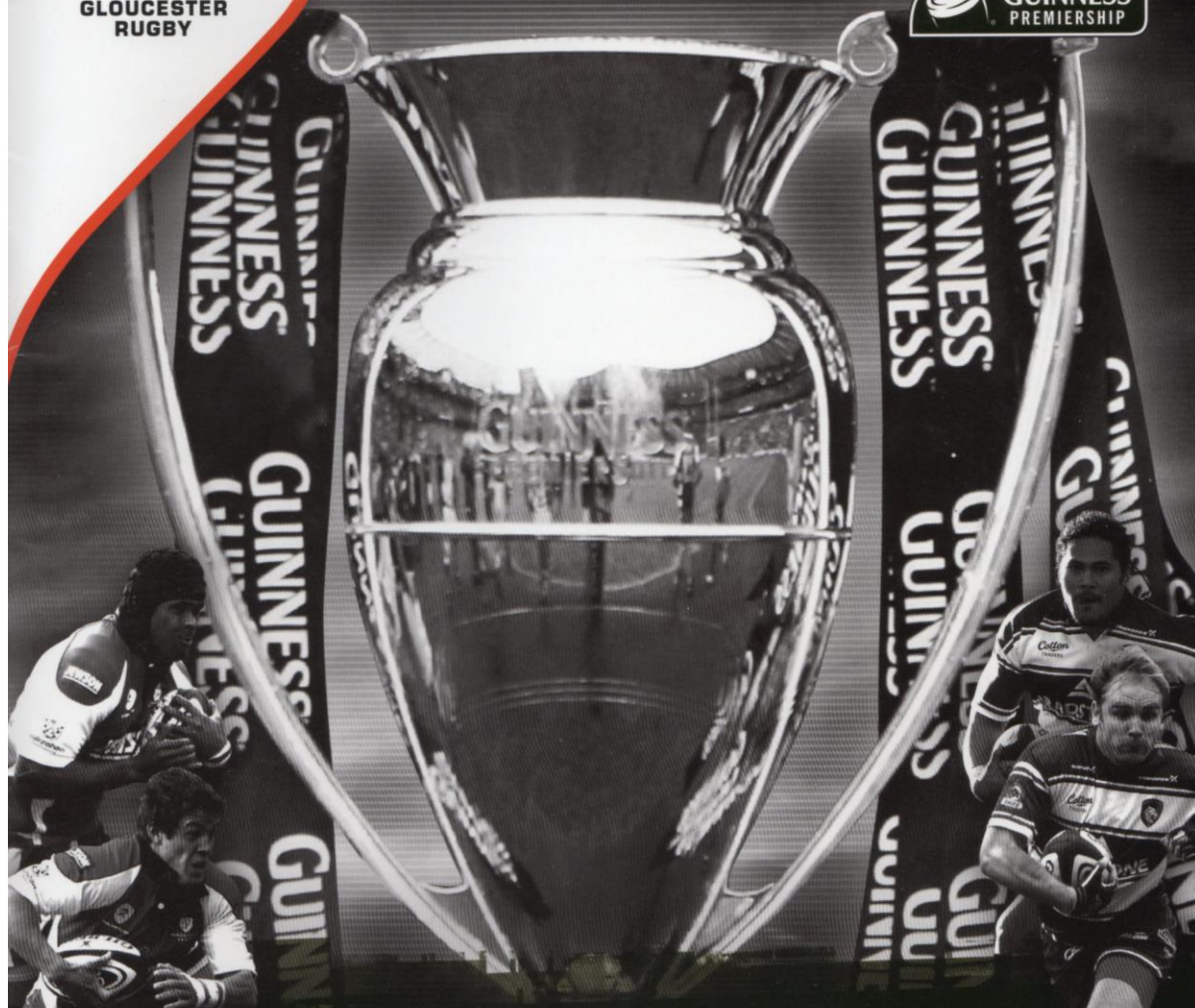




**GLOUCESTER
RUGBY**

The Official Programme
of Gloucester Rugby

Issue 17 • £3.00



GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP SEMI-FINAL

May 18th 2008 KO 4.30pm Gloucester Rugby V Leicester Tigers

Club Sponsor



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The Guinness Premiership Final



CAPTAIN'S CORNER

Gloucester's victory over Bath last weekend means they go into today's semi-final in good spirits as skipper Marco Bortolami reveals.

▶ WE ACHIEVED what we set out to do last September – finish top of the Guinness Premiership table last weekend.

There is no prize at stake, just the satisfaction and knowledge that over a gruelling 22-game season and all the vagaries that we face, we have been the most consistent, durable and best side in the country.

We can be very proud of our achievement and over the last month or so we have started to answer some of the critics who suggested we lacked the stomach for the big occasion.

It was very important that we back up our victory over Wasps against Bath and if anything Saturday's contest was even more intense, even more physical and even more unrelenting. I have not experienced a club game in the Premiership of that magnitude before and

our defensive effort and concentration levels were outstanding.

Today we head into the play-offs and no matter what happens I am convinced we are a better side now than we were last season. The development is a gradual process but we are beginning to see real returns for the investment we have made in some of the brightest talents in the country and it is vital that continues.

Knockout rugby is a totally different animal and we are playing a team today who have made it an art form in recent seasons. But we are now operating at levels that means we are more than capable of beating any team in the country provided we maintain the foundations of our game in place.

Leicester are an outstanding team and their threat is

obvious. They have already won at Kingsholm this season so it will not hold any fears for them and it will be up to us to re-create the same atmosphere, desire and sheer willingness to win as we did last weekend.

The atmosphere last Saturday was the best of the season – it was as intense as the rugby

itself. We are one game away from Twickenham and another final appearance so please, re-create the same noise levels today and help us into that final.

