

Gloucester

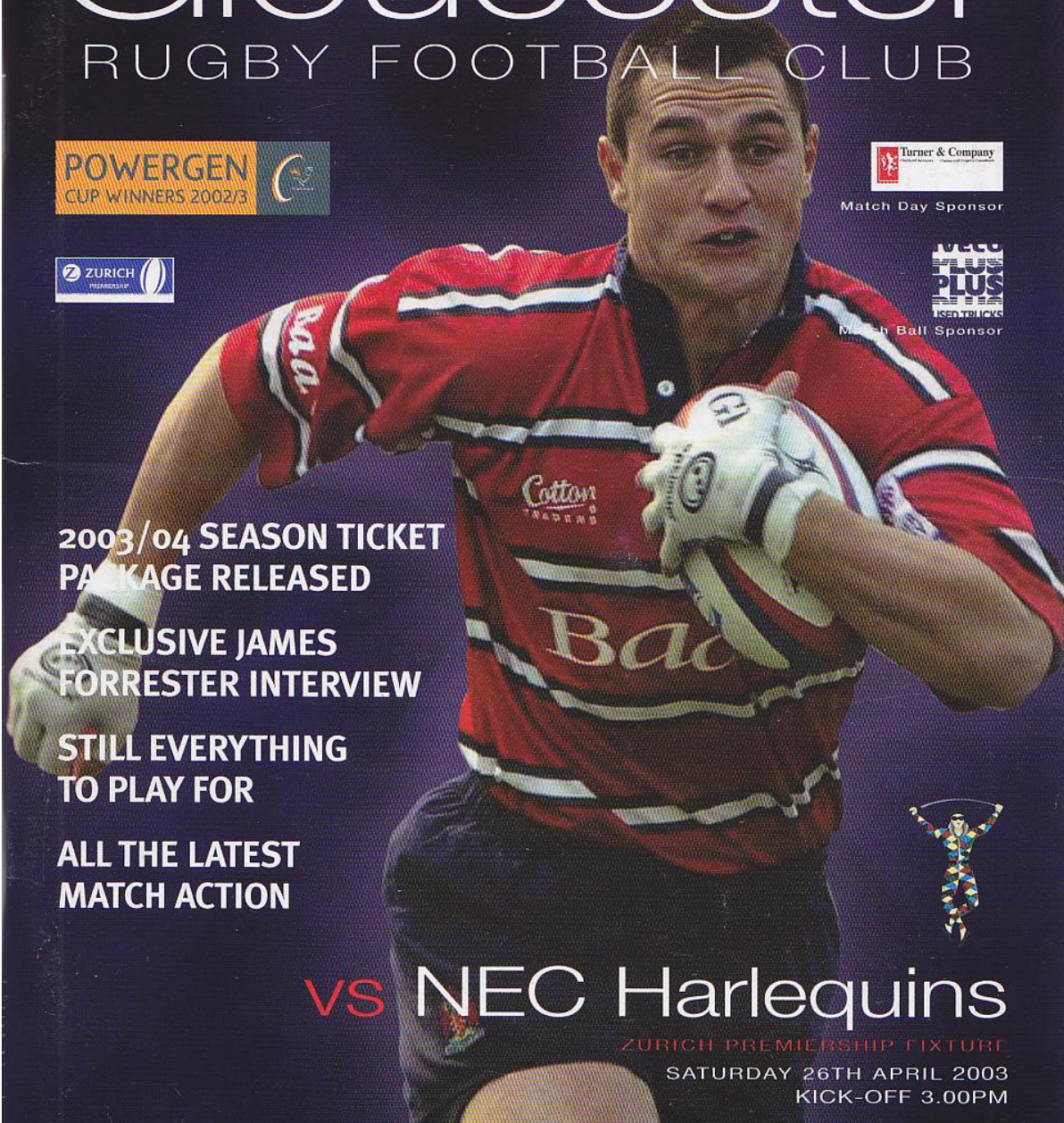
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EXCLUSIVE JAMES FORRESTER INTERVIEW

STILL EVERYTHING TO PLAY FOR

ALL THE LATEST MATCH ACTION



vs NEC Harlequins

ZURICH PREMIERSHIP FIXTURE
SATURDAY 26TH APRIL 2003
KICK-OFF 3.00PM

**ZURICH PREMIERSHIP FINAL
SAT 31st MAY**





WELCOME FROM...

Charlie Little

Marketing Manager

It gives me great pleasure to welcome NEC Harlequins to Kingsholm for this all-important Zurich Premiership Clash. Last weekend's draw at Heywood Road has guaranteed our place in the top three of the league and a 5-point haul today clinches our place at Twickenham for the Premiership Final on May 31st.

It certainly gets a little complicated as we approach the end of any season and both the top and bottom of the league require a little bit of mathematical scrutiny. I have been assured that a win with 4 tries will put us on 76 points. While The Sharks can tie on points, the deciding fact is that we will have 16 wins; an aggregate that Jim Mallinder's side cannot match.

"...a 5-point haul today clinches our place at Twickenham for the Premiership Final on May 31st."

Of course if the Sharks fail to win at Northampton today (4pm Sky Sports), a point could be enough to secure Gloucester the top of the table spot, however, I am sure that Nigel Melville's side will be more concerned with the win first and that will be no easy feat against this rejuvenated Harlequins side. A marvellous win against Leicester last Saturday has cleared the relegation nerves for Quins who now can look towards gaining a place in next years Heineken Cup. Such is the nature of the league that our winning of the Powergen Cup has meant that eighth position in the Zurich Premiership can now qualify for the Heineken Cup through the Zurich Wildcard –

it is all to play for this afternoon.

It was back in August 2002 that Gloucester travelled to The Stoop for the opening game of the current season. Tries from Trevor and Marcel gave us a 25 – 19 victory and it would have been the first opportunity for many to see the new team take to the field.

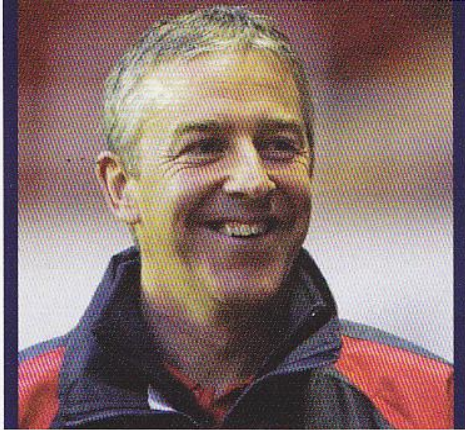
You may have read with great interest Nigel's piece in Wednesday's Guardian Newspaper that a large part of

"Arguably the greatest ever comeback took place a fortnight ago here at Kingsholm..."

our cup-winning side will be at Kingsholm when next season kicks off. This is good news for everyone and comes at a time when we are all beginning to look forward to September and to get everything in place.

While Nigel can now look to develop his team, I have worked hard with the Season Ticket Holders Association Committee to launch next season's Season Ticket Deal. You will see on page 29 the new prices and structure that your Committee put forward to the Board of Directors. It represents a small increase in price but when compared to last year and the new Match Day prices, there are greater savings to be made. For example, an adult membership next year works out at just £11 a game, saving you £6 every time on the match price. With capacity crowds now commonplace at Kingsholm, this package saves you money and is the only way to guarantee a place at the games next season.

Finally, back to today and what will be another enthralling game. Arguably the greatest ever comeback took place a fortnight ago here at Kingsholm and wonderful scenes of jubilation erupted from the stands. If today's match gives us half of the excitement that we had last time then we are in for a great afternoon. With Sale Sharks travelling to Northampton for a 4:00pm start, I hope that our performance and result today can guarantee our own Premiership destiny here at Kingsholm in front of another packed crowd. Enjoy the game. ■



NIGEL'S NOTES...

Nigel Melville

Director of Rugby

It gives me great pleasure to welcome the Harlequins players, management and supporters to Kingsholm for this afternoon's Zurich Premiership action. The last time we met in the Premiership was way back in August in the opening game of the season. It seems so long ago it is hard to believe it is the same season!

