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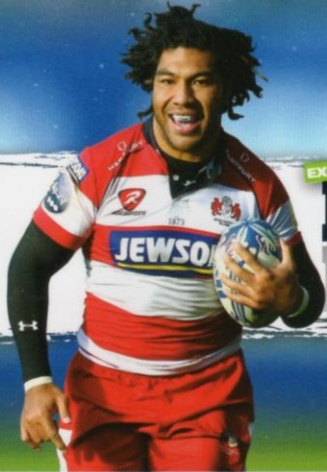
GLOUCESTER RUGBY

OFFICIAL MATCHDAY PROGRAMME

AMLIN CHALLENGE CUP
VS. LA ROCHELLE
19 DECEMBER 2010, KO 5.45PM // £3

**PLAYER
PETER
BUXTON
FEATURE**

**MATCH
ACTION**



EXCLUSIVE FEATURE

**BIG
LES**

INSIDE

**REGULAR
FEATURES:**
DAVE KING,
PETER ARNOLD,
BOB FENTON

Amlin Challenge Cup Round 4

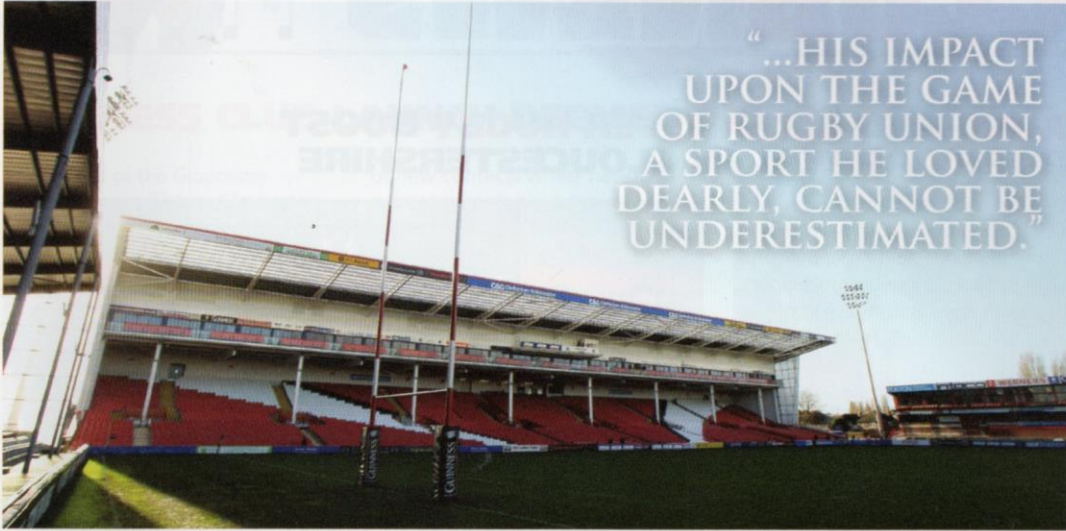
**Amlin
Challenge
Cup**





TOM WALKINSHAW

- A TRIBUTE



Tom led Gloucester into rugby's brave new world.

I knew Tom Walkinshaw for many years and I will feel his absence deeply.

I became acquainted with him before I even joined the club. Tom became Club Chairman in 1997 when I was working at Newcastle United and he was the driving force behind me coming to Kingsholm in 1999.

I spent more than a decade working with Tom, an amazing time. We had some good times, we had some tricky times. And, it was certainly never dull!

I think that it's only now, in hindsight, that people realise what an incredible life Tom enjoyed. Rugby was just one facet of it. You could probably write a book about his career in motor sport alone.

However, his impact upon the game of rugby union, a sport he loved dearly, cannot be underestimated.

Who knows, for example, where Gloucester Rugby would be had it not been for his stewardship over the years? Particularly those incredibly difficult first few years of professionalism when many clubs were basically learning as they went along.

His influence, though stretched far beyond Kingsholm and it's only fitting that tributes have come flooding in this week from the likes of Premiership Rugby and the Rugby Football Union.

Tom served as Chairman of Premier Rugby from 1998 to 2002, creating relative calm and stability where chaos had previously reigned.

During his four year tenure as Chairman, Premier Rugby introduced the salary cap and the average attendances in the Premiership increased by 33%.

His passion and vision led the clubs' team negotiating with the Rugby Football Union over the release of England players and a structure that created a commercial vehicle for the

healthy progression of English rugby.

His leadership in this role is widely recognised in establishing an English league that is widely regarded as one of the strongest in world rugby, a contributing factor to England winning the Rugby World Cup in 2003 and reaching the final in 2007.

Gloucester was his first rugby love, however, and the position that the club finds itself in today is his legacy.

Everyone at the club has been extremely saddened by his passing and the stadium, usually so vibrant, has been understandable subdued this week.

Once we have all had time to reflect, however, I think we will be able to celebrate everything he did for Gloucester Rugby and the game of rugby union.

He will be a great loss to many and our thoughts go out to his family.

Ken Nottage,
Managing Director.



"THE BEAUTY OF THE ERA THAT I PLAYED IN WAS THAT I PLAYED WITH PEOPLE WHO WENT ON TO BECOME GENUINE FRIENDS OF MINE, PEOPLE YOU WOULD LITERALLY DIE FOR AND THAT'S QUITE SPECIAL."

"The food was here, we changed here and we'd run to Estcourt Road and back as a warm up and cool down! As a result the pitch wasn't in quite as good nick as it is nowadays."

Having played as an amateur, when the game went professional, Simon confessed that it took some getting used to especially observing the immaculately kitted out Gloucester side going through their paces.

"When the game went pro, it was quite a strange concept to get your head around – you'd be practicing scrums and lineouts and thinking you ought to be at work! It took a while to get used to.

"They (the current Gloucester side) are all wearing the same kit. We used to see all sorts, odd socks etc. When the game went pro, you suddenly got all this free kit. Before that, you only used to get kit if you went on a tour."

Diet and nutrition is obviously a massive part of the modern game but Simon said Gloucester were fairly quick off the mark in that area, even in the early days of professionalism.

