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Gloucester

Gloucester RFC official matchday programme 2001-2002

European Shield fixture



vs La Rochelle

Saturday 29th September 2001 kick-off 3.00pm

[issue] 4

[price] £2.00

gloucesterrugbyclub.com www.gloucesterrugbyclub.com www.gloucester



Line-ups



34 Gloucester VS La Rochelle 15

i	Alessandro Stoica	15	Diego Jiannantonio	
	Daren O'Leary	14	Franck Brunet	
i	Terry Fanolua	13	Yacine Dekkiche	
	Robert Todd	12	Matt Tetlow	
	James Simpson-Daniel	11	Ezio Galon	
	Ludovic Mercier	10	Federico Todeschini	
	Dimitri Yachvili	9	Jean-Baptiste Elissalde	
i	Federico Pucciariello	1	Yannick Lacrouts	
	Chris Fortey	2	Jean Charles Vicard	
i	c Phil Vickery	3	Lionel Faure	
i	Rob Fidler	4	Craig Yandell	
	Ed Pearce	5	Julien Pierre	
	Adam Eustace	6	Nicolas Djebaili	
i	Koli Sewabu	7	Nick Harvey	
i	Junior Paramore	8	Sylvain Bonneau	

[replacements]

i	Andy Gomarsall	16	TBA	
	Jon Goodridge	17	TBA	
	Joe Ewens	18	TBA	
i	Federico Pucciariello	19	TBA	
i	Oliver Azam	20	TBA	
	James Forrester	21	TBA	
	Mark Cornwell	22	TBA	

[teams correct at 26/09/01]

i [denotes international]

c [denotes captain]

[today's officials]

[referee] Marco Salera FIR

[touch judges] Nereo Dordoid FIR, Sergio Di Gregorio

Director of Rugby

[Philippe Saint-André]

"My team must want to work hard and give everything and try to play well, but not take anything for granted against La Rochelle."



After the Leicester game, we were labled as a bad team but after Sale we were fantastic. This is not rugby. We know how we achieved these things, we know we worked hard and things will get better and better.

This is still a very new team with twelve new players and the guys are still gelling together as a unit. We showed some good things at Sale, scoring four tries and defeating a team that had won their first three games.

We must respect the work of the players in this result. I hope the players will take this match very seriously today and play well again and the crowd will get behind the team.

This week we welcome La Rochelle to Kingsholm. Two or three weeks ago they beat Colomiers away. Our supporters will know Colomiers from last season and recognise the quality they have in their side consequently, we must have a lot of respect for our opponents today.

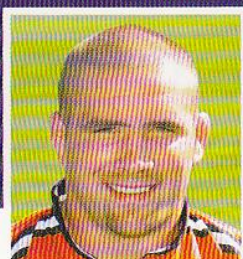
Ok, last year we were in the Heineken Cup and this year the Shield, but we will still need to play very well in every game because our target for the club is to get back into the Heineken Cup. We have set our targets this year to finish in the top four or five in the league and win the European Shield.

To reach our targets we must first try to finish top in our group and we start today with a very tough home fixture. Against La Rochelle, it will be very hard and very physical. They play very good rugby, but I hope that after our result against Sale, where we played well and scored four tries, we will use these two weeks in the Shield to continue to improve and try new things before the next league game. I hope that the supporters will

continue to get behind this team and all our new payers. We need to give this team time. So far this season we have played Leicester, who are the Champions, we have played Sale, who were top and unbeaten in three and Saracens who are now third. I hope we showed all our supporters the need for patience and the need for their great support.

It is not a case of expecting too much, we must continue to work at our game. We have good players in this squad. Today we welcome back Phil Vickery, and Robert Todd and it will be the first start for Koli Sewabu. My team must want to work hard and give everything and try to play well, but not take anything for granted against La Rochelle.





Club Captain

[Phil Vickery]

D.O.B: 14/3/1976
Position: **Tight Head Prop**
Height: **1.91m**
Weight: **112.5kg**
Former Club: **Cheltenham**
Honours: **England**

"Today we kick off our European campaign and I have heard no talk about taking our game today lightly. It is a serious game for us, we have ambitions to win this competition and that starts today."

People expect you to win and with the players that we have in this squad, we want to win every game, so there is always going to be pressure.

The Sale match was one result. The boys all worked really hard to get that result, they played really well and in the end they deserved it. Obviously it has relieved pressure off everyone because we were bitterly disappointed by the Leicester result. Looking back the boys will all know just how hard they worked for the Sale game and I am confident that if we can continue in that

vein and if we are playing well, we can keep getting results but it won't just happen for us.

For my part it is always disappointing when you don't play, particularly as I have only come back for one game so far and had a few problems. I have had to get on and accept it and the players we have in this squad are more than capable of filling anyone's boots. I know as well as we all do, that if we don't play well there are capable people to step in and we proved that at the weekend.

In any squad now, you have to be able to play people out of position, and as players we can't afford to be a one-position person. I think a lot of the guys are lucky in that they have been given the opportunity to play in other positions. But I think that the boys who play here will play anywhere and it is just a case of getting on with it.

Today we kick off our European campaign and I have heard no talk about taking our

game today lightly. It is a serious game for us, we have ambitions to win this competition and that starts today. La Rochelle have already beaten, amongst others, Colomiers away. We were lucky to draw with them here last year so this proves they are a good side and we will have to play very well to get a result.

I have been asked how important this competition is and how far we aim to go. Well we never play in any competition for nothing and it is a competition I believe we can go a long way in. As players and as a club we want to be seen to be doing well and we have the chance to do this in this Cup competition. Last year players and supporters had a taste of the Heineken Cup and this is one route to getting back into it again.

There is no point in playing a game just to play it. We are in a competition and we want to win it. I'm sure that everyone who takes the pitch today wants to win.



The Sale match was one result the boys all worked really hard to get!

