

FIRST DIVISION

RUGBY

P R O M A G




FOUNDED 1873

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RESTRUCTURING THE ENGLISH BACK ROW

 **COURAGE** 
CLUBS CHAMPIONSHIP

Westbury 

**GLOUCESTER
v
WEST HARTLEPOOL**

at Kingsholm
Saturday 18th January 1997
Kick off 3.00 pm



First Division
RUGBY

All the best to West

Seems an awful long time since we were last gathered together in the search for mutual truth and purpose. In fact it's four whole weeks, which the intervention of Christmas and New Year celebrations have made seem even longer. For once, the reason for the hiatus has had less to do with the vagaries of a strangely distorted season, than with a series of temperatures calculated to freeze the ballcocks off a brass cistern, which is, I suppose, at least traditional for this time of year.

One of the casualties has been the equally traditional practice of tendering New Year wishes to everyone through the medium of these pages. It's a bit late to do that now (although I hope you'll take them as read, and none the less sincere for their brevity), but there's one set of people to whom everyone at Kingsholm will wish to extend hearty thanks and, after today's get together, the very best of good wishes for the rest of the 1996/7 season.

I refer, of course, to the whole West Hartlepool clan - players, officials, supporters, bartenders, camp followers, the lady who comes in to disinfect the telephones, and including the clubhouse cat, and the groundsman's budgerigar. To everyone, in fact, who has ever cocked an approving eyebrow in the direction of today's respected and welcome visitors.

The reason for such fulsome felicitations? Obvious. 'West' did us an enormous favour by beating Bristol the other weekend. Deadlines being what they are in these highly technological days, I don't know what happened last weekend at the time of writing, but that victory left us two points clear of our

nearest rivals with a game in hand over them, and that is certainly not to be sniffed at, whatever has transpired meanwhile.

As I write this, 'West are probably on their way to Orrell for, what the Press loves to call 'the bottom of the table clash'. Conventional wisdom says that they ought to have won that one, and that they are coming here with two successive League victories under their belts, which means they'll be on something of a roll. If Orrell did manage to put it across them - and it's never easy to win at Edgehall Road - then they'll be out to prove that the Bristol result was no flash in the pan. Either way, all guns will be blazing today.

On the other hand, Gloucester do badly need to win this game. Before the weather intervened, we had a fair old measure of momentum ourselves, and Richard Hill and the lads will want to re-establish that, and then some. One way and another, we're in for an exciting encounter at Kingsholm today.

My own opinion is that West Hartlepool is a better side than the position in the League table suggests. It would be easy to lose to them, as we could have done on their own ground a bit earlier on. You may agree or disagree with that, but you'll certainly be with me when I say that they are one of the most enjoyable clubs we meet all year. Hospitality up there is superb, one always feels welcome, and several major clubs could take lessons from them on that score. Ask the legendary coachload known as 'Mitchell's Marauders', if you have any doubts on that score.

Once again, good wishes to West Hartlepool. We hope they have a great time here at Kingsholm.

Peter Arnold

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Well Done the Famous Five

A whole fistful of players in the England 'A' squad at Bisham Abbey! That's one more than even Leicester could muster. As I've said before, it's a vindication of Richard Hill's youth policy, even if he does, I imagine, have a say in selection for such gatherings.

Congratulations to Chris Catling, Mark Mapletoft, Dave Sims and Rob Fidler, all of whom richly deserve their elevation to such august ranks, but I'm sure they would agree if I give just a little emphasis to Scott Benton's selection.

The other four have played at this level before. Scott has only graced the benches as replacement scrum-half as yet, so we all hope he can get a chance to show his undoubted quality.

If I read the fixture lists aright, it seems that England 'A' are committed to playing two fixtures on the same day - January 31st, when they're down to meet Scotland 'A' and the Otago touring side. As the 'A' squad only consists of 40 hopefuls, I suppose that our quintet are all in with a good fighting chance of a game. If not, there are two further opportunities in February, when matches are scheduled against France and Ireland.

We shall watch events with interest.

GREENING FOR DANGER

Congratulations, too, to Phil Greening on keeping his spot in the full England squad, an eventuality which will have surprised precisely no one. It was also very gratifying to note his reactions, and those of the club, to the stories about predators trying to seduce him away from Kingsholm. If you believe some reports, there have been whole flocks of vultures circling over Kingsholm, fighting over Phil's superbly fit carcass. In fact, such farragos are, I'm told, grossly exaggerated.

In any case, it seems that Our Mr. Greening,

backed by the Board, has pointed out that there is more to rugby than pointing a loaded cheque book. Down this way there is, anyway; can't vouch for certain other necks of the woods.