"I think it's a personal choice thing. Even back in the early 90s, I used to watch what I ate. I trained with Dave Kearsay a hooker who had

come out of the RAF and now lives in the Forest.

"I picked up a lot off him, he had his own weights set up in his garage and, through that process, I started to eat healthily so it wasn't such a big shock when the game went professional.

"We also got a guy in called Paul Balsom who was a former bobsleigh trainer and he was very meticulous on the diet.

"We used to get all sorts of shakes and amino acids – I used to have to set my alarm for 4 in the morning to take my amino acids as we were training that hard that our muscles needed to replenish. I put on a stone of muscle in the first year alone and my body fat went down to about 10%.

"I've got one funny story when we went on preseason tour under Phillippe Saint Andre and we'd trained hard all summer and had eaten pasta until it was coming out of our ears. So, we were in a restaurant and thought we'd try and sneak a knicker bocker glory.

"We were looking over our shoulders to see if Balsom could see but they arrived with sparklers coming out

of them and all sorts so we were rumbled straight away. Deacs (Andy Deacon) and Tony Windo were trying to sneak it down and Balsom was going ape!"

With the benefit of hindsight, does Simon wish his time had come later and that his playing days were now rather than then?

"No, I don't wish my time had come later. I was fortunate that I played for Gloucester in the amateur era and then saw the transition into professionalism.

"I used to watch Gloucester from the terraces in the 1980s, watching my heroes like Mike Teague, John Gadd and Richard Mogg to name but a few. You played local rugby and maybe got a call up to training and, if you were any good, you stayed.

"All you wanted to do was impress those people and I can remember being in training and thinking that I was stood alongside my heroes who have since become friends of mine.

"The beauty of the era that I played in was that I played with people who went on to become genuine friends of mine, people you would literally die for and that's quite special."

On behalf of everyone at Gloucester Rugby, I'd like to wish the players, staff and supporters of La Rochelle a very warm welcome to Kingsholm this afternoon.

I can't really start these programme notes without talking about Tom Walkinshaw who sadly passed away last weekend.

I had a meeting with Tom just before we took on Saracens in the Aviva Premiership a couple of weeks and his desire to see Gloucester Rugby at the pinnacle of the domestic game burned just as brightly as ever.

Even if he couldn't make it to our games in person, he still appreciated an update as soon as possible after the final whistle and I often made a point of calling him even before the post match press conference.

His passing, although not unexpected, has still come as a shock and he's going to be greatly missed by everyone at the club. He believed in me and offered me the opportunity to become Head Coach at this great club which he loved so much.

I'll always be grateful to him for that and my thoughts are with Martine and the boys.

We entertain La Rochelle today of course a mere eight days after meeting them in Round 3 of the Amlin Challenge Cup at Stade Marcel Deflandre.

The back to back games that always occur at this time in the European calendar always conjure up some interesting situations. How much will both sides have learned from the first encounter? How deflating is a defeat? How much of a boost is a win?

All I know for sure is that we had to work damned hard for that win in France. People keep saying

it it, but wins over there are rare commodities indeed.

It's always a different type of atmosphere to an English ground. There's more singing, a bit like a football crowd and none of the respectful silences that the kickers in England would expect!

With that in mind, I was delighted with our discipline and application last weekend. They came at us hard in the opening half hour and we made some defensive changes at half time which paid off in the second period.

But our discipline was excellent

come to Kingsholm and a trip to Rovigo still to come, we know what we need to do in order to qualify for the knockout stages.

Just as important today though is the performance. We've dogged out a couple of good wins in recent in games which could easily have gone the other way.

We're winning when we're not quite playing to our full potential which isn't bad. But we all know that there is still a lot more to come from us.

Putting in a good 80 minutes today will set us up nicely for next weekend when we return to



and restricting them to just three points was crucial. Then, when we struck through Sinbad's try, you could see that it took a lot out of them.

After the break, we did absolutely the right thing and played the game in the right areas. We pinned them back and forced them to try and play from deep and our defence was up to the task.

It sets things up nicely for today and we know that our destiny, in terms of the Amlin Challenge Cup, is now in our hands again after a poor start with the defeat in Agen.

Win today and we'll have won three from four. With Agen still

Aviva Premiership action against the Northampton Saints.

There's a strong argument that the Saints, led by my old mate Jim Mallinder, have been the side of 2010. We now all too well that they lifted the LV=Cup back in March but, even more impressive has been the way that they've maintained a long term challenge in the Premiership.

They so nearly made the Final last season and have been leading the way this time around. We'll need to be at our best against them and it'll be a real test of our credentials but I'm confident that we have what it takes.

Enjoy the game and Merry Christmas!



"I HAD A MEETING WITH TOM JUST BEFORE WE TOOK ON SARACENS IN THE AVIVA PREMIERSHIP A COUPLE OF WEEKS AND HIS DESIRE TO SEE GLOUCESTER RUGBY AT THE PINNACLE OF THE DOMESTIC GAME BURNED JUST AS BRIGHTLY AS EVER."

BRYAN REDPATH

RUGBYTECH



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View from The Citizen

with Nick Purewal

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Tom Walkinshaw: Hard working and passionate to the end.

"He was fiery, a really fiery Scot, who told it how it was, didn't sugar coat anything and would be blunt and honest to the end." Bryan Redpath

Tom Walkinshaw's last order to Bryan Redpath was typically direct: keep it going.

Gloucester chairman and owner Walkinshaw lost his long cancer battle on Sunday – but hard working and passionate to the end, he met with Head Coach Redpath and managing director Ken Nottage only a fortnight ago to start contract plans for next season.

That was to be the last time the former Scotland and British Lions scrum half spoke with Walkinshaw, the man who saved Gloucester when he took charge in April 1997.

Humbled Redpath paid tribute to a 'fiery, blunt' boss, who knew his rugby, knew what he wanted but did not meddle or interfere.

Hailing a boss who backed him to the hilt when a string of defeats last season punctuated the new Head Coach's initial tenure, Redpath said Walkinshaw's unstinting support fuelled the coaches and squad with extra determination to succeed.

Redpath explained: "I met with Tom 11 days ago, and his last words to me were to tell me to keep it going.

