EXCLUSIVE PULL OUT GLOUCESTER 2002-03 TEAM POSTER

END OF SEASON STRUCTURE EXPLAINED

READ THE NEW AND EXCLUSIVE 'FANS VIEW FROM THE SHED'

PLUS ALL THE GAMES' RELEVANT STATS AND ANALYSIS

vs The Sharks

ZURICH PREMIERSHIP FIXTURE
SATURDAY 7TH SEPTEMBER 2002
KICK-OFF 3.00PM
WELCOME FROM...

Tom Walkinshaw
Managing Director

First of all I would like to welcome supporters of both Gloucester and The Sharks to Kingsholm today for the second round of Zurich Premiership matches.

The season started well for both Clubs last weekend and today promises to be another wonderful advert for Premiership rugby in this country.

"AS A MEMBER YOU WILL BE ABLE TO WATCH AT LEAST A GAME A WEEK HERE AT KINGSHOLM FOR FREE."

Figures recently released show that, across the board, rugby attendance has continued to increase, with season tickets rising by an average of 17%. At the time of writing we are on the verge of hitting our first target of 4500 and this in itself represents a Kingsholm record.

I am delighted, and proud, that so many supporters have decided to commit themselves to this great Club by purchasing a Season Ticket.

For those of you who are joining for the first time this year, welcome. I hope that you will enjoy a wonderful season supporting the Cherry and Whites. For those who have renewed their membership this season, thank you, for your continued support. I believe that the team we have assembled on and off the pitch will repay the faith that you have shown in them.

For those who have yet to be convinced, let me assure you that even after today's fixture, the 2002-03 Season Ticket package still represents excellent value. With the inclusion of the Gloucester Academy matches and the renewal of the United fixture all included in the package, as a member you will be able to watch at least a game a week here at Kingsholm for free.

Off the field too, the Season Ticket Holders association will provide all members with excellent social evenings and events.

In conclusion, I am delighted to welcome each and every one of you to Kingsholm this afternoon, and hope that you will join me in cheering on the Cherry and Whites to great successes and continuing to make Gloucester Rugby Club the best in Europe.
NIGEL'S NOTE'S...

Nigel Melville
Director of Rugby

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to Kingsholm for our first home Zurich Premiership game of the new season. Sales, our visitors, have travelled from Manchester today, but in rugby terms have travelled significantly further in the last two seasons. Last season Sale Sharks finished the Zurich Premiership in second place and won the Parker Pen Shield, the squad has remained largely intact and expectations are high for the new season.

Last week's visit to the Stoop against a rejuvenated Harlequins may not have been pretty, but an away win in the Premiership is always welcome. It is always frustrating to see top class players making basic errors, but no matter how hard you prepare for the Premiership, you cannot replicate the intensity of the competition in friendly games, last week's performance certainly kept everyone's feet on the ground – we have worked particularly hard this week.

Apart from winning last weekend, the game brought a number of positives for the squad. Marcel Garvey proved once more that he is an exciting young talent and that he has the ability to turn any situation into a try scoring opportunity.

Andy Harrison has returned to form after his injury problems, Trevor Woodman proved that it is not only backs that side step and score tries and Thinas Delport made an excellent start on his Premiership debut for Gloucester.

This week you will have again read about the problems we have been having agreeing release dates for fitness and skills sessions for our England Elite Players Squad members. The Elite Player Squad (EPS) consists of between 35-40 players; this is backed up by a further 20-25 players National Academy Players lead by Brian Ashton. The EPS players programme is managed by RFU Performance Director, Chris Steele.

The EPS players programme includes a 32-match maximum per season (1 match constitutes more than 1 half), this includes international fixtures. EPS players will attend a further 20 days for fitness and skills work, they will be released on the week leading up to the November internationals and 6 Nations games. They are also subject to an 11 week break at the end of each season (not including international tours).

Selecting teams has always been tough, but with 13 players in every match squad now having to be English qualified (17 next season) and an as yet unknown group only available for appro 22 games (+ 6 bench games), the task has become even more complicated. The 20 extra training days will cause disruption during the working week, releasing players during the build up to an important Premiership game is always frustrating for coaches and players alike.

