

Gloucester Rugby

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Peter Richards
Making Strides

Feet On The Ground
Dave Balmer

Ryan's Review
All The Latest
From The Coaches

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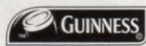
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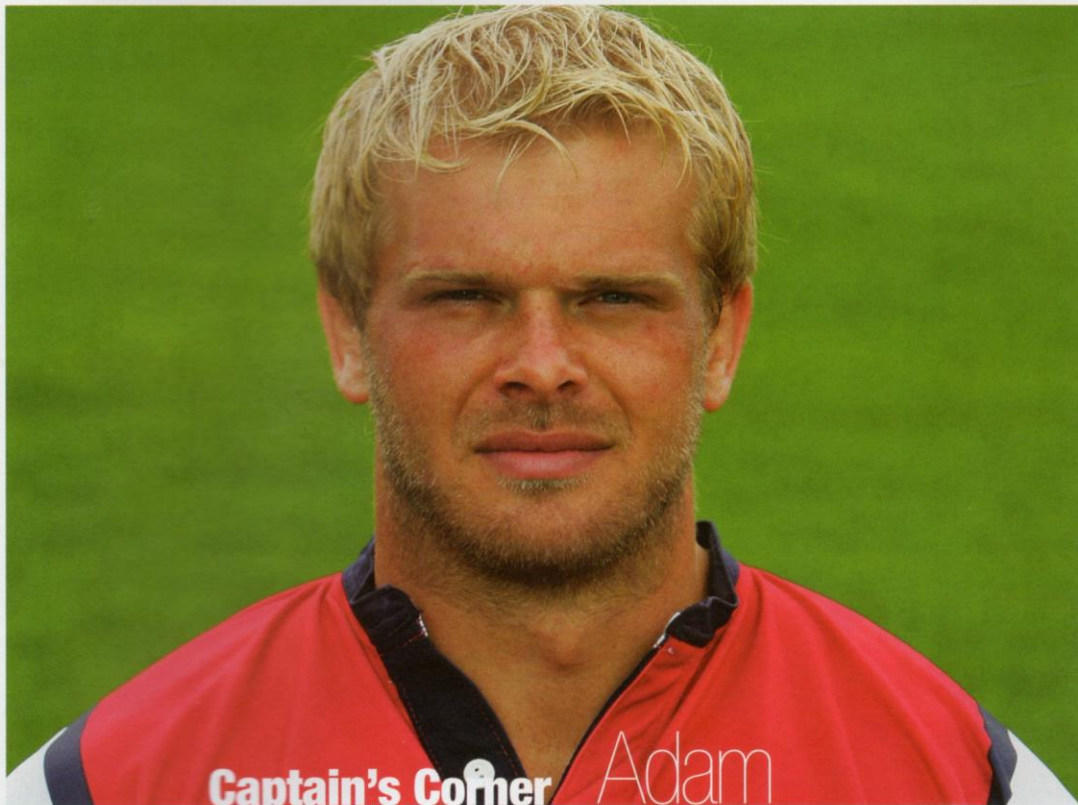


vs **London Irish**

Saturday 28th January | Kick Off 15.00pm



www.guinnesspremiership.com



In association with
dair*

Balding

SO, HERE we are again.

We welcome London Irish to Kingsholm today for another potentially enthralling Guinness Premiership encounter.

Our task this afternoon is to consolidate our position within the top against a side who covet a play-off place.

It will be tough, it will be tense and it will be full-on. We already have experience of London Irish this season when we lost at the Madejski Stadium in November.

From our point of view, that day

was the most disappointing performance of the season.

We simply didn't function against a supremely competitive pack of forwards and a positional stand-off who continually put us on the back foot.

We have to remember the disappointment of that day and produce a much better performance.

London Irish have always possessed a competitive line-out and a very good pack of forwards but this season they have combined that with a real potency in the backline with the

likes of Mike Catt, Riki Flutey and Delon Armitage.

But we know how important this game is to us in our quest to earn a top four finish and have approached it in the right way this week.

We are in the process of building our momentum again and last week qualified for the knockout stages of the European Challenge Cup with a victory over Bayonne.

Brive, the first winners of the Heineken Cup, will be the visitors to Kingsholm in late

March or early April and I am sure both teams will have their eyes on a semi-final and then final place.

Irish have also done well in that competition so this afternoon's game will be a good indicator of where both teams stand.

There have been a few injuries knocking around the squad recently and I have missed the last two games because of a knee injury but everyone involved in the team would like to wish both Phil Vickery and Haydn Thomas speedy recoveries.

I think it will be a really eye catching game this afternoon, so get behind the team, enjoy the contest and get right behind us.

The **Passion**

Guarantee a ticket at **Kingsholm** - call **0871 871 8781**

Dave Balmer

**Celebrates
10 years**

As Kingsholm's
Head Groundsman

Next month, Dave Balmer will celebrate 10 years as head groundsman at Kingsholm. He treats 'God's little acre' as an extended member of the family, is here come rain or shine and tells the matchday programme the secrets of his trade.

IT IS PROBABLY the most worshipped piece of turf in Gloucester – and probably beyond – and for the last 10 years Dave Balmer has cared for it with the love and attention as if it were a baby.

Dave's official title at Gloucester is 'Stadium Manager' but he spends most of his working life tending the Kingsholm pitch – cutting, rolling, filling, marking, and nurturing – to help produce one of the best pieces of turf in the Guinness Premiership.





Always armed with a cheeky chappie one-liner, he tries never to take life too seriously, until that is, he gets onto the subject of his precious piece of green stuff that has been virtually untouched since 1891.