"He told us to keep maintaining the standards we've set at the start of this season, and that he was happy with how we were progressing."

Redpath stepped up to the top coaching job when Dean Ryan left Kingsholm, but his early time in charge was blighted by six straight Premiership defeats in September and October at the start of the 2009-10 campaign.

Paying tribute to Walkinshaw's steely faith in trying times, Redpath said that support allowed him to maintain the strength of his coaching convictions.

Redpath continued: "Last season we had a run of bad results and outside commentary was getting louder.

"But Tom's actions then were the most reassuring thing that I could have received.

"To know that he was wholeheartedly supportive during what was a really tough time for all of us – him included – was priceless.

"He knew that I was committed to making everyone fully aware and driving them to buy into understanding quite what Tom had

achieved at the club, and exactly where he wanted to take the club.

"He really supported us all, and that rubbed off. I drew a lot of strength from his support, and I knew he would stick by me.

"And hopefully I would like to think that we've come out of the other side of that, and are really moving forward, and in the direction he wanted us to.

"I didn't really get a chance to get to know him as well as I would have liked, but the time I did spend with him I relished.

"He was fiery, a really fiery Scot, who told it how it was, didn't sugar coat anything and would be blunt and honest to the end.

"It was a clarity of direction that anyone who worked with him respected and appreciated.

"I was just delighted to get a chance to work with him as closely as I did for a time.

"He was still brimming with ideas and clear intent on what he wanted next for Gloucester, but sadly it was just his time to move on."



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EXCLUSIVE
**PETER
BUXTON**
FEATURE

**MORE
BANG
FOR YOUR
BUCK**

FACT

Bucko started his career at Cheltenham before moving to Midlands side Moseley. After a successful spell there, he moved to Welsh side Newport and then on to Gloucester in 2002.

GLOUCESTER
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He's led from the front, he's quite literally bled for the cause. He's Gloucester through and through.

It does beg the question, though. Born just up the road in Cheltenham, how on earth did he slip through Gloucester's net and kick off his playing career at Rodney Parade with Newport?

"It was basically down to Allan Lewis. He spotted me playing at England U18s and I went via Moseley to Newport mainly because of him."

"At the time, Newport were in Europe and doing some good things. It was the era when they had a few South Africans around like Gary Teichmann and Andy Marinos. Shane Howarth was there as well. It was a good move for me at the time."

Former Gloucester Rugby

"I'M REALLY ENJOYING IT. THERE'S A GOOD BUZZ. WE'RE LUCKY IN THAT WE HAVE SOME GOOD YOUNGSTERS COMING THROUGH EACH YEAR. IT'S A GOOD TIME TO BE AT THE CLUB."

supremo Nigel Melville, now CEO and President of Rugby Operations for USA Rugby, was determined that Kingsholm would not miss out a second time when he arrived to take over player matters at Gloucester.

Buxton was the first signing that Melville made for Gloucester in his capacity as Director of Rugby and the back row/ second row has since gone on to top 200 appearances in all competitions. However, Melville wasn't the first person from Kingsholm to have his eye on Bucko.

"The year before, Philippe (Saint Andre) had shown a bit of interest. I think he knew I was from Cheltenham and there was a bit of a local link."

"However, Nigel took over and was keen to bring me over. And, I was keen to come to Kingsholm, of course. It was where I wanted to be, it was a great move and an easy decision to make."

Dean Ryan went on record to describe Buxton as being the glue

of the side, the man who holds it all together. On the surface of it, that looks to be a huge compliment but the self effacing back rower isn't so sure!

(Laughs) "He was probably put on the spot and had to think of something to describe me in a positive way! No, it's great. When your coach and someone of Dean's standing says something like that about you, it's good to hear."

"It was good to be playing week in and week out at that time and it was a really nice compliment."

Buxton arrived at Gloucester on the back of the memorable Zurich Championship victory over Bristol in June 2002 at Twickenham in 2002, a game that will live long in the memory for supporters of both clubs.

The club then swept all before them in the following campaign and topped the end of season table by a country mile until the new end of season playoff system reared its ugly and

in May 2006 must have been one of the highlights?

"Yeah, that was great. It was my first season as skipper. Dean appointed me in preseason down in France and I was lucky enough to be captain throughout the year, finishing with that great final."

"It was a huge battle up front but we got a few tries. It was all square at half time but we won it in extra time thanks to Django's fantastic try."

"We had a young team at the time and it was a great feeling as we felt as though we were embarking on an exciting journey."

Out of contract last year, there were plenty of rumours about Bucko possibly moving on. Worcester was mentioned in several rugby publications. But the 32 year old chose to stay loyal to Gloucester and sign on again.

"At the time, you do have to

consider your options. Especially when you have a family etc. But, I always wanted to stay."

"I'd had eight great years to that point and to say you've done ten years at one club would be fantastic, particularly my home club. Once everything was sorted just after Christmas, it was a no brainer really."