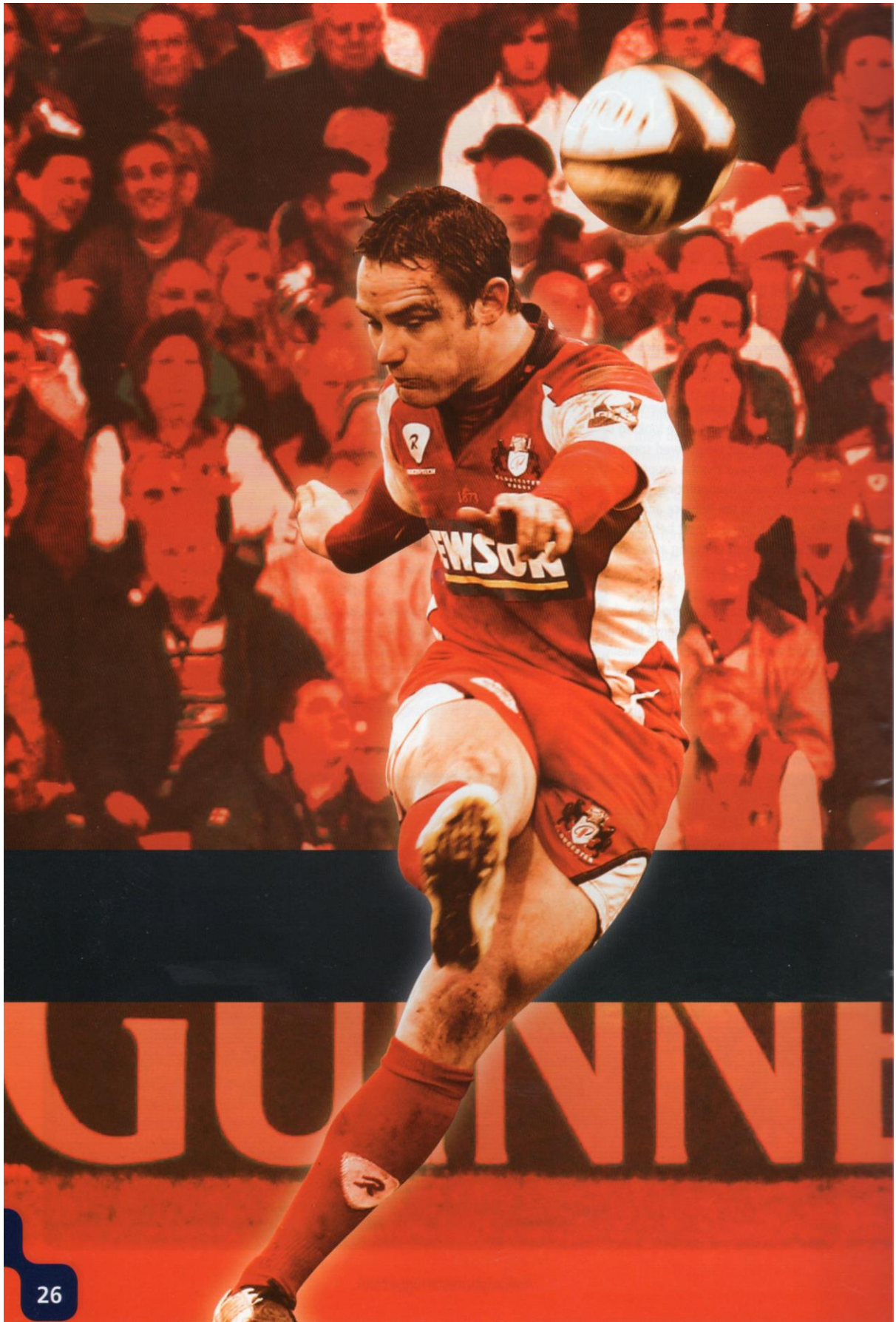


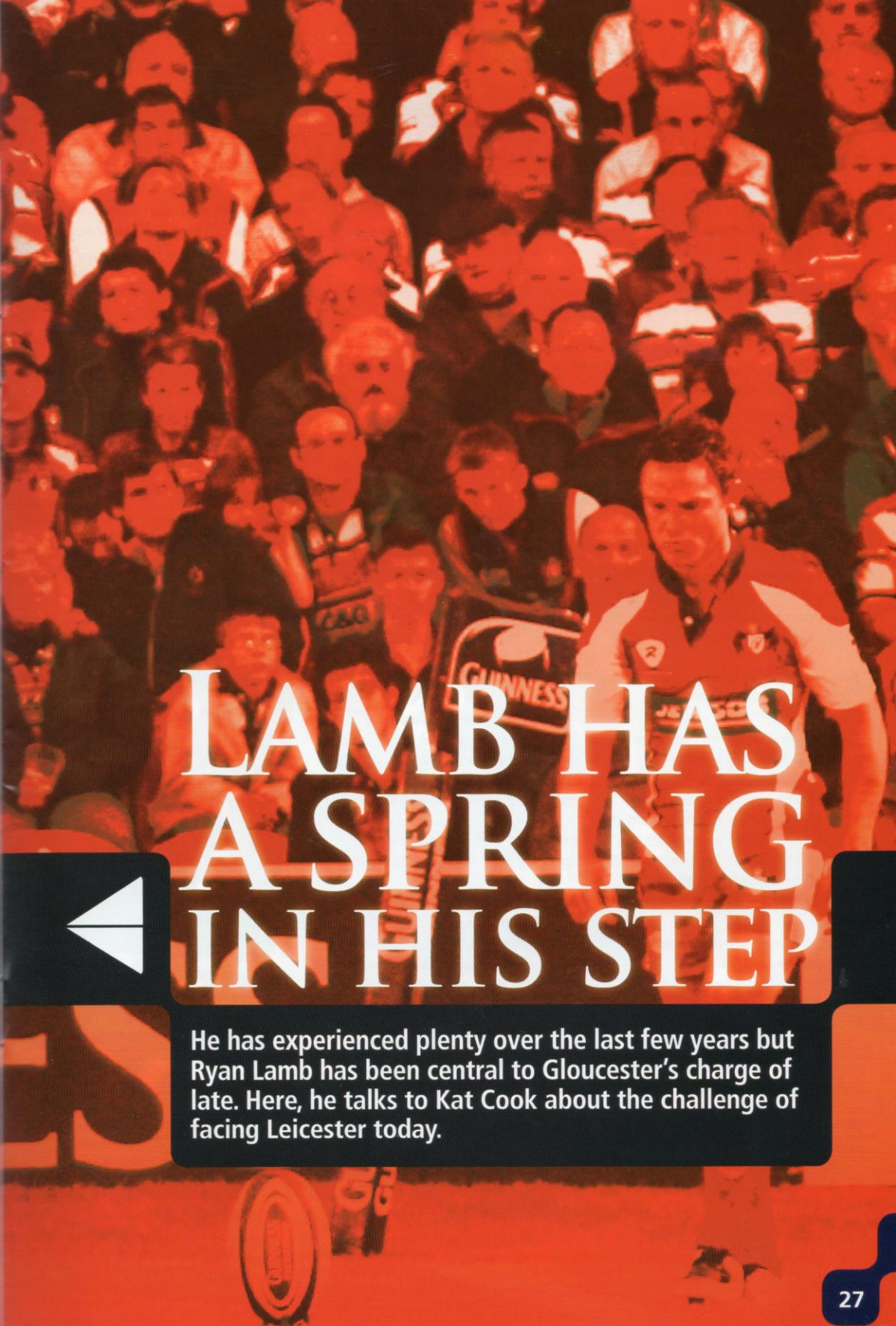
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LAMB HAS A SPRING IN HIS STEP

He has experienced plenty over the last few years but Ryan Lamb has been central to Gloucester's charge of late. Here, he talks to Kat Cook about the challenge of facing Leicester today.

LAMB HAS A SPRING IN HIS STEP

WITH HIS luxuriously gifted game-breaking skills, needle-sharp distributional game and more than a touch of mischief about him, Ryan Lamb has been through a fair bit since he burst onto the scene almost three seasons ago.

If he was not shredding Guinness Premiership defences he was being castigated because of his perceived lack of size but as Gloucester set their sights on a second successive Guinness Premiership final, Lamb is in rude good health.

Since Gloucester's victory away to Wasps a fortnight ago, a new wave of confidence has washed through the squad and Lamb's involvement against Leicester this afternoon – the side who dished out one of his more uncomfortable memories at Twickenham last season - will be crucial.

But Lamb begins by looking back a stage further.

"We had a good Heineken Cup, to start off with, and we had a great group stage within that," said the 22-year-old. "We had a bit of a blip mid-season but obviously the Wasps win away was a huge achievement and then we beat Bath last week to secure a home semi-final play-off, and that has boosted our confidence ahead of the game today."

Lamb has been central to Gloucester's cause this season – mixing his wonderfully effective passing skills with an additional physicality level. It was to Gloucester's great credit last week that even without Mike Tindall – easily one of their most physical backs – they stood up physically and Lamb played his part.

With eight tries to his name – with the interception his trademark – Lamb has helped steer Gloucester into today's knockout contest against the Tigers.

"I think our running game is a massive

threat," he said. "We've got a really mobile front five, so, if we can get good, quick ball over the game line and get our big runners going to midfield then I'm sure we can cause any team problems.

"Leicester have got a very physical, strong pack. They carry the ball very well and latch on, so I think in the contact area we're going to have to be very strong, the back fives are going to have to do massive work again, the same as they did against Wasps and Bath.

"It is up to us to win the physical battle in the first 20 minutes and then try and play off the back of that."

Lamb has played over 22 games this season and notched up 234 points and he added: "The lads are feeling pretty confident, but a bit battered and bruised. We've got a few little injuries but I'm sure they'll be okay for today.

"The big turning point was the away game against Wasps. I think it put a lot of belief into the squad that we can step-up and compete in these sort of high-profile matches and, potentially, win. Everyone has a lot of confidence meeting Leicester today due to our form of late and that they've not been very successful recently."

At the end of Gloucester's draining 8-6 win over Bath last Saturday Lamb was awarded Young Player of the Season as voted for by the season ticket holders and was this week named in the England Saxons squad for their summer tour.

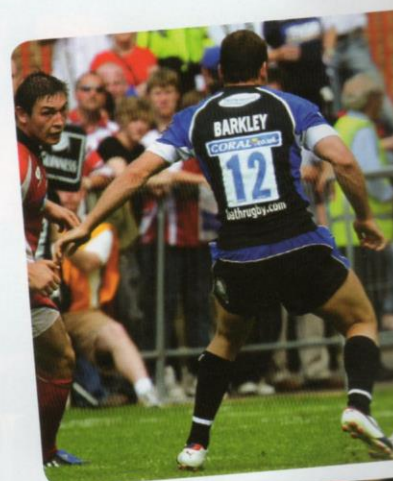
"I felt very honoured to be awarded Young Player of the Season, it was a massive surprise. But, I think this year has been a huge team effort, more than working on an individual basis. The pack give me a great platform to work off, they've given me a lot of options and more often than not I pick the right one and I'm pretty happy with that.

