

**GLOUCESTER
FAMILY** left
devastated after
'holiday from hell'
in Greece

**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED** to help
repair Atyla Ship

**VULNERABLE
ADULTS**
defrauded
of £14k by
Gloucester care
worker

**GLOUCESTER-
BORN LEE
MANSELL** is
Wembley hero for
Bristol Rovers

A STEADY SHIP

WITH the regular Premiership season now wrapped up and another ninth place finish in the bag for Gloucester, you could be forgiven for being more than a little disappointed.

The same finish cost Nigel Davies his job and looking at the domestic season on paper, there has only been a very slight improvement.

This campaign the Cherry and Whites have won one more game, scored more tries and conceded less than last term.

But as the players reflected on the year in Tuesday night's end of season dinner there was plenty more to be encouraged about – not to mention the prospect of Champions Cup rugby.

At the end of last season the club were in disarray and rudderless. Twelve months on there is a clear direction, leadership and playing style.

Credit must go to Davies for some of this at least, he identified the weaknesses and addressed them with the signing of the likes of John Afoa, Richard Hibbard, Mariano Galarza and Greig Laidlaw.

Now Gloucester have a hard-nosed, experienced spine running through the team to supplement the likes of Tom Savage, who has returned to his



(above) Solid Foundations

The new Gloucester coaching team has steadied the ship and provided a strong base to develop from

(far right) Perspective

David Humphreys will be looking for a big improvement in Gloucester's Premiership form next season

best, and Billy Twelvetrees.

This quality has brought out the best in several individuals, none more so than Matt Kvesic, who is showing exactly why Gloucester signed him and in my view England's finest specialist openside flanker.

There has also been the emergence of some exciting young talent, Henry Purdy and Ross Moriarty have exceeded expectations, Billy Burns continues to progress and Dan



QUALIFYING FOR THE CHAMPIONS CUP HAS BEEN OUR AIM ALL YEAR, TO BE TOP SIX AND IN THAT TOP TIER OF EUROPE SO WE HAVE TO BACK UP THE CHALLENGE CUP WIN WITH TWO PERFORMANCES DOWN THE TRACK. **Laurie Fisher**



Thomas is a real rough diamond.

Tom Marshall, Jeremy Thrush and Willi Heinz will add further depth and quality next season, where Gloucester should finally begin to climb up the table.

All the signs have been there since the turn of the year and the Cherry and Whites are unbeaten at Kingsholm in 2015.

At the beginning of the season both David Humphreys and Laurie Fisher were coy on targets but admitted they must restore Castle Grim into a fortress.

They are not quite there but they are beginning to bring that fear factor back and it is certainly something they can build on next season.

Speaking earlier this week

Humphreys said, "It still resonates with a lot of us that at the beginning of the season James Simpson-Daniel thought we had lost Kingsholm. But that is not the case anymore and that's a huge credit to the players and the effort, enthusiasm and commitment they bring to every game.

"We are unbeaten here in 2015 and with a full crowd behind us it is becoming a very intimidating place."

And so we come to today's clash with Connacht, the first of potentially two play-offs to qualify for the Champions Cup.

Without doubt winning the Challenge Cup should have been rewarded with the final qualifying

spot for the top tier of Europe, but we knew the rules.

Gloucester have already beaten today's opponents at the quarter-final stage of their cup run and a victory over French opposition, whoever it may be, at home, albeit a home away from 'Holm at Sixways is certainly achievable.

The Cherry and Whites are favourites to progress and they simply have to back up their cup triumph by securing qualification.

Nothing can be done about the system in place and they must ensure their success at the Stoop is not a hollow victory.

As Laurie Fisher said on that joyous Friday night in Twickenham, "Qualifying for the Champions Cup has been our aim all year, to be top six and in that top tier of Europe so we have to back up the Challenge Cup win with two performances down the track."



Citizen AVAILABLE DAILY

GLOUCESTER RUGBY
HERITAGEwww.gloucester rugbyheritage.org.ukEUROPE
BECKONS

WITH today's match raising the prospect of European Cup rugby next season and resulting from success in the European Challenge Cup, we look back at Gloucester's most successful season in the old Heineken Cup and at the Club's previous success in the Challenge Cup.

THE 2000-01 HEINEKEN CUP CAMPAIGN

Gloucester's group matches were spread far and wide, the opposition being Llanelli in Wales, Colomiers in France and Roma in Italy.

The first four matches were played in successive weeks. Gloucester kicked off in their first ever Heineken Cup game with an encouraging away win, 27-20, at Llanelli. Jason Little scored a try in only his second game for the Club, having scored two on his debut against Bristol the previous week; Andy Hazell scored another. Kicking duties were shared out between Andy Gomersall with a conversion, Simon Mannix with three penalties and Terry Fanolua with two.

The following weekend saw a try-fest against Roma at Kingsholm, with Tom Beim scoring five and Frank Schisano, in his only season with Gloucester, one. Elton Moncrieff added four penalties and two conversions, whilst Terry Fanolua again chipped in with his boot with three conversions. Roma were sent packing to the tune of 52-12.

Next came home and away games in successive weeks



Tom Beim scoring one of his six tries against Roma

against Colomiers and these severely dented Gloucester's chances of progressing. Following a 22-22 draw at Kingsholm, in which all Gloucester's points came from the boot except for a penalty try, there was defeat by 19-30 in France.

After a break of more than two months, action resumed in the New Year with the visit of Llanelli to Kingsholm. In a nerve-racking game, Gloucester looked set for an early exit from the competition, but were pressing hard on the Llanelli line at the end of the game, when Elton Moncrieff scored a dropped goal in the most bizarre of circumstances.

