



GLOUCESTER RUGBY

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Gloucester Rugby v Bristol Rugby

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INSIDE

James Forrester

On his recovery

Derby Delight

Gabrielle Lewis looks ahead to this afternoon's clash

Match Of The Days

Cup final glory

PLUS: Fans Zone, Ryan's Review, Peter Arnold and Community News

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TWELVE TEAMS STARTED.

CAPTAIN'S CORNER



Skipper Peter Buxton looks ahead to today's mouth watering clash against Bristol.

▶ WHAT an end to 2007 – one of the biggest games on the calendar against Bristol.

Games simply don't come much bigger than this and it will be a fantastic way to see out what has been a really good year for the club.

I know this game has been completely sold out for more than three weeks now and if any indication was needed of the size of the occasion that is surely it.

There is always something a little bit extra in a local derby – the proximity, history and tradition all play their part in creating a unique atmosphere and anticipation and this game is no different.

Bristol have been an outstanding team for a number of years now. They are resourcefully coached, for a relatively small squad have recruited shrewdly and are renowned for their confrontational forward-orientated style and approach.

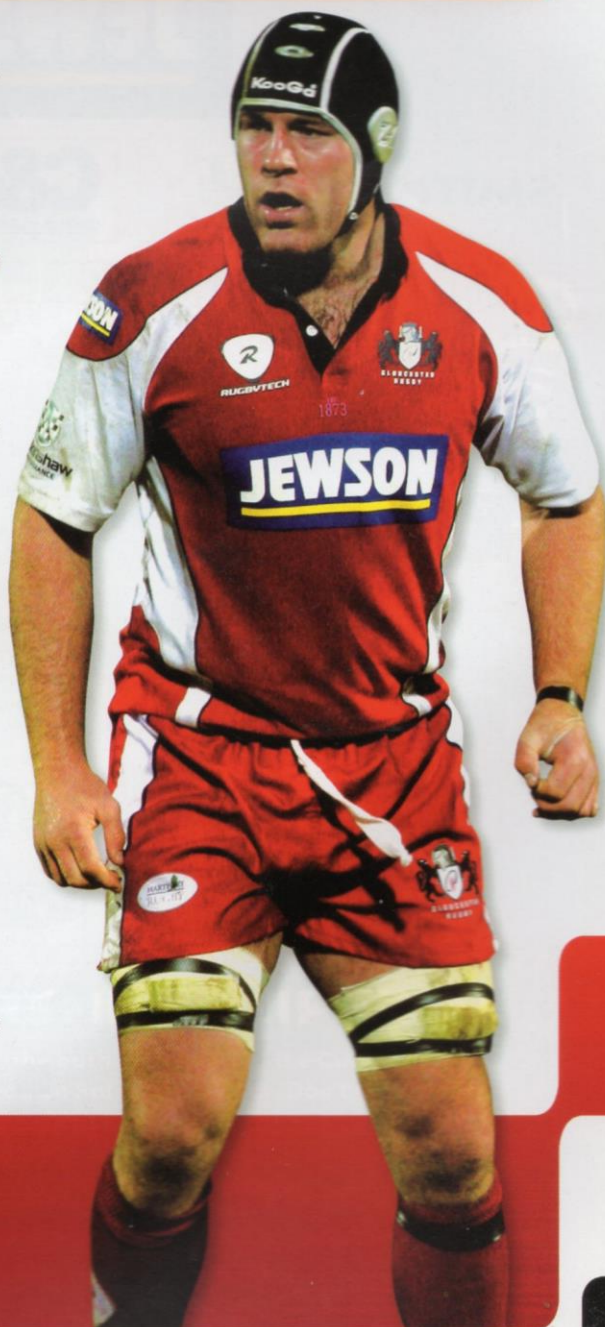
It will be up to us to match

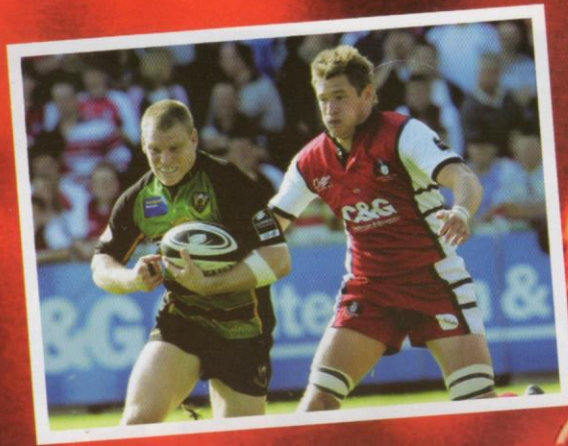
their enthusiasm, passion and durability for the contest. This is right up there with any of the games we have played so far this season in terms of intensity. Bristol are doing a fantastic job to be top of what is an extremely tough Heineken Cup pool and will come to Kingsholm with plenty going for them.

For me, it has been a very busy few weeks. By the time my last set of notes had gone to bed, I had not had time to mention my delight at being able to sign a new contract. It is a massive honour and a privilege to commit my long-term future to Gloucester.

We are building something at the club – on and off the pitch – that is very special and I want to be involved in that for as long as I can be.

But today is all about Guinness Premiership points. We want to maintain our home record and to have 16,500 voices behind us will be a fantastic feeling. Please give us everything you have got today and help us see out 2007 with another victory.

