Gloucester RFC official matchday programme 2001-2002

Gloucester vs London Wasps
Friday 23rd November 2001  kick-off 7.30pm

[issue] 8
[price] £2.00

www.gloucesterrugbyclub.com
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gloucester</th>
<th>VS</th>
<th>London Wasps</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert Todd</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Matthew Leek</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daren O’Leary</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Shane Roiser</td>
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<td>Terry Fanolua</td>
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<td>Fraser Waters</td>
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<td>Henry Paul</td>
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<td>Mark Denney</td>
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<td>Diego Albanese</td>
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<td>Kenny Logan</td>
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<td>Ludovic Mercier</td>
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<td>Andy Gomarsall</td>
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<td>Patrice Collazo</td>
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<td>Federico Pucciariello</td>
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<td>Will Green</td>
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<td>Rob Fidler</td>
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<td>Simon Shaw</td>
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<td>Ed Pearce</td>
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<td>Adam Eustace</td>
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<td>Jake Boer</td>
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<td>Alex Page</td>
<td>T.B.A</td>
<td>Stuart Abbott</td>
<td>Colin Allan</td>
<td>Joe Beardshaw</td>
<td>Ali McKenzie</td>
<td>Trevor Leota</td>
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*teams correct at 21/11/01*

*denotes international*

c [denotes captain]

*today’s officials*

*referee*

touch judges
We must respect Wasps and not forget that they beat us home and away, three times last season...

The result at Newcastle was such a big shame for us. We were playing the team in second place and if we had won, we would now be second and challenging for the league.

We lost the game in the end by only two points but we were in control for long periods of the match.

We missed three or four very important kicks, we had two tries disallowed and Joe Evans was very unlucky to knock-on over the line. If we add those points up we would have scored twenty-seven more points and we would again not be talking about a loss but a very good win.

The away matches and those at home are absolutely different. Away games are far more difficult but we must learn from the mistakes we have made away from home this year.

At Saracens, we were asked for the first half. At London Irish we had very bad discipline and at Newcastle we were 13-6 up and had the opportunity to kill the game off but we didn’t do this. We will get fewer chances to score, away from home and we must learn to be more clinical and take our chances.

There are many good things that came out of this weekend and we must remain positive. This team is still relatively new and is learning all the time. This weekend our discipline was good and our defence was strong but we missed chances to score.

Our results away from home show the importance of the bonus points system. We won against Sale and scored four tries, which gave us five points. We also picked up three points by losing by less than seven away at Saracens, London Irish and Newcastle. If we add all these points up, it is the same as winning two games, away from home.

Tonight’s game has become even more important. We must respect Wasps and not forget that they beat us three times last season including home and away, and that they also had a very good result against Leeds last weekend. We have our own targets this year though. We have lost one game at home, against Leicester and I hope this is the last one.

I would like to welcome Nigel Melville tonight. He has done a wonderful job with Wasps in his time there. He has not become a bad Director of Rugby in one year. People have such small memories and I understand the pressure he is under. He is a great Director of Rugby and I have great respect for him.

In tonight’s game we will also welcome Ian Jones back to Kingsholm for the first time. He was a great player and did much for Gloucester Rugby Club in his time here.

Tonight though, there will be no room for sentiment. Every league game is very hard. We lost against the second placed team on Sunday, now we are fifth, but only six points behind Newcastle. There are still many positive things for us at Gloucester and we must start winning points again tonight.
There were many factors that lead to our defeat at the hands of Newcastle last weekend.

I wouldn't say we had the Falcons on the rack in the first half but we definitely exerted a lot of pressure and created a lot of scoring opportunities. Unfortunately, we had three disallowed and one missed a few kicks.

Going into the second half I was very positive about the way the game was going. Then various things started to go wrong. We made some bad decisions, and as captain, possibly I made a bad decision. That happens in games but I don't believe the decision I made swung the game.

In the last fifteen minutes they put the pressure back on to us and we gave away kickable penalties. For this we were punished once again and we can't let that happen.