His kick from right under the posts had no hope of going

over until it hit one of the Llanelli players trying to charge it down, and it ballooned up over the bar. Gloucester had squeaked it 28-27.

The final game in Rome was duly won 38-29. Simon Mannix was the main contributor with eight penalties as well as converting the tries scored by Joe Ewens and Jason Little.

In somewhat fortuitous fashion, Gloucester were through to a quarter-final at home to Cardiff. They made the Kingsholm factor count. Although failing to register a try, six penalties from Simon Mannix and one from Byron Hayward were enough to secure victory 21-15. This led to an all-English semi-final.

21ST APRIL 2001
LEICESTER 19
GLouceSTER 15

Gloucester: B Hayward; R Greenslade-Jones, T Fanolua, J Little, J Simpson-Daniel; S Mannix, A Gomersall; A Deacon, O Azam, P Vickery, R Fidler, I Jones, J Boer, K Jones, J Paramore.

Leicester: G Murphy; W Stanley, L Lloyd, P Howard, T Stimpson; A Goode, A Healey; G Rowntree, D West, D Garforth, M Johnson, B Kay, W Johnson, N Back, M Corry.

Gloucester made an electric start and forced an early penalty, which Simon Mannix kicked from in front of the Leicester posts. The game was played at such a pace that it was hard to catch your breath, but Leicester turned round 16-9 ahead, having scored what proved to be the only try of the match in contentious fashion.

Leicester knocked on and the referee called advantage to Gloucester, who failed to progress before losing the ball again, but the referee failed to bring them back for the original offence as Tim Stimpson started a flowing move, finished off by Leon Lloyd scoring under the posts.

If anything the heat increased in the second half, and Junior

Paramore and Martin Johnson were sent to cool off in the sin bin after the most notable confrontation of the afternoon.

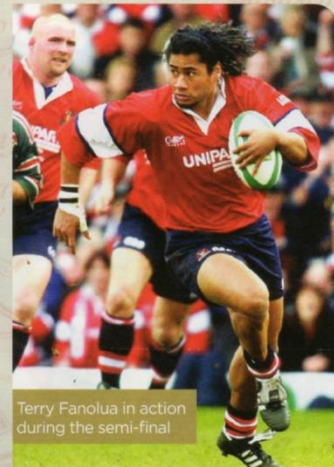
The tension could have been cut with a knife as Gloucester threw everything into a last-ditch effort. Four points behind, they kicked a penalty into touch, from which Mannix kicked to the opposite corner – no try resulted but Ian Jones somehow regained possession, only for it to be lost again and Leicester cleared to end the match.

It was a desperately close run thing, and to this day remains the closest that Gloucester has come to success in the European Cup.

EUROPEAN CHALLENGE CUP SUCCESS IN 2006

Gloucester's progress through the group stages was perhaps most remarkable for the scale of success achieved against Toulon home and away. Victory 74-3 in Toulon, still Gloucester's biggest ever away win, was followed a week later with a 66-5 triumph at Kingsholm. Gloucester scored ten tries in each match.

However, Gloucester also went into the record books with 106-3 (4 tries for Sinbad) against Steaua Bucuresti, which remains their highest team score and greatest



Terry Fanolua in action during the semi-final

margin of victory in any game. Bayonne were the other victims as Gloucester romped through with six wins in the group.

This meant a home quarter-final and Brive did not put up much of a show at Kingsholm as Gloucester ran in 7 tries as they won 46-13.

The semi-final opponents were Worcester, who had been defeated 27-16 in the league the previous week, and this proved a good guide to the form in the Cup as Gloucester ran out 31-23 winners with tries from James Simpson-Daniel, Anthony Allen and Mark Foster.

The final against London Irish at the Stoop was a dramatic affair, which went to extra time before Gloucester edged home 36-34. Gloucester were leading 18-13 at half time, thanks to tries by Mark Foster and Andy Hazell. A long range try by James Simpson-Daniel seemed to have sewn things up for Gloucester going into the last quarter.

But then Irish came roaring back and two tries (one converted) in the closing minutes levelled the scores. In extra time a penalty goal from London Irish edged them ahead but then came the moment of the match when Jamie Forrester collected his own hack through to touch down just inside the dead ball line and claim a memorable victory 36-34.



The silverware secured

PLAYER
FEATURE

BILL
MEAKES

AUSSIE RULES

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HOME ADVANTAGE IS A KEY THING, WE TAKE A LOT OF CONFIDENCE FROM PLAYING AT KINGSHOLM AND NO DOUBT EVERYONE WILL BE READY IN CHERRY AND WHITE TO CHEER US ON.



THIS TIME LAST YEAR, BILL MEAKES HAD JUST MADE HIS GLOUCESTER RUGBY PREMIERSHIP DEBUT, AND 12 MONTHS ON, HE IS NOW A HOUSEHOLD NAME AMONGST FANS OF THE CHERRY AND WHITES.

WITH aspirations for Champions Cup rugby throwing up another crucial clash this afternoon, the Cherry and White squad continues to respond to everything thrown at it. It shows how much progress has been made by the group over the course of the season, and Meakes in particular is riding the rollercoaster of professional rugby after a crazy few weeks.

After a handful of appearances last year, Meakes has laced his boots up for 22 appearances to date this campaign, and the Manly-born midfielder is loving contributing so much in a season that started with lifting the Premiership Rugby 7s title.

"I definitely feel like I've pushed on, the coaches have shown a lot of faith in me since the Sevens series and I feel like I have really moved on from that and become part of the squad this year.

"The Sevens were a great springboard, I made good use of them and made the most of the opportunities I've been handed. I think it

PLAYER FEATURE

BILL
MEAKES



has been a great year for the young boys, although some of it has come about through injury unfortunately.