"It's brilliant to be recognised by the fans

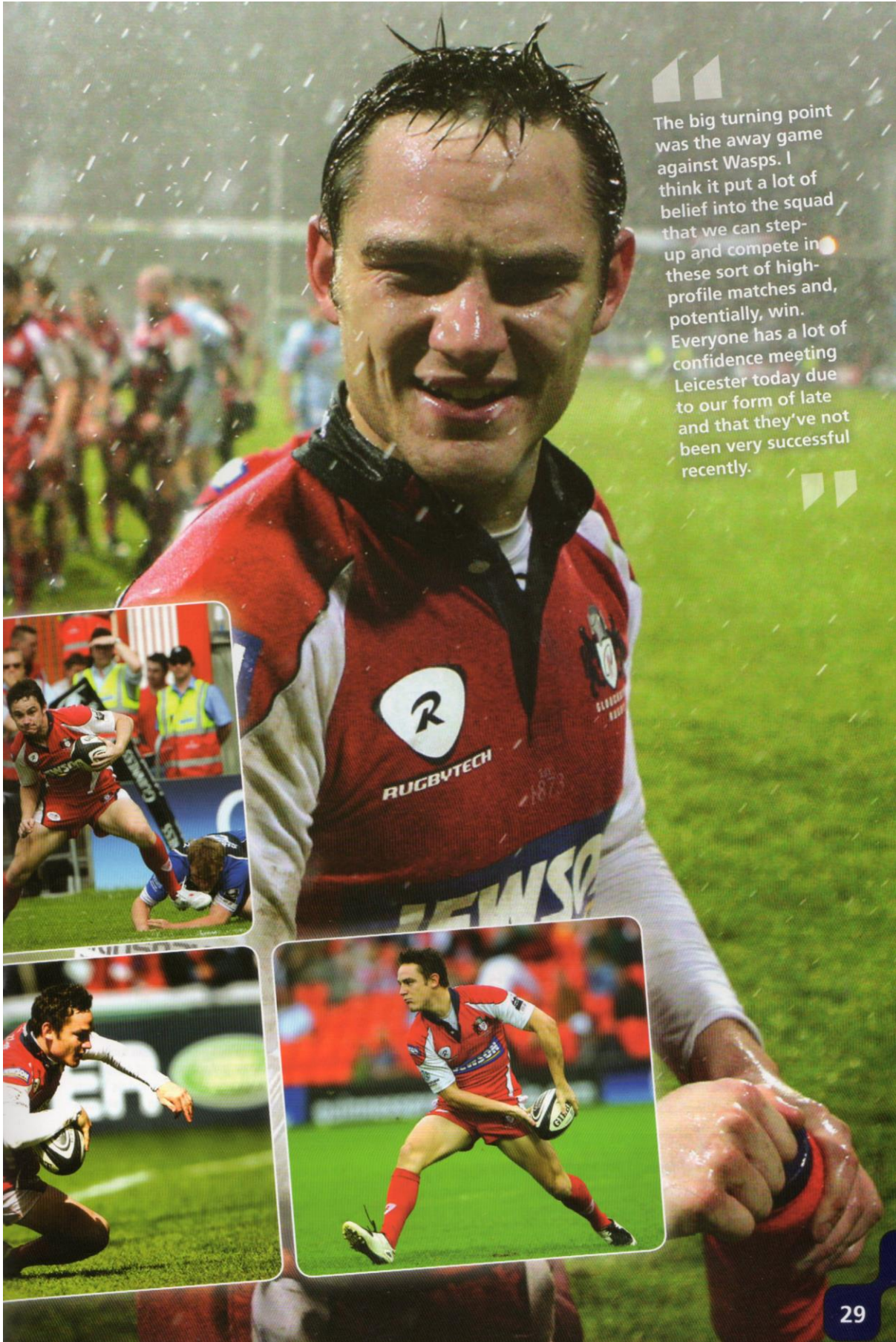
and shows that you've had a good season, and hopefully I'll be able to carry it on for more years to come.

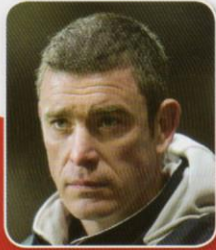
"I think that we've made a statement over the last two years that we want to be one of the best clubs in Europe. We are still at the development stage, building a new stand and attracting a lot more people coming in to the club. With the new signings made over last summer and this summer, we are heading in the right direction.

"We want to be up there at the top with the best teams in Europe and hopefully over the next few years we can carry on working towards that, I see a bright future for the club and I hope I can be involved in it."



“ The big turning point was the away game against Wasps. I think it put a lot of belief into the squad that we can step-up and compete in these sort of high-profile matches and, potentially, win. Everyone has a lot of confidence meeting to Leicester today due to our form of late and that they've not been very successful recently. ”





RYAN'S REVIEW

He watched his side beat Bath last weekend and now Dean Ryan has his sights on Leicester.



You completed the nine month job last weekend with victory over Bath. How satisfying was that achievement?

DR: It was a special feeling to know after eight or nine months we have been the most consistent team in the Guinness Premiership and we can take a lot of satisfaction from that because it continues our development.

For the second year in succession we have finished top of the table after the regular season and that shows we are capable of producing a high consistency level, are durable and competitive across a season that is never settled because of outside demands placed in the squad by international call—ups and injuries.

Last Saturday we didn't just want to get a home semi-final we wanted to be number one at the top of the league and so did Bath. It is very important we can maintain that level of competitiveness because

it will only improve our players. We are trying to build a squad that can compete long-term in the Premiership and finishing top emphasises that. I was really pleased for everyone involved and we need to build on it.



The Bath game was one of the most intense of the season, is it hard to back those performances up week after week?

DR: If you want to be successful then you have no choice. When you are playing high-end knockout rugby then the physicality

and intensity levels do increase and like any other side at this stage of the season, we have been bumped around.

Last weekend our defensive qualities and sheer willingness to get up and get to the next tackle was a huge credit. We understood and appreciated where Bath would look to be a threat and that meant certain individuals were tasked to do specific jobs to prevent that happening. It was an enormous strain physically on players and the heat played a significant part but our energy levels, composure and decision making were very good.



We are trying to build a squad that can compete long-term in the Premiership and finishing top emphasises that. I was really pleased for everyone involved and we need to build on it.



Rory Lawson



Delve & Bortolami tackle Higgins

In games like the small margins make the difference. We scored a very good try and it was a hugely disciplined effort afterwards to take top spot.



Could we be in a better mindset going into the play-offs?

DR: WE are confident and have managed to identify different styles we need to be successful over the last month. I have never deviated from the fact I believe in where this group is heading in the long-term and although we are not there yet, we are making real progress.

The away win at Wasps was significant and we backed it up last weekend. We have been exposed to high-level knockout rugby already this season and learnt and understood a great deal about ourselves and where we need to get to.

That will be tested for as long as we are involved in the latter stages of the

competition. But we are more than prepared and just need to maintain what has made us successful.



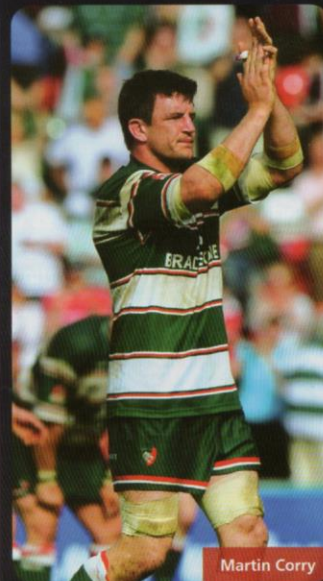
Leicester are the visitors today, did that surprise you?

DR: NO, not at all. The play-off situation was so tight last weekend that any number of teams could have qualified. There may have been other teams favourite to qualify but it is impossible to look past a squad of Leicester's quality and competitiveness.

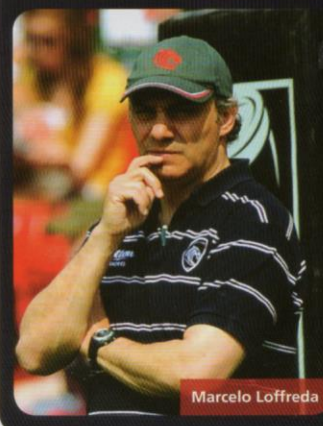
They have already been to Kingsholm and won this season and some very good teams have not been able to do that so it emphasises their threat. Teams like them come into their own during these stages of the season and as a result we will know what to expect from them.

It is up to us to produce a performance and if we can do that then I am sure we can match anyone left in the competition.

The play-off situation was so tight last weekend that any number of teams could have qualified. There may have been other teams favourite to qualify but it is impossible to look past a squad of Leicester's quality and competitiveness.



Martin Corry



Marcelo Loffreda

TODAY'S TEAMS







Sunday 18th May 2008 4.30pm

Gloucester Rugby
v Leicester Tigers

















Gloucester RUGBY  25

Leicester TIGERS  26

	Iain BALSCHAW	15	Full Back	15	Geordan MURPHY	
	James SIMPSON-DANIEL	14	Right Wing	14	Tom VARDELL	
	Mike TINDALL	13	Centre	13	Dan HIPKISS	
	Anthony ALLEN	12	Centre	12	Aaron MAUGER	
	Lesley VAINIKOLO	11	Left Wing	11	Johne MURPHY	
	Ryan LAMB	10	Fly Half	10	Andy GOODE	
	Rory LAWSON	9	Scrum Half	9	Harry ELLIS	
	Nick WOOD	1	Prop	1	Boris STANKOVICH	
	Andy TITTERRELL	2	Hooker	2	Mefin DAVIES	
	Carlos NIETO	3	Prop	3	Julian WHITE	
	Marco BORTOLAMI ©	4	Lock	4	Marco WENTZEL	
	Alex BROWN	5	Lock	5	Ben KAY	
	Alasdair STROKOSCH	6	Flanker	6	Martin CORRY ©	
	Akapusi QERA	7	Flanker	7	Ben HERRING	
	Gareth DELVE	8	No 8	8	Jordan CRANE	

Replacements

	Olivier AZAM	16		16	George CHUTER	
	Alasdair DICKINSON	17		17	Marcos AYERZA	
	Will JAMES	18		18	Richard BLAZE	
	Luke NARRAWAY	19		19	Tom CROFT	
	Gareth COOPER	20		20	Christophe LAUSSUCQ	
	Willie WALKER	21		21	Sam VESTY	
	Mark FOSTER	22		22	Ayoola ERINLE	



HEAD COACH
Dean RYAN



HEAD COACH
Marcelo LOFFREDA

BUILDING WORK CONTINUES ON AND OFF THE FIELD

BBC Radio Gloucestershire's Ian Randall has watched all his rugby away from Kingsholm this season but believes the building blocks are in place for Dean Ryan and Gloucester.

▶ TWELVE months ago Kingsholm was a building site. The old stand had gone, only three sides of the ground were open for the play-off against Saracens, and Gloucester ran up 50 points, with Luke Narryway's infamous bird celebration after scoring his try. The Twickenham finale was disappointingly one sided.