With only 3 games to go to the end of the Zurich Premiership programme the pace is 'hotting' up at both the top and bottom of the table. Last week Harlequins climbed away from any relegation fears with an excellent win over Leicester. The Stoop is fast becoming a bogey ground for Leicester – lets hope we can emulate them in our final home game of the season in three weeks time.

Last weekend, our game against Sale was, I understand, a cracking game to watch – if you were a neutral! For the second week running we had to pull off a great escape coming from behind to win important Premiership points. I have been very impressed with Sale this season, they play open exciting rugby and are always hard to beat at Heywood Road. The coaching team may not have been overly impressed with certain parts of our game, but the commitment and never say die attitude of the squad is to be commended.

One area we felt Sale definitely had an upper edge was general sharpness around the field. Rest is a key part to preparation at this time of year, having had an extra week off, Sale looked sharper and stronger. It was no surprise that Northampton lost in the final moments of their game at Newcastle last Sunday. They had just completed a week

including Toulouse away, Bristol at home and finally Newcastle away.

Everyone received a huge lift this week with the return to training of Phil Vickery. Having undergone surgery on his back and an intensive period of physio and rehabilitation, Phil is now back in full training with the squad and hopes to be playing in a Cherry and White shirt before the season is over, maybe our next home game at Kingsholm!

“Everyone received a huge lift this week with the return to training of Phil Vickery.”

This weekend, only Junior Paramore and Phil Vickery were unavailable for selection, after so many tough fixtures, this is a statistic that Wayne Diesel and his medical team should be proud of.

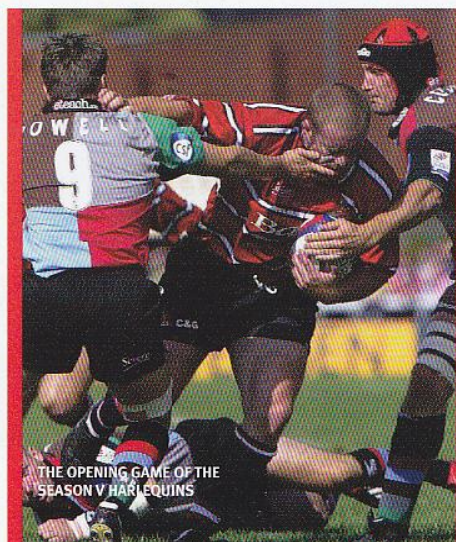
Finally, I would like to thank our supporters for their continued support, home and away, this season. So many people make so many sacrifices to watch us play.

At our last home game against Newcastle, we weren't playing well, we were losing by 20 points, put you got behind the team and lifted them to a stunning victory.

I was told that in the past the Gloucester supporters were only noisy when they were on top, and worse still they walked when their team was losing!

That is certainly not an accusation that can be levelled at today's Cherry and White supporters.

Have a great afternoon ! ■





CAPTAIN'S CORNER

Jake Boer
Match Captain

They say that Leagues and Championships are won by grinding out results when you are not playing well; I think that stands 100%. If you look at a few of the games we have played this season, we have played brilliantly and come away with wins and we have had other games where we have looked back afterwards and thought that we didn't deserve to win, but that is what a winning team is about.

Certainly we have something of a never-say-die attitude in this squad at the moment. Coming back with the final kick of the game is not an ideal situation to be in, but we can be positive when we look back on these games and be pleased that we got something out of them. Against Newcastle especially, we had to work very hard to get the result, against Sale it was questionable whether we deserved to win but they are second in the league and you have to be pleased when you come away from somewhere like that with some points.

The Sharks have a great record to uphold up there, it is a difficult place to go to so we were happy to come away with something.

Now we have to carry this momentum on, the season is coming to an end but we need to look long-term again. We owe much of this year's success to the work we did at the end of last season, now we have to build on this year and carry on through next season and for years to come.

Today we are at Kingsholm for the penultimate time this year and we are facing a very dangerous Quins' side. As they demonstrated last weekend, they have a habit of turning Leicester over, they are a side that

should never be underestimated. They have a lot of good players in their side and are fighting for pride as well as a place in the Wildcard competition. I am sure that, as players, they will feel a bit let down when they look back at some of their results this season, and will feel that they are a much better team than their league position suggests.

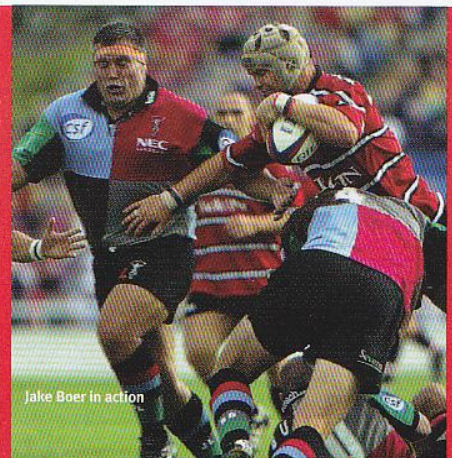
We know that the league can be sewn up today and that a five-point win will guarantee us top spot and a place in the Zurich Premiership Final. For me

“Certainly we have something of a never-say-die attitude in this squad at the moment.”

personally, a criticism I have to take on board is that, as Captain, I was really pushing the boys for a five-point win against Sale. I was putting a lot of pressure on them to go and get us the points we needed. In hindsight, that wasn't the way to approach the game. We need to try to win every game on its merit; if we do that then the bonus points will come.

Our focus this week will be on the performance; that is what matters. We want to play well, and if we perform that will win us the points. After the game we can see if we were good enough to get any bonus points.

Of course to finish it all off in front of our fans would be great. We have had great support this year again and it would be a great thing for us to give to the supporters. But we can't think too much about that today. If we win every game from now until the end of the season they will win the league, if we don't teams will catch us. ■





THE opening round of matches, which saw Harlequins tackle Gloucester at The Stoop seems a long time ago now, but one thing has stayed current - Gloucester's ability to come away with the spoils when seemingly down and out.

Heywood Road when despite playing well below par, two points were gained against all the odds.

Had it not been for the Jos Baxendell's unreliable kicking, Sale Sharks could have been home and

BY JON NEWCOMBE

RUGBY TIMES

The corresponding fixture between these two sides at the end of August saw Quins holding a 19-18 lead going into the latter stages with Gloucester looking anything but champions-elect. 14 points from the boot of Irish fly half Paul Burke looked like steering Quins to an unlikely victory until Cherry & Whites prop Trevor Woodman stole in for a late try to seal a 25-19 victory.

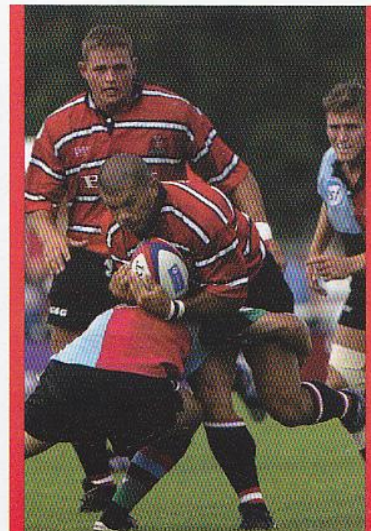
That win was significant in the fact that it conclusively consigned Gloucester's reputation as poor travellers to the bin at the very first attempt. Harlequins quickly took over that mantle and had the unwanted record of two years without an away win the Zurich Premiership until recording a victory at the Madejski Stadium against beleaguered London Irish. Following that breakthrough, Mark Evans side were mightily unlucky to lose away to Leeds after Dan Luger was sin-binned late on and are certainly not the pushovers on foreign turf they once were.

Gloucester again will have to show all the resolve they have called upon time and again this season to keep the momentum going heading into an inevitable Championship final appearance.

That they are in such a lofty position is tantamount to the fighting spirit, which the off-field problems may have helped engender in the Kingsholm dressing room. The grit displayed at The Stoop in that curtain raiser was again in evidence at

hosed and Gloucester will be mindful of Burke's prowess with the boot after his opening day contribution. Burke was again in fine goalkicking form against Leicester with his 12 points crucial to their first league success at home to Leicester for 11 years. Burke is in fact second only to Saracens' Nicky Little in the 'deadly boot' stakes with a 82.54 percent success ratio - compared to Ludovic Mercier's 71.17 percent.

