

SHARKS



Sharks v Gloucester

Zurich Premiership

Good Friday 18th April 2003 Kick-off: 3pm

Sharks Official Matchday Programme £2

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Captain's Log

WE take on Gloucester at Heywood Road this afternoon and it is a huge game for our players. Gloucester are not at the top of the table by chance. They are there on merit and have turned in some very impressive performances this season.

They already have one trophy under their belt, having beaten Northampton Saints in the Powergen Cup Final and will be keen to return to Twickenham for the Zurich Championship Final next month with the aim of collecting some more silverware. Gloucester have usually been able to field a formidable pack and they present a very physical challenge to any side. But, this season, they have grafted on a very dangerous set of backs with youngsters like James Simpson-Daniel and Marcel Garvey joining the more experienced Thinnus Delpont and Henry Paul. My immediate opposite number, Andy Gomarsall, has played for England this season and poses another threat.

The only surprise this season was the manner in which Gloucester went out of the Heineken Cup but, as the Sharks discovered, there are no easy games when you come up against the top sides in Europe.

We are keen to return to winning ways following our defeat by Leicester Tigers at Welford Road two weeks ago. Until then we had been on a winning run in the Premiership and had been adding crucial try scoring bonus points to our victories. I believe we had been playing as well as we have ever played since I have been at the club so it was very disappointing to come away from Welford Road with nothing. We never really got going in that game. Leicester are very good at obstructing possession but we have to expect that and it's just one of those things.

That performance has to be put behind us now and it is important we concentrate solely on the task ahead of us. The end of the season isn't far away but we have to stay totally focused.

We have an especially hard run in but I believe this side is better equipped to cope with that pressure than it was twelve months ago.

There have been some very good performances by individual players and they realise what it takes now to perform consistently well at the top level.

BRYAN REDPATH



TETLEY COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP
Lancashire v Notts, Lincs and Derbys
At Sedgley Park RUFC
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Saturday 3rd May 2003 Kick Off 3pm



Gloucester

With the Powergen Cup already resting in their trophy cabinet, Zurich Premiership leaders Gloucester arrive at Heywood Road this afternoon with a domestic Double well and truly in their sights.

Of course the Sharks will be hoping to have a big say in the title run-inthemselves, but the Cherry and Whites are buzzing ahead of the clash of the league's top two.

At the time of writing the men from Kingsholm are unbeaten in seven league games and travel north having won their last two games against the Sharks.

The most recent of those encounters came in the opening throes of the season when they triumphed 44-8 in the West Country despite a third-minute try from Mark Cueto and prior to that they won 33-11 at Heywood Road in the Zurich Championship last season. But memories of the Parker Pen Shield semi-final just six weeks before that are still strong in the mind for Sharks fans as the nerve-racking 28-27 victory was the third of an eight-match winning run that culminated in THAT trophy-winning defeat of Pontypridd.

Nigel Melville's men also finished the campaign on a high as they went on to beat Bristol 28-23 in the final of the Championship - and they have picked up where they left off this season.

With six weeks still remaining, the Cherry and Whites have already won one trophy having swept aside Northampton 40-22 in the Powergen Cup final at Twickenham.

After an entertaining first half in which the lead changed hands no less than six times, 20 unanswered points after the interval saw Gloucester secure their first taste of cup final silverware in 21 years.

The architect of that victory - as he has been so often since moving to Kingsholm - was LUDOVIC MERCIER.

With his second full season in the country drawing to a close, the Frenchman has over 530 Premiership points to his name.

Yet the man Philippe Saint-Andre recruited from Aurillac two years ago has bad memories of the Sharks after the heart-breaking Parker Pen Shield defeat last season.

Mercier - usually so accurate kicking both from hand and the tee - was inconsolable after dragging a last-minute penalty wide to end his side's hopes of victory.

He went some way to avenging that by booting 18 points in the Zurich Championship semi-final and kicked another 14 in September, but this afternoon's game gives him the perfect platform to finish the job.

The 26-year-old is far from a one-trick pony, though, and he is more than happy to run with ball in hand particularly when he knows the class of those outside him. One of those backs is League convert HENRY PAUL, recruited by Gloucester at the end of the 2001 Super League season.

The former Bradford Bulls star has become something of a utility man - appearing at both full-back and in the centre - and after a somewhat shaky start has begun to find his feet in the 15-man code.