"MARCEL GARVEY PROVED ONCE MORE THAT HE IS AN EXCITING YOUNG TALENT AND THAT HE HAS THE ABILITY TO TURN ANY SITUATION INTO A TRY SCORING OPPORTUNITY."

There should be no doubt that we are fully behind England's World Cup Challenge, but I personally believe that extra skills and fitness sessions could be carried out at the Premiership Clubs. These sessions could be taken by the England coaches and the players wouldn't have to travel. This would strengthen the relationship between the England Squad coaches and the Premiership coaches producing a genuine partnership.

Finally, I would like to thank you for your continued support, your commitment to the team, home and away, lifts us all to greater things, enjoy today's game and have a fantastic season.
CAPTAIN’S CORNER

Phil Vickery
Club Captain

Last weekend we got off to a great start. It wasn’t our best performance as we were a little off the pace, but we won, a lot of people were so happy with the result. Now we have points on the board and something to build on.

Make no mistake, regardless of all the hype surrounding the game, Harlequins are a very good team. In previous years, that was a game we would so easily have lost.

Harlequins put us under a lot of pressure, which was something that Newport didn’t do. We had to raise our game to a level that perhaps we hadn’t reached against Newport, but that was down to the quality of our team. I am just pleased that we have not looked back at this game and say “What if?”

In the first half of last season, away from home, we lost to Saracens by four points, London Irish by four points and Newport by two points. They were all games that we felt we should have got something out of, but didn’t. This year we did.

We have set our benchmark, and now it is up to us, as a squad, to perform consistently to that level. We are building on what we achieved towards the back end of last year. We set standards last year by winning at home and away in the Championship Final and we want to push on from that.

Before the game, the press were all writing about us as Premiership contenders and that is their job. No rugby had been played so there were very few stories other than hype. I am glad that now the first weekend is out of the way and there are games being played, at well a few upsets to talk about, that we can just get on with our jobs and concentrate on the rugby.

The Premiership as a whole has become more competitive. Squads have strengthened their resources well and this will be a very tough league to win. I think that Leeds proved on Saturday, and many teams will follow throughout the season, that on their day any team is capable of beating any other.

This week Marcel Garvey has grabbed a lot of headlines but, here at Kingsholm, we have known about his talent for a long time. He has a huge amount of natural ability and has been given his opportunity in the squad. He will get chances in this team and if he keeps his head down and works hard, I’m sure that he will play a lot of rugby for this Club.

Our opponents today, the Sharks, will bring with them enough quality to provide us with another stern test. They have many winners throughout the side, but I think we have shown enough to suggest that we too have quality in depth.

We are at home in our first Premiership fixture of the season, which brings its own pressure from within the squad and from the supporters outside. Of course we want to play out our best rugby all the time but I think we all know that that may not happen. We have prepared well and hopefully at three o’clock this afternoon when the whistle blows we will all be on top of our game.

We have worked hard all summer and now is the time to show it.

I AM JUST PLEASED THAT WE WILL NOT LOOK BACK AT THIS GAME AND SAY, “WHAT IF?”.
This season saw the inauguration of the Joint England-Gloucester Rugby Academy.

This jointly run Academy is part of the RFU’s World class performance plan to help England win the World Cup in 2007 by developing a structure to develop the most talented 16-21 year old rugby players. At 12 Zurich Premiership clubs have secured franchises to run a Regional Academy and two more have been created on split sites in the West Midlands at Worcester RFC and Birmingham University and in South West Further Education Colleges at Truro in Cornwall and Wybriedge, Exeter and Barnstaple in Devon. Each Academy has a manager and assistant manager who will be responsible for implementing a programme of training, support programmes and personal guidance aimed at making the most of each player’s ability.

Former Worcester Academy Manager Carl Douglas is the man charged with finding, and coaching the next generation of James Simpson-Daniel’s and James Forristal’s.

Said Douglas, “We are lucky that we have a very strong rugby situation locally and our relationships with the local Clubs is such that the young players are coming to Gloucester and working their way through the ranks. This means that there is a stream of young talent available to the senior Club in the region”.

Douglas also paid special tribute to the work done at local junior Clubs that has enabled these players to step up to a professional arena.

