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Official Matchday Magazine of London Irish

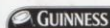
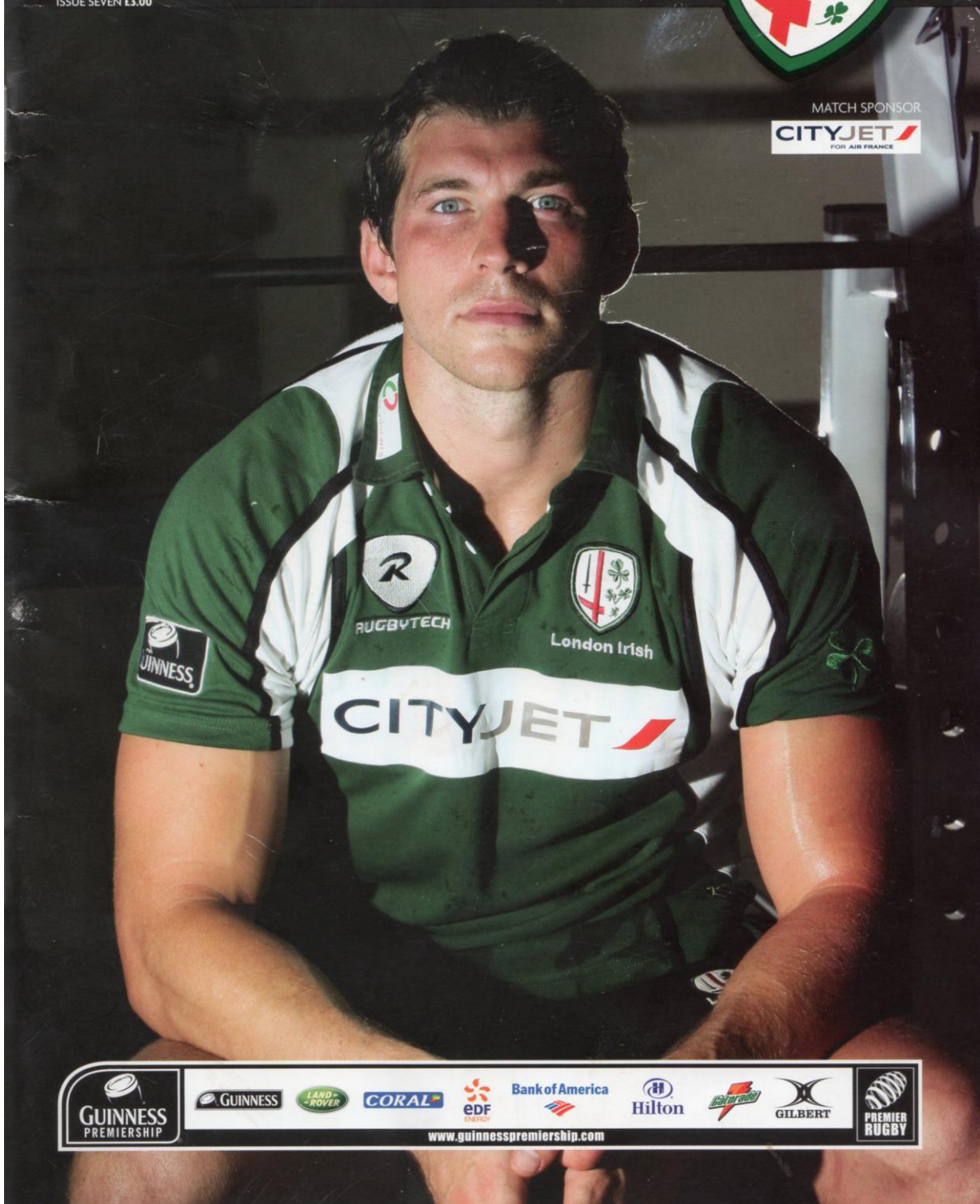
ISSUE SEVEN £3.00



20th December 2008
kick-off 3.00pm
vs: **GLOUCESTER**



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AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHERRY AND WHITES' SEASON TO DATE



If you had muttered to a Gloucester supporter in any pub, snug or smoking area around the uniquely atmospheric delights of Kingsholm at the end of September that Dean Ryan's side would be joint top of the Guinness Premiership five days before Christmas, they may well have just carted you off to the funny farm.