The 29-year-old's presence in the team to face Saracens in January was greeted with boos from sections of the Kingsholm crowd, with Paul

seemingly the scapegoat for the defeat by Munster which saw Gloucester ousted from the Heineken Cup.

But he has silenced the critics to become an integral part of a back-line that - like our very own - boasts England hopefuls on either wing.

James Simpson-Daniel - the man they call 'Sinbad' - leads their Premiership try count with seven and already has an England cap to his name but MARCEL GARVEY, at 19 a year younger than his fellow winger, is hot on his heels.

Garvey burst onto the scene at the start of the season when his raw pace and sublime running left a string of Premiership stars grasping air. Despite his tender years, he is already an England A international and five tries in Gloucester's doomed Heineken Cup campaign show he can perform at the highest level in club rugby.

A fearsome set of backs including the likes of Mercier, Paul, Simpson-Daniel and Garvey is all very well, but if they are starved of the ball their ability to win games for their side is dramatically reduced.

Step forward JAMES FORRESTER, whose tremendous all-round game has already seen him mentioned in the same breath as legendary French back-rower Laurent Cabannes.

At 21, Forrester is from the same mould as our own Chris Jones with his combination of power and pace making him a fearsome opponent both in the pack and the loose.

Like Jones, Forrester has an eye for the spectacular try as none other than Jonah Lomu can testify.

The legendary All Black was helpless as the wing he was marshalling was breached by a trademark Forrester burst for his first try in England colours, albeit in an uncapped match against the Barbarians.

That is far from a one-off, though, and with his versatility meaning he is happy on either flank or at No 8, Forrester is sure to be an England regular of the future.

The youthful exuberance Forrester brings to the Gloucester pack is perfectly counter-balanced with the experience of hooker OLIVIER AZAM.

The Frenchman - who has 19 caps to his name - is a typically no-nonsense hooker, a fact borne out by his five yellow and one red card in English rugby. And his solitary dismissal sparked one of rugby's most unseemly episodes. The 28-year-old and Newcastle back-rower Epi Taione were dismissed for fighting when the two sides met in December 2001.

Azam, who had his nose broken, was later given a five-week ban for his part in the brawl and a three-week suspension for spitting at Taione, who himself received a three-week ban.

But in the aftermath of a stormy match Falcons coach Rob Andrew accused the Gloucester man of making racist comments to Taione.

The Cherry and Whites were furious and launched a vigorous defence of their player, who threatened legal action, which culminated in Andrew being banned from Kingsholm.

The former England fly-half later withdrew his accusations, though, and Azam has been allowed to put the incident firmly behind him.

And as a key member of a potential Double-winning side, it is fair to say he has done just that.



HENRY PAUL



LUDOVIC MERCIER



MARCEL GARVEY



Sharks

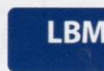
Player	Pld	Sub	Try	Conv	Pen
15 Jason Robinson					
14 Mark Cueto					
13 Dan Harris					
12 Graeme Bond					
11 Steve Hanley					
10 Jos Baxendell					
9 Bryan Redpath					
1 Kevin Yates					
2 Andy Titterrell					
3 Barry Stewart					
4 Chris Jones					
5 Dean Schofield					
6 Phil Davies					
7 Stuart Pinkerton					
8 Peter Anglesea					
16 Charl Marais					
17 Jim Thorp					
18 Stuart Turner					
19 Iain Fullarton					
20 Richard Wilks					
21 Vaughan Going					
22 Nick Walshe					

Gloucester

Player	Pld	Sub	Try	Conv	Pen
15 Thinus Delporte					
14 Marcel Garvey					
13 James Simpson-Daniel					
12 Henry Paul					
11 Tom Beim					
10 Ludovic Mercier					
9 Andy Gomarsall					
1 Trevor Woodman					
2 Olivier Azam					
3 Andy Deacon					
4 Adam Eustace					
5 Mark Cornwell					
6 Jake Boer					
7 Andy Hazell					
8 James Forrester					
16 Clive Stuart-Smith					
17 Simon Amor					
18 Chris Catling					
19 Chris Fortey					
20 Peter Buxton					
21 Junior Paramore					
22 Ed Pearce					

Match Referee.....Mr Spreadbury
Touch Judge..... Mr Rowden
Touch Judge.....Mr Terheege

4th Official.....Mr Campsall
4th Official.....Mr Daniels



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