"Without the work and excellent coaching done at the local Clubs, these boys would not have the skills and attitude to make the step up. They are now at the bottom rung of a new ladder, rather than being at the top of an old one. Having said that, they would not be where they are without the support of their local Clubs and we must recognise that”, he added.

The U21 Academy organised a tough pre-season schedule with games away against Pontyprrid and Llanelli along with a tough physical encounter with local side Old Pats in order to prepare thoroughly for their League campaign that kicked off at Kingholm last Friday.

The Academy enjoyed an inauspicious start to their pre-season as they went down to a strong Pontyprrid side. This was followed by another loss to Old Pats and again the Academy came away empty handed from their trip to Llanelli’s Stradey Park.

They began their League season 0-3 as the youth Harlequins team.
entered Kingsholm. 700 people though saw the young Academy side, through the efforts of Brad Davies, who took a star in the making at Fly-half and a strong forward effort led by try scorer and Captain Peter Knight in the back row, hold on for a crucial victory 23-17.

Scrum-half Dan Parr scored two more individual tries but on the whole the Academy coaches were pleased to get off to a winning start, particularly in front of the home fans.
Former dartman, who was the first Gloucester player to receive a testimonial year. Few players have made the transition from amateur to professional status so successfully and Deacon admits to being flattered than ever. Signed another one year extension to his contract and will provide excellent support and experience in the front row in his fifteenth season with the Club.

Tieke lines capped Springbok with blistering pace and powerful running style. He scored a staggering 20 tries in 22 matches for the Lions under Laurie Maitland. At the beginning of this season’s Super 12 series before moving across to The Sharks, Tieke Deport had scored more tries (20) for the Super 12 than any other player. He had also represented the Golden Lions at provincial level 63 times scoring 87 times.

Former Colli who is one of the new breed of strong, mobile, second row. Moved from the back row to his new position on successfully he was invited to join up with the English development squad last season. Was enjoying a great start to this season until he recently broke his leg against Esher in the Friendly. He has retired fitter and stronger and is keen to make a big impact this season.

One of the out figures of the Gloucester side. He showed off his diving skills after the Champions Final at Twickenham, but has retained his hunger for the game. As distinctive as his appearance was his commitment in the tackle. Has played in every position in the Gloucester back line except scrum-half although plays a role at centre. He seemed to enjoy a resurgence in form at the end of last season.

Excellent number two jumper who has started to come of age in the last two seasons. Gloucester side to the eve of all pro Fijian player to continue his great work at the lineout and in the tight as he admits to doing much of the dirty work during a game. His form was consistent enough that season to give selection for the tour to Argentina this summer.

Enjoyed many highlights last year including an England caps and a try for England against the Barbarians last June. A full back who can play in any of the positions in the back line. James is an excellent ball handler who can provide the essential link between forwards and backs. Has shown he is more than capable this season and has a great knock of scoring tries.

Local born hooker who continues to make the grade at first team level. His consistency last year undeniably helped Gloucester in this area and his excellent tackling skills and his accuracy and timing work will be a great asset, once again to the Cherry and White. As long as he and Adam stay fit, the competition to be the number one number two will be intense.

Wing of the year award. Chen was first to make the breakthrough after being held up last season but judging by it will not be long. Has a unique ability to play at either wing or fullback, because of scoring goals on the wing, his versatility will serve him well this year.

A former U19 international whose power and pace baffle he size. His greatest asset is his pace and has been described by many coaches as 'A natural try scorer'. He has carved a huge by-scoring impact every time he has played the pre-season and recent form suggests that the best is yet to come from this former St Peter's schoolboy. Will provide extra competition out wide.
Randy Full Back who made his debut against 2000-01 against London Irish. Played his entire rugby at Fly Half but made the very successful switch whilst playing for the DRFC Academy. Is very strong in defence and can cross the try line but also has the ability to counter attack effectively, given space. toured the with England U21 to the SARAZAR tournament this summer, but a shoulder injury cut short that trip.

Former England U21 prop, who toured with the SARBAN team to South Africa. After interest in the Club's U21 side, he signed professional terms this season and many are interested to see what effect a full season of training and coaching will improve this former bridgegutter player.

