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Sale Sharks v Gloucester

Guinness Premiership Round 4

Friday 26th September 2008 Kick Off 7-45pm

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GLOUCESTER

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE OPPOSITION

Second hosts sixth tonight as Gloucester travel north to Edgeley Park after bouncing back from a losing start to 2008/09 with two successive victories.

And that has eased some of the pressure around Kingsholm that had built up after their disappointing end to last season and defeat in round one of this campaign.

Having topped the Guinness Premiership table in the regular season for the third time in six years, Gloucester's 2007/08 season ended in yet more disappointment as they were beaten 26-25 by Leicester Tigers in front of an expectant home crowd.

That left head coach Dean Ryan fuming as he admitted: "For a side to move forward, you cannot continue to be a side being told what to do. "It either stays okay for nine months of the season when the team is being told what to do, or it takes responsibility for its actions and delivers on the big day.

"That is what we have done for the last two weeks. We have been very accurate (against Wasps and Bath). Here we had none of that. This isn't a learning curve, it is about people fronting up. If we do that, we just might move on."

Fast forward four months and Ryan was once again reading from the same script after another Kingsholm defeat by Leicester on the opening day of this season.

He said: "I am frustrated, but we know why we lost that game.

"It is the small things and how we are being distracted that is killing us. We should have put the game away – we had the winning of it for 70 minutes. "We have to look at individuals. We will win games this season, but can we win big games? The template is there for us to be very good, but taking responsibility is key."

Ryan's response was immediate and a Gloucester side featuring no fewer than six changes bounced back the following weekend with a hard-fought 21-17 victory over Bath, ending a 20-year wait for a league win at the Recreation Ground.

And four points was the winning margin once again last week as the Cherry and Whites edged to a 24-20 victory over Harlequins at Kingsholm. In both games, though, things could have been different had opposition kickers taken their chances – Bath's Butch James missing five kicks and Quins' Chris Malone four.

And even the report for the Quins game on the club's official website admitted there was "plenty still to do" and that "Gloucester are not functioning with anything like the alacrity we know they can".

Yet at this stage in the season it's the results teams will be primarily judged on and in hindsight Gloucester would probably have taken two wins from three outings.

Their record in the north west is not one that will inspire confidence in the ranks tonight, though, as you have to go back to April 2003 for the last time they didn't lose an away match at Sale – and even that game ended in a 30-30 draw.

Since then, the Sharks have secured five successive home wins (though it has to be said Gloucester have done likewise in fixtures at Kingsholm), taking their overall tally to 14 league victories for a lead of one in the head-to-head between the clubs.

But the Cherry and Whites have a couple of 'insiders' in the camp, including one player who started the season on the books of Sale Sharks. That man is hooker SCOTT LAWSON, who moved south to Kingsholm at the start of the month after Gloucester lost Ross McMillan to a serious knee injury.

Signed in the summer of 2007 along with fellow Glasgow player Rory

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ANDY TITTERRELL

Lamont, Lawson had a frustrating first season as he made just 11 appearances for the Sharks.

A combination of international duty as part of Scotland's World Cup and Six Nations squads – plus the form of youngster Neil Briggs in his absence – meant Scott had limited chances to show his undoubted ability to the Sale faithful.

The man from Lanark is cut from the same cloth as another Sharks hooker of recent days in ANDY TITTERRELL – and it is ironic the duo are now team-mates.

'Titts', for his part, joined Gloucester around the same time Lawson moved to Edgeley Park but remains a popular figure with Sale players and fans alike.

Capped five times by England, Titterrell made his debut for the Sharks at just 20, and was part of the squad who memorably won the domestic title in 2006.

While he was at Edgeley Park, Kingsley Jones was always convinced the hooker had a future at flanker, leading to comparisons with another pocket dynamo in Neil Back, but it is in his usual hooking position that he has been deployed at Gloucester.