"You need a lot of patience, first and foremost," he said.

"It is about knowing what you can do and when. If it's wet, if it's raining, you might as well go and find something else to do because nothing can be achieved on the pitch in those conditions.

"It is only possible to work on the pitch when conditions allow you to do so. I have been here long enough now to know it feels part of me, 24-7, 365 days a year.

There is no getting away from it but I wouldn't have it any other way."

Dave's first game at Kingsholm was in February 1996 against Orrell after progressing from working for Oxford City Council as a park hand. But he already had a family connection to Gloucester through his father, who was the groundsman at King's School.

He replaced Bob Park from Lydney at Kingsholm and is now the longest serving head groundsman associated with a

Guinness Premiership club at the same ground.

"I started life as a trainee building surveyor but in the February of 1977 the firm I worked for went bust," he said. "There was a slump in the industry and nothing came up for me.

Being involved as a groundsman had always been in the family and it just went from there."

Since his appointment, Gloucester have never lost a game because conditions have prevented the pitch being playable but there have been a few difficult moments.

But there is more to his job than simply sitting on a tractor all day cutting and rolling. He monitors the weather forecast on the internet daily, is updated on weather patterns and temperatures.

"We played Bath a few years ago in the Powergen Cup – I think it was Junior Paramore's debut – we won the game in very bad conditions and then had Worcester in the next round," he said.

"But in between Richard Hill [former director of rugby] arranged a game against

Harlequins so Zinzan Brooke could get a game on the Wednesday. The conditions were so bad after that game, by Friday you could not walk across the pitch because it had frozen so much.

"We were in at 6am to get it ready for the game against Worcester. I have also been in overnight before with Sport's Stadia to try and de-frost the pitch with their heaters.

"Knowing how much work there was to do, I just couldn't sleep. I thought I might as well be round here moving frost covers than lying in bed worrying about it.

"But that is how it gets you – I need to know what is happening most of the time and apart from holidays, I pop in most days."

After a game, Dave and his son Gareth – the latest in the Balmer line to become groundsman – will verti-drain the pitch on Monday and replace as many divots as possible. After the team-run on Friday, the pitch will be rolled and the sponsor's logos sprayed on behind the posts.

Come matchday, all the lines are re-marked and it is then ready for another match. It

is only then that he can get changed into a suit, mingle in with the crowd and enjoy a relaxing pint of Guinness before fish and chips after the match.

The quality of the surface has improved dramatically in the last decade and that is down to his hard work.

"You need patience, pure and simple," he said.

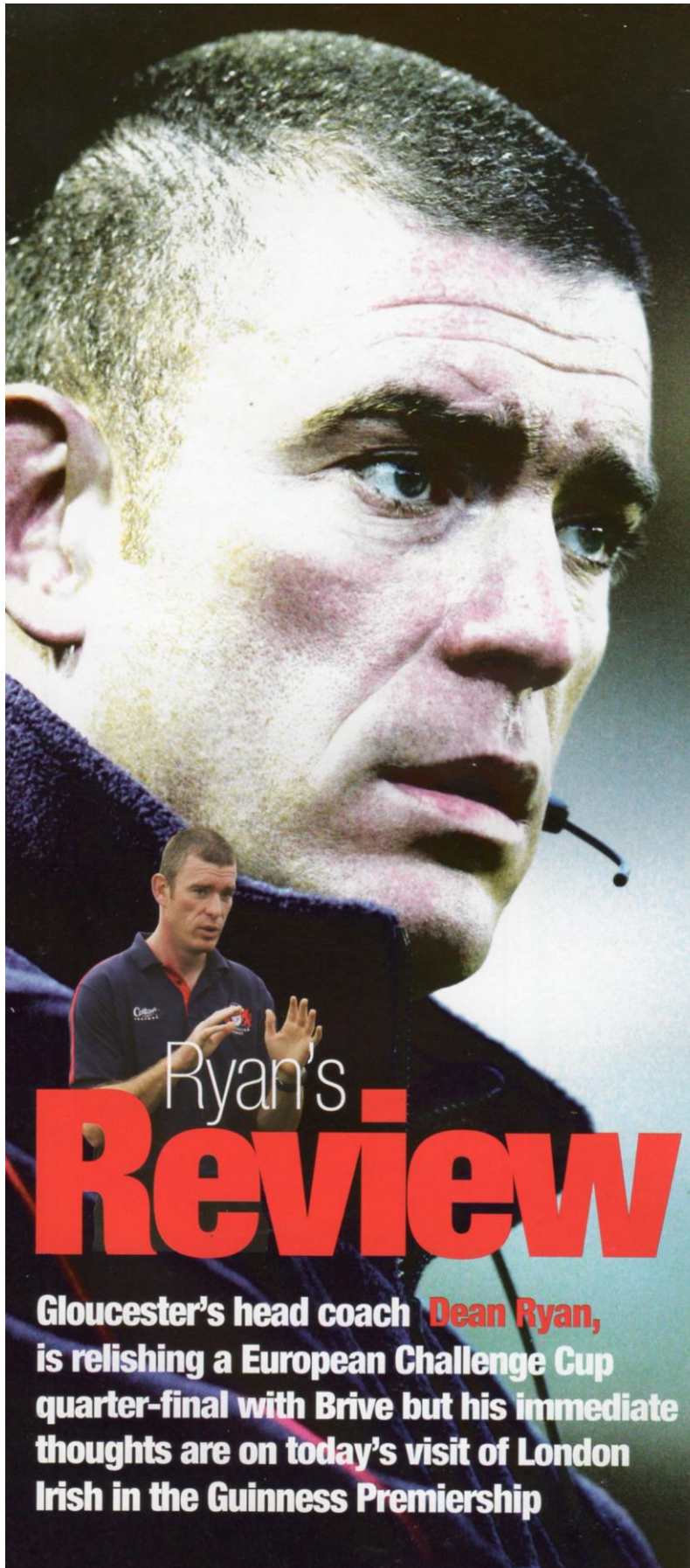
"There is not much I have not seen – there have been three head coaches in my time at the club.

