

CHERRY & WHITES



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**GLOUCESTER
RUGBY**

V **EXETER CHIEFS**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY
OFFICIAL MATCHDAY PROGRAMME**
2017/18 SEASON / ISSUE 01
AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY
FRIDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2017
KO 19.45 / £3

AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

AVIVA

LAND-ROVER

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CITIZEN

GILBERT

THE SUNDAY TIMES
THE SUNDAY TIMES

5

BT Sport

CAPTAIN'S CORNER

WILLI HEINZ

RIGHT: Willi Heinz looks on during the Captain's Run ahead of the ERC Challenge Cup final between Gloucester and Stade Français at Murrayfield Stadium on May 11, 2017 in Edinburgh, Scotland.

IT'S GREAT TO BE WRITING THESE NOTES FOR THE FIRST TIME AS THE CAPTAIN OF GLOUCESTER RUGBY, AND WE'RE LOOKING AHEAD TO A VERY EXCITING NEW DOMESTIC SEASON.

It seems a long time since the final whistle blew in Edinburgh back in May. It's been tough for us that we've not had a chance to bounce back from that game, but there is a really great mood amongst the playing group, and a good buzz ahead of the new campaign.

The Aviva Premiership gets harder every year, I've definitely found that in my time at the club, and this year is no different. We met Exeter in the last game of last season, and they went on to lift the title, so it will be good to renew the battle with them this week.

They set the bar last season, winning the Aviva Premiership was a great achievement for them, and they are a great opponent for our Kingsholm curtain-raiser.

We know that the Chiefs bring a large vocal away following, and my request on behalf of the squad for the Gloucester fans is to make yourselves heard throughout the game. That said, we have to provide that exciting rugby to produce the noise.

We felt happy after the pair of wins at Kingsholm last week, and in the game against Scarlets, we played some really exciting rugby. Going into the game we wanted to be tested against the Pro 14 Champions, and our defensive effort in the first half was great.

We went down to 14-men but the effort, commitment and application from the boys to stick to our defensive game plan, with a man in the sin bin, and keep Scarlets out for phase after phase was great to see, and we know we

have to find that level for 80 minutes this weekend against a clinical Exeter offensive unit.

We've had a really tough, and gruelling preseason this summer, and we have come together nicely as a squad. The new faces have settled in nicely and everyone has been getting to know Johan who has made a great first impression.

What players want is a Head Coach who they respect and believe in, Johan definitely provides that. When he and David approached me to be the captain, I couldn't have been prouder.

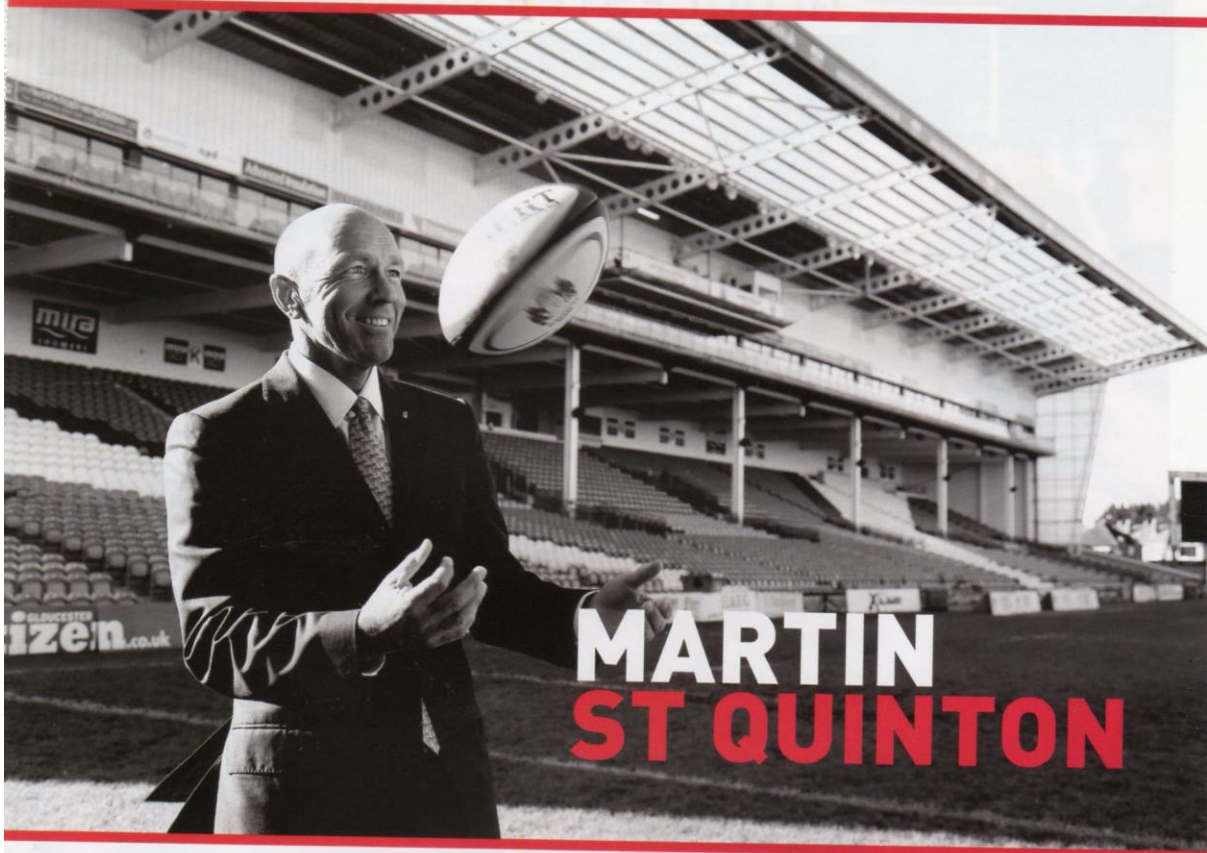
When I arrived at the club in 2015, I was keen to prove my recovery from my injury and find my feet in the league. To now be captaining the side for this season, is something that I am hugely proud of and will treasure for a long time.

But with the role, comes responsibility and I am committed to doing everything I can to lead from the front, and create some awesome memories for the squad, and our fans this season.

It'll be great to see you all tonight, and we'll be giving everything to give you plenty to shout about!

Enjoy the game!

Willi



Good evening and a very warm welcome to Kingsholm for our first Aviva Premiership fixture of the 2017-18 season.

Before we contemplate the game itself, against the reigning Premiership champions, I'd just like to pay tribute to our Operations Team and contractors who have carried out the repair work that has taken place at the stadium over the last few weeks.

Each and every year, of course, we carry out a lot of essential work during the close season, but this summer presented us with an exceptional challenge when two extraordinary rain storms caused terrible flooding in the Mira Showers Stand.