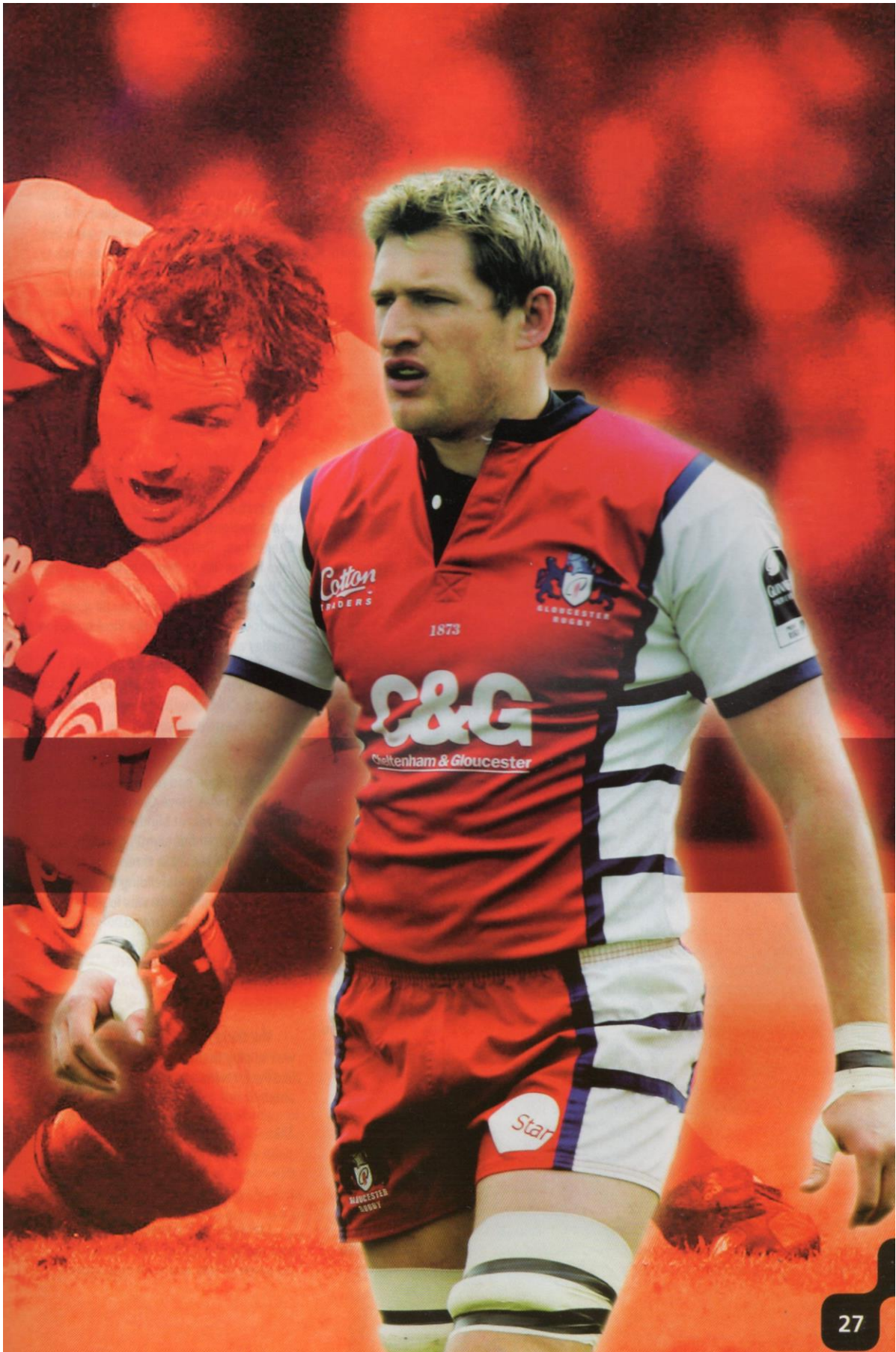




EIGHT ON EIGHT

WITH SIMON DEVEREUX

In his latest series of articles, former Gloucester number eight Simon Devereux meets James Forrester and talks about his recovery from injury, the pace of the modern game and handing out some lip to Pete Glanville...



EIGHT ON EIGHT

SD: *How is the injury and how are you doing in terms of getting your strength back?*

JF: It's going pretty well now. For a while I didn't seem to be getting anywhere because it was a serious injury and there was a lot of dead time when you are healing. Now it feels as if I'm making progress. I saw my surgeon again in late November and we feel I'm not a million miles away.

SD: *I was at Ashton Gate for the Bristol game when it happened, and you just seemed to be hitting a rich vein of form at the time.....*

JF: These things always happen when you least want them too. It was a strange one - a non contact injury if you like. My foot caught in the ground, though I didn't know when my knee twisted that it would do that much damage. People have said it happened at a bad time, but there is no good time for an injury like this.

SD: *You looked to be bringing more physicality into your game at the time. I've seen a programme from just after your debut in 2001, and according to this season's stats you are 12kg heavier now than you were then.....*

JF: I was a bit of a pole when I started playing. I worked really hard with fitness coach Mike Anthony in the summer of 2006 to improve my power and strength, and put on nearly a stone which I felt was a big benefit to my game. I had a knock on the other knee during the season but I was happy with the way I was playing at the end until this happened. Now I've got to concentrate on hitting that form again when I come back.

SD: *Do you have a target date?*

JF: I have a target in my mind but I don't want to disappoint myself. It's a hard one because it was an unusual injury and there are no set guidelines about when

you should be doing X,Y or Z. I'm just concentrating on working hard with the physio's every day. There's no set pattern. What we do evolves on a week to week basis.

SD: *Pace is one of your strongest attributes - have you always seen yourself as a number eight or are you really a frustrated three-quarter?*

JF: I've (almost) always played as an eight. Jon Goodridge and I grew up together, played mini rugby at Bicester together and have always been at the same club until he left to join Leeds. I did have a season playing as a fly-half when I was about 13, but I'm not sure the centres enjoyed it very much.

SD: *So was rugby always THE sport for you?*

JF: I used to play mini rugby on a Sunday, but growing up in Oxford the main sport was football. I played for school on a Wednesday and for a team on a Saturday until I went to a school which played rugby when I was 13. I'm still a big football fan, and I think there is a cross-over of skills.

SD: *So who were your biggest influences at Bicester?*

JF: The biggest one was my father. He took me to a mini's session when I was 7, and he was asked to help run it. Ten years later he was still coaching me. The other guy was called Roger Arneil (Scotland 1968-72). He was a blind side flanker who went on a couple of Lions tours. He was a legend at the club.

SD: *Who spotted you and persuaded you to come to Gloucester?*

JF: I was actually scouted when I was at school by both Harlequins and Northampton. Dad and I went along to both but we weren't that impressed, so we approached Gloucester ourselves.

I met John Haines and John Fidler, and they both seemed good, friendly guys. The set-up, especially the youth set-up, was much more professional. That was in the summer of 1998 when I was 17, I'm still here and I still talk to both of them.

SD: *How did you fit in coming from Oxford? In my day, local players would come down for trials in the summer - if you survived a good kicking you'd stay, and if not you'd go back to your club....*

JF: I was the posh foreigner! Rob Fidler was a foreigner too - he was from Cheltenham. There were a lot of lads from places like St Peter's in the Academy in those days, whereas now they come from all over the country. I'm still good friends with a couple of the local boys, Joe Goatley and Tom Miklausic.

SD: *When you breaking into the side, who were the number eights who you watched and admired?*

JF: Mike Teague had retired by then, so I suppose it was Steve Ojomoh. My first United game was at blindsides with Pete Glanville at number eight. I did quite well on the attack but let in three tries. He blamed me for my defending and I had the cheek to tell him he was looking at things the wrong way round....

SD: *I'll bet that was Pete Glanville's only ever game at number eight ...*

JF: The thing is, you forget what a thrill it was to play in the United side with a guy like Pete. I remember telling all my mates about it.

SD: *What about the modern eights in the Guinness Premiership - which ones are the best in your eyes?*

JF: I thought Nick Easter did really well at the World Cup. He's burst onto the scene of late and is an outstanding

player. He is strong, stays on his feet and is good in the line-out. James Haskell of Wasps did a job on us in the EDF, and he's very quick. I'd say those two stand out. Here, Naz (Luke Narryway) has been one of our best players so far this season, but there's a lot of competition with so many talented back rowers about. Gareth Delve is finding his form again after his injury, and Luke has got some confidence from having a run in the side.

SD: A lot is made now about power. You're not a bulldozer like Martin Corry, so are you conscious of being able to offer something different?

JF: Yes but you actually need to be able to offer the power as well. Sometimes the weather isn't great and the pitches are heavy so you need two strings to your bow.

SD: You've been in the first team squad now for 6 years, what are the main differences between now and when you started?

JF: I think the infra-structure has changed a lot. When we started we were using sites all over the city, doing different skills at different sites. Now we have everything at Hartpury, including the ice baths ...