"But there have been a lot of games this year in both the LV= Cup and the European Rugby Challenge Cup, that has meant the boys have been able to get a lot of game time, and that has only benefitted us massively and we've taken it with both hands and kicked on this season."

Residing in Montpellier with fellow breakthrough back Billy

Burns, Meakes is grateful for the comfort of a familiar face in helping him settle in in surroundings which are the polar opposite to the golden sands of Manly Bay.

"Living with Bill has helped me a lot, he's been at the club a long time now and he knows it inside out and he's helped me out from day one, getting to know the place, and getting to know the boys as well."

It is refreshing to discover a tale of the rise to the top level like



DID YOU KNOW?

BILL WAS ALSO CAPPED AT SEVENS LEVEL FOR AUSTRALIA AS MEAKES PARTICIPATED IN THE 2011-12 IRB SEVENS WORLD SERIES.

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WE'RE PLAYING A REALLY GOOD BRAND OF RUGBY, AND THE BOYS ARE REALLY ENJOYING BEING OUT THERE AND REFRESHED. THIS WEEK IS A MASSIVE FOCUS, AND WE CAN'T WAIT TO GET OUT THERE AND PLAY.

Meakes', and after Clifton RFC took the leap of faith to bring the centre to the UK, it has been a rapid rise from the outskirts of Bristol to Cherry and White, a fact that has the 24-year old pinching himself.

"Yeah, all the time if I'm honest. During the week, it is just normal business but when I sit down at home, I do think about how far I have come and where I am now, and I'm not ashamed to say I do pinch myself.

"I definitely do look back to Clifton, every time someone asks me how I got to here, I look back to Clifton and how good they were to me when I came over, they showed a lot of faith and supported me financially which I'm sure wasn't easy for them, but I am extremely grateful for that. I had the time of my life there and made some friends for life and had some great days and played some great rugby."

Starting in the European Rugby Challenge Cup final against Edinburgh three weeks ago, a red card dented Meakes' evening, but he is seeing the experience as another chance to learn.

"I've never sort of been in that position before, being in a final, and being sent off before, so it was a whirlwind evening. The main focus was winning the final

and I was ecstatic to be part of the team.

"To get the red card wasn't great, and looking back I will probably take that back but I was happy to be a part of it, and be part of the win.

"Something like that can be a massive learning curve, firstly receiving the red card, and then dealing with the behind the scenes that follows, and it has been a real eye opener for me. Going forward, and touch wood, it doesn't happen to me or any of the guys again, we will be much more prepared for it."

With Connacht Rugby picking up the seventh spot in the Guinness Pro12 following last weekend's fight-back against the Ospreys, Pat Lam's men travel back to Kingsholm for a second time this season in this afternoon's play off, and Meakes reveals the squad are no strangers to reacting to different opponents from different competitions.

"I don't think there will be anything unfamiliar about this play off, we are in a really good place as a team and regardless of who we are playing, we will be concentrating on us and our game.

"We're playing a really good brand of rugby, and the boys are really enjoying being out there



and refreshed. This week is a massive focus, and we can't wait to get out there and play.

"Home advantage is a key thing, we take a lot of confidence from playing at Kingsholm and no doubt everyone will be ready in Cherry and White to cheer us on."

GLOUCESTER RUGBY AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION



BOB FENTON'S

KINGSHOLM NEWS

” YOU CAN IMAGINE THE VIDEO ANALYSTS SLUMPING FORWARD, HEAD IN HANDS, AFTER SPENDING WEEKS LOOKING AT PLAYERS ONLY TO BE ASKING, ‘LEWIS WHO???’ BEFORE TRYING TO HUNT DOWN CLIPS ON YOUTUBE!

S O the other week when I wrote, ‘... see you back here in October...’, I was being a tad premature it seems. Here we are back - in the middle of May.

Normally by now most players will be thinking of jetting off to somewhere exotic for a bit of a wind-down after a long slog through the winter. Instead they are lining up for what is undoubtedly the biggest game of the season so far - yes the latest in a long line of those must win, do or die - insert cliché of choice - games.

This one though offers the chance of seat at the top table of European rugby, well nearly - if we win this one it gives us a crack at a French team to get that coveted spot. At least we know who we are playing now - welcome back Connacht. It only seems like a few weeks ago when you were here, maybe because it was!

It is an odd way to end the season though, a play off series that makes even the inscrutable LV= Cup seem completely straightforward. Let's not complain though, we're in the mix and that's all that really matters.

The importance of this game meant that we had really no option other than to give a few players a bit of a break last week, and send a very unusual looking side down



to Bath for our last Premiership match. Being a bit of a dead rubber there was little at stake other than local bragging rights.

I don't know about you but I would rather put up with a few months of gloating from some of my Bath supporting comrades and grab that European spot rather than losing a few players for whatever reason in a meaningless match.

That said, and even though we came out on the wrong end of a bit of a thumping, our young guys did reasonably well and will have gained a whole heap of experience that will stand them in good stead over the coming years.

I would have liked to have been a fly on the wall of the Bath coaching set up when they got our team sheet though. You can imagine the video analysts slumping forward, head in hands, after spending weeks looking at players only to be asking, 'Lewis who???' before trying to hunt down clips on YouTube!

A win wasn't to be though. It did make me smile when my friend Adam placed a bet on the game only to get a pop up warning that the result he had selected was - according to the site - going to be a bit of an upset. Turns out they were right, but they are clearly not used to following Gloucester - we're used to upsets both good and bad!