With the contrasting fortunes that we are suffering at home and away, I have been asked many times what I think the causes are. It is a very difficult question to answer. I can only talk about my personal preparation for the game and it is exactly the same whether I am home or away. I would like to think that everyone else in the squad prepares exactly the same as well. Putting a finger on why we miss kicks away from home, or we don't score our tries is something I can't answer.

If you look at the games we have lost away from home it's disappointing. We have lost three games by less than five points. We are there but not able to take the next step and win the game. That is the unknown quality we lack away from home.

Personally, I don't think we should be looking for excuses as to why we lose away from home. With the quality we have in this squad I don't feel we should be losing away from home at all and certainly not looking for excuses.

Tonight, our focus must turn solely to Wasps. From a personal point of view they are a team that, since I have been in this country, I have not done so well against. There are loaves you always want to perform against and Wasps are certainly one of them and I think we owe them a performance after last season.

We must respect them; they had a poor start to the season, but they no doubt come here fired up looking to repay their performances last week.

We would never take this game lightly but three weeks ago this is a game we might have had much shorter odds on. Wasps though have turned in some good performances in the last few weeks and we come to tonight's match after a poor performance. I would hate to be a bookie tonight.

One thing that will change at home for the game is the conditions. It will be cold and visibility will not be too good. Once the game starts though, your body warms up and there is something very special about playing under floodlights. It's hard to explain but there is an aura created within the ground, like a game of night cricket. I think there will be a very special atmosphere here tonight and I hope that after a hard week at work, people will be able to come down tonight, relax and enjoy a great game.
After last week's surprise exit from the National KO Cup, Gloucester U19s were determined to make amends and show the Academy coaches their true ability and they did so in style!

The Academy team were now well in command and Andy MacRae was denied another try when the referee blew for a dubious scrummage decision. Pressure on the opposing scrum meant Gloucester went on the attack and Tigers halted the pressure momentarily with a kick to touch.

Gloucester though would not let up and another good run by MacRae saw replacement winger, Joe Peart, cross the line unopposed for the home side's fourth try of the match. It went unconverted but still gave Gloucester a deserved 26 nil lead.

Gloucester kept the pressure on the visitors but were denied a further score and disappointingly let Leicester score a conversion before the final whistle. It made the final score line look somewhat better for the Tigers in 2017.

This was an outstanding display following last week's dismal performance at Macclesfield and the whole squad could see how far they had come.

GLOUCESTER ACADEMY FIXTURES 2001/2002

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GLOUCESTER LEAGUE Table 2001-2002

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I never underestimate the privileged position I hold by presenting the Saturday mid-morning programme on BBC Radio Gloucestershire.

I get to talk to all sorts of local people with stories to tell about a million different topics - both out and about at events around the county, and from the comfort of the studio - but I must admit that Saturday November the 9th was a bit like a busman's holiday.

I often finish my programme at midday and make it to Kingsholm for a game in the afternoon, but to tidy up and make the 12.30 kick off against Bristol looked unlikely. "We could base your programme there in the morning", suggested my producer, Than Campbell. "How about finding out what goes on at Kingsholm before kick off on a match day?" That's what you call a win-win situation.

I was a little surprised to find the ground a hive of activity when I arrived at around 8.15. Ted Ball, normally to be found at the players entrance gate, was already in position, and massage Balmer and Balmer - groundsman of the hallowed turf - had already been hard at it for over an hour. With sub zero temperatures forecast on the Friday night, Davide and Garth had covered the pitch, which proved a wise move based on the thermometer on the side of the home dug out. Dave told me he wouldn't have been concerned with a 3pm kick off, but needed the heavy black sheets as an insurance policy against the earlier start. Even by the time my programme began at 9 o'clock, the dressing rooms were cleaned, the shirts were up in the boiler room to air and warm, and the caterers were busy laying tables. Kick off was still more than three hours away.

Safety is high on the agenda at a big sporting venue like Kingsholm, and if there are any problems it's Ken Holland, as Managing Director, who has to face the music. Recent changes to ensure major incidents are avoided include special viewing positions for children behind the advertising boards, more stewards to stop gangways being blocked, and more limited access for photographers, caused by a player at one top turntable crashing into a lens pitchside. Such...