I'm not exaggerating when I say that work has gone on around the clock to get everything ready in time, and it's been an heroic effort by all the staff.

This evening will also see us play the first competitive game under our new Head Coach Johan Ackermann and I'm sure you will all want to give him a warm Gloucester welcome.

When Laurie Fisher announced his departure towards the

end of last season, Johan very quickly became our number one choice and we were delighted when he decided to join us. It's a big move for himself and his family, and we hope that their stay in England is a happy and successful one.

It couldn't be a more challenging start for Johan and the team on the pitch, of course, as we face the defending Premiership champions, Exeter Chiefs, at Kingsholm this evening.

The Exeter story is a remarkable one. We were in fact the opposition in their very first Premiership fixture, back in September 2010, and you can only admire what they have gone on to achieve since gaining promotion to the top flight.

However, whilst we acknowledge how far our visitors have come, we are very much focused on the start of our own journey with Johan and would like nothing better than to get off to a winning start this evening by defeating the reigning champions!

Martin

GOOD EVENING AND WELCOME BACK TO KINGSHOLM FOR OUR FIRST GAME OF THE 2017/18 AVIVA PREMIERSHIP SEASON AGAINST EXETER CHIEFS.

The start of every new Premiership season brings a sense of anticipation and optimism for all players and supporters but this summer, with the arrival of new players and Johan Ackermann in Gloucester, we're all very excited to kick off the 2017/18 season at Kingsholm against the Premiership Champions.

I'm delighted to welcome Ruan Ackermann, Fraser Balmain, Gareth Denman, Ed Slater, Jake Polledri, Val Rapava Ruskin, Owen Williams & Jason Woodward to Kingsholm as Gloucester players and I'm sure you're looking forward to the impact they will have over the next few months.

With the quality of players that we've added to the group, our playing squad is stronger now than it was 12 months ago but the biggest change during pre-season has been the arrival of Johan Ackermann.

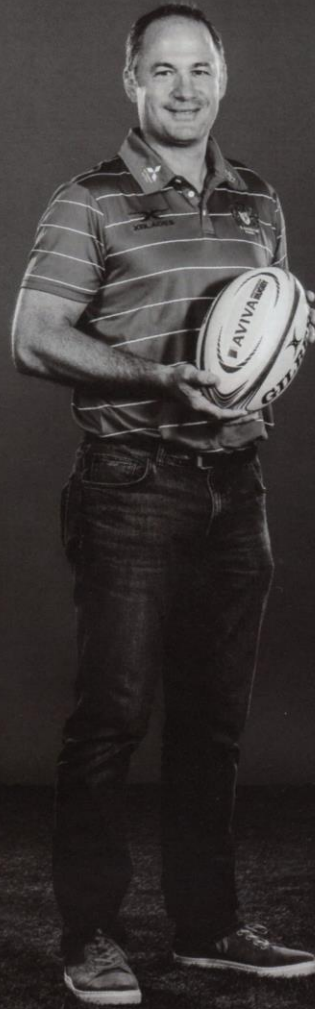
After transforming the Lions in Super Rugby over the past 5 seasons we were delighted when he accepted the Head Coach role at Gloucester and although he only arrived a couple of weeks ago, he's already made a big impression on everyone at the Club.

Anyone who attended the Fans Forum during the week will have got a sense of his honesty and his deep-rooted passion and values for the game and I'm excited to be working with him to deliver success at Gloucester.

Despite Johan's late arrival due to the Lions reaching the final of Super Rugby, it's been a really tough preseason for the players physically and the intensity has been going up bit by bit over the past two weeks as the Exeter game has loomed on the horizon. There were lots of positives from the preseason games but we all know the results in friendly games count for nothing and are under no illusions as to the task ahead this evening and over the next few weeks.

With all the training and preparation now done we're very much looking forward to this evening's game. Rob Baxter has done an outstanding job with the Chiefs and, as we saw in the last Premiership game at Kingsholm in May, they have developed into a great side and were worthy Champions last season. I'm delighted to welcome Rob and all the Exeter

DAVID HUMPHREYS.



players, staff and supporters to Gloucester for the start of another season.

It's going to be a wonderful Kingsholm atmosphere in front of a huge partisan home crowd. Your support tonight, and throughout the season, will be absolutely vital to delivering the quality performance we'll need to get the season off to a winning start.

Enjoy the game.

David



2017/18 SQUAD

RUAN ACKERMANN



POS
Back Row
HT/WT
6ft 4in / 108kg
DOB
29.12.95
HONOURS
-

SPONSOR
Omega

JOHN AFOA



POS
Prop
HT/WT
5ft 11in / 120kg
DOB
16.10.83
HONOURS
New Zealand
SPONSOR
-

CULLIMORE
GRAVELS

MARK ATKINSON



POS
Centre
HT/WT
6ft 5in / 107kg
DOB
08.03.90
HONOURS
-

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01452 872 274

FRASER BALMAIN



POS
Prop
HT/WT
6ft 1in / 117kg
DOB
16.11.91
HONOURS
-

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CALLUM BRALEY



POS
Scrum half
HT/WT
5ft 10in / 83kg
DOB
20.03.94
HONOURS
-

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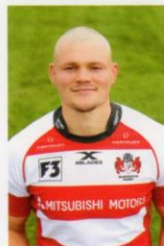
BILLY BURNS



POS
Fly half
HT/WT
5ft 11in / 85kg
DOB
13.06.94
HONOURS
-

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FREDDIE CLARKE



POS
Back row
HT/WT
6ft 5in / 114kg
DOB
10.10.92
HONOURS
-

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01452 872 274

GARETH DENMAN



POS
Prop
HT/WT
5ft 11in / 114kg
DOB
12.11.90
HONOURS
-

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CHELSEAFCAR SERVICES
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TOM DENTON



POS
Lock
HT/WT
6ft 6in / 114kg
DOB
13.02.88
HONOURS
-

SPONSOR
rra

GARETH EVANS



POS
Back row
HT/WT
6ft 3in / 111kg
DOB
19.09.91
HONOURS
-

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LLOYD EVANS



POS
Fly half
HT/WT
6ft / 84kg
DOB
14.12.95
HONOURS
-

SPONSOR
DC DEAN CLOSE
CHELTENHAM
SENIOR SCHOOL

MARIANO GALARZA



POS
Lock
HT/WT
6ft 8in / 114kg
DOB
12.11.86
HONOURS
Argentina
SPONSOR
-

Sherbornes
Solicitors Ltd

DAVID HALAIFONUA



POS
Wing
HT/WT
6ft 2in / 104kg
DOB
05.07.87
HONOURS
Tonga
SPONSOR



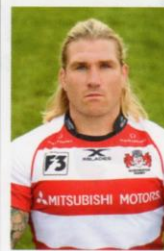
WILLI HEINZ



POS
Scrum half
HT/WT
5ft 11in / 89kg
DOB
24.11.86
HONOURS
-
SPONSOR

Ann & Terry Short

RICHARD HIBBARD



POS
Hooker
HT/WT
6ft / 112kg
DOB
13.12.83
HONOURS
Wales
SPONSOR



JOSH HOHNECK



POS
Prop
HT/WT
6ft 3in / 123kg
DOB
06.01.86
HONOURS
-

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LEWIS LUDLOW



POS
Back row
HT/WT
6ft 3in / 105kg
DOB
11.09.94
HONOURS
-

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Agricultural
Merchants
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TOM MARSHALL