A year on, and all my Gloucester rugby this season has been watched away from Kingsholm. I've left the commentary box seats to my colleague Andrew Pugh and our summariser Simon Devereux, who has been as committed behind the microphone as he was on the field. We know from the thousands that listen on line that our internet commentaries are seen as a valuable service, and if you've followed the events at Watford, Belfast and Swansea (amongst others) via your computer, you'll know the away games

this season have been a broad church.

Lesley Vainikolo's debut at Leeds could hardly have been more dramatic: Ryan Lamb's penchant for interception tries started at Saracens, and the win at Welford Road included some heartfelt support for Leon Lloyd from the Tigers regulars. The first 20 minutes in Belfast was probably as clinical as anything Gloucester produced all season, although the win at Wasps earlier this month was probably the most pleasing, given the history, the opposition, and the occasion.

In between, not all went well. Luke Narryway's angled run to create Andy Titterrell's late try in Bourgoin stands out, as does the rain which dominated the night. It was wet too at the Rec – farcically so really – and the Liberty Stadium wasn't a happy place after the demolition by the Ospreys. At

Worcester, where again Lesley Vainikolo demonstrated his power by running through Marcel Garvey to score, the Warriors proved however much in control you think you are, the scoreboard must back that up.

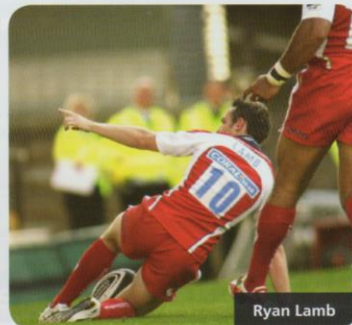
I was just glad that another narrow lead, against Bath last week, was retained at full time.

In terms of individuals, two bits of business really stand out. Alasdair Strokosch and Akapusi Qera arrived with potential that was difficult to quantify, but both have developed to such a degree that stalwarts Peter Buxton and Andy Hazell can't get in.

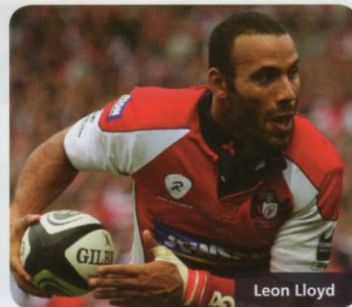
Strokosch's appetite for a tackle is insatiable, and Qera's nomination for Premiership Player of the Year (along with James Simpson-Daniel) was well deserved. "JSD" continues to show his



Lesley Vainikolo



Ryan Lamb



Leon Lloyd

best form in a Gloucester shirt, and he remains someone who can create from anywhere because of his great balance and acceleration.

As for today, Tigers come here after a season unlike any other I can remember. The stability you associate with the club

appeared flaky with talk of Jake White succeeding Marcelo Loffreda until Peter Wheeler's very public support for the former Argentina coach.

Non qualification for the Heineken Cup would surely not have been acceptable for a club of Leicester's standing,

but they have made it and the key positions in the team still have good players – Murphy, Hipkiss, Ellis, Kay and Corry aren't a bad quintet. Fortunately, Gloucester has home advantage – which means once again I'm not here. I enjoy the away trips – but next year, I must organise things differently.