Ryan has plenty of front-row ammunition at his disposal already, but it is soon to be bolstered further by the arrival of All Black GREG SOMERVILLE. The 30-year-old is the most-capped prop in New Zealand's history having made his 65th Test appearance earlier this month and is due to head to England in December, unless he is released early from his contract by the NZRU.

Somerville is part of a select group to have played 50 games for both Canterbury and the Crusaders and was in the New Zealand squad for both the 2003 and 2007 World Cups, the latter despite a year out with Achilles trouble.

Recruited on a two-and-a-half-year deal, the big prop is nicknamed 'Yoda' and set a New Zealand record by failing to score a point in his first 42 Test match appearances.

Somerville's signing was one of two really eye-catching moves Gloucester made in the summer, with the other the recruitment of OLLY BARKLEY from Bath.

The 26-year-old moved to Kingsholm after seven years at a club he said "played a massive part in my life for a long time, not just as a player but also as a person".

And after his debut was delayed by wrist surgery over the summer he was finally able to open his account for Gloucester in the victory over Harlequins last weekend.

That was the second time in successive club appearances he has been on the winning side at Kingsholm, the last being in May when he helped Bath to victory over Worcester in the final of the European Challenge Cup.

In the interim he had an unhappy time on England's southern-hemisphere tour as he picked up the wrist injury that delayed his Gloucester debut.

But Barkley is a talented performer with over 1,000 Premiership points to his name and has proved time and again the damage he can cause when given the chance.

Playing at inside centre last weekend, Barkley had a familiar face outside him in England (and former Bath) team-mate MIKE TINDALL.

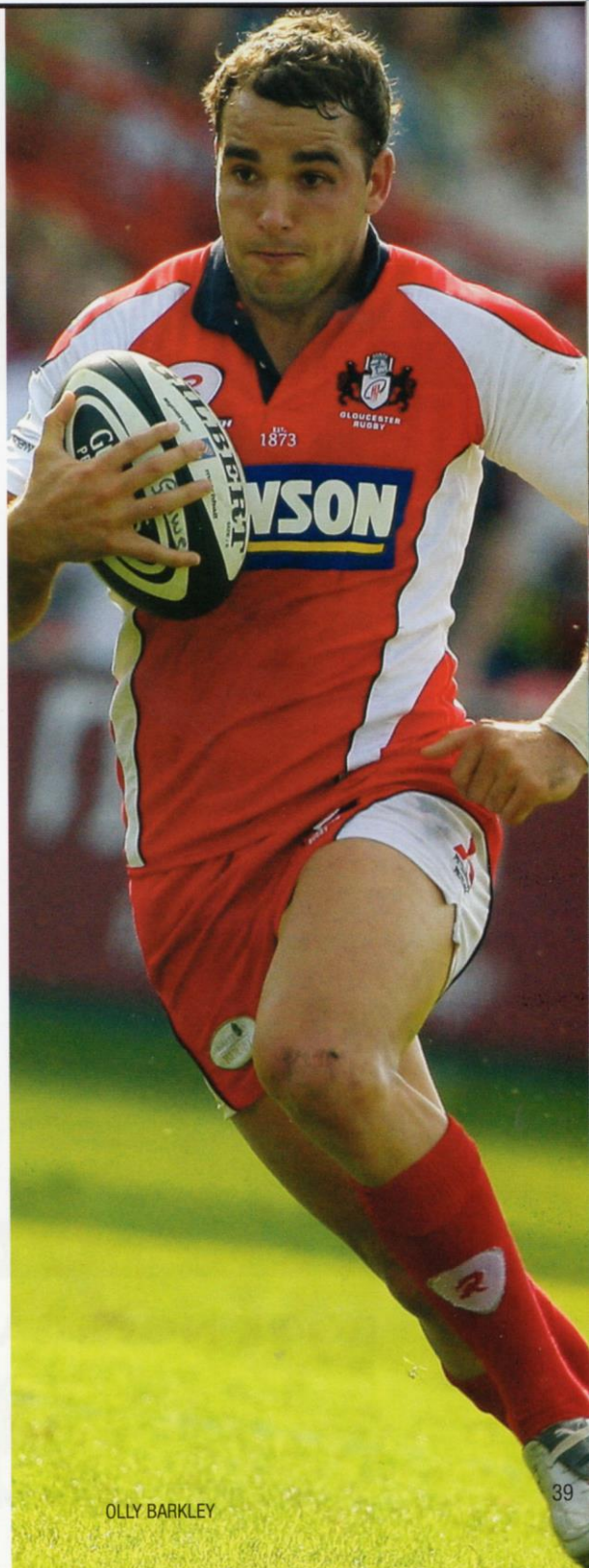
The 29-year-old made the move from the Rec to Kingsholm in the summer of 2005 and is a man who has had to put up with his fair share of criticism and injuries.