With many of his strikes coming from long distance, Gloucester's discipline, or lack of it, could be crucial in deciding the outcome.



GLOUCESTER U21 27

V SALE JETS 12

Despite conceding an early try, the Gloucester U21's completed a comfortable win over the Sale Jets at Oxstalls on April 17th.

The score, at the beginning of the game, kick started the home side into action. After this initial set back the Gloucester team took control of the game scoring four tries of their own to earn a bonus point.

The game as a contest was effectively over at half time as Gloucester raced into a 24-05 lead. Sale did score-and convert- a consolation try before the final whistle to add respectability to the score line but the margin of victory reflected Gloucester's dominance of the game.

Full back Neil Hunter scored a brace of touchdowns and added three conversions after tries from fly half Brad Davies and lock Tom Skelding

This was the U21's first fixture for three weeks and after working out a little rustiness a good scrummage and forward work laid a solid platform form, which they built their effective game plan.

Academy Director Carl Douglas said he was pleased with the first half performance but added that the side had a lot to work on before their game, which is against quins today

Worcester U19 v Gloucester U19 Cup Semi Final Monday 28th April

After a convincing 22-0 win over Bedford in the Quarter Final's, the Gloucester U19's have drawn a tough Semi Final match against Midland's Rivals Worcester at Hartpury on Monday 28th April 600pm.

Two seasons ago a strong Gloucester U19 side, which contained 1st team regulars Marcel Garvey, Clive Stuart-Smith and James Forrester amongst their ranks won this National Cup competition

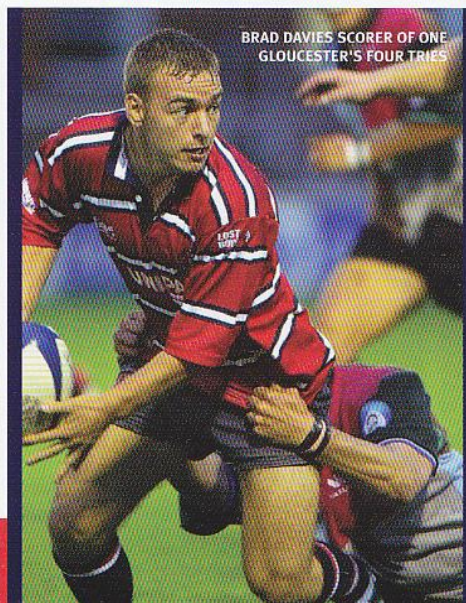
at the home of the Bedford Blues, beating West Country rivals Bath.

This season's crop of aspiring youngsters have a strong local influence with players from local school's Hartpury College, Saint Peters in Gloucester and Pates Grammas School, and Bournside in Cheltenham as well as local Club's such as Coney Hill.

This side has lost just once this season, and Academy director Carl Douglas is confident of his side's chances.

"We have a good squad of young players this season. The issue in the semi final is which team can function under that sort of pressure. If we handle it well then we will win", he said.

The winners will play London Irish, who have already booked their place in this season's National Knock Out Cup Final which will be played at Northampton's Franklins Garden's on Monday 5th May kick off 3.00pm.



What a weekend this promises to be. With Forest Green Rovers safe in the Conference for another season, Gloucestershire's other senior clubs could all have their fate decided today after a long season. Lydney's play off with New Brighton is a "winner takes all" game, while here, and at Whaddon Road, things are more complicated.

invention and ability that's very much on the cards. Quins come here having toppled Leicester at the Stoop, but their attitude may be the key. They look safe, but a relaxed team can either switch off and become disinterested or play in a carefree and sometimes dangerous fashion. Given Gloucester need to get a bonus point to eliminate Sale from



BY IAN RANDALL

BBC RADIO GLOUCESTERSHIRE

From a radio point of view, it's wonderful that there is so much still to play for.

While I was waiting to interview Nigel Melville at Sale, a supporter passed me and said it was "a disgrace" to have grounds like Heywood Road in the Premiership. I'm not sure I'd go that far but he has a point. It's the smallest and tightest venue in the League, and one that the team has clearly outgrown. Talks are going on with regard to a move to Stockport County next season, where the capacity is 11,000, albeit with a third of that in a stand at one end. Just 15 minutes down the road, Edgeley Park would seem far more able to cope with the demands of the Premiership, and more particularly the Heineken Cup, yet Sale don't need to move to comply with the current ground regulations. With promoted Rotherham now installed at Millmoor, Gloucester have the smallest number of seats of any Premiership club, something the club know they need to address.

On last weekend's evidence, Sale (and Quins, no doubt) will feel top spot in the table won't be decided today. The Sharks go to Northampton needing a win to stay in the picture, and with their

the equation, it might all go to Leeds next Sunday.

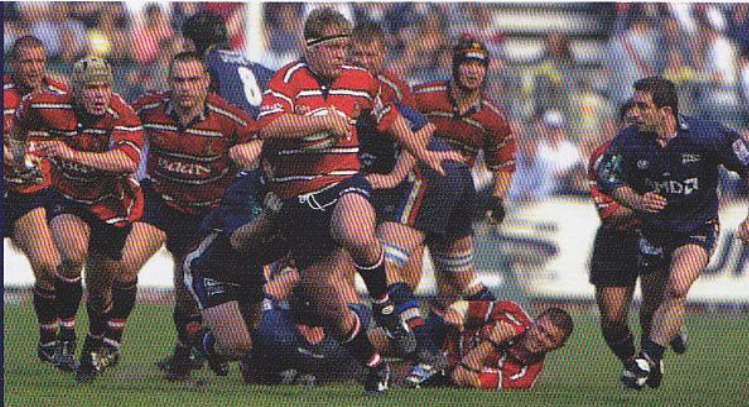
Gloucester rightly been grateful to Ludovic Mercier over the last fortnight for two kicks that have meant 3 points in the table, and the time is approaching where they club may have to quantify his value. If the proposed cuts have to be deep, then there may be one or two big sacrifices, and while on the field Mercier performs, off the field all is not sweetness and light between him and the club – and he's not the only player in that position. Collectively the playing staff has done well to push such matters to one side, once the season is over, the lid may come off, particularly as there are three weeks between Leicester's visit here and the last match at Twickenham. One has to admire Mercier's single mindedness at this time.

Mercier's points tally for the League season – 233 – is actually less per match than Lydney's Adam Westall, who, if they win their play off today, will have the full back to thank more than anyone. His 373 League points is more than half the Severnsiders' total, and in all matches he has passed a 30 year old club record held by John "Copper" Morris. Brought in from Newbury last

summer, he has been the regular goal kicker every side needs and it would be a major achievement for Lydney to again be among the top 40 clubs in the country. Trips to Doncaster, Sedgeley Park and Stourbridge would all be new, but having lost in the Cup at relegated Fylde, the gap they have to bridge shouldn't be

of to steal the match. A lot has happened in between, yet the season has gone very quickly, with just one more home match after today. Interestingly, Gloucester may be just as committed for that game as any other, even if top spot is secure, because it would be in their interests to keep the Tigers out of the play offs. For today

B B C



Peter Buxton charges forward against Sale Sharks.

underestimated. Good luck to them today.

It is a quirk of the fixture list that we haven't played Quins since a sunny day last August, when Gloucester unleashed Marcel Garvey into the Premiership, and Trevor Woodman produced a darting run many centres would have been proud

though, let's hope the patchy performances of the past 2 games can be improved on, and a crucial win secured. Who knows, Gloucester may be top dogs come 5 o'clock.

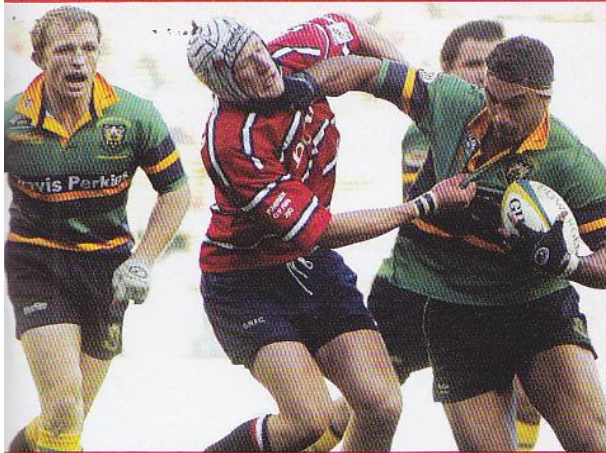
C'mon Glaws!