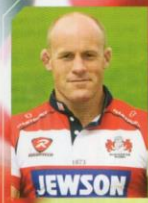
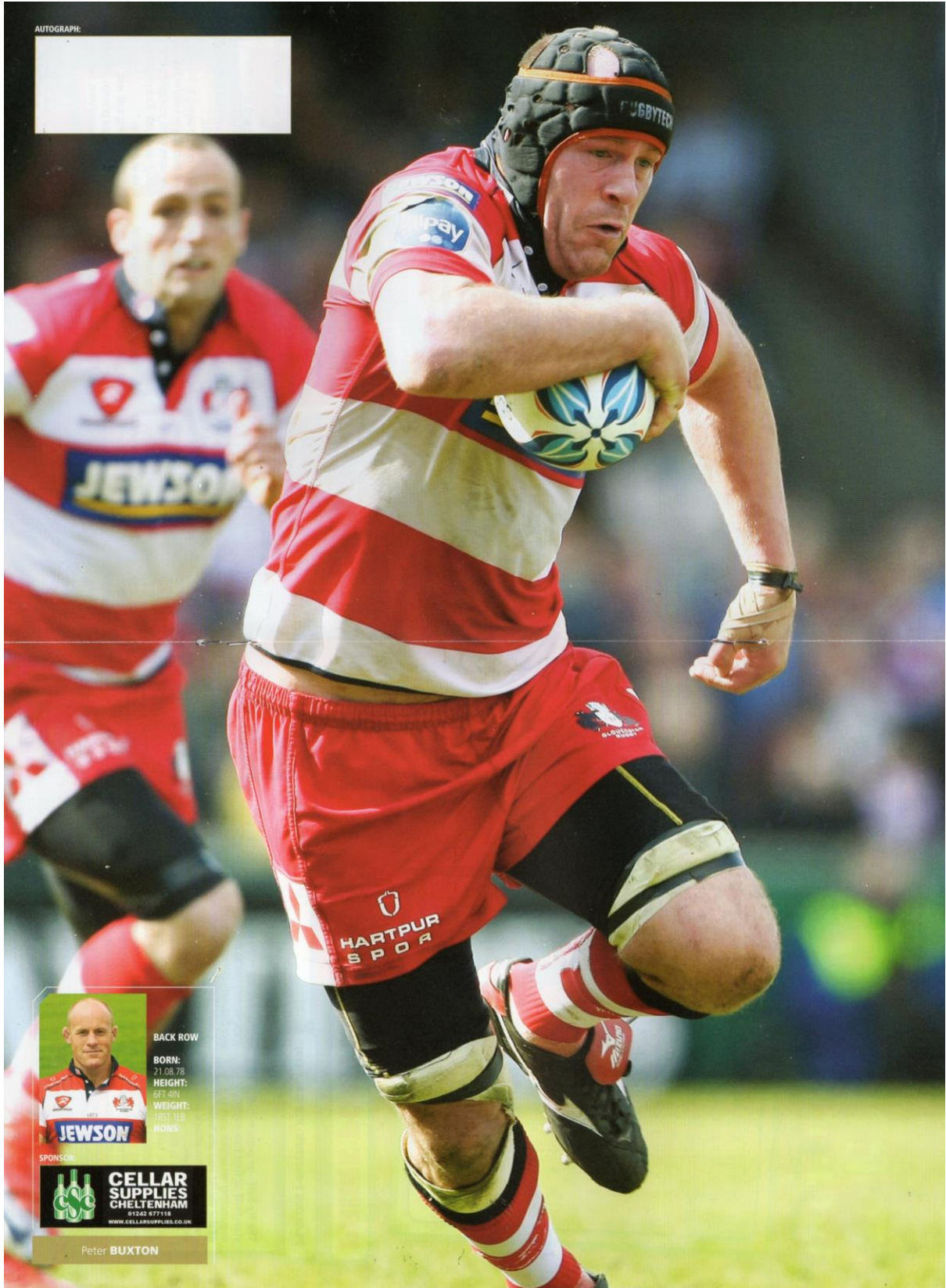
"I always had faith in the squad and the coaches. We went through a bit of a hard time last season at the start. We'd been through some big changes and we all had to find our feet a little bit."

"But, we moved on in the second half of last season and things have continued in that vein this time around."

"I'm really enjoying it. There's a good buzz. We're lucky in that we have some good youngsters coming through each year. It's a good time to be at the club."

"We're playing well and, if we can maintain our position and just pick up a few away wins, we'll be challenging."

AUTOGRAPH:



BACK ROW

BORN:
21.08.78
HEIGHT:
6FT 4IN
WEIGHT:
155ST 11LB
HONOR:

SPONSOR:



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Peter **BUXTON**



It was in the European Shield on 29th September 2001 when La Rochelle last visited Kingsholm.

A resounding 34 points to 15 victory ensued for the 'Cherry & Whites', in front of a modest attendance of 6,568.

Over a period of nine years it is interesting to reflect on the change in playing personnel from that early autumn afternoon.

Our team line up that day was as follows:

Stoica; O'Leary, Fanolua, Todd, Simpson-Daniel; Mercier, Yachvili; Vickery, Fortey, Pucciarello; Fidler, Pearce; Eustace, Sewabu, Paramore.

Replacements: - Ewens, Goodridge, Deacon, Cornwell, Forrester, Azam, Gomarsall.

Our point scorers were: Ludovic Mercier 19 (4 penalties, 2 conversions

and a drop goal) while **Junior Paramore**, Christian Stoica and Joe Ewens each recorded a try a piece. The referee was M.Salera from Italy.

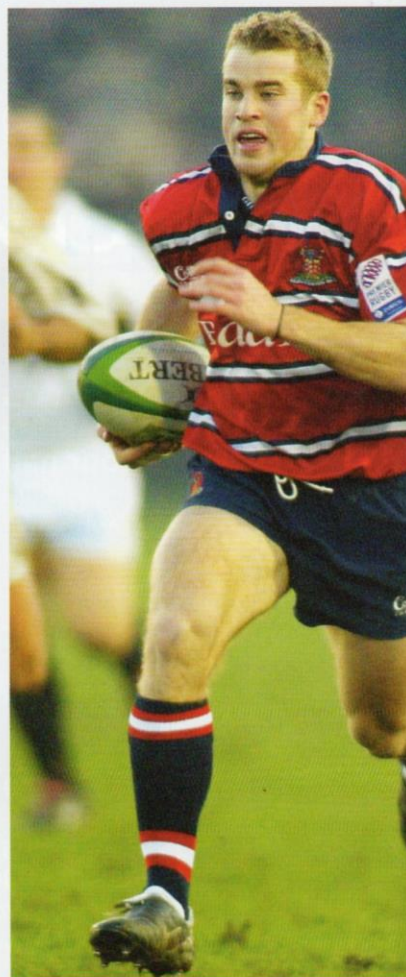
Our return match in the competition took place the following year on the 12th January before a crowd of 5,000 spectators.

It was a rumbustious affair with our prop forward Trevor Woodman receiving his marching orders with a red card and Adam Eustace and Frederico Pucciarello both receiving yellow cards from referee Alain Rolland.

A similar winning margin was recorded under floodlights by 34 points to 12.