"My proudest moment was probably when Grandstand hosted their entire programme from Kingsholm when we played Cardiff in the quarter-finals of the Heineken Cup.

"That was great and my youngest boy Craig was also the mascot when we played Ebbw Vale in Europe.

"It was pretty special watching him coming out with Dave Sims."

"I have had a fantastic time but I would still love to improve the surface if I could. You can never be too satisfied really."



Ryan's
Review

Gloucester's head coach **Dean Ryan**, is relishing a European Challenge Cup quarter-final with Brive but his immediate thoughts are on today's visit of London Irish in the Guinness Premiership



Despite the victory over Bayonne last weekend, was the performance up to the standard you set yourselves?

DR: I think if we were honest we would say we were unhappy about the last 20 minutes. We became pretty disjointed against a side who had nothing to lose and that left a bad taste in our mouth because other than that it had been a reasonable performance. Bayonne threw the ball around quite effectively from long distance and we were disappointed to concede two late tries. But I thought Jake Boer had another outstanding game, Peter Buxton was once again a credit to what we are trying to achieve and Peter Richards is also getting better, particularly when we get fast ball. There were elements of the performance that were pleasing and our task is to increase the effectiveness of the entire package.



We are now in the quarter-finals of the European Challenge Cup. Has the importance of this competition shifted in emphasis now?

DR: I have said right from the start of the season that our emphasis has purely been on winning games in every competition we play in. We have not consciously set out and pinpointed just one competition to try and win. We are now in the quarter-finals and have a home draw which was the only variable we could control. Our task now is to make the most of it, aim to continue our current form and press on for the remainder of the season.



What do you expect from Brive, they have obviously been a huge name in French rugby?

DR: It is a bit early to start planning for their visit to Kingsholm because there is a lot of significant rugby to be played between now and then. But Newcastle obviously played them in the pool games so we


will be able to obtain footage of those matches that will aid us in our preparation. The value of this game is that we could potentially be at home in the semi-final too but we must deal clinically with the quarter-final when it comes. Brive have a long and proud history and were the first European Cup winners, so their pedigree has long been established.

 **Today we welcome London Irish to Kingsholm in the Premiership. Was the defeat against them earlier in the season the most disappointing performance so far?**

DR: That game back in November was the first time we had been disrupted through international commitments and it obviously affected us in terms of the level of our performance. It was fairly obvious on that occasion that without our senior guys, we were not as effective. I would like to think we have learnt from that but it has been a steep learning curve for everyone involved. We, like anyone else, are a better team with our senior players involved but we have to get used to


“Today is obviously a very significant game because we see London Irish as a team who are almost level pegging.”

the disruption and progress from that.

 **That disruption of international call-ups is happening again ahead of the Six Nations, does this make today's fixture even more vital?**

DR: Today is obviously a very significant game because we see London Irish as a team who are almost level pegging with us in terms of league position. The games we have remaining now will shape the end of the season but we are all aware that a victory today would stretch the gap between the top four and the rest. We know we will have people missing in the next few weeks – even more so than before Christmas – because there is talk the RFU are planning to take our Under-21 players [Anthony Allen and Olly Morgan] too.

That could cause us further problems so all our energies and focus have been on today and getting the right result.

 **Lastly, can you clarify the position with the injury situation?**

DR: The situation with Haydn Thomas is pretty cut and dried. We know he has broken his collarbone and that has a finite recovery time we can identify. We expect him to be out for about six weeks. The situation with Andy Hazell and Phil Vickery is not quite as precise. Hazy is on his way back but with any head injury, particularly to a number seven and the stress they go through, we will not rush him back. Phil obviously has a back injury but we have nothing definitive just yet. We are managing the situation the best we can and will just continue to monitor him.



Jake Boer



Peter Buxton

The **Passion**

Persistence paying off for Pete



IT HAS been a peculiar few seasons for Peter Richards.

This time last year he was shunted out of position at Wasps and switched to centre in order to accommodate World Cup winner Matt Dawson at scrum-half.

He had worked his way through the national ranks, featuring in both the England Under-16 and Under-18 Group Schools teams, then at Under-19, Under-21 and A level, yet the wider audience knew him better as a Sevens specialist.

With his shock of strawberry blonde locks, he became a recognisable figure in the abridged game, picking up an array of individual accolades alongside the prestigious Hong Kong Sevens crown in 2004 and was handed the captaincy in Los Angeles 12 months ago.

But up to now, the 15-man code at its zenith has been hard to crack.

He was part of England's ill-fated tour to Australia and New Zealand in 1998, getting a run-out in the 62-14 drubbing by NZ Maori.

The so-called "Tour of Hell" curtailed so many international careers, yet there is something of the Peter Pan about the boy from Portsmouth. Ageless, resolute and with a mischievous glint in his eye, Richards has never abandoned his ambition.

With his move to Gloucester last summer, he signalled the end of his Sevens career and made a determined bid to break into Andy Robinson's England squad.