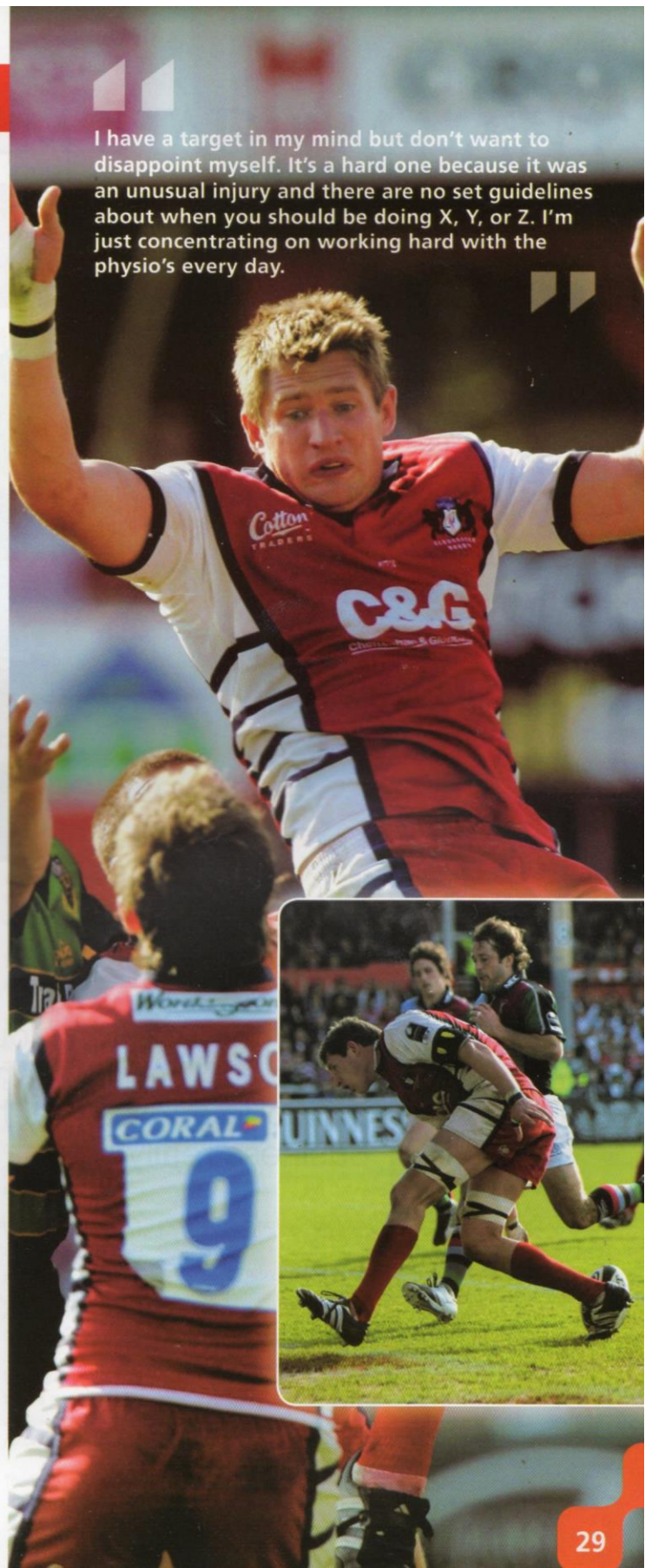
SD: And on the field - is it faster and more physical?

JF: That's hard to say. It is faster, but I'm not sure the skills have necessarily improved. The main thing is the power and pace, and every tackle hurts now. Defences are far more organised too.

SD: With things going well, you must be excited about the prospect of playing again....

JF: I can't wait to get back and play in front of the new stand. The atmosphere is brilliant now and Dean's done well with his recruitment. When I played in the Under 21's the reality was that only one or two of us would make it. We've got Lamby who's a talent but other players like Anthony Allen and Morgs (Olly Morgan) have shown that the club does recruit the best they can from all over the country, and those guys have an influence on the team even though they are still young. We feel we can win games from anywhere now.

I have a target in my mind but don't want to disappoint myself. It's a hard one because it was an unusual injury and there are no set guidelines about when you should be doing X, Y, or Z. I'm just concentrating on working hard with the physio's every day.





RYAN'S REVIEW

It is back to Guinness Premiership action today and head coach Dean Ryan looks back at an eventful year.

Looking back at our first four Heineken Cup matches, you must get a great amount of satisfaction from taking 19 points?

DR: OF COURSE we do – I think it is a considerable achievement to drop only one point after four rounds of matches. To win away anywhere in Europe is a hard enough process but to get bonus points in places like Ulster and Bourgoin says a huge amount about our development in the competition. To me, points come off the back of good performances and that is equally as significant for me because it shows in the toughest environments we are competing really well.

We have given ourselves a great opportunity to progress to the knockout stages but I would reiterate that nothing has been achieved yet – we still have two massive games to play and they will be decisive. I was asked after the Bourgoin game whether I thought we were already in the knockout stages and my answer to that is quite simply no. Nothing will be decided until after the group phases have been completed.

Not only have we been doing well on the field but a number of players have re-signed contracts ahead of next season.

DR: WE are aiming to establish and maintain a stable environment players want to be involved in. There are a large group of players who are all out of contract at the end of the current season and we wanted to be pro-active and get a number of them sorted out as quickly as possible. If we want them to stay and they also want to be involved with us, I see the process as being fast and concluded fairly comfortably and that is great moving forward.

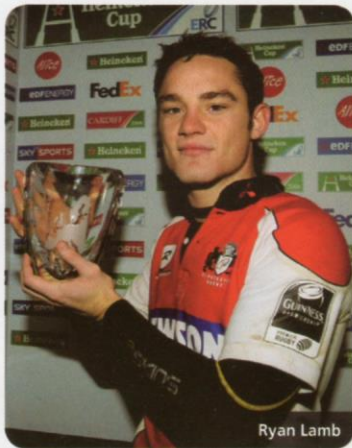
This is squad-orientated game and we need a big group of players who are capable of coping with the rigours of three competitions. I think any Gloucester fan can be really pleased with the work that has gone on behind the scenes so early in the season. It sends out a strong message we are a united group and that is important.

There are some huge matches coming up, starting today with the visit of Bristol.

DR: WE have big matches every week. The level of the competition these days means every single week we are under scrutiny and that is great because you want to test yourself against the best. We



We have given ourselves a great opportunity to progress to the knockout stages but I would reiterate that nothing has been achieved yet – we still have two massive games to play and they will be decisive.



Ryan Lamb



Gareth Delve



are getting a lot of exposure because we are near the top of the table but from my playing experience, there is nothing quite like a derby of this magnitude.

Richard Hill has done a really good job at Bristol and has got them playing to a formula that has been successful. I think the state of the three west country clubs gives a pretty good indicator to the health of the Premiership as a whole.

Games against them have been pretty close in the last few years and they won at Kingsholm a year or two ago so coming here will hold no fears for them. We just need to make sure our preparation is dead right for this game because we do have some very big games coming up and we want to maintain our home record because we are very proud of it.



This is our last game of 2007, what do you hope 2008 holds?

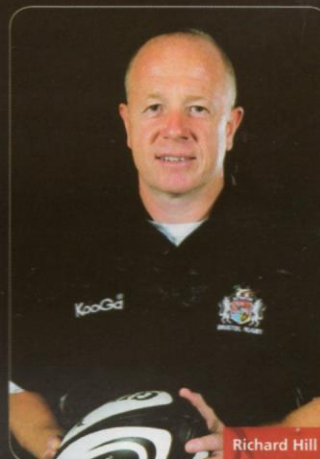
DR: OUR first game of 2008 is away to Bath, so you couldn't really ask for a bigger start in terms of local rivalry. In the new year, the games come thick and fast and I would like to think we would continue our development and become an even better side.

We got a taste of what to expect last season in the Guinness Premiership final and that is the sort of stage these players want to be on every season. We can look forward to it with enthusiasm because we have given ourselves a great platform in the Premiership and Europe.

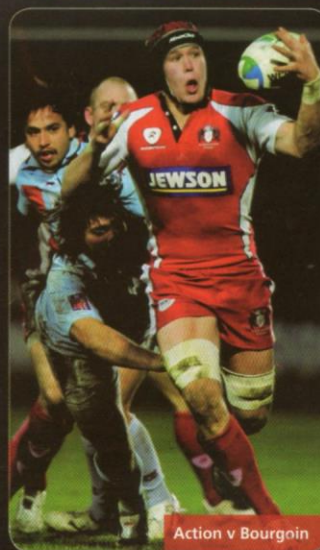
It will be a big year for some of our players as they get another 12 months of experience under their belts and I really think by this time next year they will have come on even more. But first we want to sign off 2007 with a victory and we know how hard that will be to achieve this afternoon.



Richard Hill has done a really good job at Bristol and has got them playing to a formula that has been successful. I think the state of the three west country clubs gives a pretty good indicator to the health of the Premiership as a whole.



