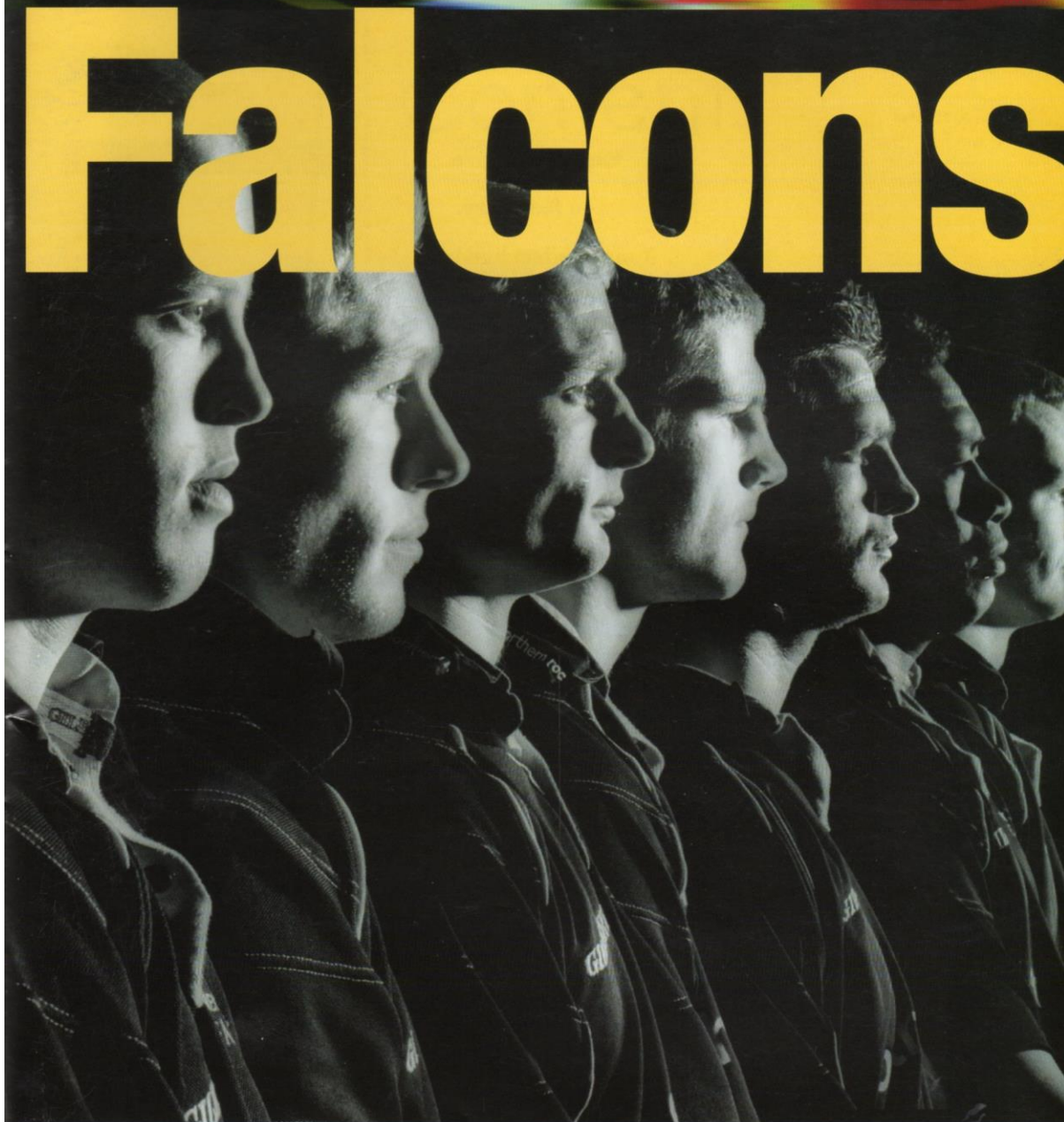


Official Match Programme
September 2002
£2.50

Falcons



01 September **v London Wasps**



15 September **v Gloucester**



29 September **v Leeds Tykes**



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Introducing . . .

Gloucester



On the whole, Gloucester enjoyed a very satisfying end to the 2001/02 season. After finishing third in the Zurich Premiership, behind perennial Champions Leicester Tigers and the League's surprise package Sale Sharks, on the 8th June they played Bristol Shoguns in the Zurich Championship final.

After defeating Newcastle at home and Sale Sharks away in the previous rounds, the stage was set for Gloucester to take on Bristol in a true West Country showdown, between the leagues oldest teams. Although not a great playing spectacle, as the occasion and long season perhaps got to a few players, it was still a pulsating match and with twenty-three points from the best buy of the season, Ludovic Mercier, and a try from man of the match Jake Boer, Gloucester won the day 28-23.

Gloucester's form throughout the season and particularly in the lead up to this season's climax was again excellent but perhaps they have still not fulfilled their potential. At Kingsholm, the Cherry and Whites were almost unbeatable, almost, because they did suffer one defeat at home to the Premiership Champions Leicester. It was, however, Gloucester's away form that prevented them from challenging the Tigers more strongly.

In European competition Gloucester swept all before them in the pool stages, and on a cold, wet, windy night they won a tricky Anglo-Welsh fixture against Ebbw Vale in the Parker Pen Shield Quarter-Final. Unfortunately they failed at the penultimate hurdle as they lost to the Sale Sharks in a nail-biting Semi-Final, that the Cheshire side won by a solitary point.

Lessons were learned and towards the end of the season, under the guidance of new director of rugby, Nigel Melville, who replaced a tearful Philippe Saint-Andre after the Quins match last season, Gloucester began to raise their standards and tread new ground. With away wins against Bristol and Leeds finally, it seemed that they had exorcised the demons that had plagued them away from home. Gloucester have pre-seasoned well. A successful tour to South Africa and competitive games against an invitational Durban Rovers side and the Natal Sharks were followed by a double-header of home and away games against Newport.

Gloucester enjoyed the best of the spoils wining both the home and away fixtures, breaking the fifty-point barrier twice in the process. Especially pleasing for the Cherry and Whites was the fact that Nigel Melville made eleven changes to the side that played away to Newport and still fielded a very strong team.

It is this strength in depth that could finally see Gloucester fulfil their promise and, once more, and mount a serious challenge to the Tigers next season.

On the field Nigel Melville has added Peter Buxton, Thinus Delpont, and Simon Amor to a very strong squad. Off the field Melville has enticed Dean Ryan away from the Shoguns and the two along with Rudi Meir, a skills and conditioning coach from Australia, and Wayne Diesel, the former Springbok physio hope to provide the support and coaching this squad needs to succeed.