RADIO GLOUCESTERSHIRE

104.7 FM & 1413 AM

B B C

EXCLUSIVE LIVE COMMENTARY BOTH HOME AND AWAY



“Reading things in the paper three hours before kick off, does add pressure...”

GLOUCESTER'S FORRESTER FIRE

After an energy sapping training session in the Kingsholm heat, James Forrester has a long languid stretch and sets about the rather onerous task of answering probing questions from the nation's press.

Despite the niggling aches and pains and the monotony of some of the questions Forrester gives each writer the appropriate time and insight with his answers. To the untrained eye he looks bored and distinctly uninterested but that is simply not the case.

“I find it difficult to talk to anyone for an hour about myself”, says Forrester.

Despite his rise to prominence in the Gloucester squad and a full England cap within touching distance, James Forrester is essentially the same shy, retiring, gangly youngster who is living his dream of playing professional rugby.

He is also learning to live in the public eye. Hat-tricks against the Bristol Shoguns, his second in successive seasons, followed by a brace for England A in the demolition of Scotland A at Franklins Gardens and continued form at the back of the Gloucester scrum have catapulted the young Forrester into the forefront of the rugby nations minds.

Cut back to the week before the Powergen Cup Final, Gloucester's biggest game in twenty years, a press gathering is called at Kingsholm. Amidst all the hype surrounding

Gloucester's first Cup Final visit since the humiliation against Bath 12 years previously is Forrester sat with a bottle of water amongst a pack of hungry rugby writers.

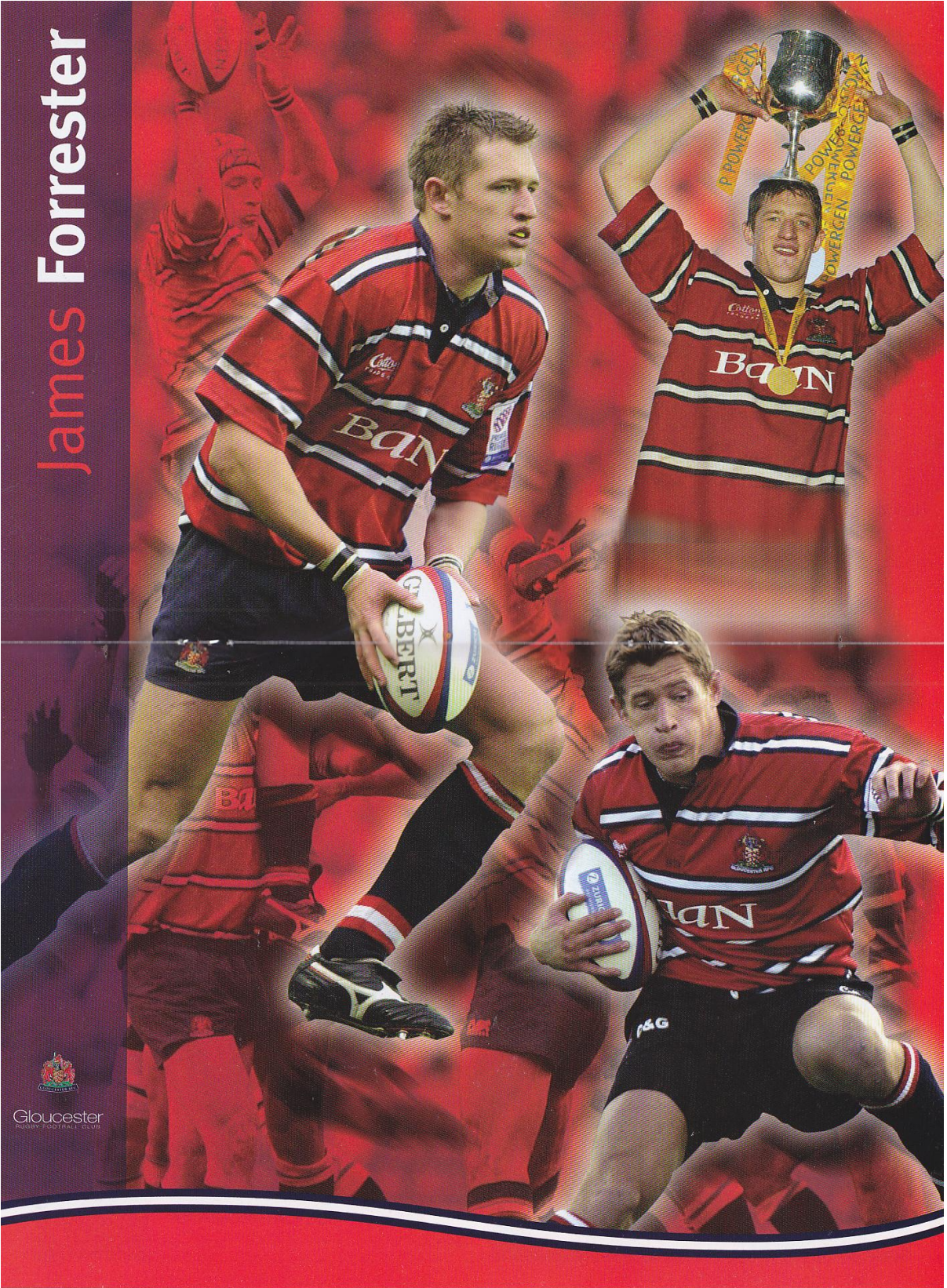
They had identified their quarry, the interview that would sell Saturday's Sports-lead edition and tantalise the rugby spectators. Not Henry Paul, James Simpson-Daniel or Andy Gomarsall, but rather a twenty-two year old in only his second season of full time rugby.

“There is always going to be interest around young English players, young guys that are playing in the Premiership are always going to be hyped up and it is a bit of a surprise and a bit daunting”, said Forrester with characteristic lethargy.

“Reading things in the paper three hours before kick off, does add pressure, because you think ‘I had better go out and put in a performance’, but it is a compliment and its all very nice as well”, he adds.

Forrester's performance against Northampton in the Powergen Cup Final was like manna from heaven for the heavy weight's in the English press, who had previously identified him as the Gloucester game breaker. He showed flashes of sheer brilliance and an audacious sense of occasion as at first he threw an outrageous dummy to set Marcel Garvey on his way to the try line and then within just moments of the restart, with Gloucester needing an immediate impact, he stole a march on the Saints defence to sprint in at the corner. ▶▶

James Forrester




Gloucester
RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

PLAYER PROFILE

Big games are made for big players and as James Forrester turned to acknowledge the applause the crowd new they had witnessed something great.

"I try not to get phased by big games. They are great occasions and should be enjoyed. All the people watching and all the extra pressure just makes you want to play better", says Forrester who seems to take most things in his impressive stride.

"It was a game I was desperate to win for the team. I wasn't interested in personal glory. I spoke to Jake just before kick off and we agreed that loosing was not an option. I couldn't have imagined walking off that pitch having lost".

"In the system we play myself, Simbad, (Simpson-Daniel) and Marcel (Garvey) get a lot of chances on the ball. I have really enjoyed this season and have had quite a lot of opportunities. We scored the tries in the Cup Final, which was nice for us, but Cup Final's are team games- you do anything for the team to win, you can't really think about yourself".

Forrester's shyness is equalled by his modesty; he still firmly believes that without injuries to key personnel in Gloucester's back row, he would still be fighting for a place in the squad rather than being one of the first names on the team list.

"It's not difficult to keep your feet on the ground with this squad. I don't know if I am going to start this weekend. We have such a good squad of back row players that if you have even half a bad game your position can be threatened, which is a good thing".

"It's what can give you the edge. Look at Manchester United, they have competition in every position and they can field two international teams. That is what it is all about. Our back row has been quite successful, but it hasn't been the same week in, week out. You need good strength in depth in the back row and that gives us an edge".