Back to today though... Hopefully the boys will have run off the after effects of the end of season dinner that happened last Tuesday (hopefully I will have done the same,) and will be fully focussed. To be fair, I don't think that our coaches will allow them the luxury of cruising through the week and I suspect that the training paddock wouldn't have been a pretty sight on Wednesday.

They will need to be on their metal today, because Connacht will be looking at this game through the same lens as ourselves - a chance to get into the big time. And at the same

time they will be itching to get a bit of revenge for that game back in April.

To be honest going into that game I was pretty confident that we would blow them away and be comfortably out of sight after about an hour. I couldn't have got

four points at home to Ospreys. However the bonus point they earned from that game was enough to see them edge past Edinburgh into the Pro 12 play-off place.

All to play for then. One thing we do know, though, is that if



it more wrong. Two first half tries while shutting them out seemed to be paving the way for a comfortable victory. But whatever they put in their half time tea did the trick because they absolutely ripped into us. In the end we were really clinging on. Had that game gone on for another few minutes they could well have snatched it.

They'll take great confidence from that game but at the same time I don't think our coaches will have let the lessons learned from that game slip from the memory. Like Gloucester they lost last weekend going down by

we win today the next match will definitely not take place at Kingsholm - well, not unless we want to hoof Suggs and Co from Madness out into the car park.

Let's just hope that this game is not 'One Step Beyond' us, and that by the end of the game we can say 'That's The Way To Do It' and we've not had a 'Grey Day' and a bit of an 'Embarrassment'.

Come on, Kingsholm is the 'House of Fun' and I'm looking forward to 'Driving in My Car' up to Sixways for the next must win game in a must win season... [STOP IT NOW!!! - Ed]

I'll get my coat.

IAN RANDALL'S RUGBY TALK

WE MEET AGAIN FOR THE LAST TIME AT KINGSHOLM THIS SEASON, WITH FAMILIAR OPPOSITION, CONNACHT HAVING QUALIFIED FOR THIS CHAMPIONS CUP PLAY OFF DESPITE LOSING TO GLOUCESTER IN THE CHALLENGE CUP QUARTER-FINAL LAST MONTH AND ALSO LOSING THEIR LAST GAME IN THE PRO 12 AT HOME TO OSPREYS.

I NTERESTINGLY, only nine of the starting XV here on Good Friday were involved last weekend but a leopard isn't going to significantly change its spots in seven weeks, so I think we know what Connacht's approach will be.

I felt the game at Bath last weekend was competitive but lacked any real tension, for obvious reasons. Both clubs had their eye on the week to come, but it was good to see Rob Cook back in the team after damaging his shoulder against Harlequins in November, an injury Cook openly admits was the worst of his career.

"It's hard when the boys are out on the pitch either training or playing because you create relationships there, and I didn't feel I was doing that because I wasn't doing anything towards it," he told me.

"The surgeon originally said anywhere between three and six months, so I thought it might only be three until it was emphasised



that the operation wasn't straight forward and that I needed to take it a bit easier in my rehab.

"I was probably lifting weights that were too heavy in the gym and not focussing on my technique. Once I understood that I might make more progress

by not pushing quite so hard the improvement picked up."

Cook might have been involved against London Irish - he was on standby for a place on the bench in case anyone dropped out - but that extra week rubber stamped his return to the team sheet.

"I was put through a sequence of eight tackles in eight different positions to make sure I was happy. Little things get the mind set right, like putting my scrum cap on, even though it was a training drill. Early in the week I nearly did it and when I got through it with no pain whatsoever on the Thursday I was happy I could commit to playing again."

Cook had an hour at the Rec, and I'd be surprised if he didn't start again today.

"I think it would feel a let down now if we ended up back in the Challenge Cup next year" he added. "We've got a massive opportunity - a lifeline for the season you could call it.

If we'd have won the Challenge Cup last season we would be in the Champions Cup already, but we knew the rules and we still have the chance to make something really good out of the season."

As Cook tries to help Gloucester to a memorable finish to the season, Henry Trinder's focus remains on his own long and winding road back to fitness - and his wedding next month.

Trinder has had a season from hell - his words, not mine - with just four appearances and shoulder and knee injuries to add to a lengthy list the centre has suffered in his career, and he's still only 26.

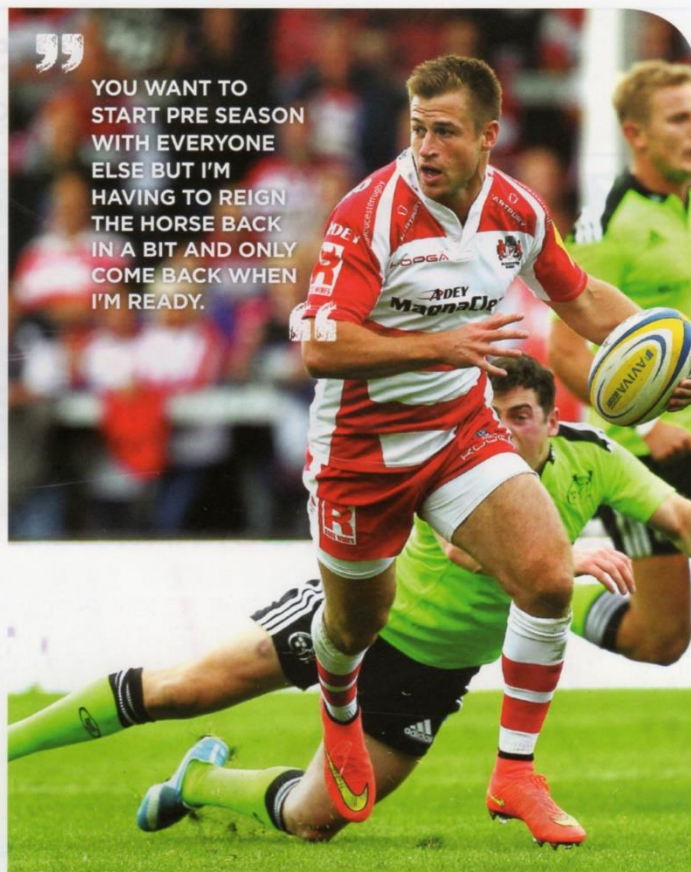
It was in February against London Welsh that his latest setback occurred, but for the moment at least things appear to be on track.