POS
Full back
HT/WT
6ft / 91kg
DOB
05.07.90
HONOURS
-

SPONSOR
Lexi Young
&
Family

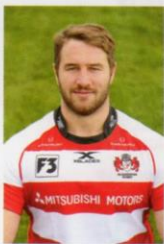
MOTU MATU'U



POS
Hooker
HT/WT
6ft / 108kg
DOB
30.04.87
HONOURS
Samoa
SPONSOR



PADDY McALLISTER



POS
Prop
HT/WT
6ft 1in / 119kg
DOB
20.07.89
HONOURS
-

SPONSOR



BEN MORGAN



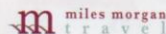
POS
Number eight
HT/WT
6ft 3in / 117kg
DOB
20.07.89
HONOURS
England
SPONSOR



ROSS MORIARTY



POS
Back row
HT/WT
6ft 2in / 103kg
DOB
18.04.94
HONOURS
Wales
SPONSOR



CAMERON ORR



POS
Prop
HT/WT
6ft 2in / 122kg
DOB
02.04.95
HONOURS
-

SPONSOR
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HENRY PURDY



POS
Wing
HT/WT
6ft 2in / 94kg
DOB
21.05.94
HONOURS
-

SPONSOR
Available Call
01452 872 274

VAL RAPAVA RUSKIN



POS
Prop
HT/WT
6ft 3in / 124kg
DOB
12.10.92
HONOURS
-

SPONSOR
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JACOB ROWAN



POS
Back row
HT/WT
6ft 1in / 104kg
DOB
14.01.90
HONOURS
-

SPONSOR



TOM SAVAGE

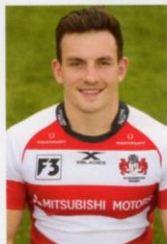


POS
Lock / back row
HT/WT
6ft 5in / 115kg
DOB
18.04.89
HONOURS
-

SPONSOR
Available Call
01452 872 274



MATT SCOTT



POS
Centre
HT/WT
6ft 1in / 101kg
DOB
30.09.90
HONOURS
Scotland
SPONSOR



CHARLIE SHARPLES



POS
Wing
HT/WT
5ft 11in / 89kg
DOB
17.08.89
HONOURS
England
SPONSOR

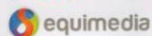


ED SLATER



POS
Lock
HT/WT
6ft 5in / 116kg
DOB
01.08.88
HONOURS

SPONSOR



ANDREW SYMONS



POS
Centre
HT/WT
6ft 5in / 106kg
DOB
29.06.91
HONOURS

SPONSOR

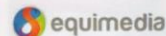
Available Call
01452 872 274

OLLIE THORLEY



POS
Centre/ wing
HT/WT
6ft 1in / 97kg
DOB
11.09.96
HONOURS

SPONSOR



JEREMY THRUSH



POS
Lock
HT/WT
6ft 6in / 116kg
DOB
19.04.85
HONOURS
New Zealand
SPONSOR



HENRY TRINDER



POS
Centre
HT/WT
6ft 1in / 93kg
DOB
14.04.89
HONOURS

SPONSOR



BILLY TWELVETREES



POS
Centre
HT/WT
6ft 3in / 103kg
DOB
15.11.88
HONOURS
England
SPONSOR

VP YACHTING

BEN VELLACOTT



POS
Scrum half
HT/WT
5ft 6in / 78kg
DOB
28.03.95
HONOURS

SPONSOR



OWEN WILLIAMS



POS
Fly half
HT/WT
6ft / 92kg
DOB
27.02.92
HONOURS
Wales
SPONSOR

CULLIMORE



JASON WOODWARD



POS
Full back
HT/WT
6ft 2in / 101kg
DOB
17.05.90
HONOURS

SPONSOR



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Back Row (L-R), R.R.Morris, R.Long, R.Collins, M.J.Potter, M.Elway, T.Pritchard, J.Holder, W.Cale N.H.B.Duncliffe, P.J.Ford, P.Hawker, F.Ewers, C.Pope, C.A.R.Lanckester, J.Hickie, T.R.Tandy

GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE

Season 1971-72

Captain: Mike Nicholls

Played	49
Won	37
Lost	9
Drawn	3
For	821
Against	414

The 1971-72 season was one of the best in Gloucester's history. Mike Nicholls was an inspirational leader, whose pre-match team talks were legendary if frightening. Much of the success stemmed from a mighty pack, with a front row of Robin Cowling, Mike Nicholls and Mike Burton, supported in the second row by Alan Brinn and Jim Jarrett. The back row of John Watkins, Mike Potter and Dick Smith was arguably the best in the country. They pressured opponents relentlessly and created the opportunities for Eric Stephens to kick the penalties and Bob Clewes to score the tries.

This was the inaugural season for the RFU National Knock-Out Competition, popularly known as "The Cup", with 32 clubs selected to take part. There were no fixed dates for the games, so clubs had to fit games into their existing fixture lists by mutual agreement. The very first game was between Gloucester and Bath at the "Rec" on the evening of Thursday 30th September, a very low key affair, which Gloucester won 12-3 thanks to four Eric Stephens penalties.



Second Row (L-R), H.C.King (Secretary), J.A.Bayliss, T.Palmer, K.Richardson, J.S.Jarrett, A.Brinn N.Jackson, J.Haines, R.Jardine, M.A.Burton, R.J.Cowling, Dr. T.Durkin, A.D.Wadley (Treasurer) J.Fryer, S.T.Day

*Third Row (L-R), F.D.H.Dawe, Dr. A.Alcock, R.Smith, M.H.Booth, A.T.Voyce (President), M.J.Nicholls (Capt), R.J.Clewes, J.Dix, J.A.Watkins, A.G.Hudson (Chairman), Canon H.M.Hughes
Fourth Row (L-R), J.Spalding, J.Hargreaves, E.J.F.Stephens, R.Etheridge, J.Horner, R.Morris*

The next game against Bristol saw each side score a try, Peter Knight for Bristol and Bob Clewes for Gloucester, but three penalties and a conversion by Eric Stephens secured the victory. In the quarter-final, Gloucester were drawn away to London Welsh, at that time the best club side in the country. The Welsh fielded 11 internationals, including British Lions in Gerald Davies on the wing, John Dawes in the centre, and John Taylor and Mervyn Davies in the back row. Nobody gave Gloucester a chance, but the game would prove to be one of the greatest in Gloucester's long history.