Talking of photographers, official cameraman Bruce Seabrook was another of the early arrivals, keen to check the conditions from all his normal vantage points for the match. Not all Bruce's shots are taken during the game. There are background shots, offside shots, casual shots - the list is almost endless. Under the category "confrontation" comes Garth Archer's punch thrown at Trevor Woodman - I must remember to ask him if he caught it on film.

Peak time at the top end of Kingsholm - if you'll pardon the pun - is as kick off approaches. No matchday would run smoothly without the club's oracle, Geraldine Peake. Geraldine is the longest serving member of the administrative staff, and that experience brings...
personal touch to running the "front of house" area in the club office. Next door is the shop, and John Hudson, who's in charge on a Saturday, is just as much a mind of information. John's grandfather (Arthur) and father (Gordon) both played for Gloucester and England, and it was Arthur who moved to the ground when the grandstand caught fire in 1936 when a bonfire was being held in the car park. The replacement stand - the one is use today - was built in just nine weeks.

John's delighted to be the third generation of Hudsons to serve the club, and never mind the replica shirts and computer mouse mats, the shop is an aladdin's cave of Cherry and White goodies to satisfy any Gloucester supporter.

James Simpson-Daniel, Fred Holton (Andy Deacon's father in law), catering contractor Rob Meeks and Tom Waterhouse also spared me a few minutes during a fascinating three hours, during which I learned a huge amount about the preparations for a match at Kingsholm. None of us though, could have forecast a victory by such a wide margin, even if Laidlaw seemed to leave his favourite kicking boots in his training kit.

Today, we welcome struggling Wasps, whose sting seemed to have been drawn by other teams so far this season. Back in February, Philippe offered to stand down after the home defeat here against the same opposition. He said he was "sick for the supporters" by the performance.

Suffice to say, a similar result outcome today wouldn't be too popular.

C'mon Gavs !

"Today, we welcome struggling Wasps, whose sting seemed to have been drawn by other teams so far this season."
Head2Head

Today's head to head, once again focuses on former teammates. Together Rob Fidler and Ian Jones made up Gloucester's formidable second row for two seasons.

Rob Fidler

Strengths

"From the way I look at it, I have a strong line out game but, more than that my strengths is in the general work around the park" says Fidler, he adds "It's nothing outstanding, but consistent. It's not glamorous but it's a job someone has to do it and I would say my strong point was getting on with the graft that has to be done".

Weaknesses

For a player who seems to have been a fixture in the Gloucester pack forever, it is hard to believe there are many faults in Fidler's game. "There are obviously some parts of the game I am not so good at", admits Fidler. "The way I look at it though is that I am always trying to improve every aspect of it. There are some things I am good at but I try to improve all round all the time".

High Point

"Obviously my first cap for England against New Zealand was a high point and funny enough that was against Ian as well", says Fidler. "I suppose for Gloucester, reaching the Heineken Cup Semi-final was a high point and a disappointment that we didn't progress".

Fidler then sums it up and admits, "Every time I put on a Gloucester shirt is a high point for me".

Low Point

"Every fitness session is a low point for me", says Fidler with a wry smile. "Any time you are not in the squad is a low point", he says, and then adds "We lost a lot of games in the last two minutes last season and that is disappointing. You work really hard for seventy-five minutes and then watch the game slip away in the dying moments. Any game that is lost in the dying minutes when we could have won is a low point".

Ambitions

On an international level if you can progress to get a full cap that's got to be the highest you can get. It's something you strive for as a kid playing junior rugby. Just being involved with the England set up is great, I want to get there and stay there. My aim is to play at that level and stay at that level."