The Gloucester line-up on that winter's evening was:

Mercier; O'Leary, Fanolua, Todd, Ewens; Paul, Yachvili; Collazo, Fortey, Vickery; Fidler, Cornwell; Eustace, Hazell, Paramore.



Sinbad circa 2003

Replacements: Goodridge, Gomarsall, Woodman, Pucciarello, Sewabu, Boer, Pearce.

Our point scorers were: Ludovic Mercier 17 (3 penalties, 2 conversions and 2 drop goals) with Daren O'Leary, Chris Fortey and Patrice Collazo scoring tries with Henry Paul adding a conversion.

There was an unhappy ending to the competition when we suffered a single point deficit to Sale by 28 points to 27 at Franklins Gardens, Northampton on 28th April in a nail biting semi-final, Ludovic Mercier missing a last minute penalty that would have ensured a victory.

It will be interesting to keep an eye on attendances during this season's competition.



Junior Paramore, a try scorer against La Rochelle in 2001



Mark Mapletoft scored 34 points against Ebbw Vale in 1996

Our home attendances during our campaign of 2001-2002 season were, apart from La Rochelle's visit, as follows - Caerphilly 7,336 (which was the highest attendance including the semi-final with Sale!), Gran Parma 6,567 and Ebbw Vale 6,816.

Home attendances are generally higher of course. For our away trips they were, excluding La Rochelle, - Gran Parma 1,500, Caerphilly 3,500 and the Sale fixture at Northampton which attracted 5,785.

Those figures were undoubtedly inflated by the excellent travelling contingent from Gloucester. European competition was only in its fifth season for Kingsholm fans and still something of a novelty for away trips.

Regular travellers who follow the 'Cherry & Whites', will be amazed at how many grounds they have visited in what will be our 14th season of European travel.

To date our overseas travels have seen visits to Beziers, Toulon, Padova, Stade Francais, La Rochelle, Viadana, Perpignan, Munster, Treviso, Bourgoin, Ulster, Bayonne, Brive, Bucharesti, Leinster, Agen and Calvisano, A total of 22.

This list excludes visits in the British Isles which include: Swansea, London Irish, Bridgend, Llanelli, Caerphilly, Wasps, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Ospreys, Glasgow and Newport.

For any devoted supporter it would ensure that they will have travelled to 33 different destinations in witnessing European Cup Competition involvement.

James Simpson-Daniel is our longest survivor on the club's playing staff that still appears in European competition.

A sprightly 28 year old, James first appeared in European Cup Competition rugby in the season of 2001-2002 in the Heineken Cup as did **Olivier Azam**. Of course Olivier returned to France playing for a brief period afterwards.

James' try scoring record in European Cup rugby is worth close scrutiny, in 2001-2002 he recorded 5 tries. In 2002-2003 (3 tries), 2003-2004 (6 tries), 2004-2005 (3 tries), 2005-2006 (9 tries), 2006-2007 (1 try), 2007-2008 (3 tries), 2008-2009 (2 tries), 2009-2010 (-), 2010-2011 (3 tries), a total of 35 tries!

The club has progressed a long way from the 12th October 1996 when it first appeared in European

competition. The visitors to Kingsholm for the inaugural fixture were the Welsh club - Ebbw Vale.

A rout of 59 points to seven set the way for the club to move from European Conference to eventual Heineken Cup qualification.

Interesting to note that in the first match our fly half **Mark Mapletoft** scored 34 points! He accumulated those from 4 tries and seven conversions. Other point scorers on that notable day were Eral Anderson, Alistair Saverimutto, Audley Lumsden and Simon Devereux. A penalty try was also awarded to complete the tally.

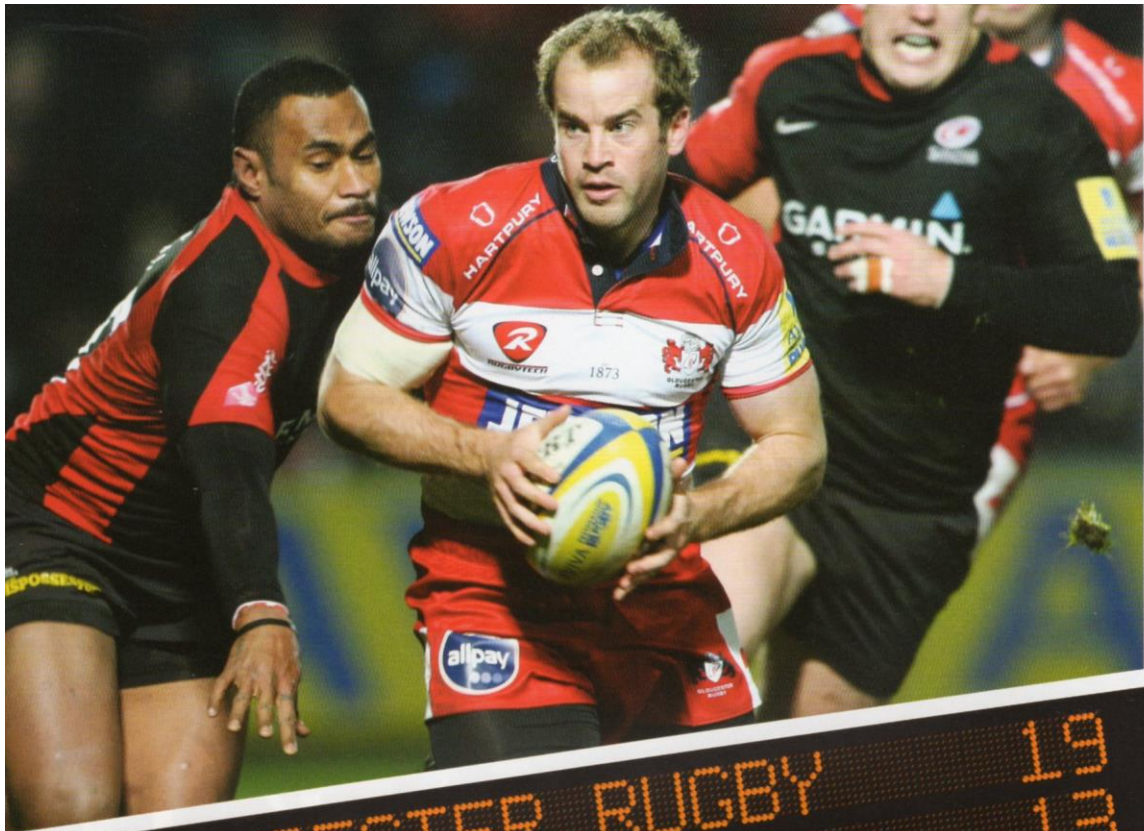
It was Welsh opposition that provided our first away trip! A visit to St Helens to meet Swansea was the blackest day of the season, a 62 points to 12 reverse, not happy viewing!