Playing against a strong wind in the first half, Gloucester won the first scrum against the head, and restricted the Welsh to a solitary try through scrum-half Billy Hulin. In the second half, with the wind at their backs, Gloucester turned the screw, and the back row of John Watkins, John Haines (Dick Smith was injured) and in particular Mike Potter made life increasingly difficult for the home team.

Eric Stephens kicked a penalty and then Mickey Booth lofted a kick almost to the Welsh try line and Potter was on hand to drive over. Stephens kicked the conversion. London

Welsh fought back but Gloucester were not to be denied and hung on for a glorious 9-4 victory.

The semi-final at Coventry was a hard, bad tempered game, where according to one reporter "fear stalked the pitch". No tries were scored, Eric Stephens kicking a penalty and huge drop goal. The game ended 6-6, and Gloucester went through as the away team. Two days later, Gloucester showed their strength by travelling to Newport and winning 9-3.

Gloucester had reached the final at Twickenham having played all their games away from home, but this game was an anti-climax. Moseley lost Nigel Horton, sent off after five minutes, also suffered injuries, and finished with only 12 men.

Gloucester won 17-6, scoring first half tries through John Dix and Roy Morris. Eric Stephens kicked a penalty, and Mickey Booth and Tom Palmer both dropped goals in the second half.

Eric Stephens finished the season with 102 penalties and 388 points, a club record.

FEATURE INTERVIEW

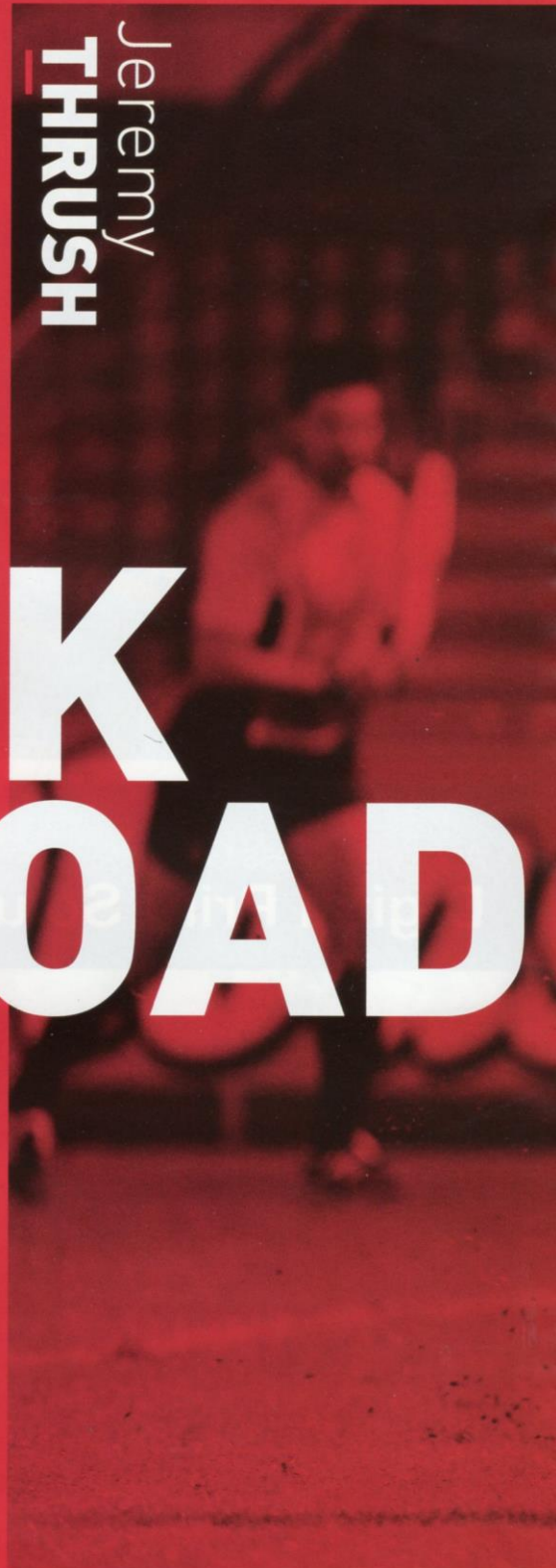
#5

AFTER A LONG PRESEASON, THE CHERRY AND WHITES GET GOING AGAIN THIS EVENING, AND AFTER A TOUGH BUT GRUELLING PRE-SEASON PROGRAMME, LOCK **JEREMY THRUSH** IS FEELING ENERGISED HAVING GOT BACK TO WORK.

Jeremy
THRUSH

LOCK & LOAD

“
WE HAVE PUT IN A LOT OF HARD WORK OVER THE SUMMER AND, SINCE JOHAN HAS BEEN HERE IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS, WE HAVE JUST TAKEN IT ANOTHER STEP FORWARD AGAIN, IT'S EXCITING TIMES.
”







And, what better way to test a summer of progress than by taking the reigning Champions head on?
"It's a great challenge going up against the winners of the competition from last season, so it will be a good way to see where we are at following a tough pre-season and I think the boys are pretty excited to get out there and test ourselves.

"We have put in a lot of hard work over the summer and, since Johan has been here in the last few weeks, we have just taken it another step forward again, it's exciting times."

The Big All Black has been working closely with new Head Coach Johan Ackermann, and is enjoying the fresh ideas and approach from the former Springbok lock.

"He [Johan] has been good. He's brought a few fresh ideas and has tampered a little bit in the way we want to do things which has been really good, and everything has been kept really simple which is what you need.

"You always learn new things from new coaches and it has been really exciting to have a new voice and we've really enjoyed the way he [Johan] has approached things and how we have gone about it."





I THINK THE FIRST SEASON WE STRUGGLED A LITTLE BIT WITH THE WAY WE WANTED TO PLAY THE GAME, BUT I THINK THE WAY JOHAN WANTS TO PLAY IS MORE MY SORT OF STYLE SO IT WILL BE ENJOYABLE TO HOPEFULLY HAVE A GOOD SEASON.



Thrush admits that he took his time in finding his feet on the Kingsholm pitch, but is full of excitement and positivity ahead of the new season.

"I think the first season we struggled a little bit with the way we wanted to play the game, but I think the way Johan wants to play is more my sort of style so it will be enjoyable to hopefully have a good season.

"I really think the way he [Johan] wants us to go about things, suits more my way of playing, and hopefully I can build on the performance against Scarlets."

And with Ed Slater joining an experienced engine room alongside 150-man Tom Savage and Tom Denton to name but a few, Thrush is keen to soak up as much advice and expertise as he can from those around him.