Defeats against Leicester and Sale Sharks had left one of the most fancied sides in the country staring up from the uncomfortable position of seventh place, struggling to adapt to the new Experimental Law Variations (ELV's) and generally fumbling around for cohesion and reliability.

But since that Charlie Hodgson-inspired defeat at Edgeley Park, Gloucester have lost just once since in all competitions – away to Cardiff in the Heineken Cup – and have re-discovered the movement game that made them such a threat last season.

Saturday's 48-5 victory over Calvisano was their seventh in a row in all competitions and means they come into today's red-hot collision with leaders London Irish in good form and good heart.

The close season was not so much about what happened at Gloucester as what didn't happen. Despite finishing top of the Guinness Premiership pile again at the end of the regular 2007-8 season, Gloucester again failed to transfer their obvious potential into a dividend during the play-offs – it was a familiar, unfulfilled ending to what threatened to be a triumphant season.

By that time, head coach Dean Ryan had done the majority of his recruiting – a policy that included nabbing one of Bath's diamonds in Olly Barkley – Llanelli centre Matthew Watkins – and former Gloucester second row Adam Eustace – also from Stradey Park.

When he completed negotiations to bring Canterbury prop Greg Somerville to Kingsholm, the general thought was that Gloucester's squad was stronger than last season's and well capable of challenging again this season.

Barkley has been brought in to provide a tactical nous and big-game understanding that so often seemed to evaporate and as a left-footed kicking option, will vie with Ryan Lamb and Anthony Allen for the 10 and 12 positions respectively – but it is the inside centre position he covets and he kicked Gloucester to an opening round Heineken Cup win over Biarritz and then piloted them to success over Northampton a fortnight ago.

Somerville is the most capped prop in All Black history and alongside Dave Young – the young and aggressive tight forward from Leicester – Gloucester kept their summer additions to a minimum.

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

Kingsholm Stadium, Kingsholm Road, Kingsholm,

Gloucester, GL1 3AX

Stadium Capacity: 16,500

Tel: 01452 300951 • www.gloucesterrugby.co.uk



With the likes of the emerging and increasingly gifted Luke Narryway, the robust Anthony Allen and the safe as houses Olly Morgan a year older and a year wiser, Gloucester's squad is up there with anything in the Premiership.

Gloucester completed their preparations with a 30-8 victory over Glasgow under the new ELV's but their Premiership campaign got off to the worst possible start with a home defeat to those Tigers – their third successive victory at Kingsholm in eight months.

Tries from Geordan Murphy and Toby Flood sealed a 20-8 victory – Gloucester's only try coming from the outstanding Morgan in the first-half.

But they responded by winning for the first time ever at the Rec in league rugby in a spot of West Country tribalism unique to the people involved. They backed that up with a tense victory over Harlequins, the Premiership pace-setters, with tries from Morgan and Alasdair Strokosch before Hodgson subjected them to a withering kicking assault at Edgeley Park as they struggled to come to terms with the ELV's. They have won games but have not been convincing so far this season – as the Falcons will testify.

That defeat, at the end of September, has been their last in any competition since then. They re-grouped with a 39-23 win over Newcastle at Kingsholm that included a bonus point and then built on that success with a 24-19 victory over Wasps in the EDF Energy Cup with tries from Willie Walker and Lesley Vainikolo.

James Simpson-Daniel's 18th Heineken Cup try established the platform for their opening European win of the season – 22-10 over Biarritz. However, they lost a high-scoring contest in Cardiff before two tries from Lesley Vainikolo and a brilliant performance from Iain Balshaw set-up a 25-20 win over the Dragons and then Apo Satala's score ensured a semi-final place against the Osprey's next year.