Left footed French Fly-Half who joined Gloucester from little known Aubiac with a growing reputation. Finished as the second highest point scorer in the Premiership and has topped 500 points in all competitions last season. Under the leadership of Nigel Melville he has started to develop his running game to become a more attacking option. Can turn defence into attack with a hearty kick.

Described as a real考场 of a winger, O'Leary's record speaks for itself. He remains the Premiership all time try scoring top, scoring 19, not only can he score tries, but that he can do it consistently. He may have lost a yard of pace but his experience and nearness for opportunity make him still one of the game's most lethal finishers. We throw a good tackle on his hands to hold down a starting place.

Billy Ross of the Gloucester pack. With a smile as broad as his shoulders Parsons remains one of the game's most popular players. Converted from centre, he still holds the Gloucester pack in the tight and in the loose he remains one of the game's best lineout men, and aged well and continues as one of the other stalwarts of the side. Skipper will look to further his experience this season.
**Robert Todd**

*Position: Centre*
*Club: London IRFC*
*Height: 5' 10"*
*Weight: 180 lbs*

Missed much of his first season at Kingsholm with a groin injury. Came back fit, strong and desperate to succeed last year. His strength in the tackle, coupled with his footwork and distribution, is very solid. Shows a vast, lateral and attacking ability that looks like its size and build.

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**Phoebe Vickery**

*Position: Tight Head Prop*
*Club: London IRFC*
*Height: 5' 10"*
*Weight: 123 lbs*

Manor of a prop born in Cornwall, whose reputation was further enhanced after leading England to victory in Argentina this summer. Took part of the British Lions tests team in Australia in 2001, and is fast becoming one of the best Tight Head’s in the game. A powerful forward and having and running skills that would make the best three-quarter jersey. Second season as Gloucester Captain.

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**James Simpson-Daniel**

*Position: Flanker*
*Club: Gloucester*
*Height: 6' 3"*
*Weight: 180 lbs*

Joined GFA Academy as an 18 year old. Last season, his rise was nothing short of meteoric. Became an integral part of the England U18 squad, scoring a match winning try in the final of the Hong Kong tournament. His performances throughout the season led to selection in the top two international teams against the Barbarians, in which he scored the try of the match, rounding lock Loix in his way to a touchdown by the corner flag.

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**Clive Stuart-Smith**

*Position: Scrum Half*
*Club: Gloucester*
*Height: 5' 11"*
*Weight: 160 lbs*

A local boy who signed professional terms last season, this character has a dedication to the arts of scrum half play. His service is excellent and has been key to the scrum of the fixture he made his full force performance in for Gloucester like an engine U18s and now in the 1st team.
Marcel Garvey

Strengths
Marcel Garvey has the physique of a sprinter. He is stocky, has a low centre of gravity and a natural ability to move short distances at a very high speed. Genuine pace is his biggest asset and the one thing that defences can never plan for. Added to this he has the ability to change direction in a single stride, which makes him very difficult to stop. Given any space in broken play and he is lethal.

Weaknesses
Other than a handful of appearances as a substitute last season, Garvey is still a genuine novice at this level. His inexperience was nearly costly last weekend as he was targeted by a Quins back line who sought to turn him and make him play from deep. He missing game also needs work, but as a quick learner Garvey is quickly becoming the genuine article.

High Points
"Probably the England U18 tour to Australia. We beat them in the test match, and just to be involved in that squad was a great experience. Also being part of the FIFA U19 World Cup squad last spring was another step up", says Garvey.

"For Gloucester, playing against Leeds and scoring a try at home and obviously getting my first Premiership start and getting a try was good too", he added.

Low points
Garvey’s inclusion in the successful U18 tour was put in some doubt whilst he suffered from a back injury. Fortunately he went on the pre-season tour with the Gloucester 1st XV and his back healed itself. The rest as they say is history.