Actual European opposition in an away fixture did not occur until the following season of 1997-1998 when on 20th September we travelled to Beziers to record a narrow 29 points to 27 victory before 3,000 spectators.

Our first try scorers on European soil were all forwards! Tony Windo, Phil Greening and Peter Glanville duly obliged.



Oli made his european debut for Glos in 2001



GLOUCESTER RUGBY 19
SARACENS 13

For the second time in a fortnight, Gloucester emerged triumphant over Saracens at Kingsholm. However, the nature of this victory was far removed from one two weeks previously.

The 36-10 win in the LV= Cup fixture was achieved comfortably despite Saracens naming a strong side. This 19-13 victory in this Aviva Premiership fixture really had to be earned.

Saracens bore no resemblance to the one that had capitulated in the previous encounter. Several Men in Black were outstanding on the day and could consider themselves unlucky not to finish on the winning side.



PEN 9min Farrell (0-3)	YC 20min Brown (Gloucester)	TRY 23min Short (0-8)	CON 23min Farrell (0-10)	PEN 35min Robinson (6-13)
		PEN 25min Robinson (3-10)	PEN 28min Farrell (3-13)	YC 35min Vyyan (Saracens)

KEY MOMENT

TRY 62min Sharples (14-13)

Gloucester were throwing the kitchen sink at Saracens but not able to make any significant inroads until Kameli Ratuvou spilled the ball in midfield.

The ball was swiftly moved wide to Charlie Sharples who skinned James Short on his way to the line for a spectacular winning score.

Brad Barritt and David Strettle were constant threats out wide, Schalk Brits was everywhere and Owen Farrell ran the game with a maturity that belied his tender years.

There was little to choose between the teams throughout a hard fought encounter but the game looked to have swung decisively Saracens' way when James Short shrugged off Charlie Sharples' tackle to score the game's first try and open up a 10-0 lead for the visitors.

However, Gloucester didn't panic. They didn't deviate from their game plan and, slowly but surely, they chipped away at the lead.

With the scoreline in favour of

"TO GET BACK TO 19-13 UP FROM 13-3 DOWN THE BOYS WERE OUTSTANDING AND I WAS DELIGHTED WITH THEM."



Saracens and the game going into the final quarter, it could have gone either way. Gloucester were trying everything but the visitors seemed to be coping well with the onslaught.

Increasingly, it seemed as though one incident would decide the game and so it proved. Saracens' Fijian international Kameli Ratuvou spilled the ball in midfield and Gloucester pounced on the turnover with Charlie Sharples finishing in style.

Injury was added to insult for Ratuvou who tried desperately to stop Sharples grounding the ball but only succeeded in injuring the pair of them.

Nicky Robinson extended the lead with a 71st minute penalty but Gloucester still had to withstand a tremendous late barrage from Saracens in order to keep their line intact.

It was nerve wracking stuff but Gloucester held out with the win taking Bryan Redpath's side above Saracens and into fourth place in the table.

THE LINE UPS

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

15. Olly Morgan
14. Charlie Sharples
13. Tim Molenaar
12. Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu
11. James Simpson-Daniel
10. Nicky Robinson
9. Dave Lewis
1. Nick Wood
2. Olivier Azam
3. Paul Doran-Jones
4. Dave Attwood
5. Alex Brown
6. Brett Deacon
7. Andrew Hazell
8. Luke Narraway

16. Scott Lawson
17. Yann Thomas
18. Pierre Capdevielle
19. Will James
20. Matt Cox
21. Jordi Pasqualin
22. Freddie Burns
23. Henry Trinder

SARACENS

15. Nils Mordt
14. David Strettle
13. Kameli Ratuvou
12. Brad Barritt
11. James Short
10. Owen Farrell
9. Richard Wigglesworth
1. Deon Carstens
2. Schalk Brits
3. Carlos Nieto
4. Steve Borthwick
5. Hugh Vyvyan
6. Justin Melck
7. Andy Saull
8. Jacko Wray

16. Jamie George
17. Rhys Gill
18. Petrus du Plessis
19. Mouritz Botha
20. Jacques Burger
21. Neil de Kock
22. Sam Stanley
23. Noah Cato

PEN 51min Robinson (9-13)

TRY 62min Sharples (14-13)
CON 64min Robinson (16-13)

PEN 71min Robinson (19-13)
YC 79min Wood (Gloucester)

42 | 44 | 46 | 48 | 50 | 52 | 54 | 56 | 58 | 60 | 62 | 64 | 66 | 68 | 70 | 72 | 74 | 76 | 78 | 80

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BY TIM LAMDEN

from Bradford to Gloucester

RUGBY LEAGUE ICON TO OVERNIGHT UNION SUCCESS. THIS IS ONLY A FRACTION OF THE LESLEY VAINIKOLO STORY. LITTLE HAS BEEN MADE OF THE TONGAN'S PATH AS A TEENAGE GANG MEMBER AND HIS AMBITION TO HELP TROUBLED YOUNGSTERS WHEN HIS PLAYING DAYS END.



**PROTECTION IS
SOMETHING YOU
IMAGINE LESLEY**

**VAINIKOLO COULD PROBABLY
MANAGE WITHOUT. SUPER
LEAGUE CLUBS COULD HAVE
DONE WITH SOME DURING HIS
149-TRY TENURE AT BRADFORD
BULLS, A RECORD ACHIEVED IN
JUST 152 GAMES.**

As could Leeds Carnegie on the advent of his switch to union, Vainikolo ran in five tries on debut for Gloucester away to the Premiership newcomers back in 2007.