Gloucester Academy

result

Leicester U21's
19
Gloucester U21's
15

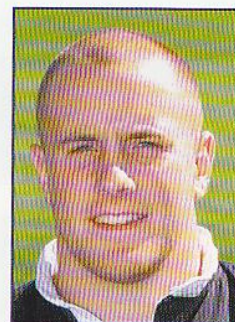
Gloucester kicked off, putting the Tigers under immediate pressure. They forced them to give away an early penalty and Joe Goatley gave Gloucester the lead after only three minutes. This lead was short lived as through strong forward play the Tigers started to take control of the game. Gloucester missed several line kicks, which the Tigers ran back in earnest and Gloucester became entrenched in their own twenty-two. The pressure had to tell and a lineout, close to the Gloucester line, resulted in a well-rehearsed catch and drive for a try and a lead of 7:3. From the restart, Leicester drove up field, putting pressure on the Gloucester scrum. Gloucester yielded and gave away a penalty. Tigers kicked to touch and again from the lineout, they drove over from for another try and a lead of 12:3. In the scramble to try and halt the

As a mark of respect for the recent tragic events in America, both teams wore black armbands and joined together on the half way line for a minute's silence prior to the start of the game.

drive, prop Nick Cox was shown the yellow card for retaliating and Gloucester were down to fourteen men. Leicester kicked off the second half and Gloucester fielded the ball well. They established good field position, but again failed to find touch. Tigers attacked, forcing another lineout deep in Gloucester's twenty-two. Cox's replacement, Roy Davies was immediately given a yellow card for infringing at the lineout. Tigers opted for the lineout and scored a copybook third try with their well drilled catch and drive. Nick Cox rejoined the fray along with replacement tight head prop Mark Irish and Gloucester's fortunes changed for the better as they started to dominate the scrums. From this new platform Gloucester created some good passages of play and consistently put the home team under pressure. This was rewarded with a Joe

Goatley try: 19:10. Roy Davies re-enforced the Gloucester scrum but they lost their way at the lineout, failing to find their man on three consecutive occasions. Each time they lost the ball and gave the home team the opportunity to relieve the pressure. Gloucester worked hard to regain momentum and when the Leicester open-side was yellow carded for consistently infringing at the tackle, they took their chance. They moved the ball wide to Marcel Garvey who beat three men to score a superb individual try. Joe Goatley hit the upright with his conversion attempt. 19:15. Although they maintained the pressure on Leicester for the last few minutes of the match, Gloucester will rue their poor first half and their inability to bring Marcel Garvey, an undoubted match winner, more into the game.

The final whistle finished a disappointing match for the Academy team who had defended well and showed much more enterprise and invention in attack than their opponents. Leicester's main attacking weapon, albeit a very successful one was the lineout drive. There is still much hard work that needs to be done here.



Nick Cox
In action vs
Leicester Academy

DATE	VENUE	ACADEMY U21'S/U19'S	U21 RESULT	U19 RESULT	DATE	VENUE	ACADEMY U21'S/U19'S	U21 RESULT	U19 RESULT
1/9/01	Away	Northampton	L 43-24	-	5/1/02	HOME	LONDON IRISH U19		
8/9/01	HOME	SARACENS	W 64-31	-	12/1/02	HOME	NEWPORT U19		
15/9/01	Away	Leicester	L 19-15	-	19/1/02	Away	Bath U19		
26/9/01	HOME	SALE 7.00PM WEDS			26/1/02	HOME	BRISTOL		
29/9/01	Away	Leicester U19			2/2/02	Away	Wasps U19		
6/10/01	HOME	BATH U19			9/2/02	Away	London Irish		
13/10/01	Away	Harlequins 2.30 KO			16/2/02	HOME	SARACENS U19		
20/10/01	HOME	LONDON IRISH			23/2/02	HOME	HARLEQUINS 2.30 KO		
28/10/01	Away	Bristol (Sun) / Wasps U19's	Canceled		2/3/02	Away	Bristol U19		
4/11/01	Away	London Irish U19 (Sun)			6/3/02	Away	Sale 7.00pm Weds		
10/11/01	Away	Divisional training			9/3/02	HOME	SWANSEA U19		
17/11/01	HOME	LEICESTER U19			16/3/02	HOME	LEICESTER		
24/11/01	Away	Wasps			23/3/02	Away	Harlequins U19's 2.30 KO		
1/12/01	Away	Leeds			30/3/02	Away	Saracens		
8/12/01	HOME	BATH			6/4/02	HOME	NEWCASTLE		
15/12/01	TBA	Northampton U19			13/4/02	HOME	NORTHAMPTON		
22/12/01	HOME	WASPS			20/4/02	HOME	LEEDS		
29/12/01	-				27/4/02	Away	Bath		

Making Predicions

"a team with a 100% record were similarly blown away...by Gloucester."

What a difference a week makes. Leicester's domination in the last 20 minutes here suggested the team still had some bedding in to do, and that they couldn't rely on Ludovic Mercier's boot alone to win matches.

Seven days later at Sale, and a team with a 100% record were similarly blown awayby Gloucester.

In the long run, the Leicester match may be seen as a wake

up call. With an 15-6 half time lead, Gloucester were two scores ahead, but Dean Richards looked visibly calm and unruffled.

He knew he had the fire power to win the match, and he used it to devastating effect. It asked a few questions of Gloucester's character, and the initial response to those questions was on display at Heywood Road.

Once again Mercier was at the centre of things, the back division functioned far more efficiently, and the result was the first bonus point of the season. In a way I would like the European Shield NOT to interrupt the League programme at this stage, but that's just how it is.

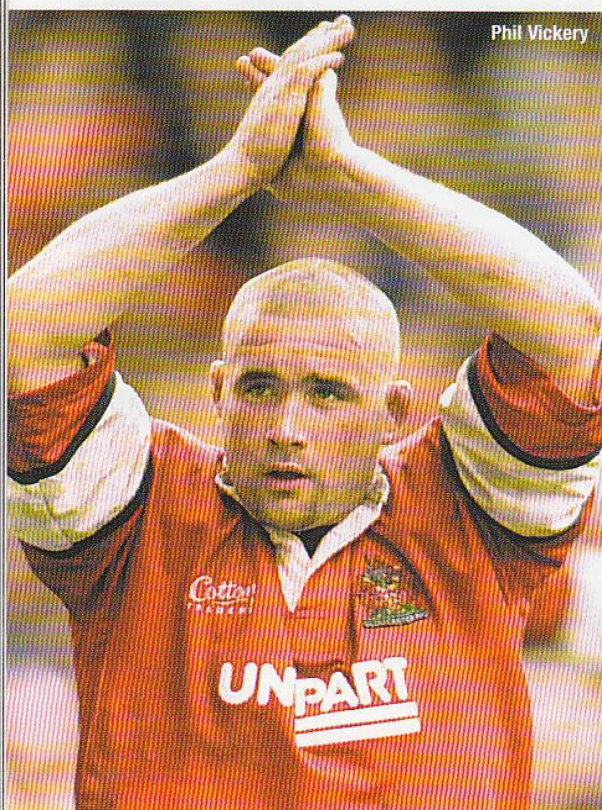
It's not for me to question the decision to make Phil Vickery skipper for the season, but Jake Boer appears to be banging hard on the door to do the job. He talks with that "win, win" attitude, and with the captain's armband on, he displays all the visible characteristics on the field of a leader you'd want to be with, not against. Last week was an ideal example. Cricket teams have vice-captains - I'd

suggest Philippe could do worse that put a similar tag on Boer's dressing room peg, so that the squad know he's in charge when Phil's either on England duty or injured.