Another thing that sets Forrester apart from his peers is his ability to do the unexpected. He plays with the naivety and vigour of youth-always looking for space no matter where it is-rather than look to smash his young frame through gaps that are not there.

Coaches Melville and Ryan have experimented with him in all three back row positions and admit that they still do not know what he is capable of, or how to use it best. The underlying theme when handling this great prospect though it seems is not to cage or pigeon hole him or apply any external constraints.

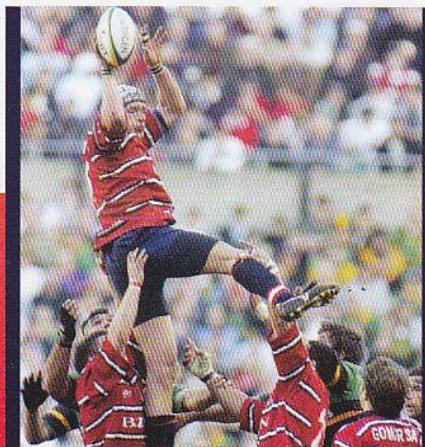
"We don't talk too much about my running game, Dean tells me to concentrate on my basics and the rest will come-if I get a chance I have to take it", says Forrester.

With the prospect of another Twickenham Final for Gloucester at the end of May, the chance to be part of a England touring squad of developing players that will travel to America and Canada to play the inaugural Churchill Cup in the Summer and then the greatest rugby prize of all; Rugby's World Cup in the Autumn Even with his unruffled nature the free spirited James Forrester is visibly excited.

For those that know him however, his thoughts on these new challenges will not come as a shock.

"First of all, I'm not expecting anything. I appreciate I have to play well for Gloucester to have the chance of anything else. But if I am going to aim then I'm going to aim high-for the full squad. You have to. If I play really well then I might have a slight chance so that means giving 100% for Gloucester until the end of the season".

Today Quins need to be wary James doesnt start his own Forrester fire... ■



"I try not to get phased by big games. They are great occasions and should be enjoyed."



KINGSHOLM SATURDAY 12 APRIL 2003



GLOUCESTER 25

TRIES: HAZELL, WOODMAN, DELPORT

CONVERSIONS: MERCIER (2) PENALTIES: MERCIER (2)



NEWCASTLE 23

TRIES: SHAW, MAYERHOFER, GRINDAL

CONVERSIONS: WILKINSON PENALTIES: WILKINSON (2)

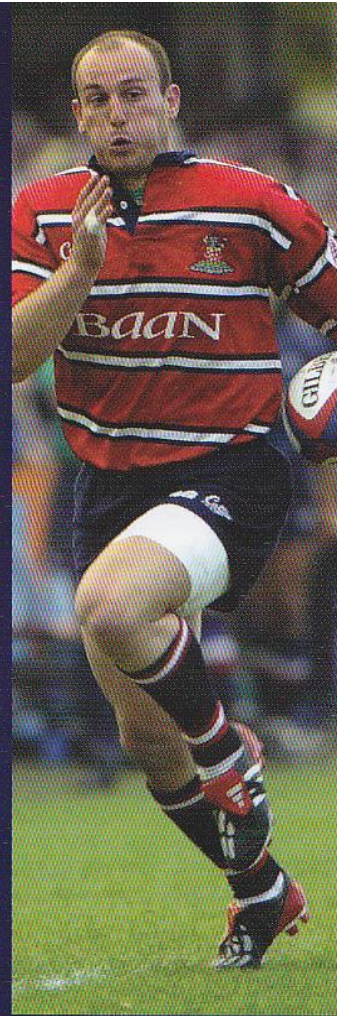


(Top Left) Adam Eustace holds back Newcastle's Stuart Grimes in the fight.

(Top Right) Thinus Delport on the charge down the wing in the first half.

(Bottom Left) Andy Gomarsall is tackled from behind by Newcastle's James Grindal.

(Bottom Right) James Simpson-Daniel is tackled by Newcastle's James Grindal.



HEYWOOD ROAD FRIDAY 18 APRIL 2003



SALE SHARKS 30

TRIES: ANGLESEA, HANLEY, ROBINSON, CUETO

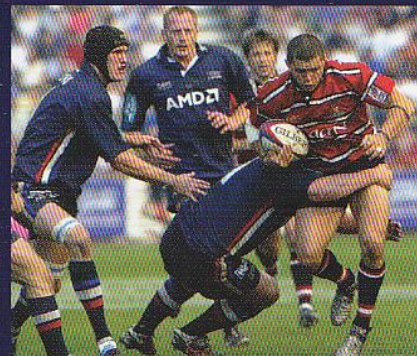
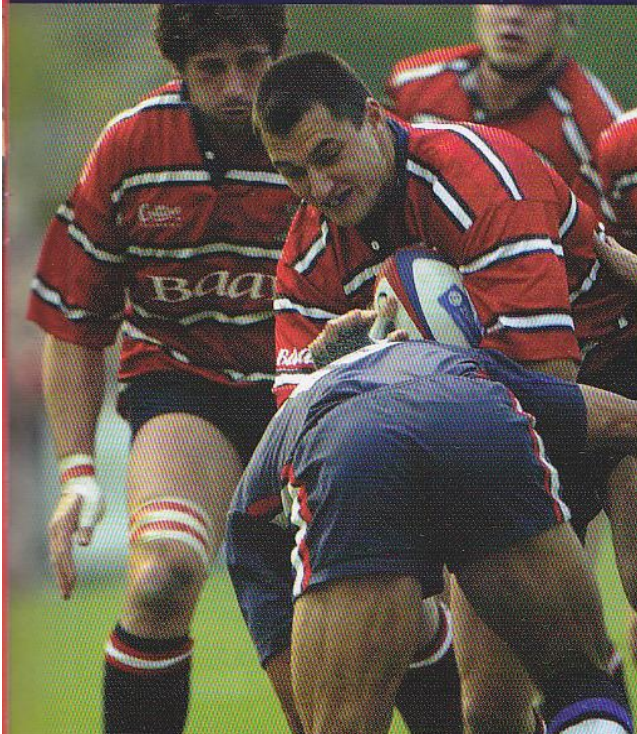
CONVERSIONS: BAXENDELL (2) PENALTIES: BAXENDELL (2)



GLOUCESTER 30

TRIES: MERCIER, FANOLUA, BOER,

CONVERSIONS: MERCIER (2) PENALTIES: MERCIER (3), PAUL



(Top Left) Sales Vaughan Going is unable to stop Terry Fanolua crossing for this second half try.

(Top Right) Ludovic Mercier runs in his first half try.

(Bottom Left) Thinus Delport is stopped by Sale's Jason Robinson.

(Bottom Right) Henry Paul is tackled by Sale's Steve Hanley.

Pictures courtesy of Bruce Seabrook - GPA

Fans Eye View

With Bob Fenton

When you go to schools what teach you writing like what I can do, they always tell you: 'Never start a story with a question', the reason being that without some sort of preface the question has no relevance. That explained, let's break the rule: "Do our national sports writers have something against Gloucester?" Discuss.

Up until recently I have always veered towards the 'no they don't camp' on the basis that up until a few seasons ago we really weren't worth writing about. This might come as a bit of a surprise to some people, but up until then we had been scrapping around at the wrong end of the table and the only interesting stories to be had were the very open feuds that were rife in the camp.

However while that has changed, our writers seem intent on focusing on the supposed negative aspects that surround this club.

Just look at the post-cup final coverage. Almost to a man the national newspapers paid little attention to the game and instead lead on more rumours of our impending financial demise. These people had just watched one of the most absorbing cup finals to be played at Twickenham in years, yet where was the praise for a great victory? Buried below acres of rehashed speculation about break ups, departures and unpaid wages.

Thanks guys, very interesting - Not. I'm sure there is an old adage somewhere about not letting facts get in the way of a good story...

I bet over in the ranks of the press benches today, some of the same writers will be sitting their, shaking their heads as they read this thinking '... another poor sap with a chip on his shoulder...'. Yeah, maybe I am.