Of course, no one can say for certain what the future may hold, but no one ever accused Phil Greening of being anything other than an intelligent young man, and if I were in his boots, I'd want to see what a few full Caps did to my market value before I relinquished any options.

And there's always that old-fashioned word 'loyalty' isn't there? It seems Phil Greening has that in spades.

MAKING HIS POINT

I suppose the worst moment of last weekend came when Mark Mapletoft left the field at the end of the London Irish game, nursing what was described in the Press, as 'an injured arm'. That was worrying, but seeing him being interviewed for 'Rugby Special' after the match, not in any apparent discomfort, did allay worries somewhat.

At the point when he made his exit, if my arithmetic is correct, he had scored eleven points. Having already pocketed 288 for the season, that puts him on 299 right now. He was already the leading points scorer in the country, according to the Unisys rankings, so when he gets on the score sheet today, assuming he's fit, he will become the first player in England to reach the 300 mark this time round. That merits an extra big outburst of decibels, I would have thought.

It's the first time a Gloucester player has headed the points scoring list for years (Peter Butler was it?), so Tofty's achievement is especially welcome in the up-and-down season.

Well done, Mark. Keep your kicking boots on.

Peter Arnold

Gloucester News

Thumbs Down

A sympathetic thought for Ian Smith would seem to be in order. Struggling to get his place in the Gloucester side, he has nevertheless sparkled on his outing for Scotland. Then he goes and breaks his thumb. Just before the Five Nations.

They do say that when it starts descending on you from a great height, it goes on doing it. That certainly appears to be so in Ian's case. Get fit soon, 'Smithy'. We're rooting for you.

CUP NEXT WEEK

It will be no news to you that we are eagerly looking forward to next week's Pilkington Cup encounter with our favourite enemies of all, the lads from Bristol. I can just hear our welcome visitors today saying things like "You should be all right. We beat them without any trouble.", but that would be an understandable misunderstanding of the situation. A word to travelling 'Westies'. Take your relationships with such sides as Newcastle and Darlington, then triple it, and add another 200% for the 'Shed Factor'. You may then just about have an inkling of the traditional, and extremely friendly, rivalry between the West Country's two premier rugby clubs. (I don't count that fading bunch down at the 'Rec.' They're comparative Johnny-come-latelies, anyway).

Gloucester v. Bristol is one of those local tribal feasts where the form book flies out of the window. The current record, and reputations, count for nothing. Positional comparisons are always fascinating. Consider.

This time round, we have Greening v. Regan, Benton v. Rob Jones, Mapletoft v. Burke, Sims v. Shaw. There are an awful lot of points to prove among that lot, and the front-row encounter will not be one to recommend to your maiden aunt.

Anyone who thinks their nerves can stand it are recommended to get their tickets right away, on sale at the office now. £12.00 Stand, (no concessions) £8.00 Ground (OAP's and Juniors £6.00).

And I should remind you that this is an 'all-pay' affair, in line with the rules of the Competition.

One for the connoisseur, this one.

CATCHING 'EM YOUNG

Richard Scrivens agreed to act as Match Mascot today at fairly short notice, so I don't have too much information about him. I do know that he's thirteen years old, which makes him fairly elderly as Mascots go, but none the less welcome for that.

I also hear that he comes from Ruardean, as many a good player has before him, and attends Heywood School. He has a sister named Kelly, who is 15.

Rich is obviously very keen on his rugby, but - don't tell anyone - he also supports Liverpool F.C. Thanks for stepping into the breach, Richard.

Peter Arnold

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Gloucester News

How Tim Curtis Certainly not through

Tim Curtis is a Director of Gloucester RFC Limited. In fact, he's the resident legal eagle. He's also the furthest flung of the Fabulous Five, living in Ealing, and working from Chancery Lane. Obviously his professional expertise is extremely valuable in looking at the minutiae of the various contracts, and other documents, which the flesh of the professional game is heir to. In fact, it was on one such matter that he rang me the other day, so I grabbed the opportunity to ask him to provide a piece for this programme. He agreed like a shot, and here is his contribution.

Incidentally, I do like his suggestion in his final paragraph, and have asked Steve from our unofficial Web Page to float the idea via the Internet. (Steve@Glawster.demon.co.uk, for any surfers out there.)

It also occurs to me that Old Cryptians have a London Branch, and might feel inclined to get involved in such a venture. Over to you, O.C's.

Although professional rugby was inevitable, no-one could have foreseen how difficult its birth and infancy would be. I could fill this whole programme with stories about what has happened, and my opinions on a variety of issues, but with limited space available, I have to content myself with a handful of observations.