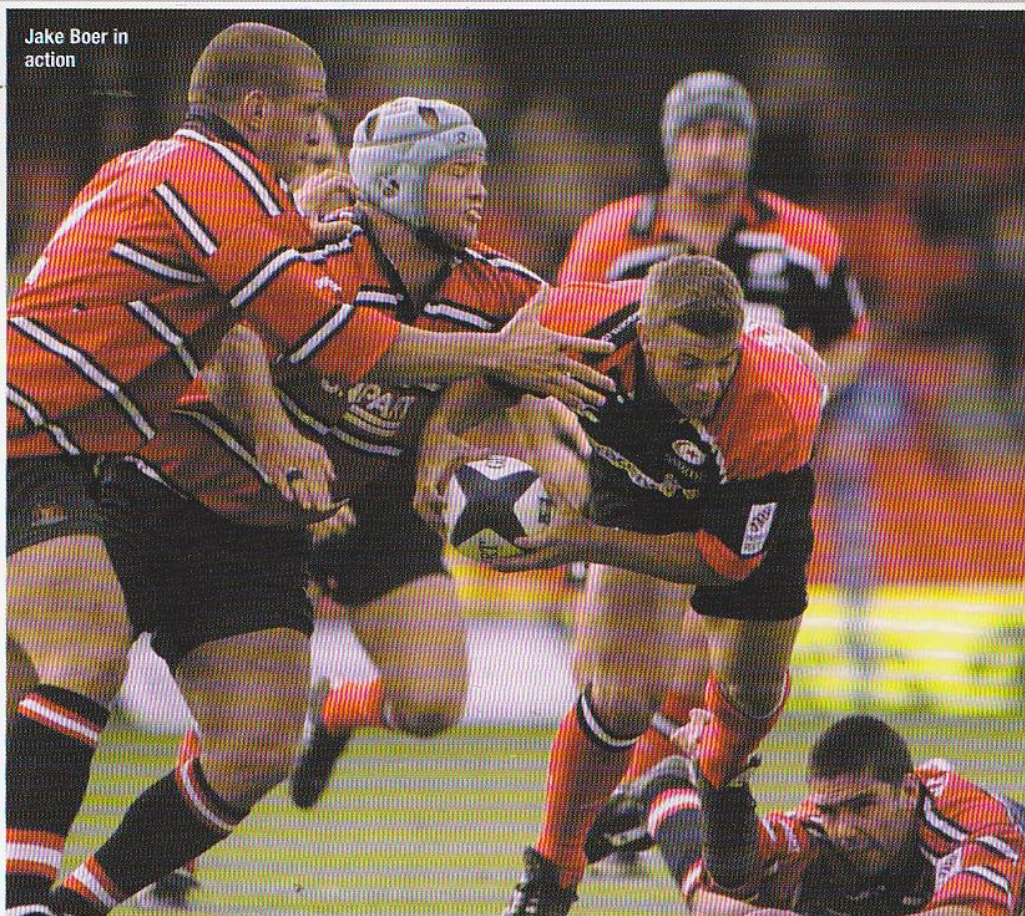
And so to today, and the start of the European Shield. Last year, we were able to look down on this competition and almost dismiss it. Crowds were small, and there wasn't the excitement of playing the top teams in Europe.

Quins won it of course, and for them, all the effort was worthwhile, with a place in this season's Heineken Cup, and that has now to be Gloucester's aim. This is a potential safety net if League form should go awry for any reason. One plus is the availability of all Gloucester's foreign players in this competition.

Alessandro Stoica's Romanian passport still classes him as an overseas player for the Premiership, but not in Europe, so that Philippe could select Fanolua, Sewabu and the versatile Stoica should he wish. It'll be interesting to see if he fields a Premiership strength team.



Jake Boer in action



Fans who enjoy travelling abroad will no doubt be looking forward to going to Parma next weekend (watch out for the Italian football international on the same day!) and to La Rochelle after Christmas, but I feel three home wins are a must to get through to the knockout stages.

Last season Gloucester got away with a draw against Colomiers, but surely a side with the Cherry & Whites' ambition would see elimination by the 3 teams in their group as failure.

Like last season, the pool stages are a fragmented affair - six matches, played over three back to back weekends, and La Rochelle provide the opposition for both the first

and the last. The French connection at Kingsholm is now so strong that there should be few surprises from today's opponents, and boosted by last Saturday's events at Sale, a solid home victory ought to be secured.

Finally, as Gloucester set off today in one Cup competition, numerous other local clubs will be doing battle domestically.

The RFU Senior Cup, the Intermediate Cup (won last season by Old Patesians) and the Junior Cup are all at the 2nd round stage.

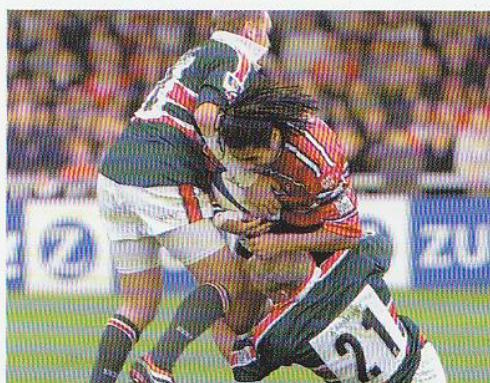
Stroud (at Norwich) and Lydney (at home to Reading) are the sole survivors in the Senior Cup this afternoon, where only 4 clubs from outside the

Premiership will join the elite in the 6th Round in December.

That goal is four wins away. Four Shield wins for Gloucester, and a quarter final will be on the horizon.

C'mon Glaws !!

"Fans who enjoy travelling abroad will no doubt be looking forward to going to Parma next weekend."