"You learn from different players. Ed has come in and taught me a few things about his experience and the way he goes against teams like Exeter.

"He is able to talk about what they have done at Leicester line-out wise or calling wise which has been really beneficial to me and the rest of the boys. It pushes us which has been good."



KINGSHOLM WITH BOB FENTON NEWS

You know those moments when you knew there is something that you needed to do, but can't for the life of you remember what it was? We've all had them, but that was me today - realising that that the rugby season is about to start. I don't know why, but it seems to have crept

up on me!

But here we are and here we go, another year of hopes and dreams ahead of us. About this time last season, just a matter of minutes away from the kick off of our opening fixture against Leicester, I rashly predicted that we would go the season unbeaten at home. 65 minutes later I was busy congratulating myself as we were demolishing the Tigers. 15 minutes after that my prediction has been well and truly laid to waste. So maybe no such predictions until after today, then.

In true Gloucester style the summer break has not been the easiest for fans. Having resigned ourselves to losing a few players at the end of the season, the news that Jonny May had opted to move on was a bit of a blow. A blow softened by the fact that we were getting a very good player in the considerable form of Ed Slater moving to Kingsholm as part of the deal.

There was some predictable outrage from those who like to be outraged over the move, I tend to be a bit more sanguine about such things. Of course, it's sad when you lose a favourite player, one you have seen grow from gangly youth to



equally gangly international star, but that's today's world. And after all, who among us hasn't moved job to something we have decided will be better for us personally? It's just the same for Jonny. So, good luck to him - except in a couple of weeks' time when I hope he spends most of the game chasing after Charlie Sharples!

Talking of whom, I trust everyone in the ground today is well aware that it is Charlie's testimonial season - yes, it's ten years since he made his debut here. If that doesn't make you feel old I don't know what will, but it really is that long ago. Even though I have a bit of a vested interest, can I recommend his testimonial brochure to you all?

It really is a good read and has some great contributions from former players and coaches reflecting on Charlie's career, a couple of articles from fans and, of course, a long interview with the man himself. It's well worth a fiver and, in return for a great publication, you will not only be acknowledging the great service Charlie has given the club, you'll also be supporting 'Pied Piper' - his chosen charity.

It was a bit of a shame that only around 3,000 people turned up to his testimonial game(s) last week - early kick offs and peak holiday season taking their toll. It was a great evening of rugby - really good to see how sharp Hartpury were and to see what a fantastic job Mark Cornwell and his



PHOTOGRAPH BY JIMMY



coaches are doing there. Even though my predictions are usually hopelessly well wide of the mark, I reckon they will go well this season and comfortably secure their place in the division.

The evening also gave us the chance to see players playing both against and for Gloucester on the same evening when a few of the Hartpury lads ran out for the Gloucester side against Scarlets. Has that ever happened before? I can't remember it, but then I have difficulty remembering what I did last week.

Our performance against Scarlets - especially during the ten minutes of solid defensive work that we put in while Lewis Ludlow spent on the exercise bike rather than the park - was great to see. If any of the Scarlets players expected an easy, not too competitive game, they had a very rude awakening courtesy of the tackling machine that is Tom Savage. Does that man ever stop smashing things?

You wouldn't want push in front of him in the supermarket check-out queue, you'll end up face down in the frozen peas in zero seconds flat.

The only downside to the evening was the fact that Charlie missed the game through injury, given the amount of running around and signing things he was doing throughout the game he would probably have had a much easier time out on the pitch!

So back to today then... If you are going to test yourself and your new line up - on and off the field - you would probably not choose to do that against one of the most consistent sides of recent years, and one who has become the yardstick for modern, successful professional clubs.

But that's the hand that we have been dealt and we just have to get on with it. And at the end of the day if you want to be the best you have to beat the best, so why not get on with it from the start.

We'll get a chance to welcome back one of our own, Matt Kvesic - a self-confessed Gloucester fan so maybe he'll mix up his loyalties a bit. The way Matt's time at Gloucester ended was not the best for anyone concerned, with him spending most of the season out of contention for the first team.

That's all in the past, and - like Jonny - most supporters will want to wish him well for the future (today excepted) and will give him a good reception when he trots out onto the paddock today.

OK, time for taking is over... time to get it on. I reckon we can go the season undefeated at home, what do you think???

RANDALL

on RUGBY



WELCOME EXETER, WHO HAVE BASKED IN THE GLORY OF BEING AVIVA PREMIERSHIP WINNERS 2016-17 FOR THE PAST THREE MONTHS.

Their title was, of course, won at Twickenham but their position as runners up in the final league table was sealed here at Kingsholm with a 34-20 victory in the last match of the regular season, and tonight will be the first opportunity to see what impact events over the summer have had at both clubs.

15 of the players that began last season at Kingsholm are no longer on the payroll, including Matt Kvesic who I would expect to make a swift return tonight in Chiefs colours.

Their departures have been counterbalanced by eight external signings and three promotions from the Academy to the senior squad, although a straw poll among supporters would I'm sure say Head Coach Johan Ackermann's arrival is potentially the most important one.

He has not been here long, but the impression you are left with is that he gets from A-B pretty quickly and, if last Friday's friendlies were any guide, his moulding of the team is starting to smooth down some of the rough edges.

The path between Leicester and Gloucester was especially well worn this summer. The deal that saw Jonny May and Ed Slater switch clubs was preceded by Sione Kalamafoni signing for the Tigers, while back in January Gloucester announced the acquisition of Owen Williams and Fraser Balmain from July 1, and the former Newcastle Academy prop is one of a number of players looking to step out of the shadows of others.

"I had got far too comfortable being understudy to Dan Cole and it felt as if I had got stuck in a rut and coming here gave me something new to attack" Balmain told me.

"I had been on the bench a lot and it was going to be pretty difficult to get more starts in games. It'll still be that way here because John Afoa is the fittest 33-year-old I've ever met, but I felt personally it was better for me to have a fresh start with a clean slate.

"Everyone has been very welcoming and being here from the beginning of pre-season stopped me hanging around in a former Leicester clique!"

Balmain's seven years at Welford Road saw him also play and train alongside Henry Purdy and Billy Twelvetrees as well as, latterly, Slater and Williams. He has no doubt both will be good additions to the squad, not only through their ability but their experience of being at a club who have had a steady run of success.

"Leicester always had that inner belief that they could take games to the last minute, and win" Balmain went on.

"Gloucester should have that too if you look at the squad. We have to believe we are as good as anyone else and Johan is trying to instil that into the team. He has tried to make the training tougher than any game and I have found this pre-season as hard as any I have ever done.

"He's an amiable man - I feel I can talk to him whenever I want about things on or off the field - but we certainly know who is in charge and he's got an aura about him that can lead us to better things."