"Originally I was told it could be 12 months, but the strength and conditioning coaches are happy with the progress so I could be back a bit earlier than we first thought" said Henry.

"The new Premiership season starts seven months after the operation, so if I only missed a handful of games I'd be really happy with that. You want to start pre season with everyone else but I'm having to reign the horse back in a bit and only come back when

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YOU WANT TO START PRE SEASON WITH EVERYONE ELSE BUT I'M HAVING TO REIGN THE HORSE BACK IN A BIT AND ONLY COME BACK WHEN I'M READY.



I'm ready."

"With a major injury and a long spell out the worst thing would be for it to go again so I am taking my time. I've started doing work with very light leg weights to slowly build the structure around the knee.

"Upper body stuff I can do, along with cycling and lots of swimming, and at some point in the next few months I can look to start gentle running. I'm not at that stage yet. It's all about off feet fitness."

Henry can't be here tonight - which perhaps is just as well given what he called "emotional outbursts" when he's observing from the stands. He wouldn't be alone in those, mind you, and you can also be sure he'll know what's going on via social media. The crowd for Connacht quarter final was over 13,000, and another knockout game will draw another big crowd today.

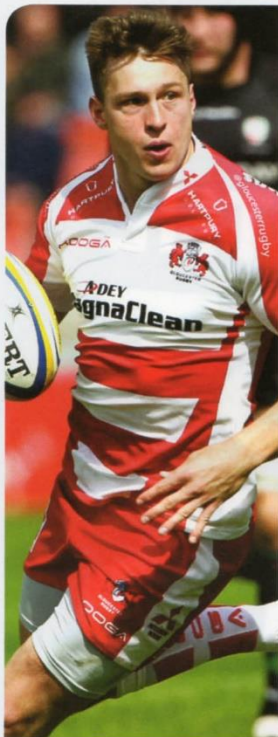
"There is a different atmosphere around the club in weeks like this" Trinder said.

"In the Premiership we got too far behind, but our performances once we got beyond the group stages in the Challenge Cup showed the grit we have and what we are about.

"Connacht have a simple game plan but they have a good structure to what they do. The sticking point sometimes when you play the same team in quick succession is whether you can get up for the match or not."

In the aftermath of the Bath defeat Laurie Fisher - who only tweets when he has something meaningful to say - remarked that he was proud of the effort but that game had too many "soft moments" for his liking.

With a more experienced side today, it's hard to imagine that being repeated.



PLAYER A to Z BRENDAN MACKEN



...is for
ATMOSPHERE...
What is the best
atmosphere you
have experienced?
Leinster v Munster
in a sold out Aviva
Stadium was
amazing

...is for best mate
...**BEST MATE** in
rugby?
Jordi Murphy, back
row with Leinster
— best pals since
we were in junior
school



...is for **CAREER...**
If you weren't a
rugby player what
would you be?
Would love to own
my own business

...is for **DRIVE...**
what car are you
driving?
VW Golf

...is for
EMBARRASSED...
most embarrassing
moment on the
field?
Having my shorts
literally pulled
down

A

B

C

D

E

M

N

O

P

Q

R

S

...is for **MATCH...**
What is the best
match you have
played in/watched?
Beating England
U20 in England
was one I'll always
remember

...is for
NICKNAME...
What's yours?
B Mac — Purds
calls me Lodger
as I'm living in his
house

...is for
OPPONENT...
Who is the best
player you have
faced up against?
Remember quite
a tough afternoon
against George
North

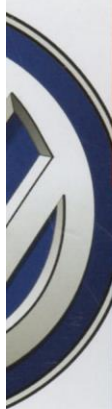
...is for **PRIDE...**
What is your
proudest moment?
Wrong Direction
welcoming me into
their own home
was rather special!

...is for
QUICKEST...
Who is the fastest
player you have
played with or
against?
Either Jonny or
Charlie — both fast!

...is for **RUN OUT
MUSIC...** what's
your tune to run
out to?
Yann has White
Stripes — Seven
Nation Army in
my head at the
moment

...is for
SUPPORT...
What teams do you
support?
My home team
Leinster, as they
were the only pro
team in my area
growing up





...is for
FASHION...
Who is the worst
dressed player in
the squad?
It's either Shane
Monahan or
Callum Braley



...is for
**GLOUCESTER
RUGBY**...best
thing about
Gloucester Rugby?
The atmosphere is
electric



...is for
HARDMAN...
Who is the
toughest opponent
you have played
against?
Ulster's Nick
Williams is fairly
hard alright



...is for **IDOL...**
Who is your
sporting idol?
Brian O'Driscoll
probably



...is for **JOKER...**
Who is the funniest
person you have
shared a dressing
room with?
Fergus McFadden
is hilarious



...is for
KINGSHOLM
...describe
Kingsholm in three
words?
Shed, Loud, Red

...is for **LIFE after
rugby...**
What are your
future plans?
Not too sure on
that just yet

F

G

H

I

J

K

L

T

U

V

W

X

Y

Z

...is for **TRY...**
What is the best
try you have ever
scored?
My first try at
home for Leinster
against Dragons
was special

...is for
UNBELIEVABLE...
Tell us something
surprising about
yourself
I'm a rising
impressionist

...is for **VISITOR...**
What is your
favourite ground to
play at?
Thomond Park
atmosphere is
unreal

...is for **WORST...**
What is the worst
thing about being
a rugby player?
Training on cold,
wet and windy
days

...is for **X-RAY...**
What is the worst
injury you have
suffered?
Shoulder
reconstruction

...is for **YOUTH...**
What advice
would you give
to aspiring rugby
players?
Enjoy yourself, and
play with a smile

...is for **ZZZ...**
Which player has
the worst banter?
Matt Kvesic ha!