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[from the commentary box]

19

Head2Head

This week the head to head focuses on two players who, in their own right are considered match winners.

Today's head to head looks at the fly halves of the two teams. Both covet the French number ten jersey, both have represented their country at younger age groups with Elissalde making the step up to senior level. From Gloucester

we look at the playmaker that has a rocket powered left boot and from La Rochelle his great adversary Jean-Baptiste Elissalde, the pocket sized number ten who will try and control the game for the French team.



Gloucester
Rugby Football Club

Ludovic Mercier

Strengths

Mercier did not understand the word strength, which seems strange as he has so many. The most obvious is his kicking ability, which has already served Gloucester well. He picked up 24 points in the club's last game against Sale scoring three conversions, three penalties and three drop-goals. Mercier though is far from one-dimensional. By his own admission he likes to play wide and has the ability to adapt to different games plans to unlock defences.

Weaknesses

Before joining Gloucester, Mercier himself admitted that his defence was not one of his strong points. He has worked hard on this aspect of his game and Gloucester are reaping the benefits at close quarters.

Special interests

Ludovic claims to have many hobbies away from rugby. First and foremost comes his young family, a two-year old daughter. He plays golf with Dimitri (Yachvili), and Zed (Azam), although not off a handicap that always suits, and he watches a lot of sport on TV. He lists football and unusually for a Frenchman he also lists cricket as a favourite armchair hobby although he admits "I understand just a little".

High Point

Ludovic still lists his career high point as winning the U19 World Championship in Romania in 1995. They beat Argentina in the final. He also lists the wins against Northampton in his first Premiership game, and Sale when the team was under a lot of pressure. "We lose two games and so there was big pressure when we won against Sale".

Low Point

"I lost a match for Béziers against Borgeoin in the Semi-Final of the Cup de France". Mercier also admits to forgetting the score of this particular match.

"Mercier on Elissalde"

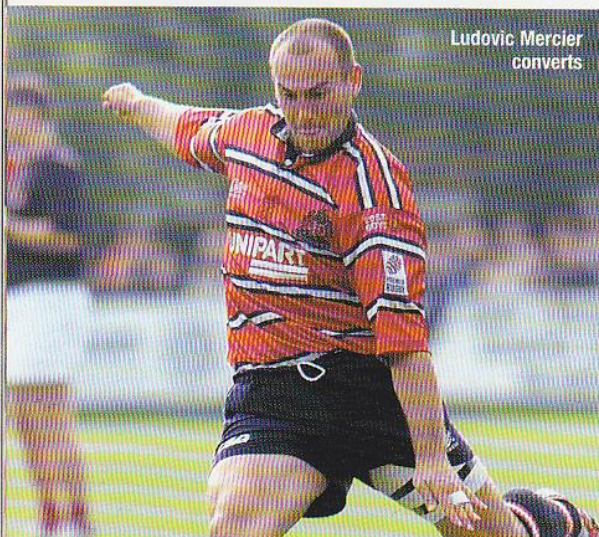
He is a good player; he attacks well behind their big forwards. I think it will be a good fight. Last year I played against Elissalde, we lost in La Rochelle but won in Aurillac but it is a good game".

"Mercier on La Rochelle"

"They are a good team. I remember that they have good forwards and good backs, they are very strong in the centre".

Mercierstats

Nickname 'Ludo'
Position Fly Half
Born
Age
Height
Weight
Club History
Int Hons France U19 U21



Diego Albanese

[player focus]



There are many clichés in sport. 'Take every game as it comes', 'you're only as good as your last game'.

'A good big un will always beat a good little un'. Well here's another one that will cheer all men in the crowd; size doesn't matter! "As far as I am concerned rugby is seventy or eighty percent played in the mind. I have to prepare myself to play bigger players and yes I will struggle to stop a guy who is 120 kilos at full speed but rugby is not always about size"

Diego Albanese, Gloucester's whippet like left-winger who, at 5'7" and 12 stone, is hardly the archetypal Argentinean Puma. Even his new girlfriend, (now Mrs Albanese), didn't believe he had played for the famous forward orientated Pumas.

"She said you do not play for the Pumas but the Punitas. (The Argentinean U19's)", admits Diego sheepishly.

He has been with his new club since the summer and says how much he is enjoying his new surroundings. "I was

looking forward to coming here, and that is why after my last match against Italy (for Argentina), I came here immediately, I didn't have a holiday. I thought always about the team and the players and I have found a really nice group of guys, this is a good thing. I think that if you want to perform as a team on the pitch, you have to be a good group off the pitch". Diego admits that he has had to get used to the different mannerisms of his adopted country but says he has settled in nicely and is happy with his new group.

"It is impossible to perform as a team if you don't have a good relationship with the one who is beside you. Rugby is a game of solidarity and you play for the one who is beside you. You are one piece amongst fifteen and what you do will help the one beside you. If you don't feel something for the one beside you, you can't play rugby".

[No.11] wing

"It doesn't matter to me whether the guy beside me is English, French, or Samoan, we are all here to play rugby and we are all Gloucester."

"Last year I received a call from Gloucester from Philippe and he asked me to come and play. I think I delayed for two minutes whilst I asked my wife her opinion."

A noble sentiment and one Albanese extends to all his new brothers in arms.

"It doesn't matter to me whether the guy beside me is English, French, or Samoan, we are all here to play rugby and we are all Gloucester".

Rugby in Argentina is still very much a developing sport behind football, the countries leading passion. Although around 50% of the current squad is still based in Argentina, rugby is still not a viable choice as a professional occupation and is something the leading players are campaigning for. A typical day for the young Diego began at 6.30am; he would attend university until 11.00am, (where he gained a marketing degree), then work until 6.30pm before doing a full rugby session. "When I was in Argentina it was not an objective to be a professional rugby player. My life changed after the World Cup in '99. It was this tournament in 1999 that put Albanese into the shop window and although he had made plans to return to his home country and return to work, he soon received a call from Grenoble in France. He saw an opportunity to further his rugby career and jumped at the chance to go to Europe. He says he enjoyed his two years in

France but admits that the team was not as competitive as he would have liked.

"I always said that if I came to Europe I would like to come to England", says Diego. "Last year I received a call from Gloucester from Philippe and he asked me to come and play. I think I delayed for two minutes whilst I asked my wife her opinion. She saw from the way I looked that I would be coming to Gloucester for this season".

