

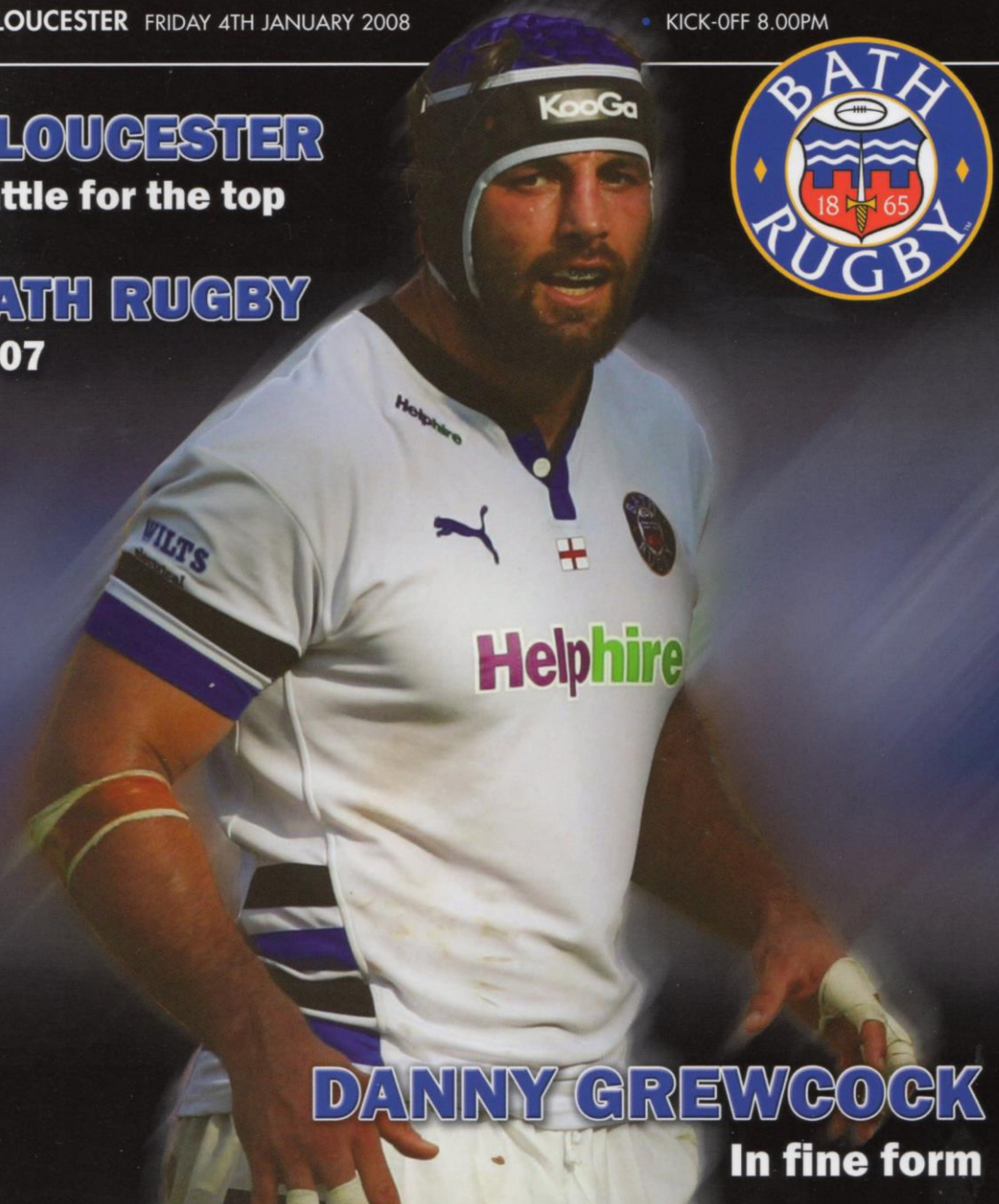
BATH RUGBY

V GLOUCESTER FRIDAY 4TH JANUARY 2008

KICK-OFF 8.00PM

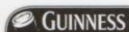
GLOUCESTER
Battle for the top

BATH RUGBY
2007



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In fine form

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BATTLE FOR THE TOP



Most, if not all, of Gloucester's trips to the Recreation Ground over the last two decades have ended in ghastly failure – that is to say they have still not registered a win against their nearest and dearest away from home in league competition.