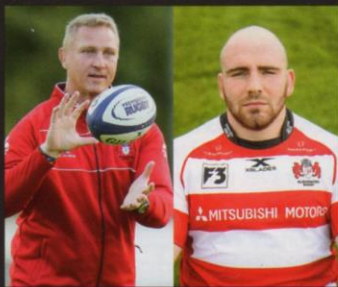
I was unable to be at the double-header here a week ago but the two most striking points made by friends who were concerned Gloucester's determination and tenacity in defence and the body language of Jeremy Thrush, who appeared to look refreshed and revitalised.

The shape of the side Johan Ackermann selects will be of huge interest, and Balmain - who hopes to start but who realistically might find himself on the bench initially - says Exeter's status as defending champions will give them a different challenge.

"Theirs is an unbelievable story but it doesn't make them unbeatable" he concluded.

"They are a very good team and are very well coached but now they have a different pressure because they aren't the underdog any more.

"Teams have had tougher circumstances than the late arrival of a coach and come out shining and we are looking forward to taking it to them. There is an onus on the forwards to win the set piece and I think we have a back line that can do damage to any team. The boys are in good nick and if we can get the scrum and line out sorted we'll be ready to fire."



THEY ARE A VERY GOOD TEAM AND ARE VERY WELL COACHED BUT NOW THEY HAVE A DIFFERENT PRESSURE BECAUSE THEY AREN'T THE UNDERDOG ANY MORE.





LEINSTER RUGBY

50-14

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

TRIES:

Nacewa, Bryan Byrne, Deegan (2), Larmour (2), Keenan

CONVERSIONS:

Ross Byrne (2), Marsh (4)

PENALTIES:

Ross Byrne

DATE: Fri 18th Aug 17

KO: 19:30

TRIES:

Purdy, Symons

CONVERSIONS: Williams, Burns

ACTION REPLAY



LEINSTER RUGBY

15. Rob Kearney; 14. Hugo Keenan, 13. Adam Byrne, 12. Isa Nacewa (capt), 11. Dave Kearney; 10. Ross Byrne, 9. Jamison Gibson-Park; 1. Peter Dooley, 2. Bryan Byrne, 3. Michael Bent; 4. Ian Nagle, 5. Scott Fardy; 6. Josh Murphy, 7. Jordi Murphy, 8. Max Deegan

Replacements

16. Sean McNulty, 17. Ed Byrne, 18. Vakh Abdaladze, 19. Oisín Heffernan, 20. Oisín Dowling, 21. Charlie Rock, 22. Cathal Marsh, 23. Ian Fitzpatrick, 4. Mick Kearney, 7. Will Connors, 11. Barry Daly, 14. Fergus McFadden, 15. Jordan Larmour

GLOUCESTER RUGBY (first half)

15. David Halaifonua; 14. Charlie Sharples, 13. Henry Trinder, 12. Billy Twelvetrees, 11. Ollie Thorley; 10. Owen Williams, 9. Willi Heinz (capt); 1. John Afoa, 2. Henry Walker, 3. Fraser Balmain; 4. Ed Slater, 5. Jeremy Thrush; 6. Jake Polledri, 7. Lewis Ludlow, 8. Freddie Clarke

GLOUCESTER RUGBY (second half)

15. Tom Hudson; 14. Andrew Symons, 13. Matt Scott, 12. Mark Atkinson, 11. Henry Purdy; 10. Billy Burns, 9. Callum Braley/ Ben Vellacott; 1. Cameron Orr/ Josh Hohneck, 2. Joe Mullis, 3. Gareth Denman; 4. Tom Savage (capt), 5. Andy Cramond/ Tom Denton; 6. Charlie Beckett, 7. Will Safe, 8. Freddie Clarke



Gloucester's new era, under recently arrived Head Coach Johan Ackermann, got off to a rocky start in Dublin as the Cherry and Whites leaked seven tries on their way to a 50-14 preseason defeat at the hands of Leinster.

In truth, Ackermann had precious little time with his new charges ahead of this encounter. A few days in Portugal on a preseason training camp gave the new boss very little opportunity to prepare for this first outing.

Accordingly, Gloucester looked a little rusty as new combinations were tried for the first time while Leinster, on the other hand, had got their campaign underway a week earlier and already blown away a few cobwebs.

And, while both teams were both missing a host of players who would arguably be first choices, the home team on the day were still able to call upon a number of players with significant international experience.

There was no lack of hard work and commitment as the game progressed, but there was a slight lack of precision at set-piece and breakdown that prevented the Cherry and Whites from establishing a real foothold in the game and Leinster took full advantage.

The first half was all about taking chances. The home team started well as Isa Nacewa scored after a good break from Scott Fardy. Nacewa then turned provider as he carved out the opening for Bryan Byrne to cross.

Gloucester had some good spells, but only made it count on 24 minutes as a quick tap from Willi Heinz gave Henry Purdy a one on one chance, and the winger needed no second invitation.

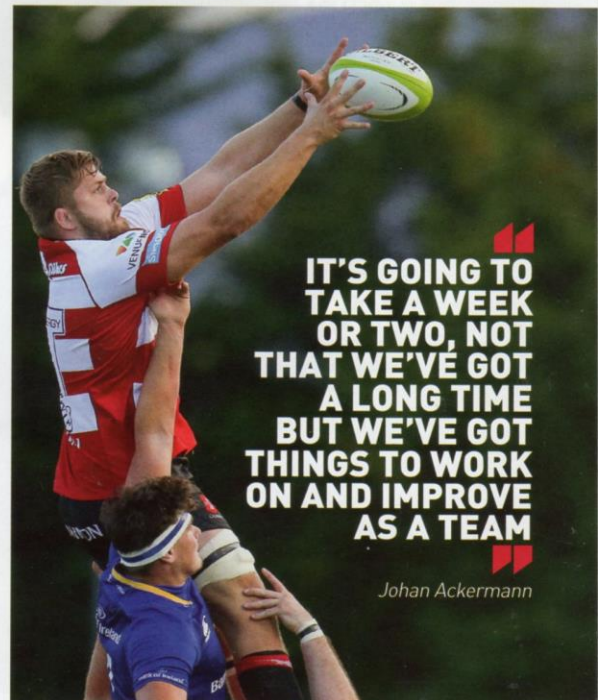


The Cherry and Whites had some momentum at this point, but couldn't quite get back on terms and were made to pay as Max Deegan finished well after a spell of Leinster pressure.

It was all change for Gloucester at half-time, only three players remaining from the first 40 minutes, and the opening quarter was reasonably close until a penalty and a try from Jordan Larmour sealed the game as the hour mark approached.

With Gloucester now playing fast and loose in a bid to get something out of the game, errors began to slip into their game and Leinster duly profited, an errant pass leading a second for Deegan.