Albanese knew Philippe from his playing days. As the young Puma was starting out the legendary French Captain was enjoying the twilight of his international career. Diego was also kept well informed about Gloucester through their Heineken Cup exploits last year. He sought affirmation from Bristol's own Argentinean gem Augustine Pichot after receiving Philippe's call and then made plans to travel.

Albanese confirms that Pichot told him about the unique Gloucester crowd but says he was still taken aback by the atmosphere in the cauldron of Kingsholm.

"It's amazing", explains Albanese "Every single Saturday I go home after the match and tell my wife about it. Not just 'The Shed' but

every one here. When I went to Sale and saw maybe one-hundred people with their jerseys it was lovely".

The adulation for his newfound fans does not stop here as Albanese proceeds to pay the Gloucester supporters the biggest compliment possible.

"I used to say that rugby would always be a game for me and I would enjoy it as such. I said rugby is for the players and the man who is beside you but since I have arrived here, I really feel something about the crowd here that we must play not just for us, but all those who are supporting us. It is something that really touches you when you run pasted 'The Shed'".

When discussing wonderful atmospheres Diego says that for an Argentinean rugby player there can be no better occasion than playing the All Blacks as the Pumas did this summer.

"To play against the All Blacks is a dream, to play them is to play against the most important team in the history of rugby I really enjoyed it. I stood in front of the 'Haka' and said I will enjoy this". Internationally, Diego lists his high points as beating Australia in 1997 and then beating Scotland at Murrayfield and beating Ireland in the 1999 World Cup. He

describes these results as very important for the history of Argentinean rugby, revelling in the pleasure of taking the Irish squads team hotel which they had left all their equipment in such was there confidence of beating the Pumas. Domestically he says he hopes that next year he can say it was with Gloucester this year, but at present the Argentinean Club Championships he won with his first club San Isidoro rates at the top. "In Argentina, your club is like your family so I remember this well", says Diego fondly. "I was at the club since I was eight years old and like Gloucester we were a family club so every one knew every one". Diego then gets to his short-term ambitions with Gloucester. "I always try to go step by step. Obviously every player and every supporter wants to be in the top three or four and to win the Shield, but I always try to think about next Saturday. For me, the challenge is to win a place in the first fifteen and have a good game to win my place for the next game. If you are thinking about a match in the future you will lose this one. If we think about the top three you will lose".

How very cliché!





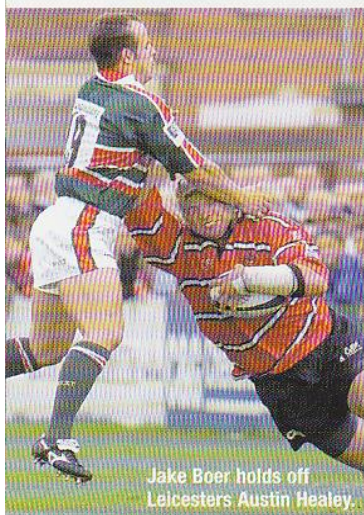
playerstats

previous club: San Isidro
representative honours: Argentina
height: 1.74m
weight: 78kg
position: Wing


Gloucester
Rugby Football Club

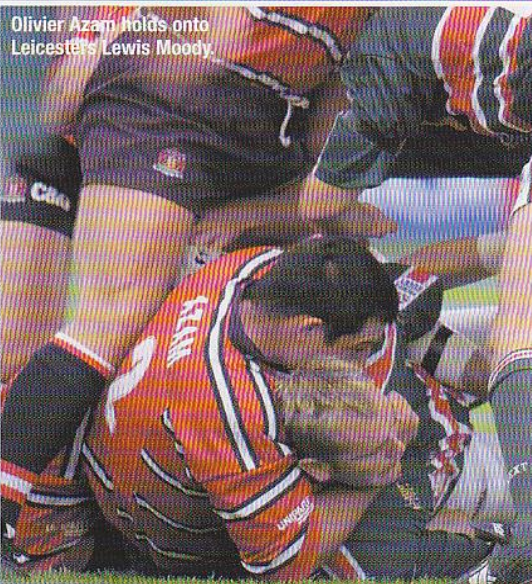
Match Action vs Leicester

Zurich Premiership
15-09-01

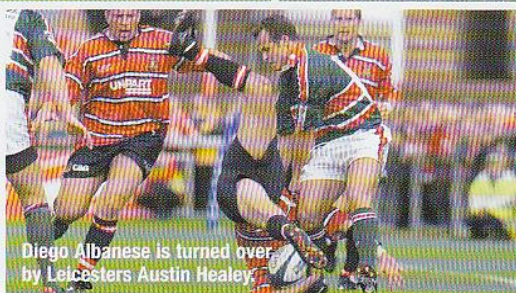


Jake Boer holds off
Leicesters Austin Healey.

Olivier Azam holds onto
Leicesters Lewis Moody.



Joe Ewens is held back by
Leicesters Andy Goode.



Diego Albanese is turned over
by Leicesters Austin Healey.

Photography Supplied by GPA

matchstats


Gloucester
Rugby Football Club

18

Gloucester: **18 points**
Tries: -

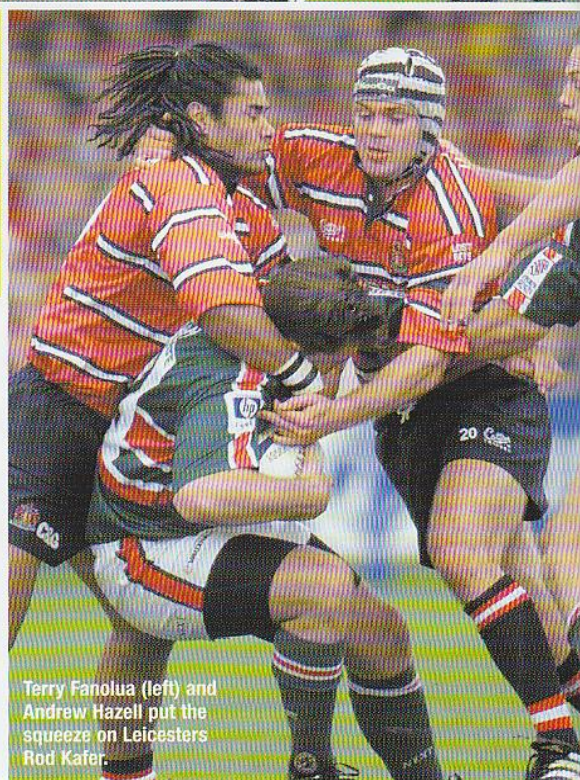
Conversions: -
Penalties: Mercier(6)



40

Leicester: **40 points**
Tries: Moody(2) Booth(1)
Murphy(1)
Conversions: Stimpson(4)
Penalties: Stimpson(2)

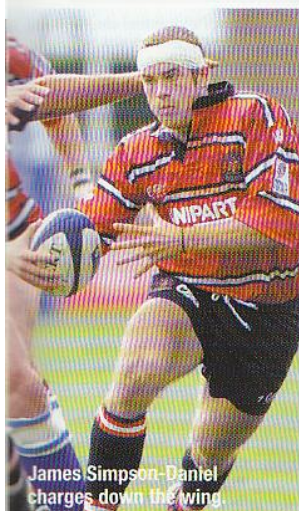
Zurich Premiership



Terry Fanolua (left) and
Andrew Hazell put the
squeeze on Leicesters
Rod Kafer.