Victories over Saracens and then back-to-back bonus point successes over Bristol and Northampton means Gloucester make their most important trek of the season to Irish today in extremely good heart.

HEAD 2 HEAD IRISH V GLOUCESTER

Table topping London Irish have won their last nine matches in all competitions since their 5-22 defeat at Worcester in the EDF Energy Cup on 5 October. This sequence equals the Exiles best run since season 1998/99. Irish have not lost at Madejski Stadium since the visit of Bath in the Guinness Premiership on 20 September.

Gloucester Rugby have won seven in a row since their 24-37 reversal at Cardiff in the European Cup on 19 October. Gloucester's only defeat in the Guinness Premiership in their last seven outings was 9-23 at Sale on 26 September.

London Irish have won just one of their last five meetings with Gloucester in all competitions: 15-10 in this equivalent fixture last season.

GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP		
Sat 27 Dec 2008		
Bristol Rugby	15:00	AWAY
Sat 3 Jan 2009		
Saracens	15:00	HOME
Sun 11 Jan 2009		
Newcastle Falcons	15:00	AWAY
Sat 31 Jan 2009		
London Irish	14:45	HOME
Sat 14 Feb 2009		
Sale Sharks	15:00	HOME

THREE TO WATCH



OLLY BARKLEY

Position: Centre/Stand-off
Height: 1.78m 5ft 10in
Weight: 92kg 14st 6lb
Date of Birth: 28/11/81
Honours: England



GREG SOMERVILLE

Position: Prop
Height: 1.86m 6ft 1in
Weight: 115kg 18st 2lb
Date of Birth: 28/11/77
Honours: New Zealand



LUKE NARRYWAY

Position: Back row
Height: 1.90m 6ft 3in
Weight: 108kg 17st 0lb
Date of Birth: 07/09/83
Honours: England

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the
exile

MARCO BORTOLAMI

the Italian international is looking forward
to this afternoon's contest



Marco Bortolami knows a thing or two about Italian rugby – their ultra-physicality, set-piece competitiveness and willingness for a battle, all of which has been just as well over the last fortnight - but he will have his sights set on the Guinness Premiership this afternoon.



After two, routine six-try victories over Calvisano in the Heineken Cup, the Italian second row will pit his wits against arguably the best line-out operation on all points of the domestic compass this afternoon, relishing the battle ahead against leaders London Irish.

The top two will come face to face at the Madejski Stadium today and nothing stirs Bortolami more than increasing Gloucester's unbeaten run at the home of the current leaders.

After crossing for his first European try in the less than exotic Centro Sportivo San Michele a fortnight ago, Bortolami should be back between the shafts this afternoon against Bob Casey and Nick Kennedy – two of the best in the business.

"I think the performances against Calvisano were OK but nothing more – we didn't do one thing in the away game that was at the level we really wanted," Bortolami said. "In some respects we made it hard for ourselves with some mistakes and that kept the difference between the teams far closer than it should have been.

"Calvisano made it as difficult as possible for us last Saturday because they are a proud team and played better than they had done in Italy but we realised that if we sat in the game and kept doing all the things we talk about, that eventually they would tire and that is what happened.

"The important thing from our point of view is that we have re-found the movement game that was such a success over the last two years," Bortolami added. "We experimented at the start of the season in certain aspects of our approach and performance and that was important for the development of the side this season.

"But we are a phase-based team who move the ball and when we do that to the best of our ability we are a good team. In Europe, the most important thing is not to make too many mistakes because the level demands that you are always competitive. If we can do that then I am positive we can cause any side problems.

"For me, London Irish are a very, very good team. They like to move the ball like us but they pay a great amount of respect to the basics of the game – the scrum, line-out and physicality – which means you have to play very well to beat them.