Richard Hill



Action v Bourgoin

TODAY'S TEAMS

Saturday 29th December 2007 15.00

Gloucester Rugby
v Bristol Rugby



Gloucester RUGBY



Bristol RUGBY

	Iain BALSHAW	15	Full Back	15	Luke ARSCOTT	
	James SIMPSON-DANIEL	14	Right Wing	14	Tom ARSCOTT	
	Mike TINDALL	13	Centre	13	Rob HIGGITT	
	Anthony ALLEN	12	Centre	12	Neil BREW	
	Lesley VAINIKOLO	11	Left Wing	11	David LEMI	
	Ryan LAMB	10	Fly Half	10	Jason STRANGE	
	Rory LAWSON	9	Scrum Half	9	Brian O'RIORDAN	
	Nick WOOD	1	Prop	1	Alex CLARKE	
	Olivier AZAM	2	Hooker	2	Mark REGAN	
	Carlos NIETO	3	Prop	3	Jason HOBSON	
	Peter BUXTON ©	4	Lock	4	Roy WINTERS	
	Alex BROWN	5	Lock	5	Sean HOHNECK	
	Luke NARRAWAY	6	Flanker	6	Matt SALTER ©	
	Akapusi QERA	7	Flanker	7	Alfie TO'OALA	
	Gareth DELVE	8	No 8	8	Andrew BLOWERS	

Replacements

	Jeremy PAUL	16		16	Scott LINKLATER	
	Patrice COLLAZO	17		17	Darren CROMPTON	
	Marco BORTOLAMI	18		18	Dave ATTWOOD	
	Alasdair STROKOSCH	19		19	Joe El ABD	
	Gareth COOPER	20		20	Haydn THOMAS	
	Willie WALKER	21		21	Ed BARNES	
	Leon LLOYD	22		22	Sam COX	