Garvey on Sale
Last week was my first Premiership start and to top it all, I scored a try. I have spoken to Nigel and I know that I still have a lot to work on. It would be an honour to play at Kingsholm against Sale and play in front of The Shed. I have only played here for the 1st team twice before against Leeds and Harlequins. I would just like the chance to get on at some point and have a positive impact for the team."
Mark Cueto

Strengths
By his own admission, Cueto is a 'have-a-go' sort of player. He enjoys having the ball in his hands and loves nothing more than exploiting the wide-open spaces in broken play. His confidence and skills were further boosted by selection to the England Sevens team. "I like to go forward rather than back. I like to have a go and with our squad, that suits our game plan. We have backs and forwards in the side that can back up this style of play", says Cueto.

Weaknesses
Having played only one season at 1st team level, Cueto understands that he still has much to work on. His all-round game will continue to improve as his experience grows. "I work on everything in training, but a key focus of mine is to keep involved throughout the game. Sometimes on the wing, you can drift and then not be ready for the pass. I just work on my concentration to make sure I can always give an option to someone", says Cueto.

Highs
"Last season was my first as a professional, so I haven't been around that long. Just being involved with Sale last year was brilliant, particularly with the Parker Pen Shield win and the League finish", said Cueto.

"Also being selected for the international tour last summer was great. It was a great experience to be involved and be seen. I got to know the coaches and the players, most of whom I hadn't played with or against before", he added.

Lows
Cueto's rise to prominence in his first year that his rather quick feet haven't touched the ground and he hasn't had time to dwell on many low points.

Cueto on Gloucester
"I think it is going to be fun. There are no easy games in the Premiership and we know that Gloucester at Kingsholm will be another great challenge. We played each other four times last season, so we know a lot about each other. Gloucester like to play with their huge pack of forwards so we have developed a game plan to cope with this. We know all about the atmosphere at Kingsholm and it can be intimidating, but you have to thrive on it as a player and to be honest listening to all the banter can be quite fun".
One down, twenty-one to go. It was nice to see so many supporters among the 7,000 at The Stoop, even if they had to ride something of a roller coaster until Trevor Woodman’s late try. My over-riding impression was that Clerk had more shops, but two pieces of opportunism, and one old fashioned catch andAlive were enough for a very useful opening day win.

Speaking to Nigel Melville on a regular basis, the “professionals’ism” he demands from the players seems to have gone up a notch, even from last season. Only wing Phil Vickery was allowed to do any media interviews ahead of the Harlequins game, and Melville has instigated new rules about the players’ rehabilitation - which even includes a ban on alcohol on the team bus after matches. One wonders what the players of a generation ago would make of it, but every little idea that might give Gloucester a small % advantage has to be grasped.

Team selection this season too, may not be so obvious, but more on a “horse for courses” basis. Ludovic Mercoeur’s 50 points last season may have been of immense value THEN, but I get the impression this season he’ll not be an automatic choice. Tactically against some sides, (such as last Saturday) he’ll merely be a “bench” option if the game needs closing up. Even if Burke’s drop goal had won the match, Nigel’s reshuffle of the back division when Marcel Garvey was withdrawn would have been justified. As it was, Woodman’s try was the bonus, and proved that all the players now have to have a good range of awareness and skills.

Today’s game marks the start of nine months rugby at Kingsholm, and I understand from “our Ken” that whatever the club decide to do about the future of the ground, we’re likely to be here for at least a couple more seasons. I’ve rarely met a man as thorough as Ken Nottage in his approach to any project, and the bigger it is, the more he seems to thrive on its demands.

I’m sure you are aware of the issues, but Kingsholm cannot stand still while they are sorted out - the new roof on the main stand this summer is the clearest example of that. I know Ken has several options on the table, and one of his prime concerns is the financial impact on the club - not only how much will it cost, but how long will it take to pay for it?

I recently went to Crewe Alexandra for their Division 2 match with Cheltenham, and their example is one Gloucester might do well to look at. Their site is not unlike Kingsholm, tight on three sides but with room on the fourth. Their new main stand, which seats 6,540, shows what can be done with careful design and prudent management. The main stand side at Kingsholm has a small capacity for the area it covers, and surely ought to be the first area to be looked at if the club decide a piecemeal redevelopment of the current site is the preferred option.