ACTION REPLAY

VS LONDON IRISH

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

LINE-UP

15	FB	CHARLIE SHARPLES
14	W	JONNY MAY
13	C	BRENDAN MACKEN
12	C	BILLY TWELVETREES (C)
11	W	HENRY PURDY
10	FH	BILLY BURNS
9	SH	GREIG LAIDLAW
1	P	YANN THOMAS
2	H	RICHARD HIBBARD
3	P	SILA PUAFISI
4	L	TOM SAVAGE
5	L	MARIANO GALARZA
6	F	DANIEL THOMAS
7	F	MATT KVESIC
8	N8	GARETH EVANS

REPLACEMENTS

16	H	DARREN DAWIDIUK
17	P	NICK WOOD
18	P	SHAUN KNIGHT
19	N8	ELLIOTT STOOKE
20	L	JAMES HUDSON
21	SH	CALLUM BRALEY
22	FH	JAMES HOOK
23	FB	STEVE MCCOLL



GLOUCESTER RUGBY

35

TRIES: May (30), D. Thomas (69), Purdy (72) **CON:** Laidlaw (31) **PENS:** Laidlaw (14, 34, 43, 53, 55, 65)



LONDON IRISH

13

TRIES: Lewington (27), A. Short (80) **PEN:** Noakes (46)



LONDON IRISH

LINE-UP

15	FB	ANDY FENBY
14	W	ALEX LEWINGTON
13	C	EOIN GRIFFIN
12	C	SHANE GERAGHTY
11	W	JAMES SHORT
10	FH	CHRIS NOAKES
9	SH	TOMAS O'LEARY
1	P	TOM COURT
2	H	DAVID PAICE
3	P	RICHARD PALFRAMAN
4	L	GEORGE SKIVINGTON (C)
5	L	JEBB SINCLAIR
6	F	LUKE NARRAWAY
7	F	BLAIR COWAN
8	N8	TOM GUEST

REPLACEMENTS

16	H	JIMMY STEVENS
17	P	TOM SMALLBONE
18	P	HALANI AULIKA
19	F	DAN LEO
20	L	KIERAN LOW
21	C	CALLUM WATSON
22	SH	EAMONN SHERIDAN
23	W	ANDY SHORT

14 MAN GLOUCESTER BATTLE TO VICTORY

THE CHERRY AND WHITES MAINTAINED A POSITIVE RECORD IN ROUND 21, UNBEATEN AT KINGSHOLM SINCE THE TURN OF YEAR, AND THE VICTORY CAME ON THE BACK OF A PASSIONATE, COMMITTED AND MATURE DISPLAY AGAINST LONDON IRISH.

THE hosts had to achieve victory with just 14-men for nearly an hour, as stand out flanker Matt Kvesic was shown red, a slight blip on an otherwise top-class season from the 23-year old.

Fresh from the Challenge Cup victory the week previous, the Cherry and Whites were slow to get going, but committed defence from Brendan Macken and then Jonny May saw Irish held up and kept out on two occasions in the first few minutes.

Early on, the Exiles' scrum had the ascendancy, and after turning down kickable opportunities, this was as good as it got in that area, as a powerful turnaround gave the Cherry and Whites the platform.

Greig Laidlaw opened the scoring from the tee, before Kvesic was dismissed for a powerful tackle on the diminutive Tomas O'Leary, which went over the horizontal. Craig Maxwell-Keys brandished a red card after a chat with the TMO.

It didn't take long for the first try to come after the dismissal. Irish sharply moved the ball through the hands, and wing Alex Lewington finished off. A tough afternoon seemed to lie ahead for the hosts.

But the Cherry and Whites rolled up their sleeves and hit back quickly. Billy Burns fed a well-weighted kick through the

defence, perfect for Jonny May and despite being felled by a pair of retreating defenders, the England man picked himself up to stroll over.

Kingsholm was its typically noisy self and the hosts were now starting to set the tempo, despite the numerical disadvantage, and Premiership debutant Dan Thomas was a real nuisance to the Exiles.

The TMO was on hand to chalk off an attempt from the Cherry and Whites as the half drew to a close, deeming Greig Laidlaw's pass forward as Henry Purdy strolled over. Unfortunately for the Junior World Champion, the video evidence proved to be rather inconclusive to the bemusement of 12,900 watching on.

Up by eight points at the break, and a man down, the Cherry and Whites were perfectly happy, with a tough second half ahead. As it proved, they were streetwise and smart to more than put the game to bed.

Laidlaw added a trio of penalties, including a monster kick from halfway to extend the lead, as Chris Noakes added one for the Exiles.

The Exiles were getting on the wrong side of referee Craig Maxwell-Keys, and the penalty count was rising, allowing Laidlaw the chance to keep the scoreboard ticking.

Once he had chipped over his

sixth penalty, on came Callum Braley and the Cherry and Whites set about looking for five-pointers.

Richard Hibbard sparked a speedy break as via Nick Wood, Macken sped away and Purdy was inches away from a score in the corner from a neat offload.