But answer me this - if the result had gone the other way, would the first half a dozen paragraphs of the match reports have gone on about Northampton's finances and

the fact that they are one of the two clubs in the Premiership expected to declare a profit this season? No, thought not...

And after the defeat of Newcastle a couple of week's back, where were the reports in Monday's papers? Half of them didn't even mention it. Can you ever imagine a situation where the leaders of the soccer Premiership were not covered in Monday's papers - not a chance.

I know rugby union does not get the same level of coverage as the round ball game, but I bet you a fiver to a bag of peanuts that were it a Leicester or a Bath topping the table who had dug deep to get that victory it would have been a different story. There would have been acres of newsprint heralding great team spirit, fantastic victory etc etc...

Fortunately we always have Alistair Downey and his slavish devotion to the cause to rely on for the truth down here. Not only do we all know where he lives if he steps too far out of line, have you seen the way the Vickster menaces him every time they meet!

I'll get off me soapbox now, shall I?

Actually before we leave the world of the media for far more pleasant surrounds, am I the only person to be taken in by a programme on the Discovery Channel of late. Surfing through the several hundred channels of dross the other evening I noticed back to back programmes called "Shedheads".

Intrigued as to whether this was a fly on the wall documentary on the various forms of life that inhabit a small corner of Gloucestershire I flicked it on, only to find that it was a programme about two guys and - surprise, surprise - sheds! Surely we can sue them for something - I'll be speaking to m'learned friend in the crowd later today to discuss what we could do...

Jake Boer



Anyway, onto more pleasant things. A couple of weeks ago at the meeting of the season ticket holders association we were told that details of the 2003/4 season ticket package would be announced - no doubt there are details elsewhere in this programme.

I don't know if it is too late to make changes to the deal now, but in the light of the last gasp win against Newcastle and the skin of the teeth draw up at Sale, can I suggest a minor change. Each season ticket should come with a personal heart rate monitor and a doctor's script for a season's supply of Valium, or failing that some discount vouchers for the bar to be used in the case of an emergency.

Maybe some false fingernails could be thrown in for good measure - in the last couple of matches I have been down to my knuckles by half time!

And talking of the season ticket holders association meeting, there was a timely reminder to vote for your player of the season. Far be it for me to try to influence the voting, but I am led to believe that all you need to do is write Jake Boer (not Dave Bower - sorry DJ Andy, couldn't resist it) on voucher number 17 and stuff it in a box somewhere. The player of the season (said J. Boer) then collects his award.

Of course last season Jake won the Shedhead player of the season award too, and for the first time bucked the curse that went with it. In previous years we anointed Tony Windo, Terry Fanolua, Steve Ojomo, Ian Jones and

Chris Catling - all of who had seasons they would rather forget immediately after getting their hands on the trophy.

On this basis I understand that a good number of people have returned their slips with the name 'Martin Johnson' written on it!

Finally, and as we are talking about awards, isn't it about time that the various trophies won by the club over the seasons had a bit of a more prominent display in the clubhouse?

After the Newcastle game a number of visiting supporters were surprised that they could not see either the PowerGen cup, or the Premiership trophy from last season on display anywhere. Fortunately we were able to point out the two, rather tarnished, C+G Trophies stuck up on either end of the bar, and told them that the Worthington Ten's Shield was on the wall in the Members Bar.

That's not really good enough though, and the visiting supporters have a point. As we enter what we all hope is a prolonged period of world domination we should have a decent trophy cabinet because, let's face it, most of us have waited a very long time to see some serious silverware to come to Castle Grim. It would be nice to be able gaze at it from time to time...

Come on Ken, I'm sure there is a chippy in the crowd who will knock one up for you for a discount thrown in for good measure...

Harlequins arrive at Kingsholm this afternoon buoyed by their win over Leicester Tigers last weekend, their first Premiership victory over the Tigers since 1997, and their first at the Stoop since 1992. Irish international fly-half Paul Burke securing the win with twelve points from the boot in the second half, including an angled forty plus metre kick after 79 minutes that denied Leicester the comfort of a bonus point.

"That had class written all over it," said England's test centurion Jason Leonard, now 34, but playing some of the best rugby of his long and illustrious career.

Quins also suffered defeat in Paris, but the result was a lot closer and has whetted the appetite of the players for more games against the bigger clubs in Ireland and France. Domestically Quins have had a torrid time in the Premiership during the last five seasons. Only twice ending up outside the bottom three mainly on the strength of not winning away from home often enough. Indeed it was only last month that Quins finally ended a near two year wait to the day for an away win in the league, when they beat London Irish at the Madejski Stadium, despite a number of good results on the road in the cup. Having lost in stoppage time by the narrowest of margins

QUINS LOOKING FORWARD TO PLAYING THE WILDCARD AT KINGSHOLM

BY JULIAN EASTERBROOK
HOUNSLOW CHRONICLE

"It was quite an emotional changing room after the game last week," continued Leonard, "but there are still games to play, and some very hard games at that."

Leonard has been a frequent visitor to Kingsholm since joining Quins after winning his first England cap against Argentina in the summer of 1990, and knows what it takes to win at the Gloucester fortress, and is relishing the opportunity to test himself in front of the Shed.

"Gloucester are one of those teams, which you can measure yourself against and see where you are as a player and as a team," said Leonard.

"We won't be kidding ourselves about the task in hand at Kingsholm. They are top of the division and they are there for a reason, and they are playing some great irresistible rugby. They have big forwards, powerful running backs and they've very rarely played badly this season, and they don't give up. "We are still striving to achieve that but if you go down there with a view that you are going to get beaten or worry about that then you are going to get a pounding".

"We've got a healthy respect for Gloucester but if we go down there and get hammered, that will sour the taste of a good win today."

After spending the best part of the last four season's fighting against relegation, Quins come to Kingsholm searching for points to ensure their participation in the wildcard play-off, a new competition that could see Quins play in the Heineken Cup next season.

This season their involvement in Europe focussed on the Parker Pen Challenge Cup, a competition that they won in 2001 by beating Narbonne when it was called the European Shield, but their involvement ended with defeat against former Heineken Cup finalists Stade Francais, a side who managed to prevent them scoring at home for the first time in over 22 years.

at Headingley in their last away test, Quins come to with both sides having something to play for, at both ends of the table. "Given the season that we've had, we've had to battle and it is tremendous that we have got something to go for," said Quins head coach and Chief Executive Mark Evans after last week's nail biter against Leicester.

"I'd be very surprised now if we don't come seventh or eighth. We've had to battle through some difficult times and to a degree we've battled through and got something to have a pop at. But we've got to go to Kingsholm next week, before hosting Northampton here and then travel to Wasps in our final league game".

"We've got it tough and I said to the players before the game maybe this set of four games will tell us, that although we are not at full strength we've not got so many injuries so that it's just a real battle, maybe we've got an opportunity to see what we really are like as a team and as a group of people".

"We've got a very tough run-in and hopefully at least two play-off games, maybe three depending on who you are going to get and it will give us something to have a poke at for the rest of the year".

"The season doesn't die for us now. If there was nothing else now and we were safe, we'll have three dead games, and I don't think that's good for any side".

"That's the strength of English rugby. The league is so competitive and all the sides are playing for something, be it to avoid relegation, to get into the wildcard or get into the top four now, because the top four will go through to the Heineken Cup".

"The top three have a championship to play for, and it keeps the whole thing alive."

Peter Arnold

KNIFE EDGE

Whoever it was who wrote that life imitates art, instead of the other way round, would have been slightly chuffed by the 30-30 draw up at Heywood Road on Good Friday. Hollywood couldn't have provided a better scenario.

Think about it. The two top sides going head to head (I had almost written 'toe to toe', but that would have given the wrong impression), at a crucial point in the season, in front of a packed house on a lovely spring day. A game, which if not a classic for the purists was pulsating throughout, culminating in a knife-edge finish. And if you wanted pure high drama, then you couldn't better Ludovic Mercier's heartbreakingly close attempt at a gargantuan drop-goal with the very last kick of the match and the scores level.