It does seem odd welcoming “The Sharks” for this match. Safe? Of course.
“Manchester Sale” seemed a pointless change, as rugby in Manchester itself has little history of note. Sale Sharks ? Better -

Elsewhere last weekend, Leicester’s defeat at Leeds stood out, but it’s never a good idea to read too much into opening day results. Flyin starts often fade, and slow ones can be deceptive. Come Christmas I’d expect Northampton and Wasps to be showing up well and maybe Bristol and Newcastle, along with Leeds, to face a demanding second half of the season if they’re to stay in touch.

Meanwhile, for now, it’s............

' Jenna Grauks !
GRFC V NEWPORT
HOME

NEWPORT V GRFC
AWAY
'QUINS V GRFC
AWAY
An ex-fanzine editor writes...
A view from the terraces

This season marks a huge change for me. No not scribbling a few words for the programme, I’ve done that a few times in the past, rather being inside the ground before 2.30pm for the first time in years.

The reason? Not standing outside the bar (always a torture on a hot day) with an armload of Shedheads. After a lot of thought and a good deal of soul-searching I’ve decided that I could not go on with it in its old format. There are a lot of reasons, but mainly because Matthew, my eight-year old son, is now in his second year as a season ticket holder, and it makes it very hard to bring him to the games and stand outside to the last possible minute.

I am immensely proud of what we achieved with the magazine - not least paying for the restoration of the club war memorial. When we took it away it was in terrible condition, look at it today (it’s in the clubhouse) and you can see why we are proud. I would also thank everyone who paid for a copy of Shedhead over the years, and for all the warmth and good wishes we received.

Anyway, when James Bennett asked me to pen something for him I was flattered. And I thought by adding my few words at least there would be something in the programme worth reading for a change! Actually that was a bit harsh, I know that from talking to James and Charlie that a lot of effort has gone in to making this a decent magazine. Hopefully we will all agree that their efforts have paid off.

It’s been a bit of a funny summer, hasn’t it - and am I the only one who feels badly let down by Gloucester Rugby Club already? I mean, what kind of a summer was that. Where were the headlines about players not talking to coaches? Where were the strikes, the walkouts, and the threat of insurrection in the streets?
This time last year the season was already in full swing. A member of the coaching staff had seemingly sat himself up as a revolutionary leader and set his foot soldiers out to overthrow the management. The revolution failed and the militant was sent into exile - or Worcester - which, on balance, is probably worse.

Players were coming and going so fast that we even began to feel sorry for Ken Nottage having to write all those contracts and PAs out one after the other. The most dangerous place in the world to be was by the revolving door outside his office - the airstream from that would take your breath away.

Back then people we had never heard of were turning up claiming to be rugby players - I remember scanning the internet for news of some guy called Ludovic Mecerar and finding half a dozen lunatic murcianes instead from all parts of the globe. Phil Vickery summed it all up when he said that it made a change to come back to the club and found that he knew the names of all the players!

And what have had this year? Zip, nada, diddly-squat, nothing. My subscription to the Gloucester Citizen was a complete waste of money. Even poor old Downey was reduced to writing about cricket.

Don’t our management realise that the summer is a very long time indeed? What are we supposed to do with ourselves if we don’t fret about the impending and inevitable demise of our favourite rugby club? At least Pucci had a go at creating a little magic when he played out of our favourite rugby club. At least Pucci had a go at creating a little magic when he played our ex-leader to Bognorlina, conveniently forgetting that he had already agreed a Gloucester contract.

But we have made a couple of smart signings. Thomas Delport for a start, what a player he is. What’s more he walks straight into an obvious nickname - welcome to Kingsholm Delboy!

And we’ve been given a bid to a young Argentinean prop Rodrigo Roncor, if we sign him up we’ll have Rodders as well! Now if Uncle Tom could change his name to Abran...

But that was then and this is now. The season has started and I’m already in trouble on the home front. It’s not my fault that my better half made an arrangement for the day of the first game of the season is. She must have known that trying to organise anything on a Saturday between the end of August and the middle of June is a waste of time. Anyway I have made it all up by promising a number of pleasant weekend’s away - Ireland, south west France and northern Italy are my suggested destinations for the time being.