Fidler stats

Nick Name: Fid
Position: Lock
Born: 21/09/74
Height: 1.96m
Weight: 112.5kg
Int Hons: England

Fidler on Jones

"Ian's reputation as a player goes before him. You don't play that many games for an All Black team that at the time was the best in the world without being a great player. When he joined Gloucester he brought a lot of the 'togetherness' into the team". All Black mentality with him. Obviously playing with him helped my game, and you have to respect the huge knowledge he has of the game. "Playing against him is a great challenge. He is very strong in the line out so to compete and win lineout ball against him will be hard. But he is also a very awkward player to play against. He makes it very difficult for you to win any clean ball in the lineout or park. He seems to be everywhere getting in your way."

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In the last player focus (Bristol programme), the spotlight turned on to Ed Pearce and talked about him as the forgotten man of last season.

Today the attention is turned to another player who endured a terrible season last year, for completely different reasons.

If Ed Pearce was the forgotten man, then Robert Todd was somewhat an unknown soldier. We all knew he was here but never really saw him.

He joined the club at the beginning of last season after some thunderous performances for London Irish. Once in Cherry and White colours however, he endured a soul-destroying nine months of injury hell. When asked to list all the injuries he suffered he says with a smile, "Only the one mate, just my foot".

The injury he sustained was in a pre-season friendly against Munster. Time is always a great healer, but this injury was beginning to take over his life. "It was a pretty low moment."

When you join a new team and you are trying to establish yourself but you can't contribute anything on the pitch, it's always disappointing..."

As spring approached so did Todd's comeback match and ironically he played his only full game of the season against his former employers. After a tough eighty minutes however, Todd was feeling the strain. With the Heineken Cup semi-final fast approaching, time was of the essence and the team had a hard session the next day.

Exhausted by his previous injury Todd picked up a hamstring injury that forced him out of the season's finale. As Todd puts it, "An exclamation mark at the end of the season."

That though, was last season Pre-season started well for the Kiwi. He was able to see consultants over the summer and allowed himself that extra

"In pre-season, Philippe Saint Andre joked that Todd had already played more games in August than he had managed in the whole of the previous season."
Time off away from rugby for the wound to heal

Todd has returned to the club with renewed vigour as he admits he has a lost season to catch up on.

"When I came back I was focused on doing the basics well. Trying not to miss a tackle or drop a ball and made sure that every pass I made hit its target. Just the simple things and the other things would come in time."

Todd was so concerned with re-mastering the basics of the game that it was not uncommon to see him throwing passes at the post pads "just to get his muscle memory back".

In pre-season, Phillipe Saint Andre joked that Todd had already played more games in August than he had managed in the whole of the previous season. Todd admits to being more than a little nervous before the first game.

"It was my first game back and there was a lot of new guys in the club. You have to get to know them and how they play. That's what pre-season is all about. You focus on them and then you focus on yourself as you try to communicate in the starting line up. At the back of my mind obviously was the worry that my foot wouldn't hold up."

Todd's foot came through unscathed and once the pre-season was out of the way it was down to the real business of making himself a permanent fixture in the team. Unlike last year however, when Todd was a fixture on the treatment table, now he is a fixture in the team.

In fact, he has recovered so well that he is in danger of becoming the one thing players hate more than being labelled a casualty; a utility player. The unfortunate injury to Chris Colling has meant a reshuffle of the back line. By switching to full back, Todd has now played in all of the three-quarter positions.

Todd has spent more time recently with the coaching staff, learning new kicking techniques and catching the high balls demanded in his new position. He admits to watching hours of video footage on positional play as he takes a crash course in the arts of full back. But, rather than concerning himself with labels, Todd is just pleased to be playing and in pragmatic mood at the moment.

"We've four centres at the club, all trying to play in two positions, which is good for competition in the squad. Henry and Terry have played a few games together and are getting on well. Before that, Joe and myself were going well, so you can do is go out and play well and leave the head coach's up to the coach. At the moment I am happy to be getting the opportunity of playing other positions, although I would obviously prefer to get a game in the position I played most."

Back play now has moved on from set positions making set plays. It is not uncommon for the wingers to pop up in midfield hungry for work and indeed full backs taking a crash ball in the centres. Todd is no different.

"Gone are the days when one player would play only one position. There is lot of chopping and changing as guys adapt to different requirements. Terry, Joe and myself have all played at different positions this season and it can only enhance you as a player."