HEAD COACH
Dean RYAN

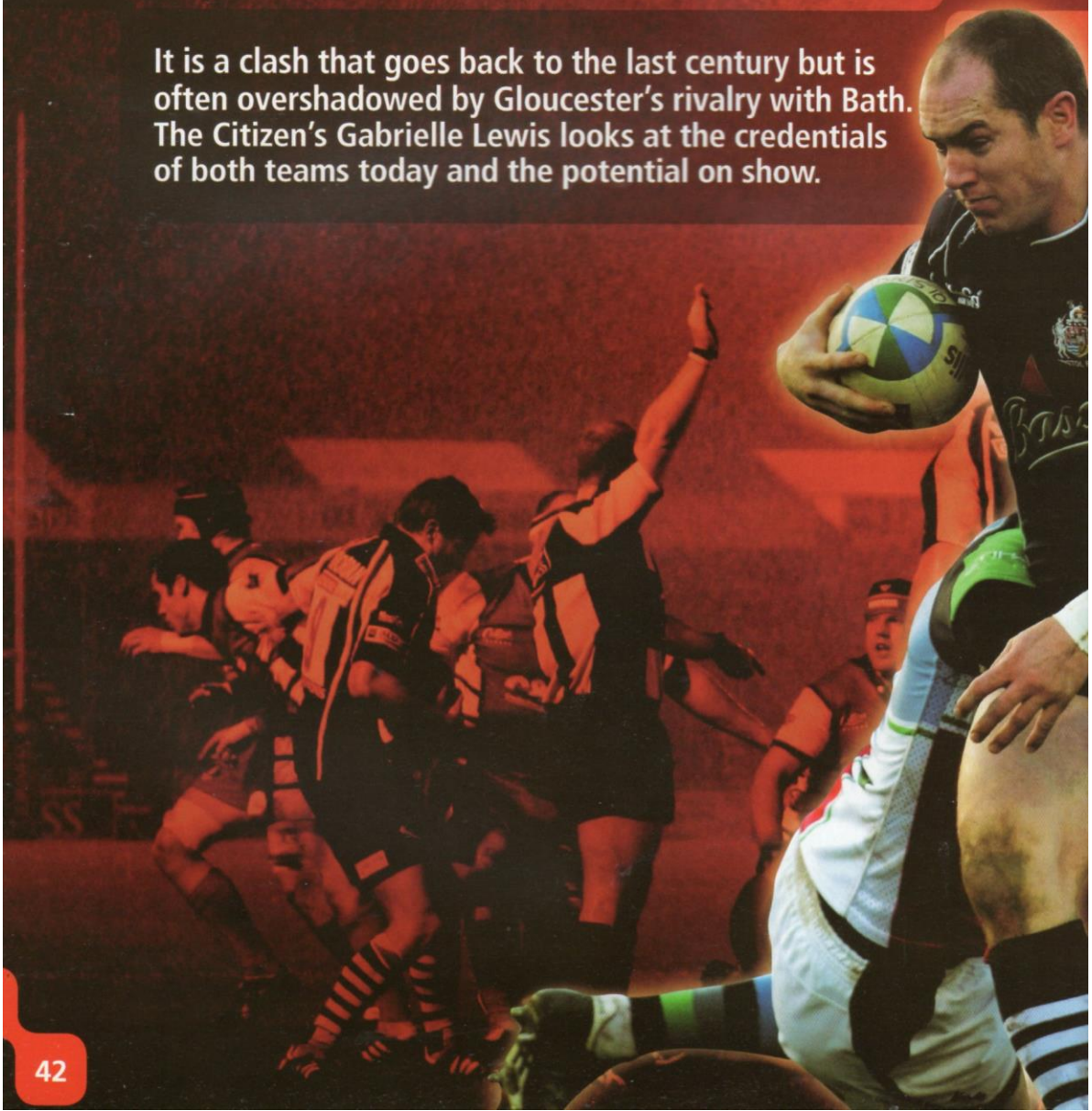


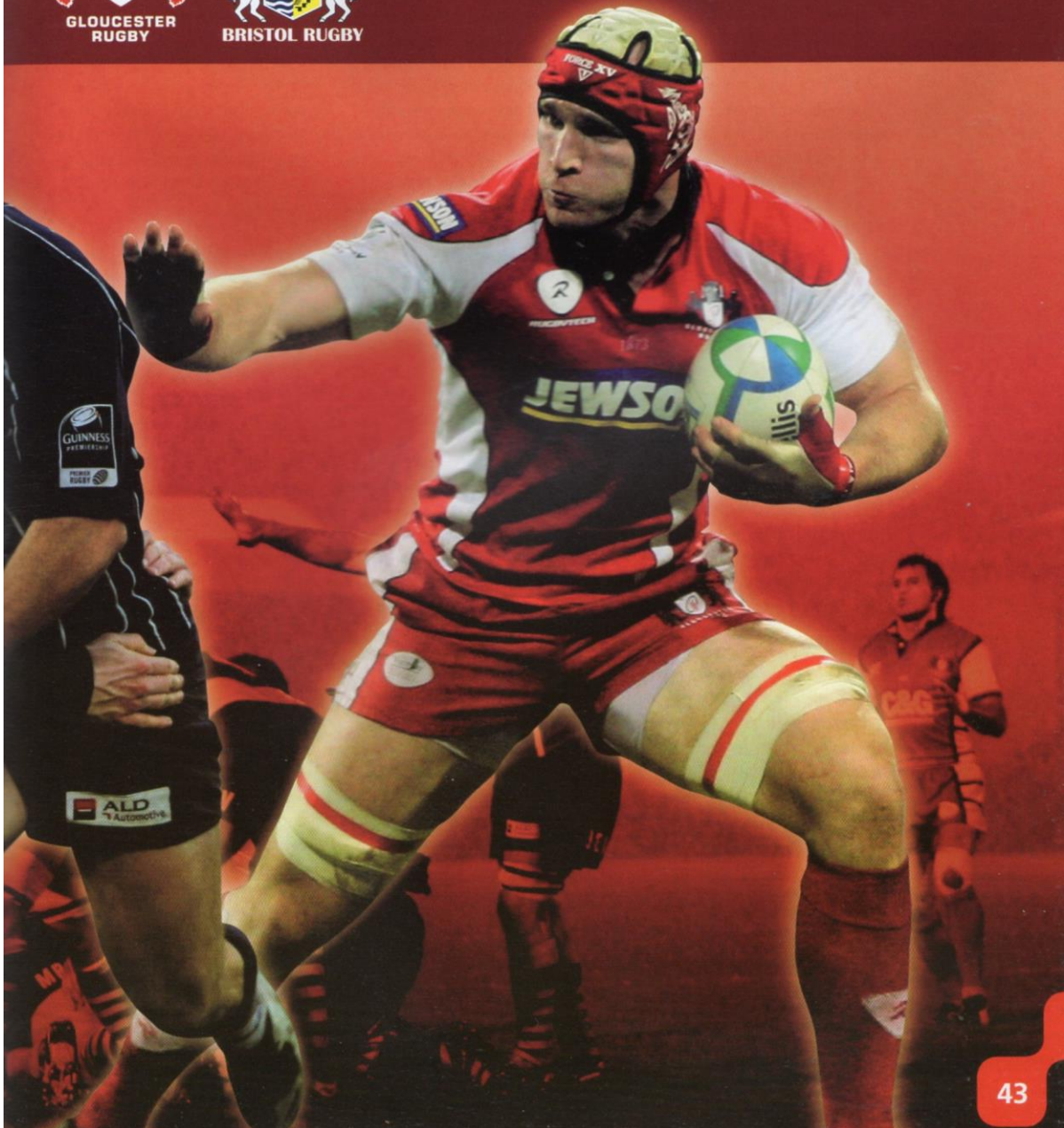
HEAD COACH
Dean RICHARDS

HIGH STAKES IN THE WILD WEST



It is a clash that goes back to the last century but is often overshadowed by Gloucester's rivalry with Bath. The Citizen's Gabrielle Lewis looks at the credentials of both teams today and the potential on show.







Marco Bortolami

HIGH STAKES IN THE WILD WEST

▶ MARK CORNWELL, that self-styled raconteur of Gloucester's finest hours and his involvement therein, was recounting his memories of classic west country derbies the other day.

Those that stuck in his mind entailed thrashings, or being thrashed by Bath. Even going back 10 years, to his early days manning the Gloucester second row, the stories tripped off his tongue.

The flow stemmed slightly when it came to recalling great clashes with Bristol – one bout with current Kingsholm chief Dean Ryan was among them and there was a vague recollection of James Forrester scoring a hat-trick of tries in another.

While face-offs with Bath will always get the gut churning, those against their more accessible, football stadium-residing neighbours have been less so over the years – despite their history and significance.

The tide started to turn, however, last year. Retiring to semi-professional rugby at Pertemps Bees and latterly as a player-coach with Cinderford, Cornwell was otherwise engaged by the time Bristol and Gloucester put on one of the most intense and frustrating derby spectacles of recent years.

In torrential rain at the Memorial Stadium, the Guinness Premiership's top two thrashed it out until Jason Strange dropped an injury-time goal that ended Gloucester's unbeaten record in the competition and confirmed Bristol as out-right league leaders.

The grip Richard Hill's men had on the Premiership last season surprised many as he had tinkered so little with the squad that had struggled the previous year.

Few questioned his motives, having saved his best from the 63-25

mauling by Gloucester in the EDF Energy Cup a month earlier. Within a few weeks it was clear that Bristol would not be in another fight for league survival, but that they were hunting down Heineken Cup qualification.

Leicester denied them a place at Twickenham and the Tigers then overwhelmed Gloucester to take the Premiership crown. The reaction to that humbling at HQ had a startling effect at Kingsholm. With the Volcanic impact of rugby league convert Lesley Vainikolo and Wales number eight Gareth Delve the most notable among Ryan's summer recruits, Gloucester have taken a huge bound forward from last term.

If anyone thought their opening gambit at Leeds Carnegie, when Vainikolo marked his debut with five tries in a 49-24 blitz, was a fluke, then their composed and determined performances since in the league and in Europe would prove otherwise.

Choking on the big stage no longer seems likely. Their young men – the likes of Anthony Allen, Olly Morgan and Ryan Lamb – have matured immeasurably and the leadership of Marco Bortolami, Mike Tindall and Peter Buxton has contributed to a campaign in which they could enjoy their Christmas bash as leaders of both the Premiership and Pool Two of the Heineken Cup.

Key to their progress is the extensive and supremely talented 45-man squad Ryan has established – and the fact that so many of them seem to be playing their best rugby at the moment.

Iain Balshaw has exorcised the demons of last year and is one of the stars this season, while the half-back combination of Lamb and Rory Lawson are making it hard for Scotland's Chris Paterson, the most reliable kicker in the World Cup, and

Gareth Cooper of Wales to get a start.

Luke Narraway, Akapusi Qera and Delve have made the back row sparkle to the extent that injured stalwarts Andy Hazell and James Forrester have hardly been missed and the ultra-efficient Alasdair Strokosch has not always got a look-in. The list goes on.

The depth of quality meant Gloucester did not miss Bortolami, Will James, Qera, Cooper, Paterson, Lawson and Alasdair Dickinson during the World Cup and there has been no indication of any let-up in the club's momentum going into new year.

Things are not as rosy at Bristol. After a slow start to the season, they have picked up the pace to move to seventh. The timing of their resurgence has steered them to the top of a tough Heineken Cup group ahead of Cardiff Blues, Stade Francais and Harlequins.

The return of England pair Shaun Perry and Mark Regan and Samoa's David Lemi from the World Cup should not be underestimated.

Perry may not have enjoyed the most fruitful of times in France, but he is a major cog at Bristol and the cracked windpipe he is nursing is a blow to Hill's plans, especially with Nathan Budgett, Lee Robinson, David Blaney and the injury-blighted Dan Ward-Smith also out.

Regan may have struck a note of discord by his decision to captain the Barbarians against the world champion Springboks, but he too is vital to what they do and will live up any contest.

If he makes it today, he's guaranteed to ensure there is a little of what Cornwell holds dear about derby days.

MATCH ACTION

Gloucester Rugby
Bourgoin

51
27



Time line

1 mins	Lamb PEN	3-0
3 mins	Boyet PEN	3-3
6 mins	Lamb PEN	6-3
14 mins	Boyet pen	6-6
16 mins	Lamb PEN	9-6
19 mins	Qera TRY, Lamb CON	16-6
22 mins	Delve TRY, Lamb CON	23-6
32 mins	Nicolas TRY, Boyet CON	23-13
37 mins	Balshaw TRY, Lamb CON	30-13
46 mins	Walker TRY, Lamb CON	37-13
61 mins	Lamb TRY and CON	44-13
65 mins	Genevois TRY, Boey CON	44-20
70 mins	Vainikolo TRY, Lamb CON	51-20
79 mins	Monzeglio TRY, Boyet CON	51-27

Gloucester Line-up

15	Iain Balshaw	(1t)
14	James Simpson-Daniel	
13	Mike Tindall	
12	Anthony Allen	
11	Lesley Vainikolo	(1t)
10	Ryan Lamb	(1t, 6c 3p)
9	Rory Lawson	
1	Nick Wood	
2	Olivier Azam	
3	Carlos Nieto	
4	Peter Buxton (capt)	
5	Alex Brown	
6	Luke Narraway	
7	Akapusi Qera	(1t)
8	Gareth Delve	(1t)
REPS		
16	Andy Titterrell	(Azam)
17	Christian Califano	(Nieto)
18	Marco Bortolami	(Narraway)
19	Alasdair Strokosch	(Buxton)
20	Gareth Cooper	(Lawson)
21	Willie Walker (1t)	(Balshaw)
22	Leon Lloyd	(Tindall)

Marching on...

Saturday, December 15, Kingsholm
Attendance: 12,370, Referee: George Clancy (Ire)

▶ GLOUCESTER took their points tally to 19 from a possible 20 in this season's Heineken Cup with a six-try demolition of Bourgoin.

They backed up their bonus point victory in France with another commanding performance and a 26-point haul from Ryan Lamb, who won his third Heineken Cup man of the match award of the season.

Once Akapusi Qera and then Gareth Delve had crossed for the first two Gloucester tries at the start of the second

quarter, Bourgoin were always playing catch-up and despite a much improved performance, lacked Gloucester's fire power and finishing qualities.