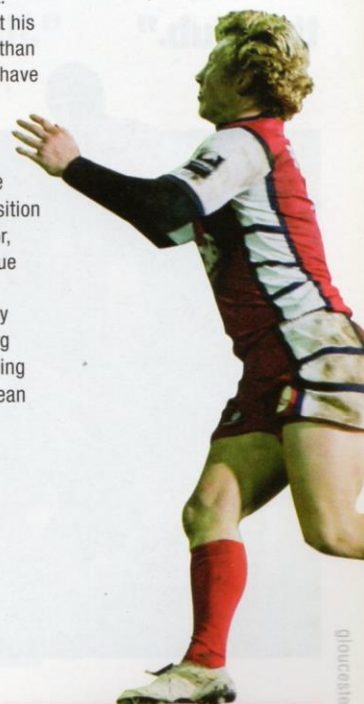
By August he was selected in the England Elite Player Squad for the first time. He retained his place when

Robinson cut the squad to 30 and was on the bench for the final autumn international against Samoa.

He has retained his place in the training squad of 36 for the Six Nations, as have Dawson and Leicester's Harry Ellis.

Finally, at the age of 27 - Dawson is 33, Ellis 10 years his junior - Richards is closer than he has ever been to his senior international debut. The irony, however, is that his club need him now more than any of his previous clubs have ever needed him.

Haydn Thomas' broken collarbone has left a huge void in the scrum-half position at Kingsholm. Simon Amor, Richards' Sevens colleague before they shared club duties, is likely to be away from next week captaining his country as usual, leaving Gloucester head coach Dean



"The irony, however, is that his club need him now more than any of his previous clubs have ever needed him."

The **History**

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“What it does is put a bit more pressure on the scrum-half situation at the club.”

Ryan waiting on Robinson's selection announcement on Tuesday.

“It's a situation clubs across the board have to put up with, whether they have strength in certain position or not,” Richards said.

When he takes the field against London Irish today, Richards will celebrate his 100th Premiership appearance - his first came for the Exiles back in 1996. In the intervening years he turned out for Harlequins, Benetton Treviso in Italy and Bristol Shoguns, before joining Wasps in 2003 and then replacing Andy Gomarsall at Kingsholm.



“I don't think it affects my England chances at all. What it does is put a bit more pressure on the scrum-half situation at the club.”

“It obviously takes out one of the three and leaves us short on numbers. So fingers crossed, neither Simon or I get injured in the coming weeks so that we can stay as strong as we can.”

And, if today's clash with Irish is critical for Gloucester's play-off intentions, this season as a whole is the big one for Richards, with the World Cup in France only 18 months away.

“There are some guys within the England squad at the moment who are coming towards the end of their careers, but are in there for experience,” Richards added. “The younger players need to make that transition.”



"There's a lot of rugby to be played before the World Cup and guys who haven't got age on their side are going to be struggling then.

"Time isn't such a concern for me. By the time the World Cup comes round I'll be 29 and that's a reasonable age for a scrum-half.

"I've been fortunate that in the 10 years I've played rugby professionally that I haven't been exposed to 30 or 40 game seasons year in, year out. Whether that's because of injury or non-selection, I'm relatively fresh for a 27-year-old and I feel pretty good about it."

"By the time the World Cup comes round I'll be 29 and that's a reasonable age for a scrum-half."



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Match Action

European Challenge Cup
ERC



AVIRON
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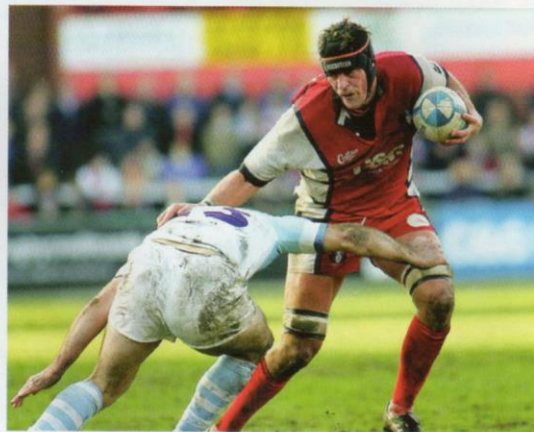
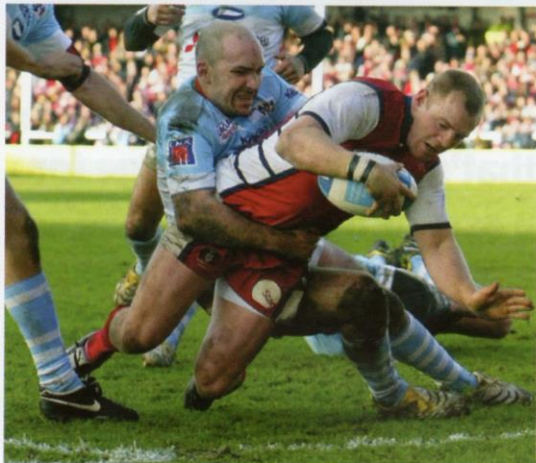
Gloucester Rugby 32 Aviron Bayonnais 19

Saturday, January 21

Attendance: 8,582

Referee: George Clancy (Ire)

Pictures by Bruce Seabrook – GPA Images info@gpaimages.com



GLOUCETSER secured a home quarter-final in the European Challenge Cup against Brive following their fifth straight bonus point victory in the group game against Bayonne.

Two tries from prop Gary Powell and one each from Olly Morgan and Mike Tindall rounded off a comprehensive victory against the powerful

French visitors. Gloucester led 15-5 at the break thanks to two touchdowns from Powell but Bayonne had cut the gap with a 13th minute score from loosehead prop Aretz Iguiniz to 7-5.