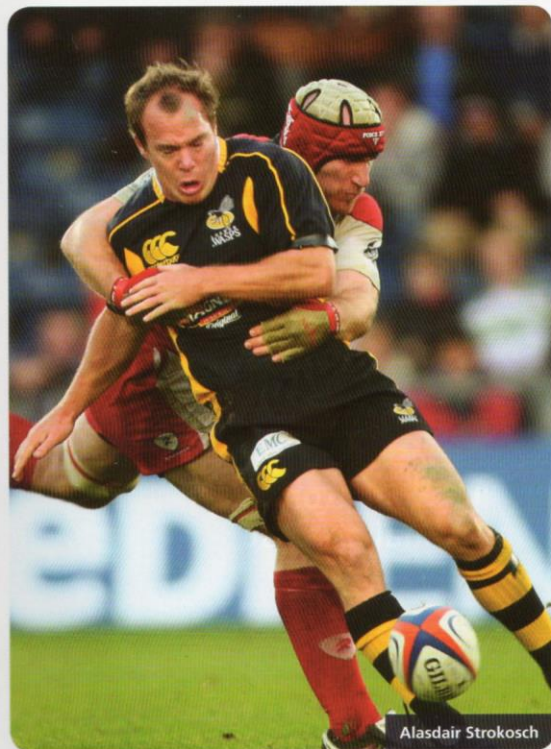
Andy Titterrell



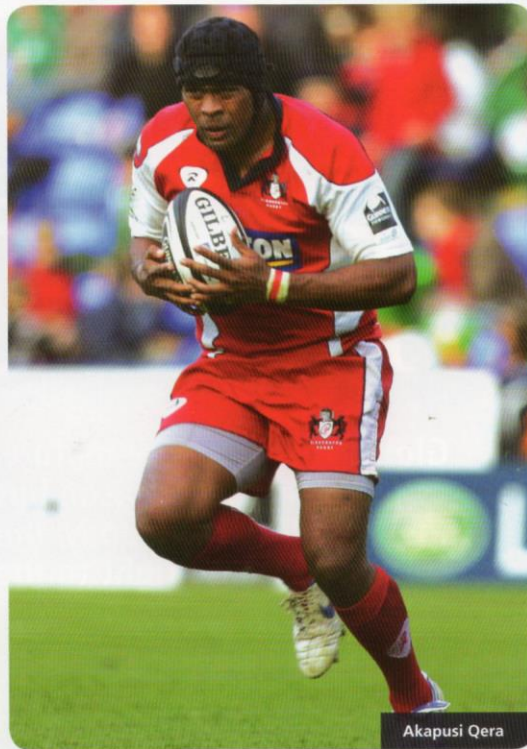
Lesley Vainikolo



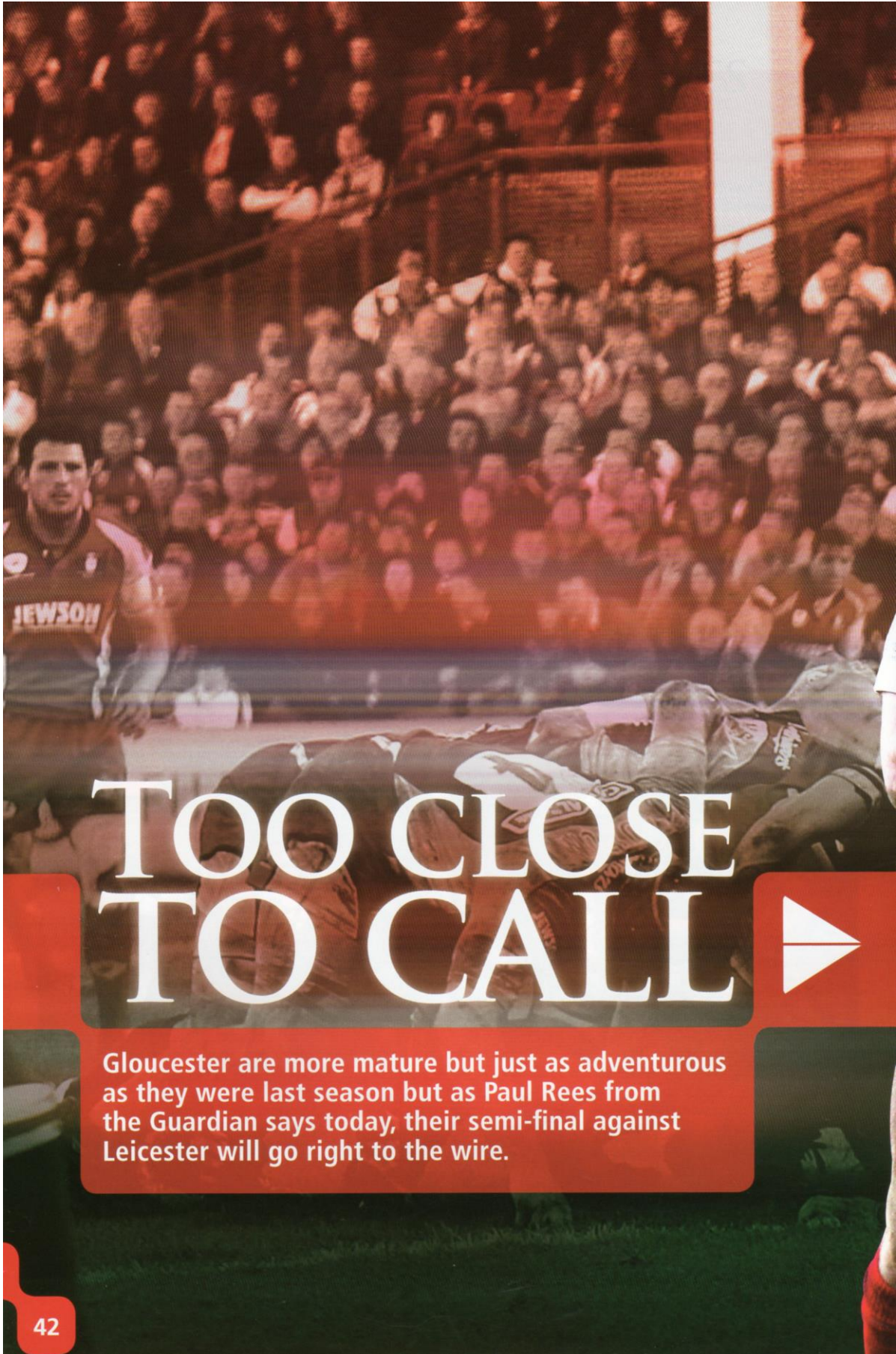
James Simpson-Daniel



Alasdair Strokosch



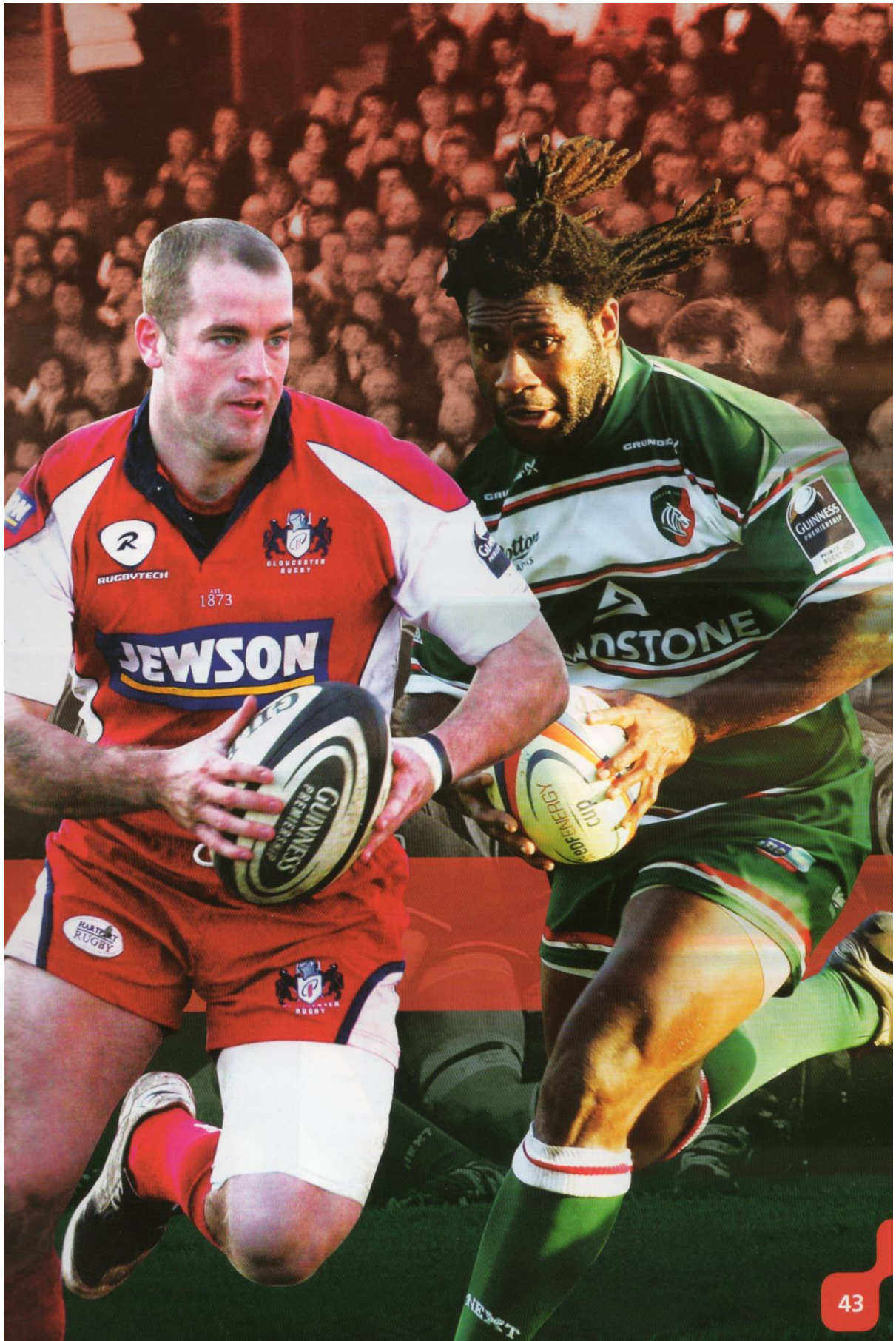
Akapusi Qera



TOO CLOSE TO CALL



Gloucester are more mature but just as adventurous as they were last season but as Paul Rees from the Guardian says today, their semi-final against Leicester will go right to the wire.



TOO CLOSE TO CALL

▶ A REPEAT of last year's Guinness Premiership final this afternoon looked highly improbable as the final round of matches in the regular season entered the final quarter last Saturday. Leicester, the champions, were effectively seventh in the table and out of the Heineken Cup reckoning as they trailed Harlequins by 11 points.

The Tigers, by their own admission, have been inconsistent this season and they were two-tone against Quins, moments of brilliance punctuated by bouts of carelessness. Leicester's success in the professional era has been down in no small measure to their organisation, their ability to play to their strengths and to minimise their weaknesses, but they appear to be caught between what they were and what they now aspire to be.

What they have not lost is their bloody-mindedness and refusal to capitulate. Like England in last year's World Cup, they are never more dangerous than when their backs are to the wall or they are written off. Gloucester will be the favourites today, not least because no away side has yet won a play-off semi-final, but Leicester have already prevailed at Kingsholm this year and they are not ones to be worried about trends.

It is five years since Gloucester finished runaway leaders of the Premiership only for Wasps to be crowned champions after winning the first play-off final. While the sense of injustice then was not just confined to Kingsholm, the system has now become more accepted, even if Gloucester's match against Bath last weekend would have provided a fitting finale to the campaign with the winner taking the title.

The play-off system turns a league campaign into a cup competition, a marathon turning into a sprint finish. Its

main draw is that clubs who provide a number of international players in the November and Six Nations windows are not unduly penalised; it is a more accurate way of determining the best side in the country and there is little to choose between the four semi-finalists, while three sides who missed out, Sale, Harlequins and London Irish, would not have lowered the standard.

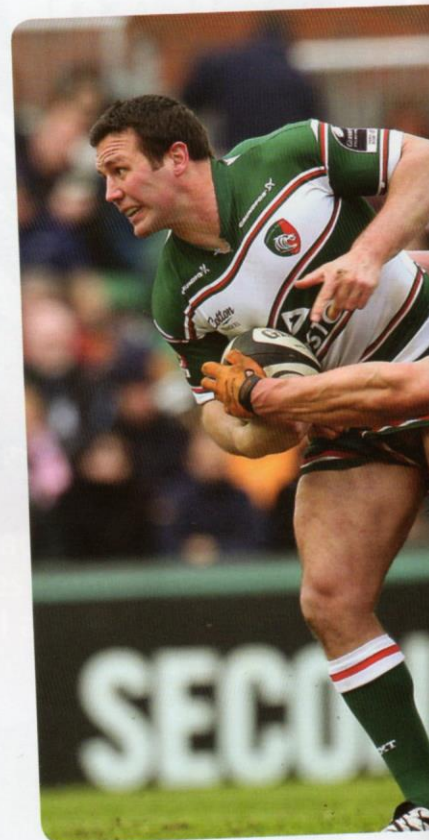
It has been a Premiership campaign to remember. Gloucester have led the way for most of the campaign, their cutting edge behind augmented by back row riches. Bath have been transformed from route one maulers to a team which off-loads more effectively than the All Blacks, while Wasps were transformed after their players returned from the World Cup, losing only one match in the second-half of the league campaign.