However, Bourgoin did hit back with a score from winger Matthieu Nicolas when they capitalised on a Gloucester mistake and flanker Marc Rennie sent him into score. Benjamin Boyet's conversion made it 23-13 but when Mike Tindall and Luke Narraway combined, Lamb sent Qera through a midfield gap to beneath the sticks and from the ruck, Balshaw scored



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to the right of the posts.

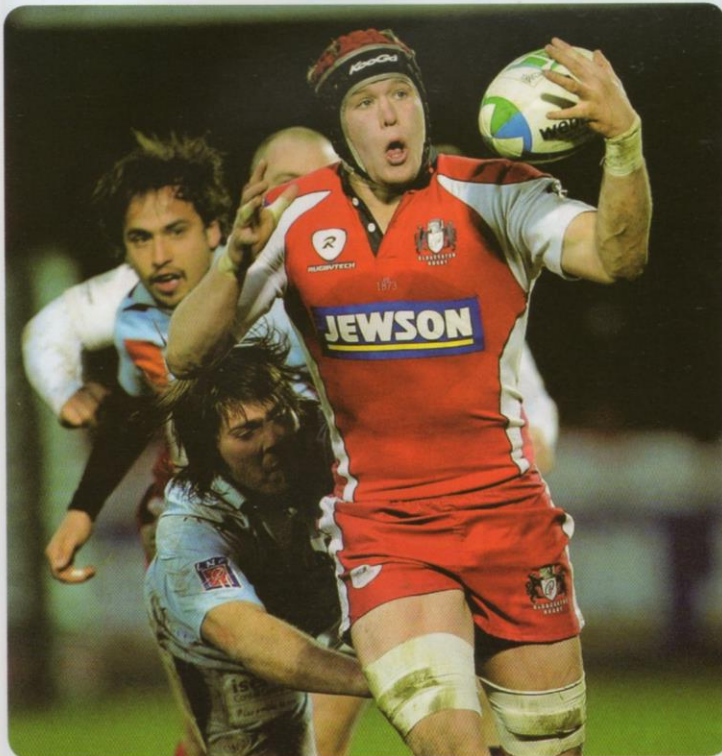
There was more to come for Gloucester six minutes into the second half when Lamb once again timed his pass to perfection and replacement Willie Walker stepped his way brilliantly to the line for try number four.

Lamb continued his 100% kicking record and then stole try number five – picking off Boyet’s midfield pass for the second week running to make it to the line from 50 metres. The conversion took Gloucester 44-13 ahead but Bourgoin did rally late

on and hooker Jean-Phillipe Genevois was bundled over from a line-out drive.

Still the scoring hadn’t finished. The impressive Delve used all his strength to sustain a move close to the line and James Simpson-Daniel off-loaded brilliantly for Lesley Vainikolo to score by the corner flag. Lamb’s touchline conversion took Gloucester over the half-century mark.

Bourgoin did respond with the final try of the game, their third, when Brice Monzeglio barged his way over in the corner.



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Man of the Match

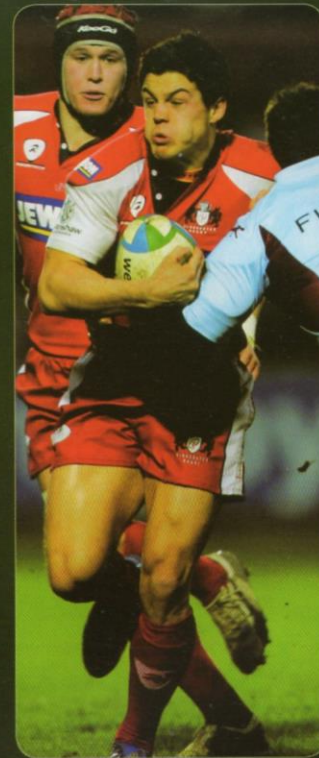


Ryan Lamb continued his development with another mature performance in the number 10 position and contributed 26 points

Coach’s Comment



“Until we have played our last two pool matches, anything can happen. We are not taking anything for granted in this pool,” head coach Dean Ryan.





PETER ARNOLD

Peter Arnold consigns another year to the history books and looks back on an eventful 2007 and forward to the exciting prospect of 2008.

END GAME

WELL, that's it, then. Our last game of 2007. And it's been a switchback of a year, hasn't it? Last season we were undoubtedly the best team in the Premiership, having proved that by finishing top of the pile in what must be

the most punishing league in the world involving eight months of hard graft.

Of course we came spectacularly unstuck in the play-off at Twickenham, but that really doesn't matter all that much when seen against the background

of the season as a whole. Anyway, as a moderately experienced Gloucester watcher, I can say, with a degree of authority, that one of the charms of supporting Glos is that you never really know what to expect. We beat sides when nobody gives us a light, but can inexplicably roll over and expire in games we ought to win with a fair degree of ease. Sometimes we even manage to do both at once, as in the Wasps game, and that takes a bit of doing.

One of the most intriguing aspects of 2007 has been the influx of new faces at Kingsholm. Last January no one would have expected Chris Paterson to arrive hereabouts, and – be honest now – I doubt if many of us had ever heard of Vainikolo or Qera. Or Strokosh and Dickinson for that matter.

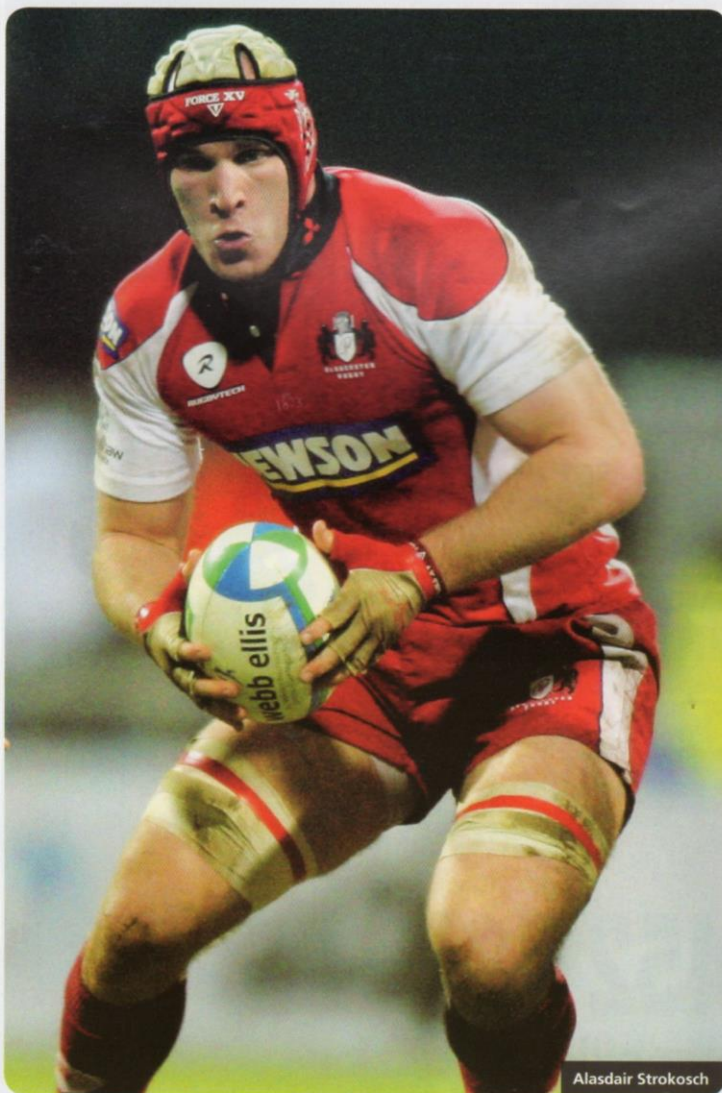
Not that our success has been totally down to imported talent. Narraway has improved out of sight, and Nick Wood has come on by leaps and bounds, for example.