But Gloucester, thanks to the power of their superior scrum and some outstanding contributions from Jake Boer

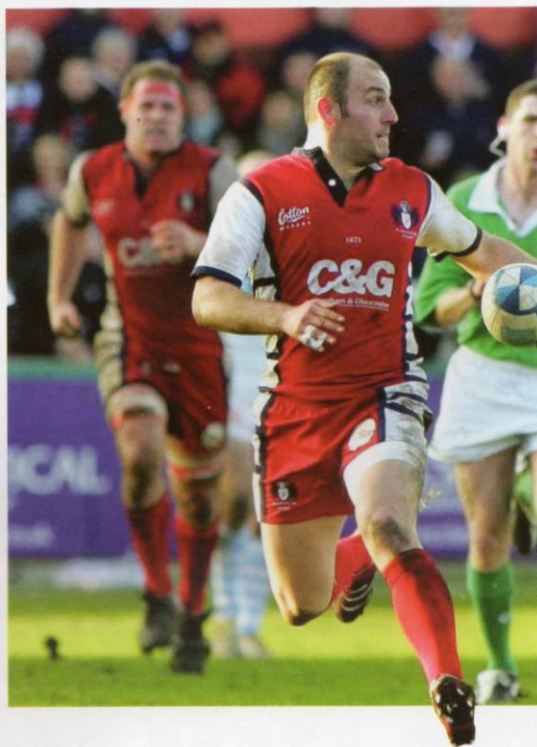
and Peter Buxton, were able to control the game to stretch their advantage in the second half.

Boer's powerful surge in the 55th minute set up a try for Morgan to take Gloucester 25-5 ahead and then six minutes later Tindall sealed the bonus point with a score from close range.

However, Tindall was then yellow carded for killing the ball and Bayonne struck back with two late scores from replacement Christophe Laurent and winger Benjamin Thierry to cut the advantage to 32-19.

Bayonne still qualified for the knockout stages and face London Irish away in the next round.

The Honour



Gloucester's head coach Dean Ryan said: "With a lot of substitutions we lost a little bit focus towards the end and when we went down to 14 men when Mike Tindall was sinbinned, they threw it around and stretched us."

"So there's a disappointing aftertaste, but we played most of the decent rugby in the first 60 minutes and came out quite comprehensive winners."

"Bayonne have been very difficult opposition both times and they gave us a similar challenge to what we face in the Premiership."

"They're a heavyweight outfit and you could see why they've been doing some damage in the French league."

"A home quarter-final was the target and it is important."

For it to have still been at risk in the last pool game and with Bayonne's form in the last six weeks we always knew it would be a difficult match for us."

"So it was crucial we were superior to them in the first 40 minutes so they didn't think they had a sniff of the win."

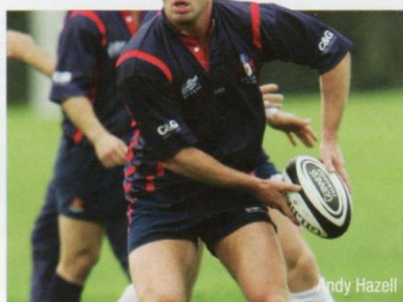
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There is not much **Peter Arnold** has not seen at Kingsholm down the years and he acknowledges **Phil Vickery** will be badly missed by Dean Ryan's side, tips **Gloucester** to meet **London Irish** in the **European Challenge Cup** final and remembers **Tony Davis**.

Peter Arnold



Andy Hazell

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

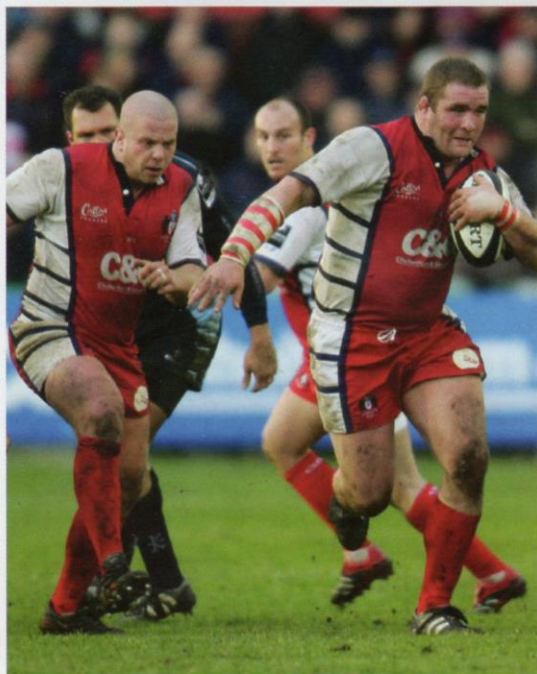
THERE IS nothing much surprising about the selections for the England

squad ahead of the Six Nations thus far. It's nice to see that most of the usual suspects from Gloucester are picked, and I feel that Andy Hazell, who has

so perhaps we'll have better news as the season wears on.

Better news? You must make up your own mind. There is a

Phil Vickery



"It is nice to see most of the usual suspects from Gloucester are picked."

been in storming form, would have been included too had it not been for concussion.

I had also hoped that we might have had more representation in the 'A' squad too. This is, after all, largely a development exercise, and I would have thought that players such as Olly Morgan and Anthony Allen, who are in the Under-21 mix, might have been in the frame. You'll have thoughts about one or two others as well.

I do gather, however, that this particular squad was picked specifically for the Italian job,

school of thought that we'd be better served by players doing the business here at Kingsholm, but we can't deny the youngsters their chances, and neither would we wish to.