Another sure sign that the rugby season is underway is the total lack of filmpjes. Every year I promise myself that I will not get that obsessed, every year I fail miserably. This year they went even faster than usual though. Twenty minutes into the game at The Stoop, 10-6 down with Burke about to kick a penalty they were gone already. I’ll be churling me knuckles by the end of the month at this rate.

Today we welcome The Sharks - not Sale anymore apparently. They will be on high after getting a win in their first match against a highly fancied Northampton outfit, and will want a bit of revenge for last season - we beat them on three out of four meetings, remember.

I think last season Robinson, Hanley and Cuello were all among the top five try scorers in the league - if I remember rightly, Hanley scored more tries than the total amassed by Bath (am I allowed to use that language in a family programme?) all season. With attacking options like that at their disposal they will continue to be a threat.

I’m confident, though. With any luck I can let my nails grow a bit this week.
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF IT SO FAR?

Well - we started with a win. A narrow, scrambling sort of affair, to be sure, but a win nevertheless. Perhaps the closeness of the result was, in part, our fault - the fault of you and me, the supporters.

Ever since the events of last May, culminating over that memorable Championship win at Twickenham, we have been piling trainloads of expectations on the players and the management, fondly imagining that we were going to cruise past all opposition in this coming season. The two Newport matches only compounded that illusion, and the level of hopes and aspirations reached high-temperature fever pitch.

Just imagine the pressure this has applied to the players. They have a hard enough job as it is, and to carry that sort of load on to the field is another disadvantage they could well do without.

It must be equally hard for Nigel Melville. Great coach that he is, he has, as far as I know, never had to work in an area where the rugby team means so much; where the fortunes of the side has such a marked effect on the morale and feel-good atmosphere of the whole City. It must be quite a culture shock for him.

He can, however, point to several plus factors in last week’s win at the Stoop. To start with, it was an away match, and we all know how hard it has been, over the past few seasons, for us to cope with the stresses of being separated from Kingsholm. We can all think of several games which we could, and should, have won, but where the side seemed to freeze with victory in sight. We simply didn’t seem to believe we could win away from home.

Thankfully, we seem to have recovered from that syndrome now. A win against Harlequins on their own turf isn’t easy for anyone, and if you go there expecting, somewhere in your subconscious, to lose, then you might as well not bother turning up, because you’re doomed before you start. It wasn’t like that last Saturday. To come back from ten points down is praiseworthy at any time, but having done that, to see your lead cruelly snatched away from you with only three minutes left on the clock, is a hammer blow.

In previous seasons, the chances are that the side would have simply folded, and perhaps conceded another try before the end. This time round, however, the lads were not going to be denied, and came back at the Quins as if there were 10 "Raging Bulls" on the field rather than just one. It was a great effort, and one which may well have implications for the rest of the season.

Possibly starting today, it’s good to see the attractive Sale sides here. They’re a formidable outfit, but it’s worth remembering that they usurped our second spot in the table last season, having won precisely the same number of Premiership games as Gloucester did, while scoring less points and conceding more. What a difference a solitary draw makes!

And that’s one result I don’t expect to see today.
NEWS FROM DEEPEST CARDIFF

My eldest brother, David, rang me the other day to tell me that he is to become a grandfather for the first time. A match fostered by my opposite number and a gentleman of the same ilk.

The same group of Gloucester fans will be pleased, I daresay, when they read that he is to become a grandfather for the first time. A match fostered by my opposite number and a gentleman of the same ilk.

That same group of Gloucester fans will be pleased, I daresay, when they read that he is to become a grandfather for the first time. A match fostered by my opposite number and a gentleman of the same ilk.

POOR OLD PAUL

Spare a thought, today, for the Sheriff of Gloucester, Paul James. He's a deft and practising Sherfield, and never misses a game if it can possibly be avoided. Unfortunately, today it can't. Obviously, he has to attend Burton at Stone, which takes place today. However, he's done that before, and always managed to get along to Stone in time for kick-off. This year, however, The Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire, Henry Elwood, is to attend the game in order to receive Gloucester's traditional gift of a lamprei pie to Her Majesty to mark the Golden Jubilee.