It is apparent in the different goals Todd has set himself this season, just how far his physical and psychological state has moved on. When he spoke last season he focused his time on just learning to run and play again. Now he has set two still out and wants to aim that little bit higher.

"I guess you know you've made it back when the big games come along. If we are good enough to get to a final and I am selected in my position, then I'll know I am considered good enough. That's where my targets are now. To cement a first team place so that in my mind I'll know I'm back and here to stay."

Only time will tell if Gloucester are good enough to make it to any finals later this season. Robert Todd began a marathon last August and only in May or June will he be confident that he has reached the finish line.

"Todd was so concerned with re-mastering the basics of the game that it was not uncommon to see him throwing passes at the post pads "just to get his muscle memory back."
Robert Todd

Player Stats

D.O.B: 19/04/71 Position: Centre Height: 1.80m
Weight: 96.6kg Former Club: London Irish
Zurich Premiership
10-11-01

Gloucester’s Chris Fussey going over for his second half try.

Gloucester: Ales콧 Hazel scores a try during the first half.

match stats

Gloucester: 51 points

Trys: Hazle, Parri, Cullingham, Fronto, Somasak, Simpson-Daniel
Conversions: Mercer (3), Paul
Penalties: Mercer (3)

Bristol Shoguns: 17 points

Trys: Foxes, Sheridan
Conversions: Drahm (2)
Penalties: Drahm

Photography Supplied by Bruce Seabrook IPA

Henry Paul is held by Bristol's Gareth Archer.

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Match Action vs
Newcastle [away]

Zurich Premiership
18-11-01

Terry Faneitua breaks away from Newcastle's Tom May.

Federico Pacciarriello is held by Newcastle's Dave Waldron.

Henry Paul puts down Newcastle's Jamie Nicholls.

Photography Supplied by Brue Seabrook GPA

matchstats

Newcastle Falcons: 18 points
Tries: -
Conversions: -
Penalties: David Waldron (6)

Gloucester: 16 points
Tries: Andy Golds 
Conversions: Ludovic Meric (3)

Zurich Premiership:

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LUCKY SEVENS

Not even the most devout and practising supporter - and I am honoured to count myself among that number - would claim that Gloucester has a distinguished record in the seven-a-side game. Indeed, we were always rather sniffy about it.

The attitude around here was always something along the lines of: "All right if you like that sort of thing. If your idea of a good game is to see people flying up and down the field, scoring tries every ten seconds, then by all means indulge yourself."

In short, we regarded Sevens as suitable for belligerence, brawling and perhaps the occasional Scot (who invented the game, anyway) but not really for the likes of us. Not for real, red-blooded, boiler-room sorts of players such as we produce at Kingsholm.

It's not all surprising, therefore, that I can't remember, just off the top of my head, a single case of a Gloucester player being drafted into an England squad, but the times, as someone once sang, they are a-changing, here, rather like the bus service, we have two coming along at once. James Forster and James Simpson-Daniel were both selected for the England party at the IRB Sevens tournament in Durban.

Good luck to them. They are certainly two of the brightest stars emerging over the horizon at Gloucester, and could both have a glittering career ahead of them. The experience will, if nothing else, give them experience of the international, big-match atmosphere, and a taste of touring at that level. Their selection will also keep them in the eye and minds of the Pro12 Tail End. This is particularly important in the case of James Forster, who missed out badly at U19 and U21 level through injury.

The squad didn't do half badly, either. They reached the semi-final, where they lost to Samoa, which is no disgrace in the seven's game.

We all hope the trip was all they could have wished. It's odd they are both named 'James', though. Well, it could hardly have been 'Jim' could it? This is Sevens we are talking about, old man.

WHY NOT GO THE WHOLE HOG?

I note that Dean Richards, understandably annoyed at seeing the Tigers go down at Leeds while being severely depleted by England calls, called for a halt to Premiership matches during the November International period. One can see his point, but the question then arises, when do we play the three games to postponed? Do we extend the season even further?