"Both teams are on a roll and playing some good rugby so it could be a great game. I have a lot of respect for what they [Irish] have done this season – it's up to us to match them and build on the good points in our game over the last few weeks."

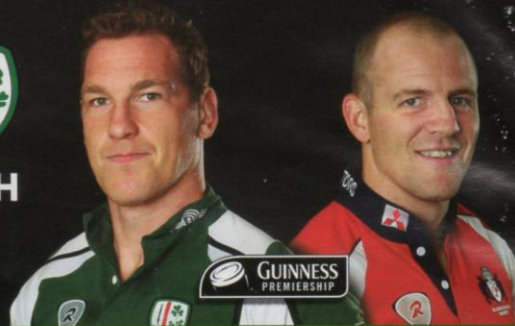
SQUAD LIST

Surname	Name	Position	Height (Metric) (Imp)	Weight (Metric) (Imp)	DOB	Honours
Adams	Jack	Centre	1.82m 6ft 1in	96kg 15st 0lb	17/09/86	
Allen	Anthony	Centre	1.80m 5ft 11in	92kg 14st 7lb	01/09/86	England
Azam	Olivier	Hooker	1.85m 6ft 1in	120kg 19st 0lb	24/10/74	France
Balshaw	Iain	Full back/Wing	1.85m 6ft 1in	94kg 14st 2lb	14/04/79	England/Lions
Barkley	Olly	Centre/Stand-off	1.78m 5ft 10in	92kg 14st 6lb 2 8/11/81		England
Bortolami	Marco	Lock	1.95m 6ft 5in	112kg 17st 5lb	12/06/80	Italy
Brown	Alex	Lock	2.01m 6ft 7in	116kg 18st 11lb	17/05/79	England
Buxton	Peter	Back row	1.92 m 6ft 4in	115kg 18st 11lb	21/08/78	
Cooper	Gareth	Scrum half	1.72m 5ft 7in	84kg 13st 0lb	07/05/79	Wales/Lions
Delve	Gareth	Back row	1.91m 6ft 3in	115kg 18st 11lb	30/12/82	Wales
Dickinson	Alasdair	Prop	1.84m 6ft 0in	112kg 17st 5lb	11/09/83	Scotland
Eustace	Adam	Lock	1.95m 6ft 5in	107kg 16st 12lb	09/01/79	
Forrester	James	Back row	1.95m 6ft 5in	110kg 17st 4lb	09/02/81	England
Forster	Jack	Prop	1.86m 6ft 1in	120kg 18st 11lb	19/03/87	
Foster	Mark	Wing	1.83m 6ft 0in	100kg 15st 10lb	02/09/83	
Hazell	Andrew	Back row	1.83m 6ft 0in	95kg 14st 13lb	25/04/78	England
James	Will	Lock	1.99m 6ft 6in	120kg 18st 11lb	22/12/76	Wales
Lamb	Ryan	Stand-off	1.76m 5ft 9in	85kg 13st 5lb	18/05/86	
Lawson	Rory	Scrum half	1.73m 5ft 8in	85kg 13st 5lb	12/03/81	Scotland
Lewis	Dave	Scrum half	1.70m 5ft 7in	80kg 12st 8lb	29/04/89	
McMillan	Ross	Hooker	1.85m 6ft 1in	104kg 16st 7lb	02/06/87	
Morgan	Olly F	ull back	1.89m 6ft 2in	94kg 14st 2lb	03/11/85	England
Narraway	Luke	Back row	1.90m 6ft 3in	108kg 17st 0lb	07/09/83	England
Nieto	Carlos	Prop	1.86m 6ft 1in	110kg 17st 4lb	28/04/76	Italy
Norton	Dan	Wing	1.79m 5ft 10in	80kg 12st 8lb	22/03/88	
Qera	Akapusi	Back row	1.94m 6ft 4in	103kg 16st 0lb	24/04/84	Fiji
Sharples	Charlie	Wing	1.84m 6ft 0in	93kg 14st 9lb	17/08/89	
Simpson-Daniel	James	Wing	1.82m 6ft 0in	92kg 14st 6lb	30/05/82	England
Somerville	Greg	Prop	1.86m 6ft 1in	115kg 18st 2lb 2 8/11/77		New Zealand
Strokosch	Alasdair	Back row	1.91m 6ft 3in	107kg 16st 11lb	21/02/83	Scotland
Titterrell	Andy	Hooker	1.78m 5ft 10in	94kg 14st 11lb	10/01/81	England/Lions
Tindall	Mike	Centre	1.88m 6ft 2in	102kg 15st 12lb	18/10/78	England
Trinder	Henry	Centre	1.83m 6ft 0in	85kg 13st 5lb	14/04/89	
Vainikolo	Lesley	Wing	1.88m 6ft 2in	112kg 17st 8lb	04/05/79	England
Walker	Willie	Stand-off/Full back	1.83m 6ft 0in	88kg 13st 12lb	19/05/78	
Watkins	Matthew	Centre	1.83m 6ft 0in	92kg 14st 7lb	02/09/78	Wales
Williams	Dan	Number 8	1.97m 6ft 5in	104kg 16st 7lb	01/02/89	
Wood	Nick	Prop	1.86m 6ft 1in	112kg 17st 5lb	09/01/83	
Young	Dave	Prop	1.85m 6ft 0in	117kg 18st 6lb	18/12/85	