Standing at over six foot and carrying close to 18 stone, the Tongan-born winger powered himself to cult hero status among the Odsal fans during his five years at Bradford, earning a place in the Bulls' Team of the Century.

Just nine games into his professional rugby union career, with an equal try-scoring tally, he was drafted into Brian Ashton's England squad, playing in every game of the 2008 Six Nations Championship.

The 31-year-old powerhouse, dubbed 'The Volcano' during a remarkable rugby league career, was not always a figure of such invincibility.

Having moved to New Zealand



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From Gangs to Gloucester

with his family at the age of six, a teenage Vainikolo found himself caught up in a gang culture that had persisted in the Mangere district of southern Auckland for almost two decades. Navigating his way through this volatile environment, the young Tongan relied heavily on the guardianship of his uncles.

"When I was young I used to be one of a gang. I was blessed that most of the leaders of the gang were my uncles. So I was pretty lucky to have security," Vainikolo recalls.

"Where I lived in Auckland there was a cop killed by islanders five doors down from me.

"There were Crips and Bloods [rival criminal gangs originating in America] back in the late '70s and early '80s, through to the '90s. It was the Tongans and Samoans, they hated each other. It was real bad."

Looking back, Vainikolo concedes losing his way amid the ongoing clash of Polynesians that engulfed him growing up:

"I got in trouble when I was younger, just from fighting." But he warns of far worse than just fisticuffs and scuffles occurring on the streets of Auckland today: "There's stabbings and drive-bys, you name it. It's probably because the kids don't have a role model."

It is on this issue that Vainikolo is determined to make a difference once his playing days are over.

"I'll probably go back to New Zealand and aim to help these kids. Just to keep myself out there speaking to people. If I can get one out of 50 kids off the street then I'll be happy.

"It's something that I've always wanted to do because I experienced being in gangs when I was young. These kids get into

BIG LES' BRADFORD BULLS CAREER STATISTICS: 152 GAMES, 149 TRIES AND 1 GOAL



a lot of trouble and they are often kids who you know could go further. You need to sit down and reach out to them. It's who you hang about with.

"I see a lot of guys that I grew up with and they could be with me, or they could be in France. They could be the best players in the world."

It is the tragedy of wasted talent that seems to bother Vainikolo most. But whilst those he knocked about with in Auckland back in the '90s may not have achieved half the success their talents portended, his is a story of great promise duly fulfilled.

Hitting almost 16 stone by the age of 15, Vainikolo demonstrated

his prowess on the rugby league field from an early age, with powerful displays for Auckland's De La Salle College.

He was also astonishingly quick, running the 100m in 10.6 seconds to qualify for the 1998 World Junior Athletics Championships, beating future All Blacks winger Doug Howlett along the way. Gifted with both speed and power in abundance, the youngster was torn between athletics and rugby league.

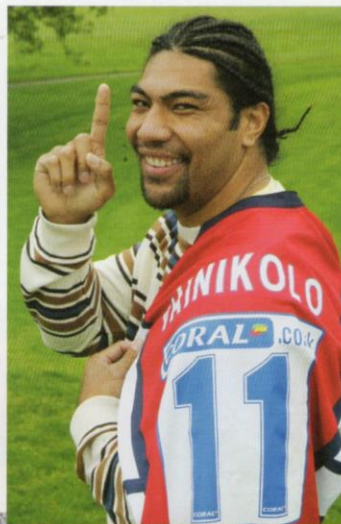
Fittingly, in a remarkable twist of fate, it was a rugby league icon who first inspired a young Vainikolo to take up the game that helped make the decision which would ultimately propel a teenager from Auckland into rugby league's history books.

"I had to choose out of athletics or rugby league," says Vainikolo. "And then my idol came down, his name was Mal Meninga. He was coaching Canberra Raiders and he came and visited me at home in '97. He said he wanted me to come over and play for him."

Without hesitation, Vainikolo followed the Kangaroos goal-kicking great to Australia and in his first season was named Raiders' Rookie of the Year.

He also made his debut for New Zealand in 1998, scoring an eventual 14 tries in 12 appearances for the Kiwis, including nine tries in the 2000 Rugby League World Cup.

In 2002, he left the Raiders for

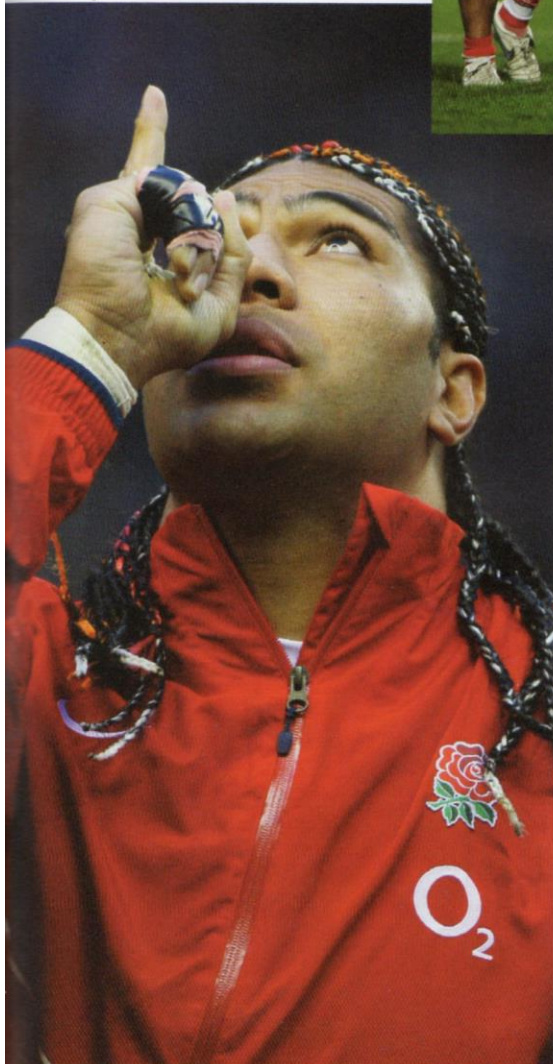


Super League and the Bradford Bulls, a move which would see him become arguably the deadliest finisher in Super League history.