Nobody from the blue half of this purely domestic dispute believes that will change tonight when the Guinness Premiership's top two collide yet again – particularly with lock turned winger Matt Banaher ripping up trees in the try scoring stakes.

But Gloucester come into this game on the back of a considerable victory away to Newcastle two days before Christmas – their 20-13 success built on their all-round defensive qualities, superior organisation and outstanding scrummage.

And while Bath have produced a brand of rugby that has caught the imagination so far this season, Gloucester's young brigade are also doing very nicely thank you very much.

Stand-off Ryan Lamb reeled off his third Heineken Cup man of the match performance of the season against Bourgoin before Christmas,

“Head coach Ryan moved heaven and earth to strengthen what was already a tremendously gifted squad”

Anthony Allen has rediscovered the sort of form that launched him into England's firmament last season and the tried and tested campaigners like Mike Tindall, Iain Balshaw and James Simpson-Daniel are running hot – and that is not to mention Lesley Vainikolo – a winger with seven Premiership tries already.

We are slowly reaching the tipping point of the season. Qualification to the knock-out stages of Europe is almost assured and Ryan and co turn their attentions back to the Guinness Premiership tonight.

They have lost just once – away to London Irish in October – and have set the pace alongside neighbours Bath, combining some outstanding attacking verve with an additional level of physicality that was missing from them last season and was

exposed in the Heineken Cup.

Last season's losing Guinness Premiership finalists made almost the perfect start to the season: five wins from six in the first section of the Premiership. Following their shellacking at Twickenham in May, head coach Ryan moved heaven and earth to strengthen what was already a tremendously gifted squad.

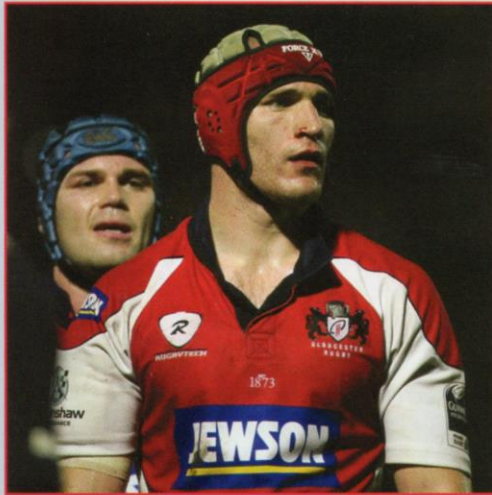
While the likes of the brilliantly precocious Lamb, the rapidly emerging Allen and full-back Olly Morgan had another season under their belts, heavy weights arrived in numbers.

Lesley Vainikolo, the try-hunting giant from Bradford was the most high profile arrival and has scored seven times already in Premiership action despite a serious neck injury.

Scotland's Chris Paterson, Wallaby hooker Jeremy Paul and Fiji's Akapusi Qera have all added to the mix. There have been other additions too: Alasdair Stokosch is a tackle-hungry, workaholic back row forward, Leon Lloyd made the switch from Leicester and Andy Titterrell has added versatility and dynamism to the hooking options.

Vainikolo announced himself on the Premiership with a debut record five tries at Headingley as Gloucester ran riot in the second half to claim a 49-24 victory with eight tries in all on the opening day of the season.

Gloucester followed that up with a hard-earned victory away to Saracens that put them under greater scrutiny. Although Vainikolo suffered a neck injury, Gloucester plundered tries from Anthony Allen, Ryan Lamb, Luke Narry and Olly Morgan to record a 38-31 victory.



THE CAPTAIN
PETER BUXTON



Having recently signed a new two-year contract, Buxton has pledged himself to Kingsholm until 2010.

As captain, he took the role during the World Cup when Marco Bortolami was away and has responded brilliantly, retaining the armband throughout the season. Renowned for his work-rate, physicality and endurance, Buxton is a key player in Gloucester's pack who will be a main man this afternoon.

It gave them maximum points after two rounds and last week they opened up at Kingsholm with a 29-7 success over neighbours Worcester Warriors.

However, it was tougher than the scoreline suggested but thanks to a brilliant individual try from James Simpson-Daniel, a punishing drive and score from hooker Olivier Azam and a returning try from Mike Tindall eased Gloucester to victory in front of almost 16,000 supporters.