Match Action vs Sale Sharks

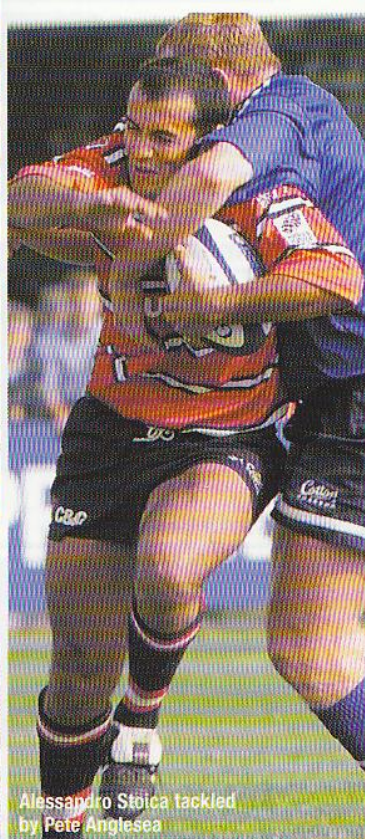
Zurich Premiership
22-09-01



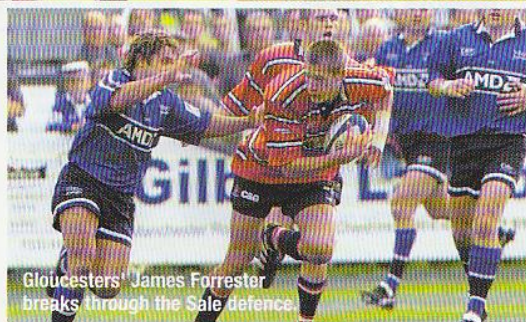
James Simpson-Daniel charges down the wing.



Gloucesters' Joe Ewens is held away by Sales' Jason Robinson.



Alessandro Stolica tackled by Pete Anglesea.



Gloucesters' James Forrester breaks through the Sale defence.

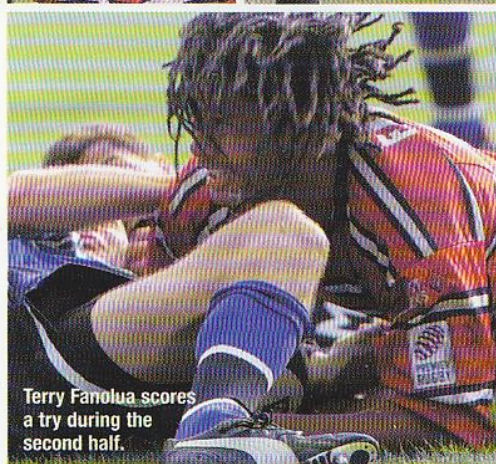


Terry Fanolua applauds the traveling fans.

Photography Supplied by GPA

matchstats	
	Sale Sharks: 21 points
	Tries: Robinson Baxendell
	Conversions: Hodgson(1)
	Penalties: Hodgson(3)
	Gloucester: 44 points
	Tries: Yachvili, Woodman, Fanolua, Pucciarelo
	Conversions: Mercier(3)
	Drop Goals: Mercier(3)
	Penalties: Mercier(3)

Zurich Premiership



Terry Fanolua scores a try during the second half.

www.gloucester rugby club.co.uk

[match action]

33

Peter Arnold

[contributor]

LUMPS IN THE MAYONNAISE

I suppose you can leave it to a Frenchman to draw a culinary analogy at the slightest provocation,

"It's like mayonnaise. It takes time to make good mayonnaise !"

and I did like Philippe Saint Andre's example recently. Commenting on the fact that a new side doesn't gel overnight, he remarked, "It's like mayonnaise. It takes time to make good mayonnaise !"

I wouldn't know, but I bow to his superior knowledge of haute cuisine. It does seem, however, that you can make an awful lot of good mayonnaise in seven days.

I've seldom felt such a pall of gloom descend over Kingsholm as that which occurred at around teatime on Saturday, September 15th. After building a useful lead in the first half, Gloucester suffered such an

efficient, 40-point demolition at the hands of Leicester that there didn't seem any way back. It isn't often that you see a steady stream of Shedheads sloping off home well before the end of the game, but that's what happened that day.

The away defeat against Saracens, with its slightly controversial elements, we could bear, but to concede 40 points at Kingsholm - that's altogether a different kettle of bouillabaisse.

But by 4.30 on the following Saturday, everything had changed. Leicester had destroyed Bath by a significantly greater margin

than they had Gloucester, so the Kingsholm result didn't seem so bad.

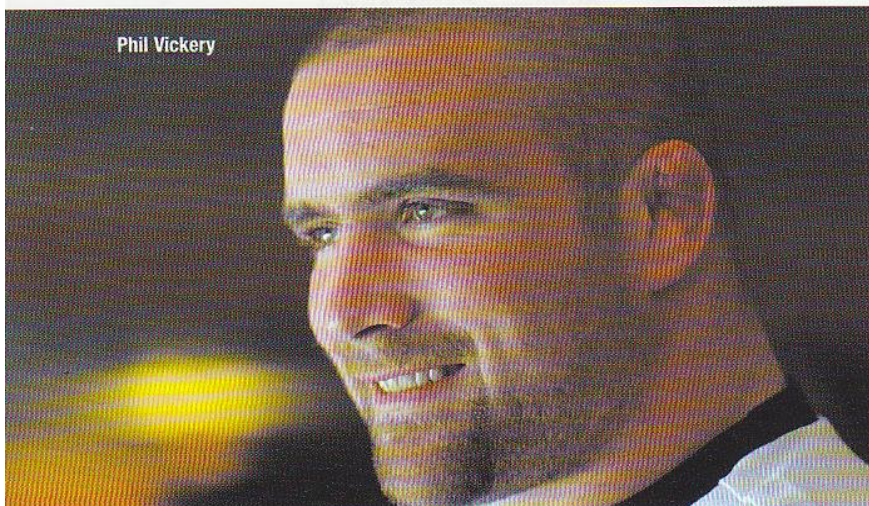
Then Gloucester put 44 points on Sale, riding high, undefeated, at the top of the table. What's more, it was done at Heywood Road, which has been a proverbially difficult place to come away from with a win for years.