Remember, this was an encounter between two class sides who have been rivalling each other for top honours ever since the beginning of last season, on a ground where the results have been close throughout that time. If the Great Scriptwriter in the Sky knows his business, and on last week's evidence, he surely does, then the two sides will face each other again at Twickenham in a winner-take-all confrontation at the end of the season.

We'd all like to see that one, and we have today's welcome visitors to thank for the fact that the game has become more likely since last Saturday when

they beat Leicester, the first time Quins have had the better of the Tigers at the Stoop since 1989, I'm told.

That result has, one feels, put Leicester out of the reckoning, although the mathematics probably still gives them a chance of being in at the death. It does look like a showdown between Gloucester, Sale and Wasps - but it's worth noting that the London side still has to visit Heywood Road.

What are the chances of a draw in that one, too? Life imitating art, again?

NOT JUST WHILE THE SUN SHINES

I do have to congratulate our local newspaper, The Citizen, for their coverage of the triumphal progress of the Powergen Cup around the city on April 14th. The imaginative use of a wraparound cover enabled them to print a spectacular panoramic view of the crowds greeting the bus as it arrived at The Cross, but many of the pictures on view were simply stunning.

I particularly liked the shots of the players sitting at long tables in the New Inn courtyard, busily signing autographs. The late Michael Green, author of the revered 'The Art of Coarse Rugby', would undoubtedly have commented that here, at last, was proof that even prop forwards can write.

I know what that feels like, actually,

having once signed 400 autographs at a sitting, and I do know what it can do to your wrist. I just hope that no one's ball handling skills were affected by the experience.

The players were, I gather, slightly gobsmacked by the reception they got as they tooted around town. They shouldn't have been. They deserved it, after all.

Of course, it's easy to give unstinting support to a winning team, but it's worth pointing out that, in Gloucester, the side doesn't have to be on a roll to receive our backing. Fair weather fans we're not. Over the years we have been branded as 'partisan', 'one-eyed' and even 'biased', which are really just other ways of pointing out that we are better supporters than most sides can claim. Perhaps things have got a bit extreme lately, and there is, no doubt, a stratum of bandwagon jumpers among the cheering crowds. However, most of us will do our best to lift the lads whatever the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, as Hamlet remarked. Just as we have always done since the days when Gloucester played on the Spa.

One nice story I came across. A winsome young lady told Andy Deacon, as the procession set off from Kingsholm, "I waved to you at Twickenham, Andy!"

"Oh yes! I remember" replied Deacs. "You were standing next to the bloke in the red shirt!"



Sales Bryan Redpath holds off Terry Fanolua

Well, it was a fair guess, wasn't it? Though I do have to tell Andy that he's been dumped. The young lady concerned has now developed a yen for James Simpson Daniel.

IDIOTS

Talking about writing, I read that Henry Paul has been receiving hate mail. Surprising, really. If the idiots concerned know as little about the English language as they obviously do about rugby, I'm surprised they can string two words together.

?????????

My brain hurts. It was a mistake to start thinking about next season while there is so much good red meat left in this one, and I wish I hadn't now because I am more confused than I was when I started.

The speculation was caused by the

announcement that the Powers That Be have decreed that only one overseas player will be allowed on the pitch at a time during Premiership games next season. But what constitutes an 'overseas player'? Surely there must be some sort of residential qualification involved, otherwise the likes of Terry Fanolua, Jake Boer and Robert Todd would be very hard done by indeed.

One also assumes that EU employment laws will still apply, so French players will not be affected. And I don't have to tell you what a quagmire the qualification rules have always been in the past.

But wait. The one-player rule, it is stated, will not come into force until after the World Cup, which was going to complicate the whole thing anyway.

Overriding all this, of course, is the continuing financial uncertainty which appears to be affecting just about every club in the Premiership. If you think we've got problems, be glad you're not a Bristol supporter.

The wage cap won't help, either. I'm told that French clubs are likely to be able to pay their squads as much as four times that of their English counterparts, which doesn't bode well for the future of the English domestic game.

It's all a severe puzzlement. I don't know which club Stephen Hawking supports, but it takes a mathematician of his standing to work out the various permutations and combinations.

At this point, perhaps the best thing to do is, as Confucius advised, lay back and enjoy it

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED

I haven't checked, but I'm told that James Simpson Daniel hasn't yet scored a try in the Premiership this season. If that's so, then someone is going to have to suffer for it before too long. Harlequins - you have been warned.

Alastair Downey

The Citizen

Solid Gloucester Need To Regain Their Edge

ROB ANDREW must love coming to Kingsholm. Not only is he always guaranteed an exceptionally 'warm' welcome but his team hardly ever win at Castle Grim. A fortnight ago today the team at the foot of the



Newcastle Falcons coach Rob Andrew

Premiership played like princes for an hour, established a 20-point lead and still managed to lose the game in the last minute following one of the most stunning recoveries in Gloucester's history.

It was an afternoon that made even the strongest of good old Gloucester hearts flutter, but what did we learn from the narrowest of escapes?

Firstly, it indicated Newcastle are the best side in the bottom half of the table but it was an afternoon that revealed more about Gloucester.

There is a desire and a collective will not to be beaten that is the enduring feature of the side. They no longer shrivel up and die at the first hint of trouble.

It takes time to learn that precious stubbornness and undoubtedly the lessons gleaned in the Munster cauldron at the start of the year have provided the biggest insight into their own capabilities.

Only special teams have the ability to rack up 20-odd points at the rate of one a minute but their inability to perform at Sale last Friday continued a slight downturn in form.

"It has been disappointing because we have not been playing very well," said forwards coach Dean Ryan.

"But there is a huge amount of expectation on us. It is very unrealistic to think we can simply turn up at Sale and smash them in their own backyard.

"Sport is about an edge - no matter how you achieve it - and we certainly need to find ours again.

"But to come back like we did shows great character and perseverance that is very encouraging."

There will be no better opportunity than today for Gloucester to rediscover the edge Ryan is after.

A bonus point victory against the highly gifted but inconsistent Harlequins will ensure they will finish top. But they will fancy their chances of exploiting the fissures in the Kingsholm machine, particularly their current problems in the lineout and their vulnerability after first phase possession.

"They are a good side," said Ryan. "They have a very good kicker, their line-out is competitive, Will Greenwood gives them real class in the backs and Dan Luger is a high class finisher."

But the motivation for Gloucester is clear. Five points would ensure they would finish the regular season as champions in name if not title for the first time.

Whatever the merits of the grand final play-off decider, nobody could deny Gloucester deserved their status as the top-placed team.

They have won more games and have earned more points than any other team. And in among those victories is a iron-streak of will that means this team does not lose.

They have come close before but it has not happened yet at Kingsholm.

It would not be a day to start now. ■



An Evening With the Southern Hemisphere Boys...

BY GEMMA TOCKNELL

In the shadow of the Powergen Cup, a packed Kingsholm enjoyed an evening with Powergen Cup Captain Jake Boer, and the Shed's adopted Samoan sons Terry Fanolua and Junior Paramore.

They fielded questions from the Season Ticket Holders on topics ranging from the preparation for their game on Good Friday to what the players will do when they retire.

It was an evening enjoyed by all. Terry Fanolua began with a witty tale about a well-known scrum-half-come-referee named Matt Dawson in the 97 World Cup Sevens in Hong Kong. During a statutory drug test after a game, Tezza asked Dawson and Northampton and England team mate Nick Beal what Gloucester was like, only to be met with laughter from Nick Beal and Dawson's response was less than flattering 'You don't want to go there, they are a bit strange'. In hindsight Terry is enjoying some sweet revenge!

The 'What brought you to Gloucester?' question arose from the floor. The overall consensus was that the supporters played a huge role for each player. Said Jake, "The supporters here are so passionate and even when playing away from home we feel at home".

As expected, the Powergen Cup Final, which each player described as tremendous, was a hot topic of conversation. The players described Twickenham as 'A sea of cherry and white', and suggested, "it was like playing a game of spot the Northampton shirt". "It was amazing to see all that support, it will be a memory kept with me forever," added Terry. Junior added his agreement with his famous huge smile.