Keeping the ball the Cherry and Whites then did put the game to bed with an impressive double strike.

From a rolling maul, Dan Leo was yellow carded, within seconds of coming on as a replacement, and with the numerical advantage no longer an issue, Dan Thomas finished off the rolling maul for a more than well deserved first Aviva Premiership try.

The restart was gathered, the Cherry and Whites worked the ball upfield, and great vision from Braley saw him kick, off his weaker foot, over the defence and Purdy was on hand to race away and dot down for a try that his efforts merited.

The bonus point was almost secured as Brendan Macken picked off an errant pass and ran the length, only to be called back.

The final say went to the Exiles, as on-loan Andy Short dived over in the corner as the defenders ran out, but it was mere consolation and the Cherry and Whites could toast a strong performance and end to the home domestic fixtures.

CHAMPAGNE MOMENT



Callum Braley's vision was to the fore as he spotted space behind the Irish defence, and his kick was perfectly placed for Henry Purdy to score.

ACTION REPLAY

VS
BATH
RUGBY

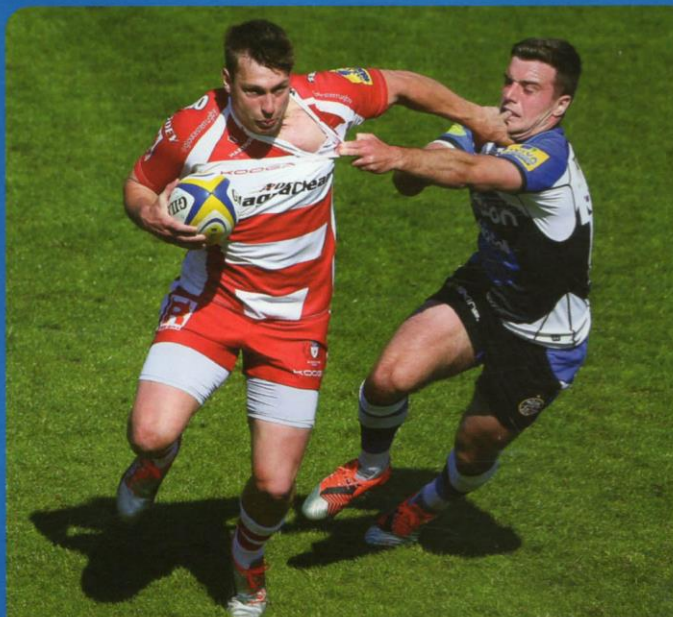
BATH RUGBY

LINE-UP

15	FB	ANTHONY WATSON
14	W	SEMESA ROKODUGUNI
13	C	OLLIE DEVOTO
12	C	KYLE EASTMOND
11	W	MATT BANAHAN
10	FH	GEORGE FORD
9	SH	PETER STRINGER
1	P	PAUL JAMES
2	H	ROB WEBBER
3	P	DAVID WILSON
4	L	DAVE ATTWOOD
5	L	DOM DAY
6	F	SAM BURGESS
7	F	FRANCOIS LOUW (C)
8	N8	LEROY HOUSTON

REPLACEMENTS

16	H	ROSS BATTY
17	P	NICK AUTERAC
18	P	HENRY THOMAS
19	L	MATT GARVEY
20	F	CARL FEARNES
21	SH	CHRIS COOK
22	W	HORACIO AGULLA
23	FH	TOM HOMER



BATH RUGBY

50

TRIES: Eastmond (9), Ford (14), Burgess (28), Devoto (56), Watson (63), Rokoduguni (70), Agulla (79)

CONS: Ford (10, 15, 30, 57), Homer (71, 80) **PEN:** Ford (46)



GLOUCESTER RUGBY

30

TRIES: D. Thomas (3), McColl (39, 59), Robson (77) **CONS:** A. Thomas (60, 78) **PENS:** A. Thomas (24, 43)



GLOUCESTER RUGBY

LINE-UP

15	FB	ROB COOK
14	W	STEPH REYNOLDS
13	C	HENRY PURDY
12	C	BRENDAN MACKEN
11	W	STEVE M'COLL
10	FH	ALED THOMAS
9	SH	CALLUM BRALEY
1	P	NICK WOOD (C)
2	H	ALEKI LUTUI
3	P	SHAUN KNIGHT
4	L	TOM HICKS
5	L	JAMES HUDSON
6	F	ELLIOTT STOOKE
7	F	DANIEL THOMAS
8	N8	LEWIS LUDLOW

REPLACEMENTS

16	H	DARREN DAWIDIUK
17	P	JAMES GIBBONS
18	P	YANN THOMAS
19	L	SAM UNDERHILL
20	N8	JACOB ROWAN
21	SH	DAN ROBSON
22	FB	LLOYD EVANS
23	C	MARK ATKINSON

GALLANT GLOUCESTER FIND NO DISGRACE IN DEFEAT

THE CHERRY AND WHITES' AVIVA PREMIERSHIP SEASON ENDED WITH AN ENTERTAINING DEFEAT AWAY AT LOCAL RIVALS BATH IN ROUND 22.

WITH the European Rugby Play offs on the horizon, the Cherry and Whites had bigger fish to fry, but were in no way disgraced as a young side went toe to toe with the title chasing hosts.

Bath went full metal jacket with their squad, whereas the Cherry and Whites handed Premiership debuts to three, with eight Academy members in the

throws, led to first Kyle Eastmond and then George Ford scores as the loose ball created confusion in the makeshift visiting defence.