My involvement as a director this year has meant that, for the first time in my life, I have had detailed knowledge about matters which have been reported in the national press. It has been a depressing education in how misleading elements of the national press can be. While I have high regard for Katie Coker

as our premier local rugby journalist, and for some of the national journalists such as Stephen Jones and Paul Ackford, others have written pieces which have been so wildly at variance from the truth that they can only have been pure speculation, or the tired unoriginal reprints of lines fed to them by those with a particular axe to grind. A journalist acting as a PR mouthpiece without scepticism or irreverence has neither integrity nor independence. In my book, that means he is not a journalist.

It would be ridiculous to think that professional sport and business are not closely related. Many make their living out of sport. My own job as a solicitor specialising in media, entertainment and sport issues, has brought me into contact with some of the biggest sharks in the worlds of film and television. Some of those sharks are agents representing talented actors and directors. Agents are now having an increasing role to play in all sports and, fortunately, those in the UK are not yet even within spitting distance of the worst the film industry has to offer. In my view, it is important that players, officials, and supporters realise that to some extent a player's agent is like a stockbroker at the Stock Exchange. He works on commission and, therefore, unless people are buying and selling, the agent or stockbroker does not make any money. That is why some agents regard players as commodities and are only interested in the cash which a deal generates. There is no commission on a player feeling settled and happy, enjoying being in a team with a purpose, or having a drink after the match with his team-mates and the supporters.

Although all clubs need more money, I do fear that business principles are, in some cases, already being taken too far. A small example.

Peter Arnold

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rtis Sees It rose-tinted glasses

am told that at one rich club in the North, players do not get a meal after the match. They are provided with a sandwich, but have to pay for their own meals and drinks. Everywhere else the after-match meal for both sides is, and ought to be, part of the courtesies of the game. At Gloucester our aim is to run the club's activities in a business-like way, but we are not a business venture seeking to make profits for investors. There is, I believe, an important difference. Who knows whether Rugby Union will be able to sustain professionalism to any significant degree? Whether we can succeed in our aim (and at the same time remain a leading club) is another matter. Hindsight will in time inevitably reveal whether we are shrewd or naive.

After those somewhat sour comments, I will finish on a different note. Even after a relatively short involvement with the club as an official, I still remain first and foremost a completely biased fan of Gloucester rugby and Gloucester Rugby Club. Even though I live in London, I spend most of my time daydreaming about Kingsholm, running through the fixtures

to calculate how the season might turn out, defending Gloucester against the taunts of patronising metropolitan soccer fans, and looking forward to the day when Gloucester win the double. If I am unable to be at a game (and ironically I will not be at today's match) I will spend a Saturday afternoon staring at the Ceefax, holding my breath as the pages turn, groaning in disbelief as the result of the Fourth Division match appears before the Gloucester result, and then spending the rest of the weekend either smiling or in deep gloom. We hold these things to be self-evident: there has never been a penalty properly awarded against Gloucester; there is no better view in life than the one which takes in both Kingsholm and the Cathedral, especially when they are floodlit; there is nowhere else where the result of a match affects the resilience and ardour of the Gloucester supporter. Kingsholm is where the heart is. Here's hoping it keeps pumping the lifeblood of the city for ever.

If there are any London-based supporters in exile who want to meet up regularly for a beer, please contact me on 0171 631 1050.



Scott Benton



Saturday 18th January 1997 Kick-off 3.00pm

GLOUCESTER

Cherry & White

WEST HARTLEPOOL

Green & White

15	Chris Catling	Full Back	Matthew Silva	15
14	Mike Peters	Right Wing	Michael Wood	14
13	Don Caskie	Centre	Liam Botham	13
12	Martin Roberts	Centre	Jamie Connolly	12
11	Mike Lloyd	Left Wing	Stephen John	11
10	Mark Mapletoft	Outside Half	John Stabler	10
9	Scott Benton	Scrum Half	Phil Harvey	9
1	Tony Windo	Prop	Wayne de Jonge	1
2	Phil Greening (I)	Hooker	Stuart Whitehead	2
3	Andy Deacon	Prop	Paul Whitelock	3
4	Rob Fidler	Lock	Chris Murphy	4
5	Dave Sims *	Lock	Kevin Moseley (I) *	
6	Ed Pearce	Flanker	Jon Lois	6
7	Nathan Carter	Flanker	Mark Roderick	7
8	Simon Devereux	No.8	Ivan Morgan	8
16	Charlie Mulraine	Replacements	Chris John	16
17	Martyn Kimber		Andrew Peacock	17
18	Warwick Bullock		John Painter	18
19	Mark Cornwell		Charles Yeoman	
20				
21				

Referee
Tony Rossall (RFU/Liverpool)

(I) International
* Captain

Touch Judges
P Allen (RFU)