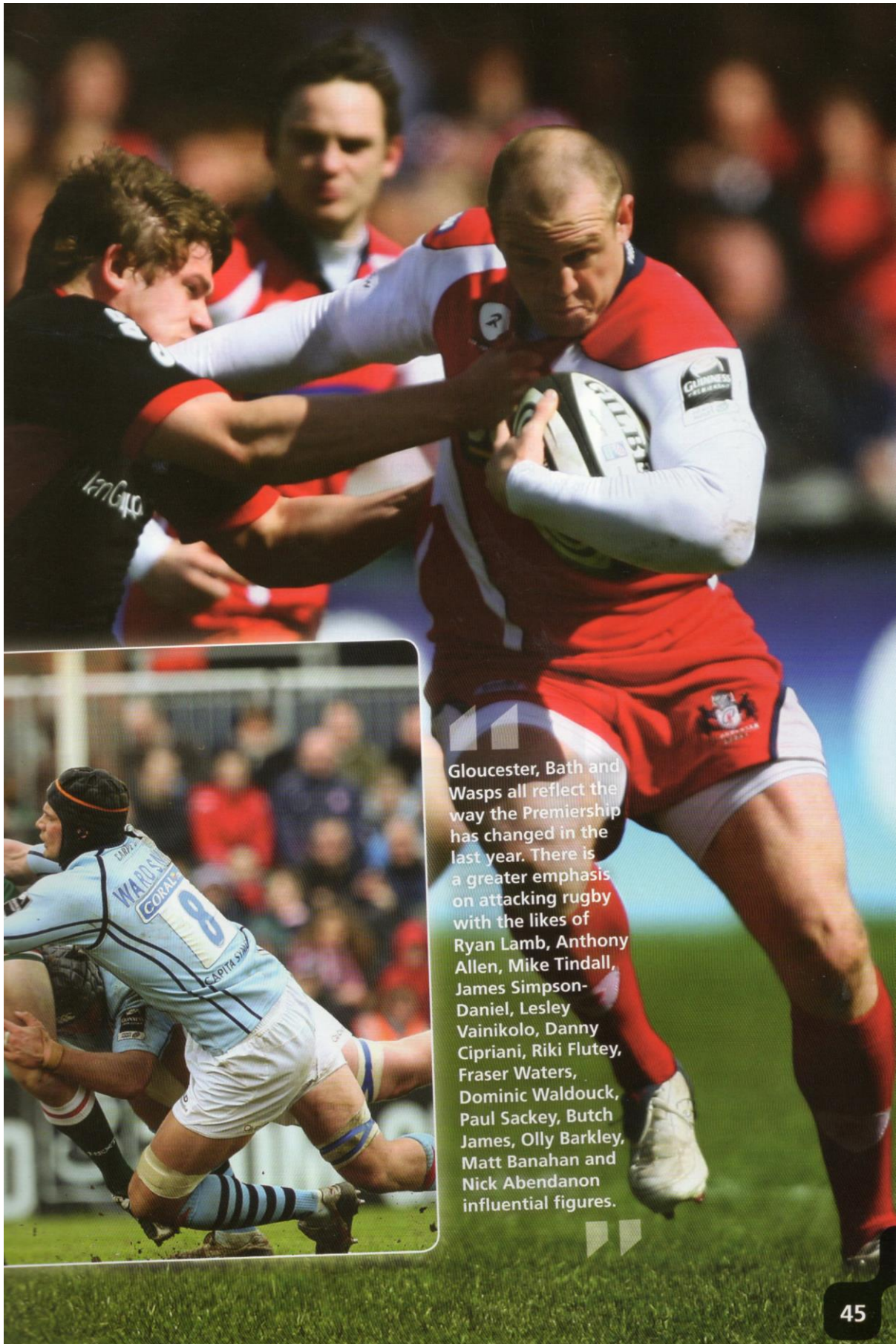
Gloucester, Bath and Wasps all reflect the way the Premiership has changed in the last year. There is a greater emphasis on attacking rugby with the likes of Ryan Lamb, Anthony Allen, Mike Tindall, James Simpson-Daniel, Lesley Vainikolo, Danny Cipriani, Riki Flutey, Fraser Waters, Dominic Waldouck, Paul Sackey, Butch James, Olly Barkley, Matt Banahan and Nick Abendanon influential figures. That the vast majority are English only highlights the rich potential England have to mine.

While Harlequins and London Irish are similar in style to the top three, Leicester are different and today will offer more of a contrast in styles than the other semi-final between Wasps and Bath. The Tigers have one of the best finishers in the Premiership in Tom Varndell and Geordan Murphy has few peers in broken play, but two players who dented Gloucester's defence in last year's final, Seru Rabeni and Alesana Tuilagi have played peripheral roles this season, while the partnership between Andy Goode and Aaron Mauger at 10 and 12

has not been overly productive.

Goode is a controller, not an outside-half given to deferring. On his day, he can destroy anyone, but if Leicester are to embrace the game their rivals have adopted so successfully, they need to get Mauger, a key figure in the New Zealand side between the last two World Cups, into the playmaking role. There is nothing flash about Mauger, but he will arguably be the Europe-based player most missed by the All Blacks this year, not least because of his ability to fully exploit the menace of those outside him. Mauger will have a major role to play today if Leicester are to achieve an upset, but Gloucester are a different side to the one which took part in last year's one-sided final, wiser and more mature, but no less adventurous, pioneers in the brave new world that is English rugby.





Gloucester, Bath and Wasps all reflect the way the Premiership has changed in the last year. There is a greater emphasis on attacking rugby with the likes of Ryan Lamb, Anthony Allen, Mike Tindall, James Simpson-Daniel, Lesley Vainikolo, Danny Cipriani, Riki Flutey, Fraser Waters, Dominic Waldouck, Paul Sackey, Butch James, Olly Barkley, Matt Banahan and Nick Abendanon influential figures.

MATCH ACTION

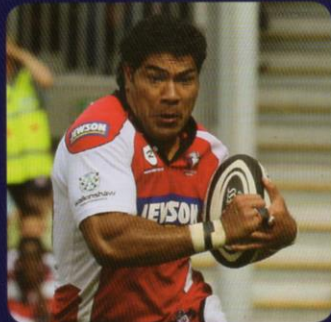
Gloucester Rugby
Bath Rugby

8
6



Time line

17 mins	
Lamb PEN	3-0
28 mins	
Barkley PEN	3-3
34 mins	
Simpson-Daniel TRY	8-3
38 mins	
Barkley PEN	8-6



Gloucester Line-up

15	Iain Balshaw	
14	James Simpson-Daniel	(1t)
13	Mike Tindall	
12	Anthony Allen	
11	Lesley Vainikolo	
10	Ryan Lamb	(1p)
9	Rory Lawson	
1	Nick Wood	
2	Andy Titterrell	
3	Carlos Nieto	
4	Marco Bortolami	
5	Alex Brown	
6	Alasdair Strokosch	
7	Akapusi Qera	
8	Gareth Delve	
REPS		
16	Olivier Azam	(Titterrell)
17	Alasdair Dickinson	(Wood)
18	Will James	
19	Luke Narraway	(Delve)
20	Gareth Cooper	(Lawson)
21	Willie Walker	(Tindall)
22	Mark Foster	(Balshaw)

Derby Day Glory

Saturday, May 10th, Attendance: 16,500
Kingsholm, Referee: Dave Pearson

▶ GLOUCESTER produced one of their most memorable performances of recent vintage to finish top of the Guinness Premiership with victory over Bath last Saturday.

In what was unquestionably one of the most breathtaking clashes of the 2007/2008 Guinness Premiership season, James Simpson-Daniel scored the game's only try.

The contest was relentless and Gloucester's outstanding defensive effort kept Bath out. For that they could thank any number of outstanding performances but in the likes of Akapusi Qera, Iain Balshaw and Simpson-Daniel Gloucester had the players of the match.

The game was locked at 3-3 when Gloucester scored the decisive try six minutes before the break. Lesley Vainikolo





Man of the Match



James Simpson-Daniel – Not only did he score a special try but his defensive work was brilliant.

carried hard into the heart of Bath's defence and Alasdair Strokosch found Ryan Lamb. Qera arrived in support and delivered a wonderful pass towards Anthony Allen and Willie Walker put Simpson-Daniel through two tackles to score.

Bath rallied with a penalty before the break and with Matt Stevens, Lee Mears and Olly Barkley all performing in a high-energy and explosive contest, the

game was too close to call.

The second half was just as frantic and full on as the first. Bath battered away at Gloucester's defence but the home side held firm and almost snatched a second try when Vainikolo discovered himself with the ball in a fleeting move and off-loaded swiftly to Luke Narraway who smashed down over the line but referee Dave Pearson called play back for a knock-on.

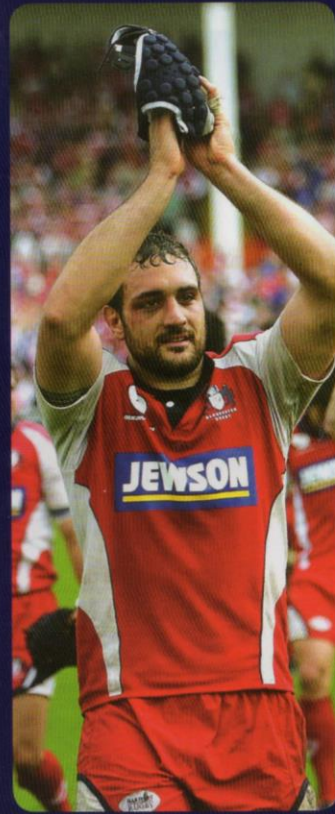
Coach's Comment



"We can take a huge amount of satisfaction from finishing top of the table after nine months," head coach Dean Ryan.



www.gloucesterrugby.co.uk





PETER ARNOLD

Peter Arnold has been known to enjoy a dram or two of whisky but he hit the bottle last weekend – to calm the nerves during Gloucester's victory over Bath – and hopes to be celebrating again this afternoon

AND FOR OUR NEXT TRICK...

OF COURSE, I might be wasting my time. At the time of writing I don't know whether this game will be played at Kingsholm or in furrin parts, and I certainly don't know who the opposition will be. There are a few things we do all know, however.

The first thing is that whoever has the temerity to try conclusions with us today will have to do so again next season. At least twice. So will all the other sides in the Premiership at that time.

That doesn't include Leeds of course, who tried hard all term, but didn't really have enough quality to cut the mustard at the top level. Their replacement, Northampton, look a more formidable

outfit altogether, having demolished everything thrown at them this season with almost contemptuous ease. Therein lies a danger. While it's good to see such a grand old club back where it belongs, they're going to have to come to terms with a much rougher ride next time round. That's a hurdle which even Bristol, who have as good a pedigree as the Saints, haven't really surmounted yet.

One thing's for sure, the Premiership doesn't get any easier, year by year. But at least we won't have a World Cup to disrupt us next season, and the autumn internationals don't seem likely to affect us as seriously as we've had to endure this time round.

But I suppose I could be wrong about that.