BACK AGAIN

PHIL VICKERY'S latest injury is worrying to say the least. Any recurring problem is a cause for concern, damage to the back even more so, and a recurring back injury to a prop forward most worrying of all.

When a first-class prop gets down in the tight scrum, he

has the best part of a ton of raw beef propelling him forward at a rate of knots. In front of him, he has a similar force coming at him in the opposite direction. The human body, no matter how well trained and conditioned, is simply not designed to handle those sort of forces with any frequency. It isn't surprising, therefore, that the old frame pops a gasket now and then.

in saying that to Phil Vickery, however. He only knows one way to play, and you're never going to change him.

Can't blame him. His aggression, technique and sheer strength have made him one of the most feared props in the world, one whom any side, from the All Blacks on down, would be grateful to have in their squad.

Phil's latest injury proves just to be another blip in his career, and that we'll soon see him back to his awesome best at Kingsholm and elsewhere.

But not at the expense of his health and well-being.

Good luck Vicks!

Wasps, so the pity of it is that we probably didn't see the best of his playing days here at Kingsholm. Furthermore, we don't have enough larger-than-life personalities these days, either in rugby or in the wider world, so we can ill afford to lose people of Tony's character. He will be sadly missed.

Our sincere sympathy goes out to his wife and family.

“When the Bull rages around the field the way Vicks does, he's bound to come out of the stick sometimes.”

In Phil's case, the problem is compounded by the way he plays his rugby. When the Bull rages around the field the way Vicks does, he's bound to come out with the dirty end of the stick sometimes, as we've seen already in past seasons through a shattered eye socket and a badly broken arm. As Dean Ryan inferred recently, no one can play that way week-in, week-out for seven months and come away unscathed. There's no point

He has the example of his old oppo, Trevor Woodman, to ponder over. It was a similar injury which forced him to take early retirement when at the height of his powers. On the other hand, one can point to old campaigners like Jason Leonard and Andy Deacon who seem to soldier on for decades without too many alarms and excursions.

Naturally, we all hope that

TONY DAVIS

MANY PEOPLE will have been very sorry to learn of the death of Tony Davis, who lost his fight with leukaemia, a couple of weeks ago aged 65.

Tony was a tremendous character, very much his own man, with a trenchant turn of phrase and a wealth of good humour. He played at No.8 for Gloucester from 1959 until the mid-1960s before his work took him to London.

There, he was soon snapped up by Wasps. After a distinguished career in the first XV, he took over the captaincy of the second team for a couple of seasons before gravitating to the lower echelons.

He remained involved with the club after that, and, I'm told, served a term as Club President. Health worries forced his early retirement, and he returned to Gloucester in 2001 with his family. Now, he has been taken from us far too early.

He would have been around 25 years old when he joined

THIS IS WHERE THE STORY REALLY STARTS...

WE CAME out top of the pile in the pool stages of the European Challenge Cup, only dropping one point from the theoretical maximum. But the real action starts now.

First of all, we have to get past Brive, here at Kingsholm. Looks good on paper, but once you get to the knock-out stages of this sort of competition, the form book tends to fly out of the window,

It's also worth remembering that poor old Bristol were the only English side to get themselves eliminated at the pool stages, so the chances are that we'll find ourselves up against Premiership sides who know us well should we negotiate the Brive hurdle successfully.

And I have, as they say, a feeling in my water. What's the betting that we find London Irish standing in our way somewhere along the line? It's the way things pan out, and we all know the chequered history our two sides have.

It should be quite a competition.



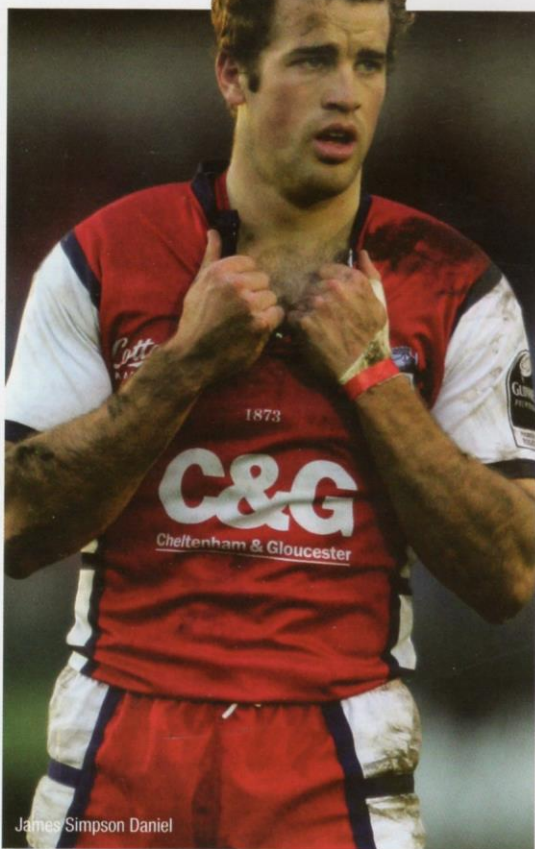
London Irish against Leicester Tigers

The History

Behind The Scenes

If you are fascinated by figures and how Gloucester's overall Premiership record stacks up against the rest, **Dave King** has the answers in another insightful look behind the scenes

WE OFTEN everhear the phrase – 'lies, damned lies and statistics' and sport intrigues us



James Simpson Daniel

all with its records relating to any given game, match, season or individual player.

Of course here at Kingsholm we are primarily concerned with our own club.