His most recent – and serious – injury came as recently as February when he was left with a punctured lung and a two-inch tear in his liver after landing chest first on Lee Byrne's foot during the Six Nations clash between England and Wales.

Two pints of blood leaked through the tear in his liver before clogging and he spent five days in intensive care before being released from hospital.

He has worked his way back to full fitness once again, though, and while his relationship with Zara Phillips draws plenty of attention, being rewarded with a three-year deal by Gloucester last season shows he is still doing the business on the pitch.

A fearsome presence both on the crash ball and in defence, yet also with a good turn of pace, Tindall may not be the flashiest of players yet he provides good go-forward.



OLLY BARKLEY

ON THE PARK

MATCH OFFICIALS

Referee: A. SMALL
 Touch Judges: D.J. KURK & A. WATSON
 No. 4: J.P. DOYLE
 Assessor: B. CAMPSALL
 TMO: D.J. HUDSON

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SHARKS

	T	C	P	DG
1 Andrew SHERIDAN	○	○	○	○
2 Sebastien BRUNO	○	○	○	○
3 Eifion ROBERTS	○	○	○	○
4 Chris JONES	○	○	○	○
5 Dean SCHOFIELD	○	○	○	○
6 Kristian ORMSBY	○	○	○	○
7 Luke ABRAHAM	○	○	○	○
8 Sebastien CHABAL	○	○	○	○
9 Dwayne PEEL	○	○	○	○
10 Charlie HODGSON	○	○	○	○
11 Rory LAMONT	○	○	○	○
12 Lee THOMAS	○	○	○	○
13 Luke McALISTER	○	○	○	○
14 Mark CUETO	○	○	○	○
15 Mathew TAIT	○	○	○	○
REPLACEMENTS				
16 Neil BRIGGS	○	○	○	○
17 Stuart TURNER	○	○	○	○
18 Sean COX	○	○	○	○
19 Jason WHITE	○	○	○	○
20 Richard WIGGLESWORTH	○	○	○	○
21 Chris BELL	○	○	○	○
22 Oriol RIPOL	○	○	○	○

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GLOUCESTER

	T	C	P	DG
1 Nick WOOD	○	○	○	○
2 Olivier AZAM	○	○	○	○
3 Carlos NIETO	○	○	○	○
4 Will JAMES	○	○	○	○
5 Alex BROWN	○	○	○	○
6 Alasdair STROKOSCH	○	○	○	○
7 Andy HAZELL	○	○	○	○
8 Luke NARRAWAY	○	○	○	○
9 Gareth COOPER	○	○	○	○
10 Williw WALKER	○	○	○	○
11 Lesley VAINIKOLO	○	○	○	○
12 Ollie BARKLEY	○	○	○	○
13 Mike TINDALL	○	○	○	○
14 Matthew WATKINS	○	○	○	○
15 Ollie MORGAN	○	○	○	○
REPLACEMENTS				
16 Andy TITTERRELL	○	○	○	○
17 Alasdair DICKINSON	○	○	○	○
18 Marco BORTOLAMI	○	○	○	○
19 Peter BUXTON	○	○	○	○
20 Rory LAWSON	○	○	○	○
21 Ryan LAMB	○	○	○	○
22 Mark FOSTER	○	○	○	○