Larmour scored a second as he volleyed ahead a chip over the top but Gloucester showed some defiance with a fine score, Ben Vellacott scorching down the left wing before passing inside for Andrew Symons to cross.



IT'S GOING TO TAKE A WEEK OR TWO, NOT THAT WE'VE GOT A LONG TIME BUT WE'VE GOT THINGS TO WORK ON AND IMPROVE AS A TEAM

Johan Ackermann



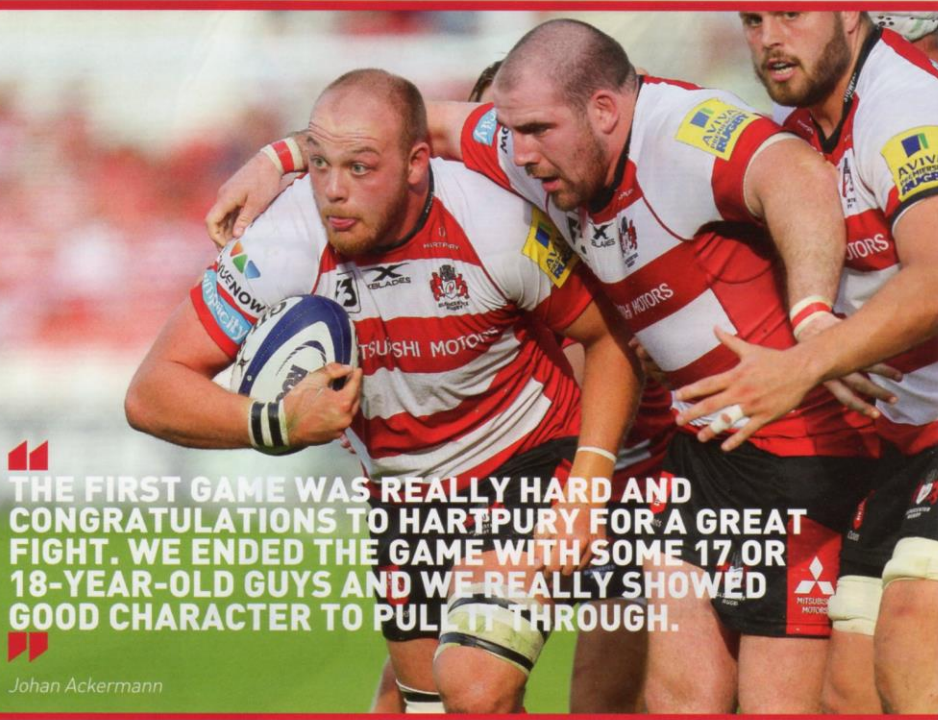
GLoucester RUGBY 41-33 HARTPURY RFC

TRIES:
Heinz, Purdy, Thrush, Atkinson, Safe, Scott
CONVERSIONS:
Williams, Burns (2), Twelvetrees (2)
PENALTIES:
Penny

DATE: Fri 25th Aug 17
KO: 17:30

TRIES:
Stratford, Cochrane, Sheldon, Craig, Cochrane
CONVERSIONS:
Williams (2), Perry (2)

ACTION REPLAY



THE FIRST GAME WAS REALLY HARD AND CONGRATULATIONS TO HARTPURY FOR A GREAT FIGHT. WE ENDED THE GAME WITH SOME 17 OR 18-YEAR-OLD GUYS AND WE REALLY SHOWED GOOD CHARACTER TO PULL IT THROUGH.

Johan Ackermann

GLoucester RUGBY

15. Tom Hudson; 14. Ollie Thorley, 13. Matt Scott, 12. Billy Twelvetrees, 11. Henry Trinder; 10. Carwyn Penny, 9. Callum Braley; 1. Josh Hohneck, 2. Motu Matu'u, 3. Fraser Balmain; 4. Ed Slater (capt), 5. Andy Cramond; 6. Freddie Clarke, 7. Jake Polledri, 8. Gareth Evans

Replacements

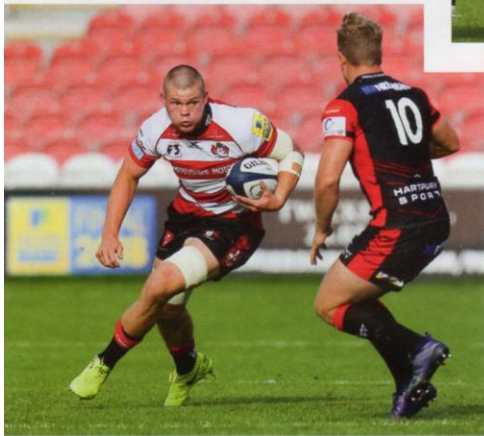
16. Joe Mullis, 17. Cameron Orr, 18. Ciaran Knight, 19. Tom Denton, 20. Charlie Beckett, 21. Charlie Chapman, 22. Tom Seabrook, 23. Jacob Morris, 24. Reece Dunn

HARTPURY RFC

15. Mike Wilcox; 14. Harry Cochrane, 13. Luke Eves, 12. George Boulton, 11. Ed Sheldon; 10. James Williams, 9. Harry Randall; 1. Mike Flook, 2. Luke Stratford, 3. Alex Gibson 4. BJ Edwards, 5. Alex Craig; 6. Rob Langley, 7. Mat Gilbert, 8. Rhys Oakley.

Replacements

16. Tom Heard, 17. Des Merrey, 18. Henry Walker, 19. Joe Dancer, 20. Joe Quinn, 21. Iain Grieve, 22. Darrel Dyer, 23. Will Safe, 24. Jamie Forrester, 25. Jacob Perry, 26. Elias Caven



For a few fleeting minutes in the second half, it looked as though Hartpury were going to take one of the more famous scalps in their fleeting history.

Regardless of the fact that the Gloucester side played most of the last half hour with a number of 18 year olds in their ranks. In years to come, had their team won, Hartpury alumni would have pointed to the scoreline and claimed the bragging rights.

Fortunately for Gloucester, they had enough about them to fightback and secure a 41-33 win with, notably, two of the remaining 'old heads', Callum Braley and Henry Trinder, combining to create a key try for the former.

Total respect to the Championship's newest side though, they gave an inexperienced side a real test and scored some cracking tries on the evening. On this evidence, their first season in the league's second tier could be an exciting one.



The first half, in particular, was real end to end stuff. Hartpury took the lead on two occasions – a catch and drive and a score inspired by a quick tap from Harry Randall sandwiching one from Gloucester's Ed Slater.

The Cherry and White pack then flexed its collective muscle, and catch and drive moves led to scores from Motu Matu'u and Billy Twelvetrees before some sparkling interplay between James Williams and Ed Sheldon inspired a cracking try for the latter and a 19-19 scoreline.

More forward play led to a fourth Gloucester try, this time from Andy Cramond, and a narrow half-time lead. The first quarter of the second half meandered a bit though as both teams made multiple changes.