After a short period of adjustment to the British game, Vainikolo emerged with the Super League try-scoring record in 2004, managing 36 tries in only 26 appearances, including five hat-tricks.

In 2007, at the age of 28, Vainikolo crossed codes and joined Guinness Premiership side Gloucester on a three-year deal.

"When you do everything in one sport, you want to challenge yourself in a different sport," he



says. "I looked at rugby union as an opportunity for me to open another chapter in my book. Gloucester were really keen for me to come and try it and I did. I made the right choice and I've never looked back since."

Tussling at the top of the try-scoring list for much of his debut season in the Premiership, it was hardly surprising when England came knocking after only nine outings for his new West Country side.

Vainikolo views proudly what was an instantaneous yet too short lived international dalliance. "The challenge is to play different sports to the highest standard and I made it. It was an honour to pull on that white jersey."

With only five caps to his name, Vainikolo's ambition appears resolute when the prospect of further appearances is raised.

"I'm trying to get back in that England team, that's my biggest goal. But at the moment, I'm just concentrating on Gloucester and performing week-in, week-out. I think that will be the best for me, my performances must do all the talking."

In the years since Lesley Vainikolo began his professional rugby league career in Canberra, it is certainly his work on the field of play that has spoken for him. The big kid from the hard streets of southern Auckland became master of his innate abilities and gained worldwide acclaim along the way.

Asked whether it is the same kind of success he hopes to bring to the troubled youngsters on the streets of Auckland today, the man known affectionately as Big Les is somewhat philosophical.

"I want to help them in whatever they want to do. They could be an art or English teacher. Or a maths or sports teacher.

"Anything, to get them off the street and get them on the right road. Just to let them know that the people around you, they may say they are your friends, but will they be there at the end for you? If you're in trouble, will they be there? Because I experienced it. When I got into trouble, where were all my friends?"

Wise words and an earnest cause. Two decades have elapsed since an Australian hero of the oval ball introduced the world to Lesley Vainikolo.

In the next ten years, will the Tongan idol emulate Meninga and pass on the baton to Auckland's next great rugby son?

If you take his word for it, it won't be anytime soon.

"I think I've got at least another five years in me, you haven't seen nothing yet."

VS. LA ROCHELLE // 19.11.10

TODAY'S LINE-UPS

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

OLLY MORGAN	15	FULLBACK
JAMES SIMPSON-DANIEL	14	WING
MIKE TINDALL (C)	13	CENTRE
ELIOTA FUIMAONO-SAPOLU	12	CENTRE
LESLEY VAINIKOLO	11	WING
NICKY ROBINSON	10	FLY-HALF
RORY LAWSON	9	SCRUM-HALF
NICK WOOD	1	PROP
OLIVIER AZAM	2	HOOKER
PAUL DORAN-JONES	3	PROP
DAVE ATTWOOD	4	LOCK
ALEX BROWN	5	LOCK
BRETT DEACON	6	FLANKER
ANDREW HAZELL	7	FLANKER
LUKE NARRAWAY	8	NO.8
SCOTT LAWSON 16		
YANN THOMAS 17		
PIERRE CAPDEVIELLE 18		
WILL JAMES 19		
PETER BUXTON 20		
DAVE LEWIS 21		
FREDDIE BURNS 22		
CHARLIE SHARPLES 23		

LA ROCHELLE

BENJAMIN DAMBIELLE		
THOMAS COMBEZOU		
SERU RABENI		
VINCENT ROUX		
MAXIME LE BOURHUIS		
GREG GOOSEN		
DAMIEN NEVEU		
ROMAIN FROU		
ANDRES BORDOY		
TAMATO LEUPOLU		
PIULA FA'ASALELE		
JACOBUS GROBLER		
QUENTIN D'ARAM DEVALADA		
PIERRE SOM (C)		
ROMAIN CARMIGNANI		
16 STEPHANE CLEMENT		
17 ALEXANDRE BARES		
18 JONATHAN GARCIA		
19 ROBERT MOHR		
20 FRANCK JACOB		
21 FLORIAN NINARD		
22 GUILLAUME DEVADE		
23 REMI TALES		

MATCH SCORE

GLOUCESTER RUGBY	<input type="text"/>
VS	<input type="text"/>
LA ROCHELLE	<input type="text"/>

REFEREE: Leighton Hodges (WRU)
ASST REFEREES:
Gwyn Morris and Colin Kirkhouse

THE STATS THAT MATTER

POOL 1

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	B	Pts
Bayonne	3	2	0	1	94	35	59	2	10
Harlequins	3	2	0	1	87	42	45	2	10
Connacht	3	1	0	2	46	56	-10	1	5
Cavalieri Prato	3	1	0	2	47	141	-94	0	4

POOL 2

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	B	Pts
Brive	3	3	0	0	166	18	148	2	14
Sale Sharks	3	2	0	1	162	38	124	2	10
Petrarca	3	1	0	2	52	98	-46	1	5
El Salvador	3	0	0	3	24	250	-226	0	0

POOL 3

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	B	Pts
Montpellier	3	3	0	0	91	35	56	1	13
Exeter	3	2	0	1	83	49	34	2	10
Newcastle Falcons	3	1	0	2	40	84	-44	0	4
Bourgoin	3	0	0	3	49	95	-46	1	1

POOL 4

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	B	Pts
Stade Francais	3	3	0	0	108	39	69	2	14
Leeds Carnegie	3	2	0	1	91	37	54	1	9
Bucuresti	3	1	0	2	49	71	-22	0	4
Crociati Rugby	3	0	0	3	31	132	-101	1	1

POOL 5

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	B	Pts
La Rochelle	3	2	0	1	74	39	35	3	11
Gloucester	3	2	0	1	122	39	83	2	10
Agen	3	2	0	1	82	59	23	2	10
Rovigo	3	0	0	3	20	161	-141	0	0

Amlin Challenge Cup

Amlin
Challenge
Cup

Amlin

FedEx

adidas

edf

ERC