The home pack was flexing its muscle and dominating the scrum battle, but the Cherry and Whites were fierce and committed at the breakdown, with back rowers Ludlow, Stooke and Thomas refusing to take a backward step against their international opponents

” THE POSITIVES DEFINITELY OUTWEIGHED THE NEGATIVES. WE CONCEDED 50 POINTS BUT AT THE SAME TIME OUR YOUNGER PLAYERS WILL BENEFIT FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF PLAYING HERE AT SUCH AN INTIMIDATING VENUE. **David Humphreys**

matchday 23.

The visitors wanted to issue an early shock, get Bath under their own posts, and they did just that. Quick ball set the returning Rob Cook away, his pass allowed Brendan Macken to race forward without breaking stride, who in turn fed Steph Reynolds.

The speedster then fed his pass through the eye of a needle for Lewis Ludlow to collect and race away, and although he was scragged down inches short, Dan Thomas was on hand to ground the ball. Shock indeed at a strangely subdued Rec.

There was polite applause as the hosts crossed for two tries from similar routes. The Cherry and Whites were disrupting the home line out, but two scrappy

Louw, Houston and Burgess.

Aled Thomas chipped over a penalty, before Sam Burgess barged over from close range as George Ford smartly dummied a quick tap.

Gloucester did have the final word of the half. Henry Purdy glided his way through the Bath defence and fed Steve McColl to canter over despite the attentions of Peter Stringer. Thomas failed to convert, but the Cherry and Whites were well in the game.

Thomas reduced the deficit to five with a well-struck penalty, before Ford replied with a three-pointer of his own as the hosts emptied their powerful bench.

Nick Wood was then sinbinned on the hour mark as the scrum battle intensified, and Ollie Devoto

CHAMPAGNE MOMENT



There looked to be little on for Henry Purdy when he received the ball just inside the Bath 10 metre line. However, the centre stepped past Kyle Eastmond and then set off on an arcing run, evading a couple of tacklers before offloading perfectly for Steve McColl to score.

capitalised on the numerical advantage to fall over the whitewash.

The game was opening up, and both sides were giving it everything. Aled Thomas picked off a loose ball and then via Purdy and Stooke, McColl raced through a hole for his second, and Gloucester's third.

The game had a typical end of season feel about it, as the two sides traded possession and territory in the final quarter.

Anthony Watson, who had a quiet game at full back, picked off a loose ball to dot down, and Semesa Rokoduguni coasted through an unguarded ruck to put the result beyond doubt. Both scores had an element of good fortune about them.

To their credit, the young Cherry and Whites, who at this point had handed debuts to Lloyd Evans and Sam Underhill, didn't throw in the towel, and picked up a well deserved bonus point when Dan Robson scooted round the fringes to go over untouched.

The scoring ended when Bath responded through Horacio Agulla to bring up a flattering half century of points, but in hindsight, the Cherry and Whites had got through the game unscathed and could turn full focus to today's play off with Connacht.

TODAY'S TEAMS

GLOUCESTER RUGBY vs CONNACHT RUGBY

REFEREE: Romain Poite (FRA) ASSISTANTS: Cyril Lafon (FFR) and Adrien Descottes (FFR)

TEAMS CORRECT AT TIME OF PRINT

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CHARLIE **SHARPLES**

FULL-BACK

JONNY **MAY**

RIGHT WING

BILL **MEAKES**

OUTSIDE CENTRE

BILLY **TWELVETREES** (C)

INSIDE CENTRE

HENRY **PURDY**

LEFT WING

JAMES **HOOK**

FLY-HALF

GREIG **LAIDLAW**

SCRUM-HALF

NICK **WOOD**

LOOSEHEAD PROP

RICHARD **HIBBARD**

HOOKER

JOHN **AFOA**

TIGHTHEAD PROP

TOM **SAVAGE**

LOCK

TOM **PALMER**

LOCK

JACOB **ROWAN**

BLINDSIDE FLANKER

DAN **THOMAS**

OPENSIDE FLANKER

ROSS **MORIARTY**

NUMBER EIGHT

DARREN **DAWIDIUK**

REPLACEMENT 1

YANN **THOMAS**

REPLACEMENT 2

SHAUN **KNIGHT**

REPLACEMENT 3

ELLIOTT **STOOKE**

REPLACEMENT 4

LEWIS **LUDLOW**

REPLACEMENT 5

DAN **ROBSON**

REPLACEMENT 6

BILLY **BURNS**

REPLACEMENT 7

ROB **COOK**

REPLACEMENT 8

15

14

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23

TIERNAN **O'HALLORAN**

FULL-BACK

FIONN **CARR**

RIGHT WING

ROBBIE **HENSHAW**

OUTSIDE CENTRE

BUNDEE **AKI**

INSIDE CENTRE

MATT **HEALY**

LEFT WING

JACK **CARTY**

FLY-HALF

KIERAN **MARMION**

SCRUM-HALF

DENIS **BUCKLEY**

LOOSEHEAD PROP

TOM **M'CARTNEY**

HOOKER

RODNEY **AH YOU**

TIGHTHEAD PROP

ANDREW **BROWNE**

LOCK

ALY **MULDOWNEY**

LOCK

JOHN **MULDOON** (C)

BLINDSIDE FLANKER

EOGHAN **MASTERSON**

OPENSIDE FLANKER

EOIN **M'KEON**

NUMBER EIGHT

DAVE **HEFFERNAN**

REPLACEMENT 1

JP **COONEY**

REPLACEMENT 2

FINLAY **BEALHAM**

REPLACEMENT 3

ULTAN **DILLANE**

REPLACEMENT 4

GEORGE **NAOUPU**

REPLACEMENT 5

JOHN **COONEY**

REPLACEMENT 6

CONOR **M'KEON**

REPLACEMENT 7

SHANE **O'LEARY**

REPLACEMENT 8

TPCD

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