What's more, the victory was achieved without four first-choice players - Messrs Vickery, Hazell, Albanese and Catling.

Everything is not sweetness and light yet. There are still lumps in the mayonnaise, and some momentum may have been lost by the temporary suspension of Premiership activities due to the advent of the European competitions. Still, I suppose the latter do give a chance to rotate the squad a little, giving opportunities to players who haven't featured prominently as yet, and providing some rest periods for those who have been turning out regularly and must need a breather by now.

We're in for a fascinating run-up to Christmas. Christmas ? Good Lord, is it that time already ?

Phil Vickery



BIGFOOT

We've had some pretty fair kickers at Kingsholm over the years, but I don't think any of us has seen any Gloucester player give the ball such an almighty whack as Ludovic Mercier does.

I have always regarded a kick by Bill Hook - was it against Cardiff? - as about the mightiest hoof I ever saw. He landed a penalty, in the pouring rain, using the old, heavy, leather ball, from the middle of the field and just inside his own half. An, boy, that old ball did get heavy when it had had a good soaking. In fact, he repeated the feat, albeit on a drier day, for England at Twickenham a few weeks later, if I remember correctly.

The late, great Willie Jones had a fair old boot on him, too. Some people will tell you that his metronomic accuracy, from all points of the compass, was the factor which got the drop goal reduced from four points to three.

I don't know how true that story is, but I do know that Willie had a little secret about it. He once told me that a high proportion of those goals came from punts rather than drop kicks, but that his foot was so fast that no one noticed.

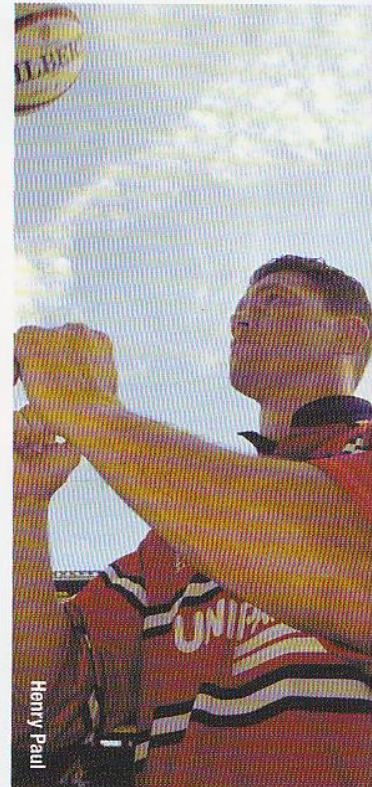
It wasn't just with the boot that he had strength belied by his slight frame. According to the bustling winger, the late Sid Dangerfield, Willie spent hours practising a reverse pass along the narrow corridor leading to the old changing rooms under the clock. In the end, he could reverse pass the ball just about the width of the field.

Sid had a rueful story about that. On one occasion Willie Jones sent out an enormous

example of that pass straight to him, lurking on the wing. So accurate was it that it bounced off Sid's chest. All he had to do was gather it and stroll over without an opponent in sight.

Much was the chagrin, however, of the pair of them when the Citizen reporter, obviously not believing the evidence of his own eyes, wrote that "Dangerfield scored from an astute cross-kick by Jones".

However, I digress. In spite of danger to the frontage of the White Hart, and the shops on the other side of Kingsholm Road, the kicking looks to be in safe hands this season, if you see what I mean. And Henry Paul hasn't even arrived yet!



WELCOME INITIATIVE

I was very pleased to read about the RFU's new initiative regarding the County Championship.

I expect just about every rugby fan in Gloucestershire, of all Counties, feels the same way.

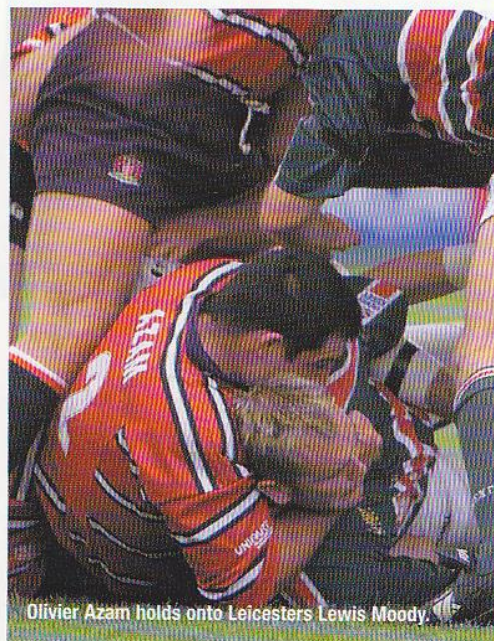
In case you haven't caught up with the news, the RFU intends to establish an English Counties International XV squad as part of their efforts to stimulate and develop amateur rugby.

It does have to be said that something needed to be done about the good old County Championship. It had been lurching along happily and enthusiastically enough, but had lost virtually all of its old charisma and interest. Then, last season, the

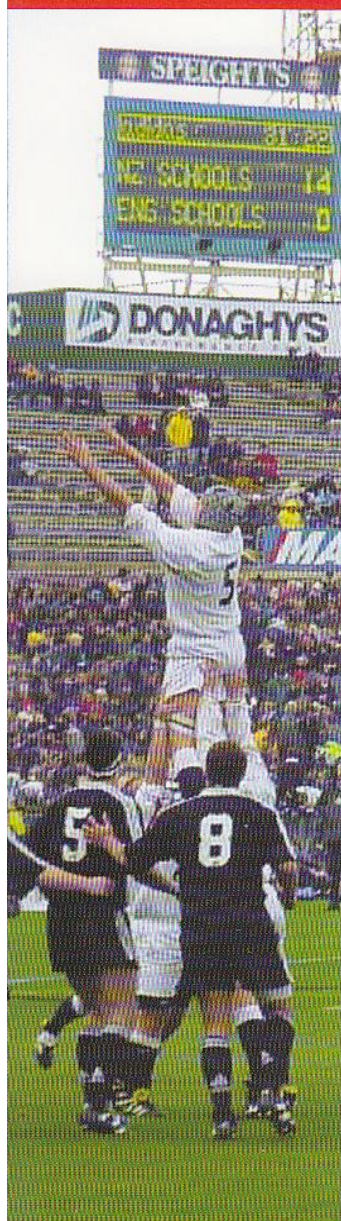
disruption caused by foot-and-mouth castrated it further.