I think it safe to say that we are a better, stronger side than we were this time last year. Of course, much of this is down to the expansion and beefing up of the squad, but we are also a more streetwise and resilient bunch than we were, as has been proved in the Heineken Cup so far this season.

As that famous All Black, Al Jolson said: "You ain't seen nothing yet"

AULD LANG SYNE

IT'S a bit of a cliché to say that this time of year is the one for catching up with old friends, but just because something has been said many times doesn't mean it's not true. That being so, we couldn't wish for better company to see



Alasdair Strokosh



Lesley Vainikolo



Akapusi Qera

in the New Year than Bristol, the most treasured enemy of them all.

Of course, times have changed, but there's still a bit of a buzz around the place when the lads from down the A38 come to town. For some of us, the old names come flooding back. We recall such formidable opposition as Big Dave Watt, who famously is alleged to have broken Mike Burton's jaw, as is described in Burto's best book, 'Never Stay Down'.

There was also Dave Rollitt, known with complete justification as 'The Grey Fox', the only Bristol player I can remember who used to get a rousing cheer from the Shed when he ran out at Kingsholm. Then there was Mike 'The Grafter' Rafter, who simply never stopped running.

I could go on: Alan Morley, Jack Gregory, even Stuart Barnes before he defected to Bath.

But anyway, whatever the tables say, there's no such animal as an easy game against Bristol, so anyone who has come along expecting to see a cosy Festive

Season run about has come to the wrong shop.

It's great to see Briss here again, whatever time of year it is. We wish them well – just as long as they don't win today.

HARKING BACK

I ALWAYS like to commit a bit of nostalgia at this time of year, and my thanks are due to Ros Lane who enables me to hark back no less than 102 years. She recently received a book all the way from New Zealand, detailing the triumphant progress of the 1905 All Blacks side who were christened 'The Invincibles' and for good reason.

They came to Kingsholm on October 19th of that year, and quite frankly stuffed us to the tune of 44-0, scoring ten tries in the process. The gate was, interestingly enough, 15,500.

Gloucester's fortunes weren't helped by the loss of "their best back, A.Hudson" to injury: no replacements in those days, of course. The unfortunate was Arthur

Hudson of the famous sports shop family who played for England and was the father of Gordon Hudson, Club Chairman (he gave me this job, incidentally). He scored four tries against Ireland in the Victory Internationals.

As a flanker, Gordon would have been interested in a letter also appearing in the book, from one signing himself 'Durham Lad' who ascribed the invincibility of the tourists to their adoption of the wing forward, which he regarded as an "immoral innovation.... neither flesh, fowl nor good red herring."

After the game, the tourists were given dinner by the Mayor of Gloucester, and then taken to see a performance of Hamlet at the Theatre Royal in Westgate Street, which seems an odd choice of entertainment for a bunch of hairy New Zealand rugby players.

It's an extremely interesting set of notes, and I wish I had room to print more. Perhaps next year. Which reminds me: have a great 2008, everyone.

MATCH OF THE DAYS

Two of the modern-day giants clashed at Twickenham in the John Player Cup final in 1977-78 and thanks to Richard Mogg's try and a brilliant forward performance, Gloucester beat Leicester to land the trophy, as Dave King remembers.

▶ FIXTURES between Gloucester and Leicester have an intensity few others compare with – for physicality, menace, firepower and history – the two grand old clubs are capable of putting on a show few can compete with.

It is now 31 years since we triumphed over the men from Welford Road in the John Player Cup at Twickenham in what was then the biggest domestic cup game ever. It had been a strange season which had been divided between the counties and the clubs. The County Championship was staged along with the new Divisional Championship, both competitions being completed in the first half of the season. The John Player Cup started on the final Saturday in January and the ties were interspersed between rounds of the Five Nations Championship.

Cup rugby had not been to Leicester's taste. They had only made it to the quarter-final once – 1973 proving their zenith. In the following seasons from 1974-75 they failed to reach this stage.

But luck turned for the Tigers in the 1977/78 season when, in a first round draw, they received their first ever home tie versus Hartlepool. Previously they had been handed eight successive away matches in the competition.

Each following draw favoured the Welford Road team and although they required any number of second half come-backs, made it to Twickenham.

Meanwhile, at Kingsholm, the men of Gloucester were dismissing any ideas that Gosforth could obtain outright ownership of the John Player Cup with a hat-trick of victories. The northern club, minus the influential Roger Uttley, made an early exit



Dusty Hare

in front of 10,000 fans at Kingsholm.

Gloucester were the season's team in form. The much vaunted pack including England international's Mike Burton, John Watkins and John Fidler set the club on the way to the final with a series of withering forward performances.

However, the cup run did not come without problems. The England selectors named Burton on the replacement bench for the Calcutta Cup match with Scotland but the great old tight-head prop preferred to stay in the Gloucester pack a week before the semi-final. Victories over Lydney 38-6 in the first round, Gosforth 19-10 in the second round, 13-3 against Wasps and Harlequins 12-6 in the semi-final powered Gloucester to Twickenham.

His demotion to the bench was a prelude to his decision to retire at the end of that season. As the day of the final approached, it was a reflective view that both Gloucester and Leicester had to thank the metronomic kicking of Peter

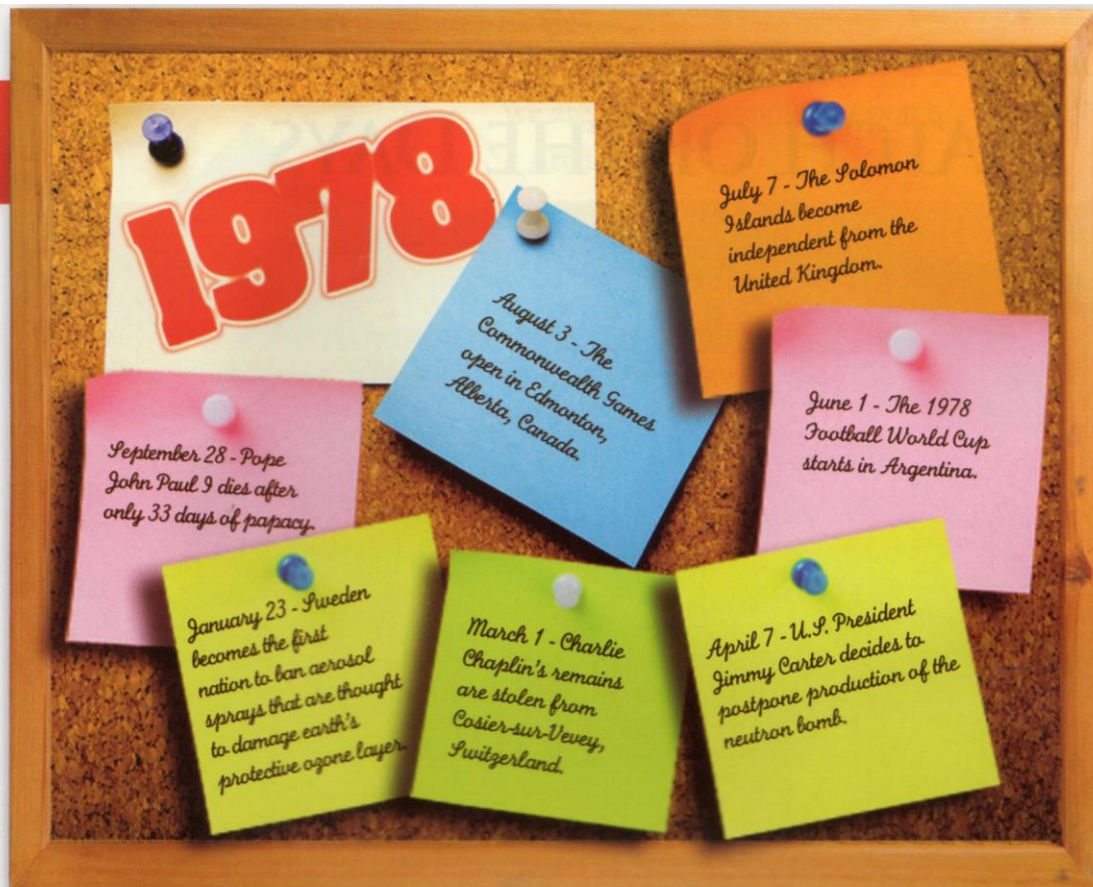
Butler and 'Dusty Hare', for almost half of their points in the competition.