HARD ON THE FINGERNAILS

I WASN'T wasting my time of course: now we do know who the opposition is, and apart from all other considerations, it's always good to see Leicester at Kingsholm. The history of such encounters is rich in incident and drama, and it's all Twickenham to a used jock strap that today's game will live up to that tradition.

We certainly had the drama last Saturday. During the eons I've been supporting Gloucester I've seen games which filled me with euphoria, plunged me into the depths of despond, and even made me very angry, but I don't recall experiencing a match which involved such a level of tension over such long periods. It was certainly hard on the fingernails, and on



Higgins tackled by Allen & Qera



Sinbad gets a joyous response after his try

my supply of Scotch whisky. I'm getting too old for that sort of thing.

The sheer level of intensity and commitment from both sides was quite awesome, and there was no little skill on view all over the park. For a game with relatively few points, the number of highs and lows was remarkable. Sinbad's last-ditch tackle on Matt Stevens, for example, was worthy of the level of applause usually reserved for a neatly taken try, and received it. It was certainly a try saver, and possibly a match winner.

I was as sickened as anyone when the Vainikolo/Narraway try was disallowed. I do have to say, however, that, when I watched the highlights on BBC2, I noticed that the ref had blown his whistle very early, a fact unheard in the general cacophony of the ground itself. Having watched it again, however, I'm not at all certain that he made the right decision in the first place.

It all came right in the end, but a converted try at that point might have eased the tension and the demands on my fingernails and my whisky bottle.

It wouldn't be right to single out any particular players, because I can't think of a single bloke who didn't distinguish himself at some time or another, but I do have to acknowledge the spark of sheer genius which led to JSD's try. It was something to savour.

I wonder if that performance might, at last, lay to rest the constant sniping that insists that Gloucester are a bunch of bottlers who can't take the pressures of the really big games. All we have to do is win the next two games to disprove it once and for all.

Apart from that, Mrs Lincoln, how did you enjoy the show?

BARBARIANS SOON

THERE is one more Kingsholm occasion this month of course. We have the Barbarians v Ireland game here on the 27th. This should be a complete contrast from recent events, because it should just be a happy, friendly game with nothing really riding on it. Just, as Confucius he say, lie back and enjoy it.

I know we have no tribal loyalty to that game, but I hope we can give the Baa-Baas a big, healthy gate. The more people who

come along, the more likely we are to get more such spectacles in the future.

And, before you ask, yes, I've got my ticket. My son bought a couple on line ten days or so ago.

Actually, mine cost me a few quid less than his did, because, as he put it, I'm "a decrepit old coffin dodger".

It's nice to have the respect of one's nearest and dearest.

NOBODY TOLD THE PLAYERS

LAST Saturday, Teletext informed me that DEFRA had issued a weather warning. Apparently the hot weather had considerably increased the ozone levels in the atmosphere yielding dangers to respiration and therefore heart activity. The ministry advised us all not to take any strenuous activity that afternoon.

Nobody told the Gloucester or Bath players about that. If the DEFRA guys had been at the game and watched the level of effort, they'd probably gone into a fit of the vapours themselves.

MATCH OF THE DAYS

The previous season Gloucester had slipped out of the Pilkington Cup against lowly Wakefield. A year later they were not to make the same mistake against Walsall, as Dave King recalls in Match of the Days.



▶ TODAY'S home semi-final against Leicester will see Gloucester lock-horns with one of the powerhouses of the domestic game but in the 1995-1996 season the side from Kingsholm were gearing up to face another side from that part of the country.

Gloucester had the dubious distinction in the 1994-1995 season of being the victims of a shock result in Round Four of the Pilkington Cup. They lost 19-9 to Courage League Two side Wakefield, producing a lethargic and disappointing performance in an away match at the Yorkshire club.

The following season they faced an equally unglamorous tie in their first cup match of the season against Courage League Four outfit, Walsall.

However, the Midlands club had a couple of players with more than a decent pedigree. Fly-half Richard Mills had been the country's top point scorer the previous season and he had been in good form prior to this match, scoring 21 points in Walsall's epic 36-35 win

over Macclesfield in round three of the 1995-1996 competition. Scrum-half, Richard Moon, played for England 'B' and was the brother of the then Welsh scrum-half Rupert.

Full-back for the Midland club was Steve Lazenby. He had joined Walsall at the beginning of the previous season after six years at Oxford. Previous to that he had spent eighteen months in 1985 and 1986 playing his rugby at Kingsholm. At the time he was serving in the Royal Air Force and played for Gloucester while based at Brize Norton.

Prior to the game he said: 'We are looking forward to the game and we are optimistic. We do believe we have a chance of winning. For a lot of the players it will be a totally new experience to play in such a big game, so whether we can do it on the day depends on the attitude when we get together on the Saturday morning.

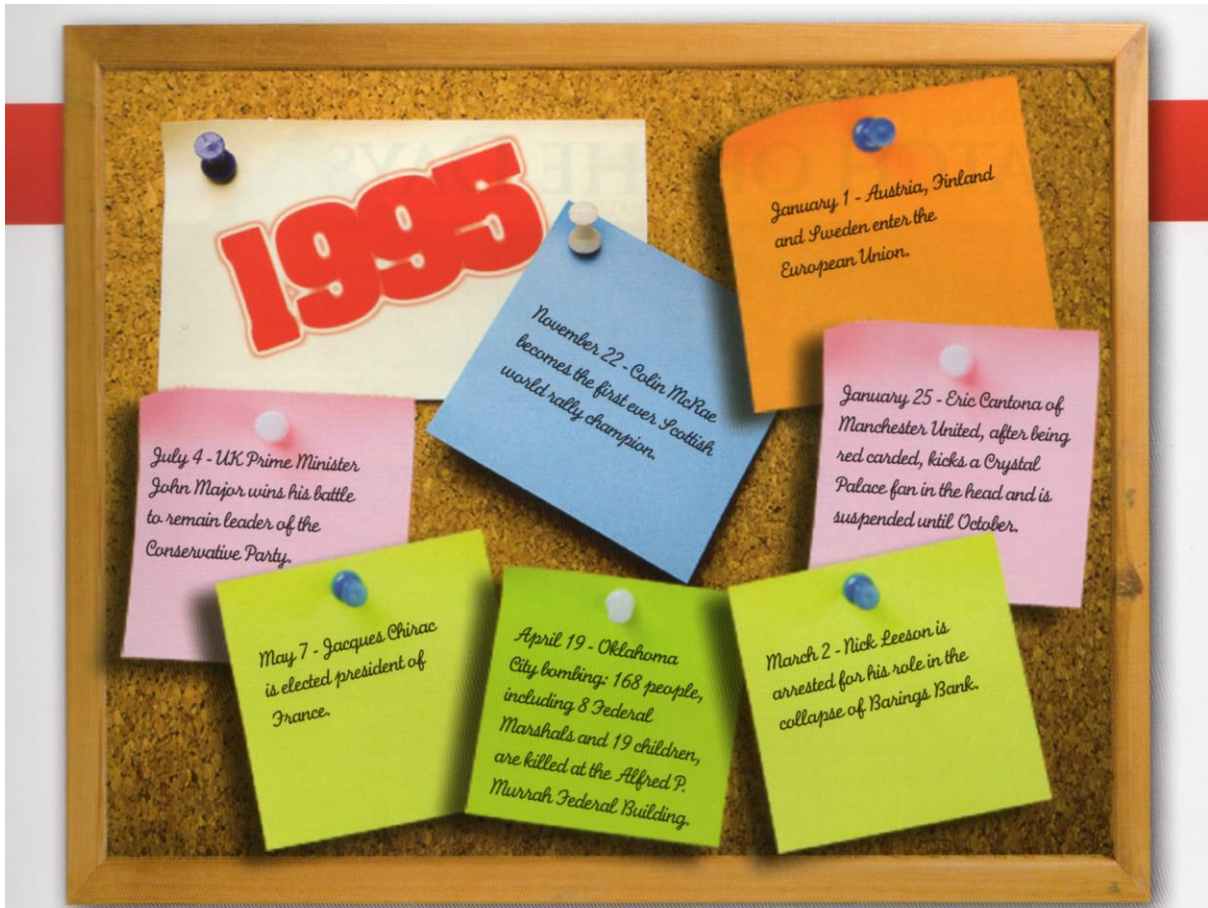
"We accept the fact that Gloucester will have a bigger pack and it will be hard

to win any ball to a degree but we are confident we can destroy them in the backs. The strength of our team is our backs and the two top try scorers enabled us to record 122 tries last season. We will be looking to run it around. We have a mobile pack."

Despite Lazenby's confidence, Gloucester did not produce the same mistake twice and outclassed Walsall in all departments, scoring eight tries in an emphatic 47-0 victory. Gloucester opened the scoring when they ran a penalty and Bruce Fenley fed Peter Glanville who charged over for a try which Tim Smith converted.

They went further ahead in the 19th minute when skipper Dave Sims took a line-out catch. The homeside drove up the line and Glanville tumbled over for a try.

Gloucester continued to press and it came as no surprise when they recycled the ball from a move that had been stopped, and sent it out to Paul Holford



We accept the fact that Gloucester will have a bigger pack and it will be hard to win any ball to a degree but we are confident we can destroy them in the backs.

Steve Lazenby, Walsall Rugby



who sprinted over on the right. Once again Smith missed the conversion. However, three minutes later Peter Hart extended the home teams lead to 20-0 with a drop-goal from inside the 22.