Might as well take a leaf from the book of the Australian Golf Association, which has recently announced that their season will now run from January to December each year.

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WOULDN'T YOU JUST KNOW IT?

Drawn away to Bristol in the Cup. We might have guessed. It's straight out of the script for a 'Roy of the Rovers' comic strip.

Drawn away to Bristol in the Cup. We might have guessed. It's straight out of the script for a 'Roy of the Rovers' comic strip.

Playing Bristol is a special occasion at any time. Playing them in the Cup is enormous. Playing them in the Cup at Bristol, just weeks after giving them a fearful whappling at Kingsholm is a prospect to make the hair stand up on the back of the neck. It certainly won't be a game for the faint of heart, whether in the front row or on the touchline. To say that they will be out for revenge is like stating that Columbus was a bit of a navigator.

The more support we can muster down at the Memorial Ground, the better. Better make a note in your diary right now.

And, while on the subject of Bristol, I don't blame Dean Ryan for placing the blame for their 50-point massacre squarely on the shoulders of Garath Archer for getting himself sent off. He had to have some straw to clutch at, after all. I was, however, somewhat disappointed to see that whole sections of the press took the same attitude.

Sure, playing half a game with only 14 men must be a disadvantage, but I would point out that when Gloucester found themselves in exactly the same situation against Harlequins, they still went on to win the game. Win it well, at that, scoring 19 unanswered points while being a man down.

It isn't always quantity which matters.

SOMEBODY OWES ME 56p

On November 6th I received a letter which had been posted on October 22nd. If Heather and Ian Lindsay had sent it to me via carrier pigeon it would have arrived faster than that.

Let's not be too hard on the Post Office, however. Heather and Ian had posted it, from their home in Turkey, via Gloucester Rugby Football Club, so it had to be redirected to my home address.

Unfortunately, I had to pay 56p postage due on the thing. Which raises the question, why did the postman not change the Club rather than yours truly? After all, he wasn't to know that the item was going to be sent on to me, was he?

The letter itself was interesting. It enclosed a copy of a Boston, Massachusetts, newspaper produced exclusively for British visitors to that fascinating city. On the back page is a story about Gloucester RFC's abortive interest in Aliki Rankin, Pierre Callet, which seems a slightly odd choice of story, all things considered.

The Lindseys, however, loved it. "It gave us a smile, and was a hint of home", they wrote.

I'm very grateful to Heather and Ian for sending me the piece. It's always good to receive personal stories like that for possible inclusion in these pages. However, you'd save me time and possibly money, if you would be good enough to post them directly to me at 74, Victoria Street, Gloucester GL1 4EN. Or you could Email me at PeteAdcock@hotmail.com.

But that 56p, still rankles. I'm not sure just who does owe it to me - Heather and Ian, Lindsay or GRFC. After all, it's getting on towards a half of turkey, isn't it?
As a schoolboy Simpson-Daniel professed to being a rather good sevens player, almost suggesting he preferred the shortened game. He though was still very surprised at the levels of intricacy with which the game is played at international level.

Many of the sixteen entries fielded some exciting newcomers to the Sevens circuit. However, there was little to suggest that the pecking order in the World Sevens Series would change since the Kiwis won their second consecutive world crown at the conclusion of the previous series in Cardiff in June this year.

The defending champions, New Zealand, provided evidence of their continued superiority in the shortened form of the game, when they easily disposed of the Springboks 45-7 in the final, to win their fourth consecutive title at the Dubai Sevens the previous week.

As expected, New Zealand were the first to qualify for the semi-finals of the IRB World Sevens Series when they beat France 28-0. Samoa, South Africa and England were less obvious semi-finalists.

Outside of the so-called ‘big five’ of the Southern Hemisphere and South Sea Islands, England, Wales, Argentina and Portugal were favoured to reach the play-offs, but none of these teams were expected to advance past the quarterfinal stages.

Before the start of the tournament England were seeded eighth and early results suggested that this was a fair reflection, considering the team had met only the previous week for some intensive sessions training at Bisham Abbey before the long flight to Durban.