A 29-7 win over Leicester at Welford Road and a convincing victory over Sale strengthened their position – before their 15-10 defeat at Irish put the skids under their start.

A draw against today's opponents Newcastle and defeat to Wasps put them out of the EDF Energy Cup but they have responded well with six successive victories – four in the Heineken Cup.

After pasting Ulster all over Ravenhill with the quickest bonus point in the competition's history, Gloucester beat the Ospreys and Bourgain back-to-back. In between, they over-turned a potentially fatal half-time deficit to grind out a 27-25 win over Harlequins thanks to two tries from the 'Volcano' and will be hunting more points today.



“ While Bath have produced a brand of rugby that has caught the imagination so far this season, Gloucester's young brigade are also doing very nicely thank you very much **”**



ONE TO WATCH Anthony Allen

PICTURES | GETTYIMAGES

Regarded as one of the new generation of outstanding English players, Allen has been in fine form for Gloucester this season. Already with two England caps following his debut against the All Blacks last year, Allen has forged a highly effective midfield partnership with former Bath man Mike Tindall.

He signed professional terms with Gloucester on leaving Millfield School in 2005 and is contracted to Kingsholm until 2009. Capable of reading the game brilliantly, Allen has a wonderful step, is deceptively quick and has already scored 19 tries in 58 senior appearances, including four this season.

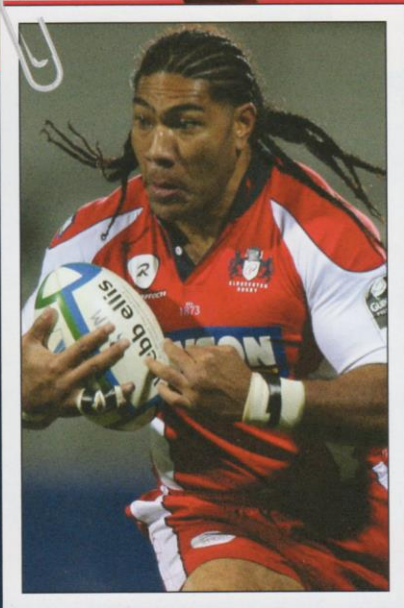
This season, he made 11 appearances in succession before resting during Gloucester's EDF Energy Cup victory over the Dragons in November but has since returned to the side and was instrumental in Gloucester's Heineken Cup win over Bourgoin at the Stade Pierre Rajon.

His form has been so good that many have hinted at a potential England recall as head coach Brian Ashton plans for his brave new world.

3 to watch

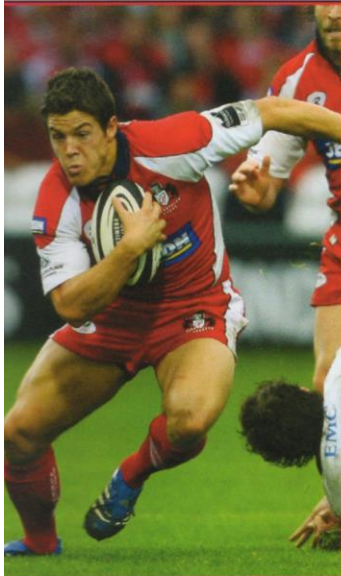
LESLEY VAINIKOLO

Powerful, quick and with a nose for the try-line, Vainikolo was Gloucester's highest profile capture during the summer from Bradford Bulls and scored a Premiership record five tries on his debut against Leeds. Before Gloucester's trip to Newcastle he had scored seven tries in only three games.



NICK WOOD

Quietly unassuming, Wood has been central to Gloucester's set-piece work this season. There maybe flashier exponents of the front row world doing the business but Wood's form has been so consistent and so mature that many pundits have mentioned him and England in the same breath.



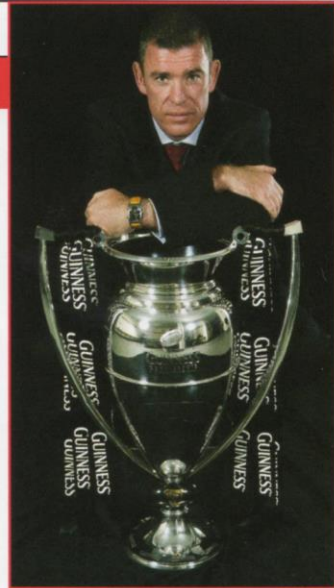
“ His form has been so good that many have hinted at a potential England recall ”

HEAD COACH DEAN RYAN

Dean Ryan is in his third year as Gloucester's head coach having taken over from Nigel Melville.