Andy Deacon increased the lead with a try within five minutes of the second half. And in the 51st minute, just six minutes after the last five points, Peter Miles added his name to the list of try scorers.

Walsall were pushed backwards in the scrum on the visitors line, Gloucester were awarded the next scrum and Miles trundled over when he picked up the ball on the blindside.

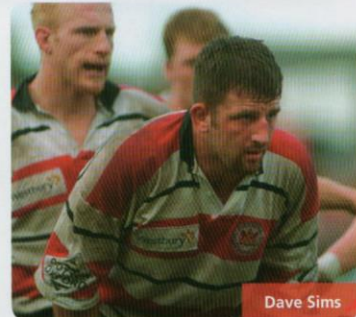
Midway through the second half the west country side came to life after

a seemingly lethargic period. They stretched their lead with their sixth try when Fenley fed the ball left from a breakdown and it went via Glanville to Tom Beim who recorded his first try for the senior team.

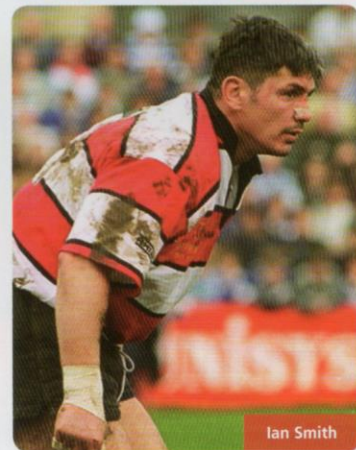
Two minutes later Gloucester added a seventh try when Holford kicked and chased up to the line, when he was stopped Don Caskie grabbed the ball and scored a try. Hart added the conversion.

With 10 minutes left Caskie scored his second try after surging runs by Ian Smith and Beim.

Don Caskie reflected afterwards: "We made sure we did not fall into the trap of taking anything for granted."



Dave Sims



Ian Smith

MATCH OF THE DAYS

THE TEAMS

GLOUCESTER:

T.SMITH
P.HOLFORD
B.WILLIAMS
D.CASKIE
T.BEIM
P.HART
B.FENLEY
A.WINDO
P.GREENING
A.DEACON
D.SIMS (CAPTAIN)
M.CORNWELL
P.GLANVILLE
I.SMITH
P.MILES

REPLACEMENTS:

H.BROWN
L.BECK
L.OSBORNE
S.DEVEREUX

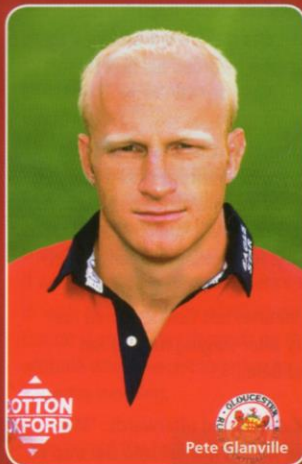
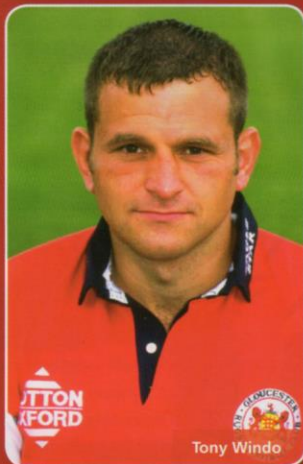
WALSALL:

S.LAZENBY
D.MARSHALL
D.ROSE
J.FLYNN
M.WALKER
R.MILLS
R.MOON
G.TAYLOR (CAPTAIN)
D.HALEY
M.JOHNSON
R.HARDING
D.GODFREY
D.BURNS
G.TILLET
R.COLEMAN

REPLACEMENTS:

M.FRYER
M.LANE
S.LEA
A.KING

REFEREE: - DOUG CHAPMAN (YORKSHIRE SOCIETY)



FAN ZONE WITH BOB FENTON

Nerves, what nerves..... Bob Fenton has stopped shaking long enough to look back at last Saturday's epic against Bath and ahead to today's semi-final against Leicester.

▶ I TELL you what, trying to type something out for the programme with most of your fingers missing is not the easiest thing in the world. No, I have not suffered from some horrible industrial accident, it's more a case of chewing well past the knuckles as last week's match against Bath became more and more tense.

Actually I love games like that, the tension is sometimes unbearable and despite checking it every few seconds, that time clock never seems to move. But that is sport at it rawest, one slip, one mistake and the whole balance changes.

For some though, an 8-6 scoreline means that it could not have been a good match to watch. Frankly, they don't know what they are talking about. If you want to watch games with basketball scorelines check out the Super 14s, yes it's entertaining but don't try to compare those games with the intensity of last Saturday.

Credit to Bath, they came with every intention of making life hard for us, they played with a huge intensity and have come on so far from where they were last season – they will give Wasps a heck of a game today and we have showed that they are beatable at Adams Park.

Good as they were, though, they were not quite good enough. In all my years I do not think I have seen two back to back performances from a Gloucester side like we produced at Adams Park and then repeated last Saturday. Quite outstanding in all facets of the game.

For most of this season pundits have waxed lyrical about our attacking prowess, while at the same time doubting that we had the steel to really defend when things got hard. Well let me suggest that any of these so-called experts take a look at the closing ten minutes of the first half at Adams Park, and through long periods of last week. I defy you to find a more consistent, aggressive defence anywhere in the Premiership.

Ok we shipped a couple (literally a couple) more tries than the meanest defences in the Premiership this season, but we scored more tries than anyone else. And for that reason we finished top of the pile for the second year in succession.

While that may not give us a trophy under the play-off arrangements this is still a mighty achievement – top of the league in the regular season for two years running. Do not underestimate how much of an achievement that is.

Of course we haven't won anything – yet – but for what it's worth I believe we are streets ahead of where we were this time last season. The confidence and belief in the squad is huge, and the team is that much more experienced. What's more, you sense that there is a togetherness and will to win that was not there before. We've learned our lessons, now we have to prove it in the sternest tests.

And they won't come much sterner than





Varndell on the verge of scoring



Of course we haven't won anything – yet – but for what it's worth I believe we are streets ahead of where we were this time last season. The confidence and belief in the squad is huge, and the team is that much more experienced.

Bob Fenton on the Gloucester Team



I firmly believe that we can do it, Adams Park a few weeks ago was a turning point, Bath last week confirmed it. We have one of the best squads to be found anywhere and on our day we will beat any side in the land, anywhere.

And today is that day.

Finally as this is definitely the last programme for the season, can I wish everyone a fantastic summer, and I look forward to being back on my step just to the Worcester Street side of halfway in a few months time.

Thanks for reading my stuff.

Leicester today. By their own high standards Tigers have underperformed this season. Much has been written about off-field problems and difficulties behind the scenes. Trust me, that will count for diddly squat with the fifteen blokes who run out onto the Kingsholm turf today.

Recently Richard Cockerill was quoted as saying that he did not believe that his side were good enough to get to the play offs, well he looks like a bloke who can manage a few pies, so eating his words will not be too difficult for him. That man is a winner, he will make sure his team know what's expected of them.

Let's not forget, either, that they put one over on us at home earlier this season. For once the international call-ups of the Six Nations hurt us more than them and they took advantage. Remember also the painful lesson they handed out at Twickenham almost a year ago.

But what better motivation is there for

our boys: avenge the defeat they gave us this year, and put them out of the final as payback for last year.

It promises to be a titanic encounter and we will need to produce another epic display to take us on to Twickenham. But



Balshaw evades the tackle

THE BEST OF THE SEASON

The matchday programme looks back at six key games that have shaped Gloucester's season.

(Gloucester score first)



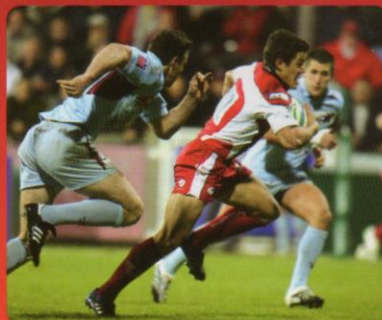
LEICESTER TIGERS (AWAY) OCTOBER 6TH 30-17



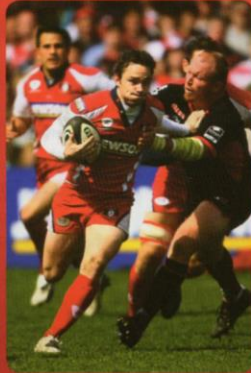
ULSTER (AWAY) NOVEMBER 9TH 32-14



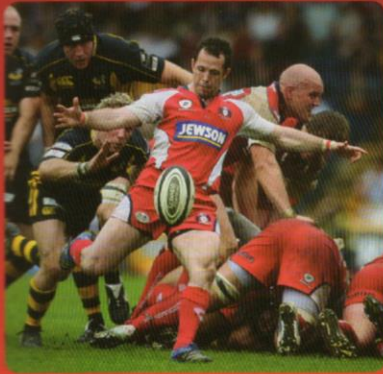
BOURGOIN (AWAY) DECEMBER 7TH 31-7



 **SARACENS (HOME) APRIL 12TH 39-15**



 **WASPS (AWAY) MAY 4TH 25-17**



 **BATH RUGBY (HOME) MAY 10TH 8-6**