Now, this new initiative will give amateur players the chance to aspire to play rugby at some form of International level, which has yet to be defined, but surely, not beyond the wit of man to devise. And it's unthinkable that Gloucestershire, with its unrivalled track record, and undoubted affection for County rugby won't feature prominently in the new set-up.

I've been as critical of the RFU as most people, over the years, but I applaud them over this one.



Under 18's England Tour



This summer, international rugby tours were ever present in the sports pages of the national newspapers.

The legend of the British Lions wrote another chapter in their esteemed history as they landed on Australian shores for the first time in twelve years.

A new-look England team toured North America and Canada, as Clive Woodward sought to establish who would compete with the English Lions for places in this autumn's squads.

There was another international representative side that left England this summer bound for Canada, New Zealand and ending its journey also in Australia. The success of this England U18 schools team may, in time, have more of a bearing on England's rugby future than that of the senior tour.

Previous schoolboy internationals include club Captain Phil Vickery, Tom Beir and recent summer recruit Daren O'Leary. Of the present England squad, Iain Balshaw, Jonny Wilkinson and Mike Tindall are all previous schoolboy internationals.

Gloucester Rugby Club were well represented on this schoolboy tour. Alongside tour

captain, Clive Stuart-Smith was another new first team recruit, Marcel Garvey. They were joined by Gloucester Academy's Brad Davis, a fly-half from St Peter's school and player of the tour Ben Durham, from Pate's Grammar School.

"We went to Canada first, then to New Zealand, then Australia and they were all different in their rugby and their life. But I personally thought Australia, was the best as things go" said Stuart-Smith. "New Zealand was all orientated around rugby, there was nothing else. In Australia, there was everything else with it as well as rugby. Sport is just big in Australia".

Marcel Garvey the quicksilver winger who has also joined the first team this summer missed out on selection for the original party through injury. The first team coaches deemed him unfit to tour but he admits this situation worked out for the best in the end. By missing the start of the tour he was able to make his first team debut against Birmingham Solihull scoring a first half try.

"I had only been with the

squad for two weeks but it was a fantastic experience because I was here for three weeks and then went over there and got the best of both worlds playing four games. I went on the first team tour and when I got back I had to do a fitness test to see if I was ok to go out. I was and was well chuffed".

The highlight for all tourists was undoubtedly, the Test victory against the Australians, who are difficult to beat at any level, particularly on home soil. A close second though was the New Zealand Test, which was played at Carrisbrook as a curtain raiser to the Bledisloe Cup game in front of a crowd of nearly 40,000 people.

"The highlight of the tour was definitely winning against Australia. The New Zealand test was awesome as well", said Gloucester scrum half Stuart-Smith. "We lost 33-7 and they were an awesome team with a lot of islanders, but Australia was by far the best. Just to beat an international side, which we hadn't done that year made it a very successful tour".

"The New Zealand game was



[canada, new zealand & australia 2001]

the hardest I have ever played in", says Old Patesian Durham. "There were just thousands of people in the ground and hundreds of school children on the sidelines, doing the 'Haka'".

"In New Zealand, most of the players are from the islands like Fiji. With their genetics, they are just bigger and stronger so in games at our age level, we need to catch up with them still. We are playing catch up whilst they are already there", says Garvey.

"Playing against New Zealand at Carisbrook was as the curtain raiser to one of the biggest games in the world", said ex St Peter's school fly half Brad Davies. "It was special being there and to play on the pitch before the world stars was quite exciting".

"You get tremendous confidence from playing against the best players in the world at our age group and hopefully you can take that back to your clubs and enhance what you have learnt".

The tour was a very intense experience for all the players. They toured for six weeks in all, playing nine games, winning six.

Even at this early stage in their careers, the tour itinerary left little room for sight seeing, although they did manage a

scuba diving trip to the barrier reef.

With a mature attitude that echoed Iain Balshaw's opinion on the Lions tour, Stuart-Smith's explains, "We were there to play rugby".

Gloucester Academy's Ben Durham agrees, "We played a lot of games, nine in six weeks with no easy ones. We had to grow up quickly. We had to stay focused the whole time but you always knew that the Tests at the end of the tour were something to aim for".

As well as winning the player of the tour award, as voted for by the players themselves, Gloucester's young number eight, Ben Durham was also awarded the Bronze Boot award. This award is given to the man of the match in Australia's one Test of the summer. The players who have won it previously perhaps best demonstrate the prestigious nature of the award. New Zealand's record try scorer Jeff Wilson and fly half Carlos Spencer have both won it and because of the recent Lions Tour, the best known winner is George Smith, the Wallaby flanker who ruled the skirmishes in the tackle and on the floor.

"It's definitely very nice to receive an award. The fact that

it is voted for by people you are with for six weeks is even better", said Durham modestly. On receiving the Bronze Boot award he said simply "It's obviously a prestigious award when you see who has won it before, players like Jeff Wilson and Carlos Spencer and George Smith".

The Wallaby flanker got the award as a schoolboy just two years ago a fact not lost on Durham. "It just shows how fast things can go", he said.

Each player went on tour with his own goals, for Garvey it was to make an impact on the test team in the short time he had. For Stuart-Smith as Captain it was quite simply to win more than you lose. They have all returned to their clubs better players for their experience. Both Garvey and Stuart-Smith want to take the next step to England U19's while Durham is too old, so has set his sights on the U21's and Gloucester squad.

All agree that their development curve will be added to, by their involvement with the Gloucester Academy.

Touring as a sportsman, representing your country is a dream come true for many people and the dream may only just be beginning for these young players. Gloucester's future is in safe hands.