But, as the hour mark approached, the game sprung to life as Hartpury profited from a charged down kick to score through Alex Craig and then scored another belter as Mike Wilcox's counter attack led to a fine finish from Harry Cochrane.



An upset was on the cards, but Charlie Chapman, who has ironically featured for Hartpury in recent weeks, showed nice footwork to score before Trinder's sharp break led to Braley going under the posts. Carwyn Penny converted and then added a late penalty to ensure Gloucester's blushes were spared.

Head Coach Johan Ackermann:

"The first game was really hard and congratulations to Hartpury for a great fight. We ended the game with some 17 or 18-year-old guys and we really showed good character to pull it through.

"For me the good thing was everyone had some decent game time. You can train as much as you want to but there's nothing like putting you under that pressure and making good decisions."





GLOUCESTER RUGBY

40-21

SCARLETS

TRIES:
Heinz, Purdy, Thrush, Atkinson, Safe, Scott
CONVERSIONS:
Williams, Burns (2), Twelvetrees (2)

DATE: Fri 25th Aug 17
KO: 19:45

TRIES:
Gareth Davies, Aled Davies, Rob Evans
CONVERSIONS:
Patchell, Rhys Jones (2)

ACTION REPLAY



THE ONE THING I LIKED ABOUT TONIGHT WAS THAT WE WERE DOWN TO 14 MEN AND DEFENDED OUR GOAL LINE FOR LONG PERIODS

Johan Ackermann

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

15. Billy Burns; 14. David Halaifonua, 13. Andy Symons, 12. Mark Atkinson, 11. Henry Purdy; 10. Owen Williams, 9. Willi Heinz (capt); 1. John Afoa, 2. Richard Hibbard, 3. Gareth Denman; 4. Tom Savage, 5. Jeremy Thrush; 6. Lewis Ludlow, 7. Jacob Rowan, 8. Ben Morgan

Replacements

16. Joe Mullis, 17. Alex Seville, 18. Fraser Balmain, 19. Ed Slater, 20. Freddie Clarke, 21. Ben Vellacott, 22. Billy Twelvetrees, 23. Matt Scott, 24. Ollie Thorley

SCARLETS

15. Johnny McNicholl; 14. Tom Prydie, 13. Hadleigh Parkes, 12. Scott Williams (capt), 11. Morgan Williams; 10. Rhys Patchell, 9. Gareth Davies; 1. Wyn Jones, 2. Ryan Elias, 3. Samson Lee; 4. Jake Ball, 5. Tadgh Beirne; 6. Aaron Shingler, 7. Josh MacLeod, 8. Will Boyde

Replacements

16. Emyr Phillips, 17. Rob Evans, 18. Werner Kruger, 19. David Bulbring, 20. Lewis Rawlins, 27. John Barclay, 22. Jonathan Evans, 23. Rhys Jones, 24. Paul Asquith, 25. Aled Davies, 28. Tom Grabham



Gloucester rounded off their preparations for this evening's Aviva Premiership opener against Exeter with an impressive 40-21 victory over the Scarlets.

If Head Coach Johan Ackermann was looking for a performance that indicated that his side was moving in the right direction leading into tonight's game, then he certainly got it.

Compared to the performance a week before against another Pro 14 side in Leinster, the step up in commitment, execution and intensity was considerable and warmly welcomed by the Kingsholm faithful.

This was a genuine workout for Gloucester against a team who their own website proclaimed was 'loaded with internationals' and who started out bristling with intent, kicking an early penalty to the corner only to be denied by a Gloucester steal.

And the Cherry and Whites duly took the lead with a fine try from Willi Heinz, who was up in support as Jeremy Thrush made a key break, the skipper having plenty to do but sprinting clear as a hand-off took care of the last defender.

Gloucester then had to show amazing resilience and commitment in defence to keep the Scarlets at bay with Lewis Ludlow in the sinbin, a period of play which pleased Ackermann immensely as he told the media after the game.

The lead was almost extended upon Ludlow's return, but it was the Scarlets who drew level as half-time approached, Gareth Davies crossing, and it was even Stevens at the break with Gloucester denied a try for a forward pass.

However, the home team blew away the Scarlets in the opening few minutes of the second half. Henry Purdy finished magnificently on the left before Jeremy Thrush romped over. Purdy was involved again in the build-up to Mark Atkinson's try as Gloucester crossed three times in eight minutes.

Will Safe made the game safe as he forced his way over to make the score 33-7, but the Scarlets restored some pride with two well-worked, long-range tries before Matt Scott ensured Gloucester had the final word and a 40-21 win.



TEAM LINE-UPS



FRIDAY 1 SEPTEMBER // AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY // ROUND 1

T P C D				POSITION	T P C D						
				JASON WOODWARD 15	FULLBACK	15	PHIL DOLLMAN				
				OLLIE THORLEY 14	RIGHT WING	14	OLLY WOODBURN				
				ANDREW SYMONS 13	OUTSIDE CENTRE	13	MICHELE CAMPAGNARO				
				MARK ATKINSON 12	INSIDE CENTRE	12	IAN WHITTEN				
				HENRY PURDY 11	LEFT WING	11	JAMES SHORT				
				BILLY BURNS 10	FLY-HALF	10	HENRY SLADE				
				WILLI HEINZ (C) 9	SCRUM-HALF	9	NIC WHITE				
				JOHN AFOA 1	LOOSEHEAD PROP	1	BEN MOON				
				RICHARD HIBBARD 2	HOOKER	2	JACK YEANDLE ©				
				FRASER BALMAIN 3	TIGHTENED PROP	3	HARRY WILLIAMS				
				TOM SAVAGE 4	LOCK	4	DAVE DENNIS				
				JEREMY THRUSH 5	LOCK	5	JONNY HILL				
				LEWIS LUDLOW 6	BLINDSIDE FLANKER	6	SAM SKINNER				
				JACOB ROWAN 7	OPENSIDE FLANKER	7	DON ARMAND				
				BEN MORGAN 8	NUMBER 8	8	SAM SIMMONDS				
REPLACEMENTS				REPLACEMENTS							
				MOTU MATU'U 16		16	ELVIS TAIONE				
				JOSH HOHNECK 17		17	CARL RIMMER				
				GARETH DENMAN 18		18	TOMAS FRANCIS				
				ED SLATER 19		19	OLLIE ATKINS				
				RUAN ACKERMANN 20		20	MATT KVESIC				
				BEN VELLACOTT 21		21	JACK MAUNDER				
				BILLY TWELVETREES 22		22	GARETH STEENSON				
				MATT SCOTT 23		23	MAX BODILLY				

MATCH OFFICIALS**REFEREE**

Matthew Carley

ASSISTANT REFEREESPaul Dix
&
Jonathan Healy