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THE GLOUCESTER RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

President: Canon H. M. Hughes BA.

v
BRISTOL

Friday, February 2nd 1990
Kick-Off 7.00pm

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TOUCH LINES

by
Peter Arnold

HOME AGAIN, HOME AGAIN . . .

It's now precisely a month since I sat down to compose my last set of Programme Notes — a melancholy circumstance brought about by the vagaries of the League fixture system, and an away draw in the Cup. It's nice, therefore, that Normal Service has been Resumed for the annual visit of our best of enemies from Bristol.

It would be true to say that a great many Gloucester supporters pay almost as much attention to the fortunes of our friends from down the A38 as they do to their own side. The chances are, therefore, that you'll be at least as conversant with Bristol's record this season as I am, and there isn't much point in writing a long screed on the subject.

It is worth pointing out, however, that Gloucester's 13-6 League win at Bristol, back in November, was one of our better results in a not undistinguished season. It also, in some measure, made up for that remarkable Great Escape act which Bristol conjured out of disaster last season, winning by a single point after a match totally dominated by Gloucester. Real black-armband stuff that was.

There aren't any League points at stake this evening, of course. But when have Gloucester and Bristol ever needed artificial stimuli to produce an enthralling, and even hair-raising, match?

You'd also want me to congratulate Bristol for their efficient demolition of Liverpool St. Helens in the Cup last week. If we can come back from the Far North with a win next Saturday, and Bath somehow scrape a win against Headingly, then Bristol's draw at home to Exeter should ensure that all three West Country sides go through to the Quarter Final, which is highly satisfactory.

Meanwhile, it's good to have the Bristol contingent with us again. It's unthinkable that we should have a season without this fixture, the result of which only a supreme optimist or an idiot would ever try to predict. No side is ever more welcome to Kingsholm, and we hope you'll have a highly enjoyable evening, on the field and off.

THANKS TO TELECOM

Almost as traditional as the Bristol game itself is

British Telecom's generous sponsorship of it. The reason is simple. BT's Severnside Region covers both cities, which is appropriate, but does mean that loyalties among the Sponsorship party will be divided.

From Telecom's point of view, a great deal has happened since they were here last. Expensive things at that. New digital exchanges, opening at Churchdown, Hardwicke and Cambridge, among many others, have cost millions of pounds, but they have meant that customers have access to a whole range of new services, including itemised billing, which must have come as a rude shock to many teenage daughters, for example, given to surreptitious hour-long chats with boy friends in Brisbane.

BT's new offices at Quedgeley have been officially opened too, an event with a tinge of sadness about it, because it was just about the last public engagement fulfilled by the late Sir Peter Scott.

We mustn't run away with the idea that Gloucester RFC are the only recipients of Telecom's generosity. Gloucester's marvellous King's Square Christmas Laser Lights Show was sponsored by BT, as was BBC Radio Gloucestershire's Schools Quiz. There were also donations to Beaufort School and the Gloucestershire Youth Brass Band.

All great stuff, but I can assure everyone from BT that none of those excellent causes generated more sincere gratitude that we feel here at Kingsholm. We all hope that all present have a memorable evening.

RING 0898 122 971

It's remarkably appropriate that British Telecom should be tonight's match sponsors, because it's also the night when our new telephone Clubline comes into operation. The idea is that you can get all the latest information about the doings of the Club, simply by ringing the above number. The system makes 1,000 lines available, so you shouldn't have any trouble getting through — although, come to think of it, knowing you lot, I ain't so sure.

We'll give you match reports, naturally, as soon after each game as possible, but there is far more to it than that. Team news, injuries, travel and ticket information, interviews — anything we think might

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DAVID I. ROBINS M.Inst.T.T.

interest you, in fact. The fixture list is there, and there's even a competition.

Having rung the above number, you'll be given a menu of possible choices. All you have to do is say "YES" at the right place, and you'll be given the information you want. You can then go back and listen to another section of the proffered menu, if you want to.

One valuable advantage will be that any cancellation, for weather reasons, for example, will be announced on the line as soon as the decision is made. This should eliminate that infuriating need to keep ringing because the club phones are bunged up.

It should all be a great new service for Kingsholm habitués (and sons of habitués), but will also be useful for exiles who like to follow the club, but can't often get along.

In fact, you should have been given a card with the number on when you arrived tonight. If you didn't, then someone will probably force one on you at some point in the evening. We've got 10,000 of them, so don't be afraid to ask for another one, if you want to send it to friends or relatives living away from Gloucester. In fact, if you'd like to take a fistful to distribute at your local watering hole, or wherever, you'll be doing the Club a favour.

Of course, we're beginners at this, so bear with us if there are any teething troubles. Shouldn't take long, however, before we can give you the best such service in the country.

And, incidentally, the voice you hear when you ring might, just possibly, be familiar . . .

WHEN IS GOSFORTH NOT GOSFORTH?