Rugby Union has evolved over a long period of time and it is totally impossible to compare the modern era of professionalism with the amateur days.

In the age of professionalism it is fascinating to see how we have fared against fellow Premiership clubs, whether past or present.

Our progress and results against certain clubs can be put into clearly defined sections. First, the clubs we have met who are now no longer in the top flight – West Hartlepool, Orrell, Richmond, London Scottish, Bedford, Rotherham and Harlequins.

We have played West Hartlepool in 6 matches, home and away winning 5 and losing once. The sequence then follows: - Orrell 4 matches, won 3, lost 1. Richmond 4 matches, won 2, drew 2. London Scottish played,

won 1, lost 1, Bedford, played 4, won 3, lost 1. Rotherham played 4, won 4 and Harlequins played 20, won 10- lost 10.

Overall, we fared favourably against those clubs and the remainder of the Premiership can be split into two groups.

In the first section we take a look at Sale, London Irish, Northampton, Newcastle, Bristol, Saracens, Leeds and Worcester.

We have played Sale in 21 matches, won 10, drew 2, lost 9. In 19 matches against London Irish we have won 13 and lost 6. We have won 11 of our 19 matches against Northampton, losing eight. Newcastle we have met in 19 matches, winning 10, drawing 1, and losing 6.

We have played Bristol in 15 matches, won 11 drew 1 and lost 3. Against Saracens, we have played 22 times, won 13, and lost 9. Leeds we have met in 9 matches won 6 and lost 3. Worcester, we have played in 3 matches, winning 2 and drawing once. The significance of this group

of clubs is that we hold an advantage in terms of the number of victories. Therefore, we can safely state that we have taken our points from League encounters usually from within this group of clubs, both past and present members of the Premiership.

Statistics show that where we have failed in the first decade of the professional era is by not taking enough points from clubs who are widely regarded as having provided the Premiership with a level of high consistency.

It must be pointed out that one of these clubs – Bath, enjoyed their pinnacle in the days before it was generally accepted players were being paid. However, our overall record against the Recreational Ground Club shows that we have played the team from Somerset 21 times, winning 6, drawing once but losing 14 matches.

Leicester and Wasps, who have dominated recent seasons, have also shown us a clean pair of heels. We have met Leicester on 21 occasions, winning 7, losing 14 matches. Wasps we have met in 21 matches, winning 6 matches but losing 15 matches.

Quite clearly, it is this trio of clubs that have caused us the most problems in attempting to gain points.

Over this period of time our League position at each seasons climax reads as follows: - 1995-96 - 8th, 1996-97 - 7th, 1997-98 - 7th, 1998-99 - 10th, 1999-2000 - 3rd, 2000-01 - 8th, 2001-02 - 3rd, 2002-03 - 1st, 2003-04 - 4th, 2004-05 - 6th. During that period the club has employed three head coaches



Jake Boer

“Quite clearly, it is a trio of clubs that have caused us the most problems in attempting to gain points.”

– Richard Hill, Philippe Saint-Andre and Nigel Melville. In that time only Melville was able to guide the club to that coveted top position.

Others in their wisdom decided that feat did not warrant merit in means of a trophy! In that season of 2002-003 we won and lost to Wasps and Leicester but won and drew with the men from the Rec.

Our try scoring since the advent of professionalism our record has been 1995-96: - 20, 1996-97: - 46, 1997-98: - 52, 1998-99: - 58, 1999-00: - 68, 2000-01: - 43, 2001-02: - 68, 2002-03: - 67, 2003-04 : - 51, 2004-05 : - 43.

The bonus point system was not introduced until the 2000-2001 season and we

reached our peak in the season of 2001-2002, the season preceding our golden season of 2002-2003.

The complete record is with the try bonus figure first: - 2000-2001 : - 3, losing bonus 5, 2001-2002 : - 8, 4, 2002-2003: - 6, 4, 2003-2004: - 4, 3, 2004-2005 : - 3, 2.

Our defensive record shows that as the seasons progress we have tightened up considerably, during the recent eight year period we have conceded tries as follows: - 1997-98: 65, 1998-99: 67, 1999-00: 46, 2000-2001: 45, 2001-2002: 45, 2002-2003 : 35, 2003-2004 : 41, 2004-2005: 43.

Notable that in the season when we finished top of the

Premier League we conceded our lowest number of tries: 35.

Since the innovation of the National League in 1987-88 we have won 169 matches out of 324, drawing 13 and losing 142. In that period of eighteen seasons we have accumulated 6,849 points and conceded 6,423.

If we look solely at the professional era we would find that we have played 220 matches of which we have won 117, drawn 6 and lost a total of 97. During that 10-year period, to the end of the 2004-2005 season, we have scored 4,923 points and conceded 4,853.

Interestingly, no club has attained our total of 82 points since 2002-2003 while the average points required over

The History

the three season period to finish in fourth place and gain entrance to the Heineken Cup has been 61.

It would appear that players have their own favourite opposition too. Take for example James Simpson-Daniel. He has scored a brace of tries against Leeds on three different occasions in 2001-2002, at Headingley and also at Kingsholm in 2003-2004 and recently against the Yorkshire club once again at Kingsholm.

The only time James has surpassed a brace in League action was against Bath here at Kingsholm in the 2001-2002 season when he recorded a hat-trick.

European competition also appears to be to James' liking for a hat-trick of tries against Caerphilly at Kingsholm in the 2001-2002 season was followed by another trio at Viadana in the 2002-2003 campaign.