The final attracted a crowd of 24,000, more than double the previous highest attendance; half had travelled from the west country to watch their heroes take on the might of the Midlands club.

Thanks to a formidable forward effort, Gloucester enjoyed most of the possession but only had Richard Mogg's converted try to show for their efforts before the interval. It was Gloucester's limited attacking ambitions that enabled Leicester to remain within striking distance.

It did appear that Leicester were further inhibited by the sense of the occasion. No player depicted this case of big stage nerves than the usually reliable 'Dusty Hare'. He only landed one of his six penalty kicks. Those misses were crucial.

Leicester had defeated Hartlepool Rovers 9-3, then Rosslyn Park 25-16, Northampton 20-11 and then Coventry



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Mike Burton

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25-16 in the semi-final but they had no answer to Gloucester's forward effort and paid the price for Hare's kicking nightmare.

Burton, in his comical nature described the victory over Leicester as: "We won convincingly, all of 6-3. I had one of my best games in a Gloucester jersey and we provided a real glut of possession which was mostly frittered away.

"Mogg scored a try which Butler converted and we were the better side. However, the referee, Roger Quitterton, who on his day was a fair and good official, gave Leicester so many penalties that I was afraid to cough in case he gave another against me. It was just as well that Dusty Hare had left his kicking boots at home. He kicked one goal but missed plenty of others."

"It was a great moment of my rugby life to see John Watkins lift the trophy above his head. Once again though voices were raised. Bad thing for Rugby. Gloucester's conservative approach."

MATCH OF THE DAYS

THE TEAMS

GLOUCESTER:

P.BUTLER
B.CLEWES
B.VINE
R.JARDINE
R.MOGG
C.WILLIAMS
P.HOWELL
M.BURTON
S.MILLS
G.SARGENT
S.BOYLE
J.FIDLER
J.WATKINS (CAPTAIN)
V.WOOLEY
J.SIMONETT

LEICESTER:

W.H.HARE
M.J.DUGGAN
P.W.DODGE
G.P.HALL (CAPTAIN)
R.G.BARKER
B.JONES
S.KENNEY
R.E.NEEDHAM
P.J.WHEELER
S.P.REDFERN
N.J.JOYCE
A.G.HAZELRIGG
S.R.JOHNSON
G.J.ADEY
D.J.FORFAR

REFEREE: R.QUITTENTON (LONDON AND SUSSEX)



Mike Burton



John Watkins



Dusty Hare

MATCH ACTION

Newcastle Falcons
Gloucester Rugby

13
20



Time line

6 mins	Wilkinson PEN	3-0
8 mins	Balshaw TRY, Lamb CON	3-7
22 MINS	Parling TRY, Wilkinson CON	10-7
31 mins	Azam TRY, Lamb CON	10-14
53 mins	Lamb PEN	10-17
70 mins	Wilkinson PEN	13-17
73 mins	Lamb PEN	13-20

Gloucester Line-up

15	Iain Balshaw	(1t)
14	James Simpson-Daniel	
13	Mike Tindall	
12	Anthony Allen	
11	Lesley Vainikolo	
10	Ryan Lamb	(2p, 2c)
9	Gareth Cooper	
1	Nick Wood	
2	Olivier Azam	(1t)
3	Carlos Nieto	
4	Marco Bortolami (capt)	
5	Alex Brown	
6	Alasdair Strokosch	
7	Luke Narraway	
8	Gareth Delve	
REPS		
16	Rory Lawson	(Cooper)
17	Andy Titterrell	(Azam)
18	Azam	(Titterrell)
19	Will James	(Bortolami)
20	Peter Buxton	(Delve)
21		
22		

Falcons Felled

Sunday, December 23

Referee: Andrew Small, Attendance: 9,316

▶ TRIES from Iain Balshaw and Olivier Azam set Gloucester on course for another vital victory in the Guinness Premiership.

The pair crossed in the first-half of an absorbing contest that Gloucester controlled virtually throughout thanks to their dominance of the set-scrum, outstanding defence and superior organisation.

Their mastery in these areas led by a monstrous effort from the front row, but contributed to by the entire eight, was the

backbone of a thoroughly deserved victory that means they go into today's west country derby against Bristol joint top of the table.

In Nick Wood, Luke Narraway and Alasdair Strokosch Gloucester had the forwards of the match and in another magnificent physically dominant display from Mike Tindall, the man who pulls it all together in midfield, the visitors kept the hosts at bay.

The England centre led a brilliant defensive display and it was Gloucester's all-round



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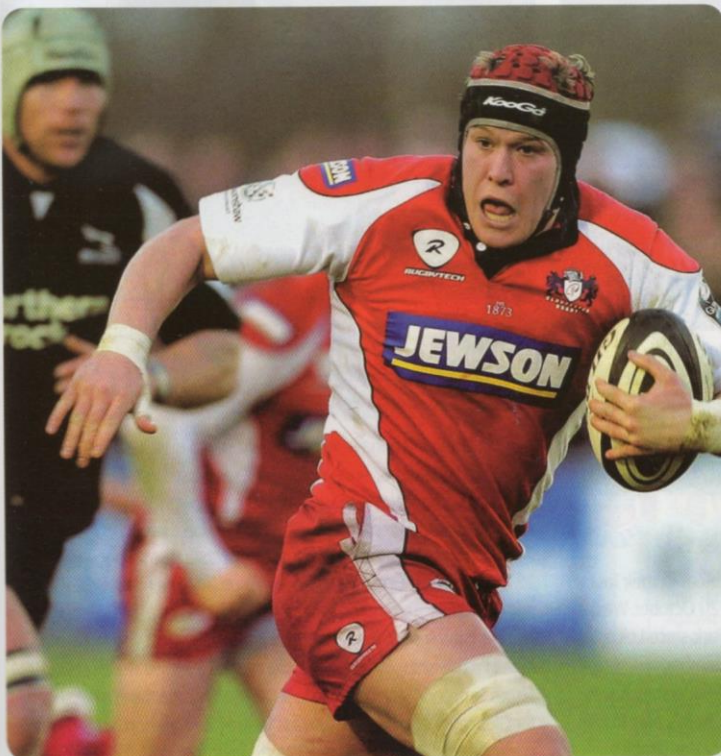
organisational qualities that denied Newcastle a route into the match, despite a try for flanker Geoff Parling.

By this time, Gloucester had already scored. Gareth Delve carried hard from the back of a scrum, Gareth Cooper made a great break and Tindall almost reached the line with a clattering surge. When play came back, Marco Bortolami threw a long pass to Anthony Allen and he sent Balshaw into score.

And when Delve held a line-out catch at the tail, Gloucester's forwards drove on and

Azam was at the bottom of the bodies with the try. In the second half, Gloucester had a couple of chances to extend their lead but Tindall couldn't get his pass away to Balshaw and Lesley Vainikolo had a couple of punishing runs.

Although Gloucester were restricted to a couple of Ryan Lamb penalties, they marshalled the contest expertly and closed it out in the last moments – Allen making one brilliant tackle on Mathew Tait in midfield – as the Kingsholm men gained four more crucial points.



Man of the Match



There were any number of excellent contributions but for his effort against All Black Carl Hayman, Nick Wood takes it.

Coach's Comment



"I thought we were pretty much in control throughout – nobody jumped out of the structure and that is a very pleasing thing," head coach Dean Ryan.