Terry admitted that when, in 1996, he was asked by John Hall what he knew of 'The Shed', he replied that he thought it was the tool shop at the bottom of the garden, or "something on a farm." Looking back the great Samoan admitted that he couldn't believe how wrong he was when he played his first game against Bristol 6 years ago. He now says he is hooked and loves playing in front of 'The Shed' and the No 1 support in the country, regardless of Leicester, who don't come close.

Later, Terry and Junior were asked to describe Jake as a

Captain and Jake to describe how he sees the captaincy himself. Jake replied that initially, the pressure of leadership and decision making was difficult but he believes he has been fortunate and thinks this is an important learning curve in his career, he added that he had a simple philosophy that "A Captain has to give a 100% per game". Both Terry and Junior agreed that Jake is a fantastic captain and has taken the role well from the injured Vickery and admitted that every squad player has loads of respect for him. Junior added that it is a great honour to play a game with Jake as Captain.

Although it was accepted that the players are still in their prime they were all asked 'What they will do when they retire?' When a roar of laughter came from the floor about the flying fullback Thinus Delpont and a helicopter license. Terry was asked if he would go for a ride and with his sides splitting replied 'are you crazy!' Tezza just laughed at the question and said he hasn't thought that far ahead as he has a few years in him yet! Junior said he would still like to be involved in rugby and would love to go into coaching and would love to achieve this in England if not right here in Gloucester, as his family are happy and settled here! And Terry added that Gloucester and Kingsholm was like their second home. We all know that Jake's second job is as an electrician, but he would love to go into travel and tourism, after Terry joked about him setting his house on fire!!

The final question of the evening focused on the supporters of the Club. The players were asked what they thought of the City Tour (especially on a bus from BATH!). Three words summed their feelings up 'unbelievable, amazing and shocked.' They were proud of what they had achieved and mesmerized by the amount of supporters that turned out to see them, and Jake, Junior and Terry all agreed that the memory of the game and all the support will stick with them forever. Jake admitted 'we play for you guys.' And Junior added 'We just could not believe it, it was an emotional moment. Fantastic, passionate support!'

Don't forget to vote for your player of the season. Use voucher number 17 of your season ticket book, write the name of the player on the back and post it in one of the boxes around the ground!

STILL EVERYTHING TO PLAY FOR



For the first time ever, the Champion Club of England will be determined at Twickenham, not at the end of the regular Zurich Premiership season. The Zurich Premiership runs for 22 rounds and finishes on Saturday 10 May. The Club that tops the Zurich Premiership table will automatically qualify for the Zurich Premiership Final and the second and third Clubs will play against each other for the other finalist position.

If Gloucester beat Quins today with a bonus point, the five points will guarantee them a top of the table finish and earn them a place in this season's Zurich Premiership Final at Twickenham on May 31st.

However, should the Sharks not win against Northampton (kick off 4pm Sky), then the Cherry and Whites only need one point, which would give them a points aggregate of 72. London Wasps can still match this aggregate but in this situation the top Club will be decided on games won. Gloucester currently have 15 victories whilst Wasps, with two games to play have 12.

Gloucester have already guaranteed themselves a top three finish, which means they will definitely be hosting Heineken Cup at Kingsholm next season but the higher ranking they receive in Europe the better the draw they will receive in the Pool stages.

As soon as top spot in the League is secured, and tickets for the Zurich Premiership Final have been received, they will be on sale from the Gloucester ticket office or on the Gloucester Ticketmaster Premiership Final hotline (number to be confirmed).

Tickets are priced at £30 and £24 for Adults and £15 and £12 for Juniors

Updates on tickets will be posted on the official Gloucester website.

The idea of a play off final is established in rugby union and rugby league around the world including the Super 12s and ensures an exciting and meaningful finish to the season. By finishing top of the table Gloucester will be rewarded not only with a bye into the final but with two weekends rest in preparation for the Twickenham Finale.

One player who is accustomed to this end of season format

is former Bradford Bull Henry Paul. While Henry's brother Robbie will take the field in Rugby League's Powergen Final this weekend, Henry has his eyes set on his own end of season Finale.

"It keeps the season alive for the top four or five clubs as they are all gunning to finish in the top three, hopefully that will bring in big crowds, who are all geeing their boys up to get them there", said Paul.

"I am used to it from Rugby League, it is tough if you lose it, but if that happens, then you weren't good enough on the day. Finals are all about being good on the day. You need to be good all season to get yourselves the rest before the Premiership Final and watch and assess the other two teams and then go into the final a bit fresher and perhaps a bit more streetwise".

"If you lose on the day; that's your fault, that's tough biccies".

I think it's a good idea; they perhaps could have included the top six to get to the Grand Final to get a bigger spectacle and get more teams hungry for it. I love the day, it's created a massive occasion the Super League at Old Trafford and I hope Rugby Union can do the same at Twickenham".

Meanwhile Nigel Melville is urging Gloucester fans to get behind the team and make sure the Cherry and Whites have another successful trip to rugby HQ, "It has always been our ambition to finish top of the table but we knew from the start of the season that from this year we needed to get to Twickenham and win at the Final to be crowned Champions. Those of you who travelled to Twickenham for the Powergen Cup Final or last year's Zurich Championship know what a great day out a final at Twickenham can be and with the whole Premiership title resting on this one game we will need as many of the cherry and white fans to be there and cheer us on as possible."





29 GLOUCESTER

Thinus Delpoit	15
Marcel Garvey	14
Terry Fanolua	13
Henry Paul <i>TP</i>	12
James Simpson-Daniel <i>T</i>	11
Ludovic Mercier <i>T3C</i>	10
Andy Gomarsall	09

Trevor Woodman	01
Olivier Azam	02
Andy Deacon	03
Adam Eustace	04
Mark Cornwell	05
Jake Boer (c) <i>T</i>	06
Andy Hazell	07
James Forrester	08

Clive Stuart-Smith	16
Simon Amor	17
Robert Todd	18
Chris Fortey	19
Rodrigo Roncero	20
Peter Buxton	21
Ed Pearce	22



NEC HARLEQUINS 11

Nathan Williams	
Dan Luger	
Will Greenwood	
Mel Deane	
Ben Gollings	
Paul Burke <i>2P</i>	
Billy Fulton	

Ceri Jones	
Tani Fuga <i>T</i>	
Jason Leonard	
Bill Davison	
Simon Miall	
Ace Tiatia	
Andre Vos (c)	
Tony Diprose	

Roy Winters	
Jon Dawson	
Karl Rudzki	
Luke Sherriff	
Scott Bemand	
Viliame Satala	
Rob Jewell	

ZURICH PREMIERSHIP 2002/03

TEAM	P	W	D	L	F	A	TB	LB	PTS
Gloucester	19	15	2	2	534	342	5	2	71
London Wasps	20	12	2	6	516	426	6	4	62
Sharks	19	12	2	5	511	393	8	1	61
Leeds Tykes	19	11	2	6	425	366	0	4	52
Leicester Tigers	19	11	0	8	398	328	4	2	50
Northampton Saints	19	10	0	9	426	334	4	5	49
NEC Harlequins	19	8	0	11	406	479	3	5	40
Newcastle Falcons	20	7	0	13	350	499	2	5	35
Saracens	19	6	0	13	426	526	4	4	32
Bath Rugby	20	6	2	12	341	448	1	3	32
London Irish	20	6	1	13	371	445	1	4	31
Bristol Shoguns	19	6	1	12	437	555	3	2	31



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Your chance to win a signed GRFC ball!
Today's lucky number will be announced at half time.

Gloucester
RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB



**GLOUCESTER'S
LAST TWO MATCHES**

LEEDS TYKES

Zurich Premiership
Sunday 4th May 2003
Headingley KO 2.30pm
Ticket Hotline: 0113 278 6181

LEICESTER TIGERS

Zurich Premiership
Saturday 10th May 2003
Kingsholm KO 3.00pm
SOLD OUT



**THIS WEEKEND'S
FIXTURES**

Saturday 26 February 2003
Leicester Tigers vs Leeds Tykes
Northampton Saints vs Sharks

Ref! Link

**TODAY'S MATCH
OFFICIALS**

Referee: Steve Lander RFU
1st TJ: Rob Debney RFU
2nd TJ: Huw Jones-Williams RFU

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