When it's the Gateshead International Stadium, so famous for all the memorable athletics action which has taken place there, over the years. Apparently, the All Blacks played there on their last England tour, and now Gloucester is to follow in their footsteps in next Saturday's Cup game against Gosforth.

Quite prestigious, of course, but there are also considerable practical advantages. For example, there won't be any tickets on sale at Kingsholm, simply because there isn't any need for them. There are 7,300 seats available. No one stands up. 4,000 of them will be on sale for £2.00, and 3,300 will cost £3.00 — and I can't help observing that the minimal stand at the Wasps game cost £5.00.

Travel seems simple too. The Stadium is just 10 minutes away from Newcastle Central Railway Station, using the city's ultra-modern Metro rail system.

The Stadium is obviously very used to major sporting events, so there is ample catering provision on the ground. Solid and liquid, I gather.

So, we're all set.

NOT SO EASY

Of course, Gosforth aren't the power in the land that they were in the days of Messrs. Uttley, Dixon, Madson etc. Nevertheless, there is no such thing as an easy Cup game, and Gloucester have often struggled against so-called inferior opposition in such circumstances. Remember Southend, West Hartlepool, Lewes? And playing at their own Northern sports showpiece stadium will probably put fire in the bellies of the Gosforth lads, quite apart from the usual hype engendered by the Cup.

Again, at the time of writing, I'm not sure about travel arrangements. There is a possibility that BR will run a train, and that should have been resolved, one way or another, by the time you read this. There will, of course, be coaches from the Club, and no doubt, Trevor Pritchard will be able to tell you more by now.

WELCOME MR. BUCKLE

Managing Director of Bass Charrington, Mr. Clive Buckle, is here tonight, his first visit since his company agreed their major sponsorship of the Club — the largest, as far as we know, of any offered to any English Club.

He is here tonight to hand over an initial cheque to Club Treasurer, Doug Wadley — which will make his night — but even if he just turned up out of sheer good fellowship, we'd be just as glad to see him. Great to welcome you, Mr. Buckle. Hope it's the first of many, many visits.

TAILPIECE

I'm told that 'Ali' Braithwaite may be here tonight. You remember 'Ali'. He's the Exeter University player who suffered a broken neck when playing here in October.

We'd heard that he was making a good recovery, but if he does make it this evening, then we're delighted to see him, and relieved that things have turned out as well as they have.

And remember 'Ali', Phil Blakeway won most of his English Caps after he'd broken his neck.



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TALKING RUGBY

with
Steve Fraser



Gosforth, next weekend's Pilkington Cup opponents, are a warning to rugby's big guns of how easy it is to fall from grace.

Gloucester and Bristol have been at the top so long that we take success for granted.

But it is only a few years since since Gosforth was a name to be reckoned with.

When they last met Gloucester in 1978, the Tynesiders had won the John Player Cup two seasons running and were chasing what would at that time have been a unique hat trick of Cup wins.

Gloucester triumphed that day and went on to win the Cup — the last time they won it outright.

Gosforth remained a strong enough force in rugby to reach the final three years later but went down to Leicester.

The intervening years have been lean ones for the Northerners, and the introduction of leagues has not helped their cause. Last season they finished third from bottom, a place above the relegation berths.

This season has been little better and the indignity of Third Division rugby may not be far away.

Even the Cup, once the platform for their greatest victories, has lost its tarnish. Last season they were resoundingly beaten 29-9 at home in the third round by Third Division Wakefield.

Failure inevitably brings with it vastly reduced crowds and the club recently sold their ground. Club spokesman Duncan Carson said: "It came down to money in the end. It has been a few years since our income met our expenditure and we decided we had to do something about it."

They are currently sharing a ground in North Shields nine miles away where next weekend's fixture will take place.

Crowds have fallen to such an extent that the single coachload which made its way to Fylde for last weekend's third round 17-15 win was considered a sign that things are picking up.

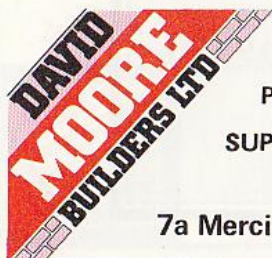
It would be tempting for Gloucester to view next weekend's trip as a formality. But they need only look at their opponents to see how quickly the good times can fade away.

The draw was kind to the big guns. Tonight's visitors Bristol entertain Third Division Exeter at the Memorial Ground and will surely join the Cherry and Whites in the quarter finals.

No one will expect Second Division Headingley to trouble Bath at the Recreation Ground and it would be a surprise if Leicester cannot despatch West Hartlepool.

Pilkington Cup fourth round draw:

Northampton v Wakefield; Richmond v Sale; Moseley v Saracens; Bath v Headingley; Gosforth v Gloucester; Nottingham v Orrell; Leicester v West Hartlepool; Bristol v Exeter.



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