LONDON IRISH

Head Coach:
Toby Booth



GLOUCESTER

Head Coach:
Dean Ryan



REFEREE

Sean Davey (RFU)



TOUCH JUDGE 1

Kevin Stewart (RFU)



TOUCH JUDGE 2

Roger Baileff (RFU)

18 4

FOURTH OFFICIAL

Full Back	15	ARMITAGE, Delon		Full Back	15	MORGAN, Ollly	
Wing	14	OJO, Topsy		Wing	14	WATKINS, Matthew	
Centre	13	SEVEALI'I, Elvis		Centre	13	TINDALL, Mike (C)	
Centre	12	MAPUSUA, Seilala		Centre	12	BARKLEY, Ollly	
Wing	11	TAGICAKIBAU, Sailosi		Wing	11	VAINIKOLO, Lesley	
Fly Half	10	HEWAT, Peter		Fly Half	10	LAMB, Ryan	
Scrum Half	9	HODGSON, Paul		Scrum Half	9	LAWSON, Rory	
Prop	1	DERMODY, Clarke		Prop	1	WOOD, Nick	
Hooker	2	PAICE, David		Hooker	2	AZAM, Olivier	
Prop	3	LEA'AETOA, Tonga		Prop	3	SOMERVILLE, Greg	
Lock	4	HUDSON, James		Lock	4	BORTOLAMI, Marco	
Lock	5	CASEY, Bob (C)		Lock	5	BROWN, Alex	
Flanker	6	ROCHE, Kieran		Flanker	6	BUXTON, Peter	
Flanker	7	ARMITAGE, Steffon		Flanker	7	STROKOSCH, Alasdair	
No. 8	8	HALA'UFIA, Chris		No. 8	8	NARRAWAY, Luke	

REPLACEMENTS

R1	16	MURPHY, Dan	
R2	17	BUCKLAND, James	
R3	18	CORBISIERO, Alex	
R4	19	THORPE, Richard	
R5	20	DANAHER, Declan	
R6	21	LALANNE, Alfredo	
R7	22	GERAGHTY, Shane	

REPLACEMENTS

R1	16	LAWSON, Scott	
R2	17	DICKINSON, Alasdair	
R3	18	JAMES, Will	
R4	19	SATALA, Apo	
R5	20	COOPER, Gareth	
R6	21	WALKER, Willie	
R7	22	FOSTER, Mark	