Jake Boer seems to find his way to the try line against Sale

quite frequently. A try here at Kingsholm in the 2001-2002 season was followed by tries in home and away fixtures versus the northern club in the 2002-2003 season.

The South African born back row forward once again found the Edgeley Park club to his liking by again crossing the try line in our Kingsholm encounter of the 2003-2004 season.

James Forrester's record against Bristol is a nightmare for the Memorial Ground club. James scored a hat-trick of tries in our League match at Bristol in the 2002-2003 season. There had been a pre-warning of his extraordinary form versus our south west neighbours for he had notched a trio of tries in a Powergen Cup match the previous season at the home of last seasons national League Champions. For good measure James added another try to his Memorial Ground tally with an early season try in our Guinness League match earlier this campaign.

Another player to find Bristol to his liking was Marcel Garvey who scored four tries against them in the 2002-2003 season including a hat trick in our Kingsholm match.

Ludovic Mercier has only failed to score in two matches he has appeared in. At Leicester (away) in 2002-2003 in a Zurich League match and Bristol (away) in a Powergen Cup encounter in 2001-2002. At Leicester he was injured and at Bristol he was a late replacement, some record!

So, all in all, figures can give food for thought and for the connoisseurs, a fascination.



Ludovic Mercier

“It would appear that players have their own favourite opposition too.”



Nick Wood is one of the most highly thought of young props in the country and last week was called into the England A training squad. He already has international experience at Kingsholm with the Under-21s and is relishing the potential chance against Ireland in March.

NICK WOOD is regarded as one of the finest young forward prospects in the country and has already graduated from the England Under-21 ranks to the A team squad.

In March, Kingsholm will host England A's clash against Ireland A – on the same day as the Gold Cup at Cheltenham and on St Patrick's Day.

If that was enough to guarantee a red-hot atmosphere, Wood believes the passionate Kingsholm support will be vital to England's victory hopes as he aims for a place in the squad.

"It would be a very special opportunity to play for England A at Kingsholm," Wood told the matchday programme. "I was lucky enough to play Under-21s there and it really does make a massive difference.

"To have the Gloucester crowd supporting you, regardless of the opposition, is a great feeling. There will be a sell-out crowd, it's St Patrick's Day and the Gold Cup – it's perfect."

Wood has made seven appearances in all competitions this season with two tries, but damaged a thumb in the European Challenge Cup victory over

Bucuresti a fortnight ago.

He is regularly up against Patrice Collazo for a place in the starting line-up but us gaining valuable experience and exposure all the time.

And he admitted he was slightly surprised to be named in the squad when it was announced last Wednesday.

"I must admit, I was pretty surprised because although I have been playing, it has not been regularly," he said. "But I am obviously really glad to be included but I am only in the squad at the moment.

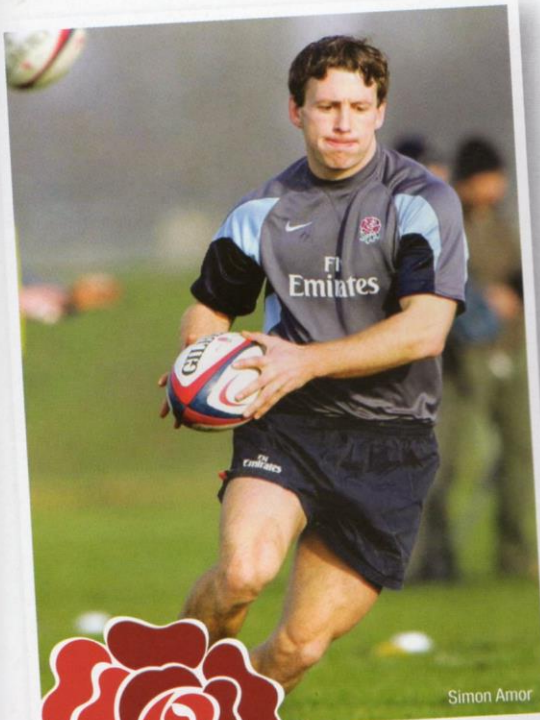
"All I can do is train hard and try and make the 22. I would think a prop from the senior squad would drop down with us – it could be Perry Freshwater and he is a very good player - but it's still a great opportunity for me and I am really looking forward to it.

"I just want to give myself the best chance of playing for England at Kingsholm – it would be pretty special."

TICKETS are still available for England A's Kingsholm clash from the ticket office, www.gloucesterrugby.co.uk or from 0871 871 8781



Nick Wood



Simon Amor

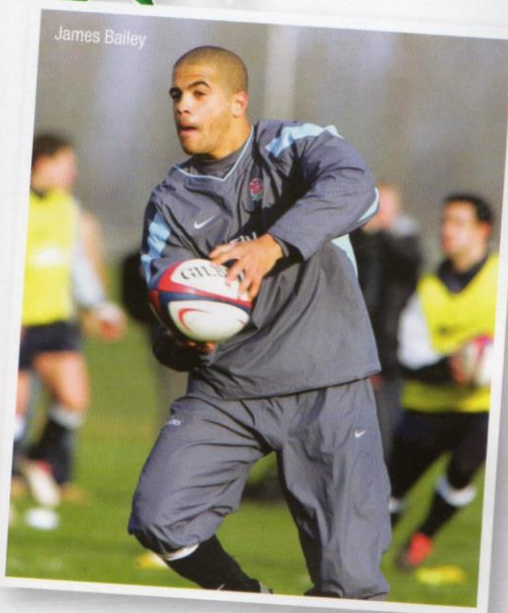


Will Matthews



Gloucester Boys

In Sevens Squad



James Bailey



Henry Paul

The **History**