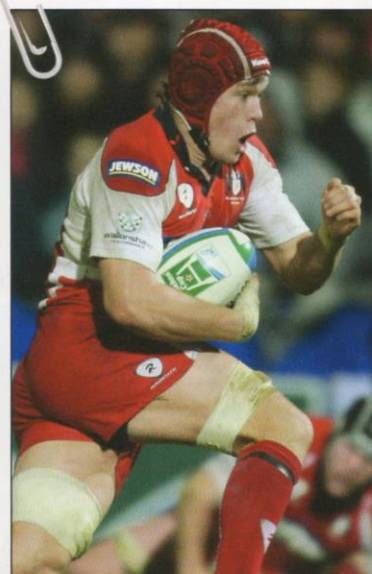
Formerly a player with Saracens, Wasps, Newcastle and Bristol, he won the European Challenge Cup in his first year and is widely regarded as one of the most respected and forward thinking coaches in the Premiership.

Responsible for bringing on players like Ryan Lamb, Anthony Allen and Olly Morgan, Ryan has led Gloucester to the top of the Guinness Premiership this year.



LUKE NARRAWAY

One of Gloucester's best players this season, Narryaway has been in outstanding form on the back of the scrum. In competition with Gareth Delve for the number eight shirt, Narryaway is an intelligent footballer, runs great attacking lines and can also play at six and seven. A real talent for the future





Past Masters

REFLECTIONS FROM BATH RUGBY'S PAST

With thanks to Roger Elliott and Peter Hall (Bath Rugby Past Players Association)

Bath founded 1865

Gloucester founded 1873

Club records pick up Bath v Gloucester encounters in the early 1880's.

Records are sketchy, but we know Bath travelled to Gloucester on the 2nd December 1882 to suffer a 0-12 defeat. Gloucester's tries were scored by H Coates Sloman and Dewey. The goals were kicked by Boughton, Jones and Berry.

Home and away fixtures are recorded from the following season.

ONE MAN SHORT

Early results seem to have gone in Gloucester's favour.

On the 29th November 1884, Bath lost at Lambridge by 3 goals to nil, with Gloucester playing with one short!

On the 9th January 1886 Bath played Gloucester at Henrietta Park (courtesy of Bath College). The score was a 1-1 draw (one try each).

Since those early days the archives are full of reports of matches between the two sides. As these are our first 'reflections', we believe it more appropriate to recall two relatively recent drawn games, with both sides fielding outstanding players of their day, perpetuating a long tradition of friendly rivalry.

12th February 1983 v Gloucester, away. The game was drawn 7-7.

Team:- C Ralston, D Trick, J Palmer, S Halliday, B Trevaskis, J P Horton, S M Lewis, G Chilcott, R Cunningham, R Lee, N Gaymond, R Hakin, R Spurrell, J Hall and P Simpson.

What Happened: Gloucester's progress in the John Player Cup, hinged on Paul Ford's injury time penalty attempt.

Unfortunately for Gloucester, he was wide and short and the match was tied. Gloucester had trailed 0-7 at one stage as Bath had scored with a try by Trevaskis and a Horton drop goal. The home side pulled back with a try by Price and a drop goal from Jones and the game was an exact draw. However Bath moved forward due to being the away side.

20th February 1988 v Gloucester, home. Drawn 26-26.

Team:- P Cue (2pg and 1g), D Trick, J Guscott (2 tries, 1 penalty and 1 drop goal), S Halliday, A Lumsden, J Palmer, R Hill, G Chilcott, R Dawe, R Lee, J Morrison, M Jones (1 try), K Withey, N Maslen, P Simpson.
Replacements - J Barnsey and P Mills.

What Happened: Bath pulled back from a 9-19 deficit, but Gloucester's late try squared the game in the final minutes. Amid deadly silence, the normally reliable Smith hit the near post with his conversion attempt

Important Dates:

- Benevolent Fund Match Collection (February 16th 2008 Bath v London Wasps) Contact Derek Stent on 10225 466 768
- Annual Re-union at the Guildhall (March 22nd 2008 - Bath v London Irish). Contact Roger Elliott on 01666 500 468