True to form, England made it through to the quarter-finals of the main competition but looked as though they would succumb to a routine victory for the Australians. The boys in green and gold scored first and not long after, lost a simple try with a knock-on. But, against all odds, England, who did everything well, except kick at goal, scored five tries to win 27-7.

This was probably the greatest victory for England in the tournament. They were then beaten in the semi-finals by the Samoans, who themselves were the beaten finalists in the thrilling finale.

Before the tournament started, new England Sevens Manager, Joe Lydon said: “We’ve announced a squad with a strong blend of development players and specialist Sevens experience.

‘Durban presents each of the players with the opportunity to stake a claim for selection to the England Sevens squad to be named in December.

“It will be the larger squad that will begin the preparations for the remaining IRB World Sevens tournaments of 2002, which culminate in August with the Manchester Commonwealth games.’”

Gloucester’s representatives in this exciting young squad were former Academy player’s James Forster and James Simpson-Daniel, who have both made a big impact with the Gloucester 1st team this season.

Both enjoyed the trip tremendously and make no secret for their desire to allow themselves more opportunities like it.

“As an experience it’s certainly up there,” says Lydon, Simpson-Daniel: “At the end of the day it’s England sevens. It’s a representative team that was treated very professionally, by...
the coaches and all the players. It was something different as well.

How did they cope with the step up to a full representative side after only a few months as full professionals? As one would expect, they took it in stride with aplomb.

"It wasn't so much a step up, as a step across," explains Simpson-Daniel. "You step up from the Academy to the first team, but then because it is a different game you step across. It was a young squad and a great learning experience. Joe Lydon, the Team Manager treated us all like adults and since the trip we have been promoted a lot of feedback which is excellent as a young player."

The experience was all the sweeter for lock forward Ben Forrester, who previously had never represented England at any level. His selection by the England management was seen as a gamble as of all the players in the party he was the one they new least about.

The gamble more than paid off as he was awarded England's Player of the Tournament, as his rise to prominence was nothing short of exceptional.

"I was one of the players on the trip that they didn't know much about," admits Forrester. "I started the tour as twelfth man but started the next game and played quite well. I think I got the award because the management were so surprised at as a " wildcard" how well I played."

Forrester has proved that he has the uncanny knack of being in the right place at the right time to score tries. He took his enviable skill with him on tour and scored in his first game against Georgia.

"It was one of the highlights for me. It was my first game for any England team and I scored a try with my first touch. I got the ball a long way out and kept running."

As a schoolboy Simpson-Daniel professed to being a rather good sevens player, almost suggesting he preferred the shortened game. He thought was still very surprised at the levels of intensity with which the game is played at international level.

"It was so much more technical than before. I used to try a couple of dummy switches and play from there," says Simpson-Daniel.

Forrester agrees, "We spent over two hours in our first session at Bisham Abbey just talking about defense."

Another aspect both players found hard to adapt to was the attitude of their opponents at the tackle. "All the Southern Hemisphere teams were very physical," says Forrester. "It was always difficult but we were beaten by New Zealand on the floor. They always contact the ball at the tackle situations and we found it very hard to get the ball back. We had a way of defending the space but they would send in three people at the tackle and steal the ball."

This difference in attitude no doubt comes from the abundance of tournaments the teams like New Zealand play in, year on year. With the Commonwealth Games approaching next summer though and the massive cost savings to play in it, both players are under no illusion that the profile needs to be heightened.

Forrester concurs but is confident that with a similar approach to the sevens game, England too can challenge the supremacy of the Southern Hemisphere giants.

"I would definitely say that if we can keep a small number of good players together we could certainly be contenders."

Both returned to Gloucester a little jaded but well trained. The bonus for them both to help them recover after a long hard week was a training session in freezing conditions at King'sholm.

Both may have started the week in severe freeze, but have returned to earth with a bump. The message from the England sevens management team is simple. Get your head down and focus on your club side.

With all the rain in the world, with our congested domestic season it may take a heavenly miracle to provide the time and resources our sevens players need to compete with the best in the world.