Unfortunately, other engagements mean that Mr. Elwood can't attend until precisely 3:00 p.m., and all of people, the Sheriff, who according to protocol represents the monarch within the City, is it really has to be there? I'll bet Paul's spitting blood.

SIGHT TO BEHOLD

Some years ago, the closing ceremony at the Hong Kong Sevens featured a parade of referees, all wearing glasses and carrying white sticks. I was reminded of that occasion when I read a report which stated that the World Rugby Union had concluded a deal which provides sponsorship for their referees.

This seems highly appropriate, especially if it means that referees can be given a free eye test before they pick up their whistles. Or is someone taking the mickey?

FUNNY OLD WORLD

Last week I watched a cricket match on the telly and saw Gloucestershire lose a very important game against Essex. It took both sides over 70 overs to score 165 runs between them on a pitch fit only for suicides to be buried in. That same day I had noticed that Swindon Town FC had been congratulated by the police for the orderly way in which their losing home team were celebrated. Apparently, 50 policemen and 10 dogs had been in attendance, and "only" 29 people had been arrested.

Aren't you glad you're a rugby supporter!
CONTRIBUTOR

THE CONTRIBUTOR employed to emote over the footsteps worn into the Kingsholm grandstand will probably go out of business this season. Unless Philippe Saint-André vaulted up and down the steps a score or more times a half, then you could reasonably expect something to be wrong with the former French winger - like his legs had fallen off.

His match-time activities summed up the volatile, uncertain atmosphere at Kingsholm during Saint-André's far from stable reign. The revolving doors that catapulted more players in and out of the club than the cast of Neighbours: have been blocked off and a sense of stability has descended on Castle Grim - what's this: Gloucester using their brain?

Nigel Melville could not be further removed from what has gone before. The steps will be distinctly silent during most home matches at Kingsholm this season.

Summer at Gloucester has been remarkably free from transfer intrigue and confusion. This scribe has taken to writing about cricket to pass the time. Only three players - and the possible addition of pro Rodrigo Roncero - have arrived to blend in with what is already an exciting mix of potential.

Melville has ensured Gloucester have got on with their jobs. It has been a tight, focused group of players. Stability has arrived on and off the pitch. Melville will attempt to drag Gloucester towards a more rounded game - a game plan they are capable of executing against the best in Europe - a game plan that is not solely based on forward muscle. They need more and he knows it.

Methodically he will build a team equally dependent on the vitality of their forwards and the acuity of their backs. He has already shaken up the selection procedure - handing the inexperienced but vastly talented Marcel O'Callaghan a Premiership debut at Harlequins last weekend. That is the very stuff continue. Perform and you are in, fall and you are out.

Melville has also been careful to double the frames of expectation - to keep a lid on the bubbling crest of a title challenge. Performances will improve. Melville will hope, starting today against the vastly under-rated Sarries. But it will be tough - from now until May. It might be too early to say Gloucester will be Leicester's closest challenger for the title - Melville is too carry for that - but he has a squad capable of achieving almost anything they want to.

He can ask for no more than that. Whatever happens, it should be an exciting, but stable season at Kingsholm.
In order to ensure that the Gloucester players are prepared mentally and physically for the new Zurich Premiership Season the Club players and coaches have moved much of their training programme to new training facilities at Woodlawn Country Club in Brockworth.

The Country Club and Gloucester RFC have entered into an agreement that will allow the Cherry and Whites to use the secluded and picturesque training pitches at the Country Club and the fitness centre, conference and restaurant facilities at the complex as part of their training schedule.

The intention is that by using separate training facilities, the pitch at Kingsholm will remain in its current, pristine, condition throughout the season as well as provide the players and coaching staff the facilities they need to cater for all their training needs in one place.

"The first training session I attended at the Club was on a school playing field. Whilst this may have provided us with a pitch, we needed the other facilities that Woodlawn specifically can offer us. We decided a long time ago that to spare the Kingsholm pitch, we needed these type of facilities", said Nigel Melville.

Managing Director of Woodlawn Country Club, Peter Gilpin said, "We are naturally delighted to have attracted the top sports Club in the area to Woodlawn. Our sports, social and conference facilities are amongst the best in the County and I am confident that Gloucester Rugby Club will enjoy training at Woodlawn Country Club".