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THE GLOUCESTER RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

President: Canon H. M. Hughes BA.

v HARLEQUINS

Saturday, March 10th 1990
Kick-Off 3.00pm



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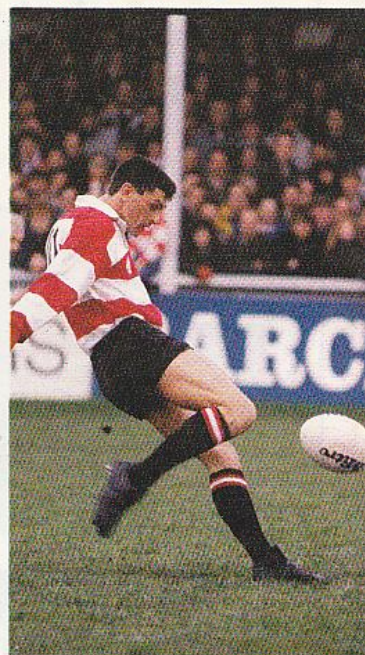
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TOUCH LINES

by
Peter Arnold

CARLING'S MULTICOLOURED LABEL

Seems a very long time since I sat down to pen a set of Programme Notes, but, at least, today's fixture has been well worth waiting for. Any game against the formidable Harlequins outfit — just about as star-spangled as the United States flag — has to be an occasion, the more so when it comes at such a crucial stage in the affairs of the Courage League.

Last season, I would remind you, 'Quins beat us, at the Stoop, by 26 points to 11, one of only three sides in the League to edge us into second place, and that by a margin not approached by anyone else at all.

At that time, Gloucester was lying second in the table, and the London side was languishing somewhere in the basement. In fact, the whole affair was a manifestation of what might be called the 'Harlequins Syndrome', an uncanny ability to come good in the second half of the season, after an indifferent pre-Christmas spell.

It should also be remembered that 'Quins have now relinquished interest in this year's Pilkington Cup, so they have the luxury of a single-minded approach to the game, denied to our own stalwarts.

So much for that side of the balance sheet. Against that, one must weigh the quite incredible team spirit of our own homespun side, mostly born and bred in these yer parts, and not about to yield easily to anyone, however eminent. In a not exactly brief involvement with the Club, I don't think I've ever seen a Gloucester side so determined to win everything in sight, and very few so demonstrably capable of doing just that.

There is also the matter of who actually runs out on the field. At the time of writing (Tuesday), the Gloucester side hasn't been selected, and there's some doubt about whether Mike Teague will turn out or not. I'm also told that England Captain, Will Carling has opted out — understandable with the 'Grand Slam' game only a week away — and that Paul Ackford is otherwise engaged anyway. Which still leaves enough luminaries in the 'Quins side to enable us to dispense with floodlights.

So this is one game where predictions would be foolhardy. What we *do* know is that we're in for an enthralling game. But when did Harlequins ever let

us down in that respect?

The Young Gentlemen for the Big City are, as always, very welcome, and we all hope they have a thoroughly memorable time during their safari to the West Country.

LONG TIME NO SEE

This is only the third programme I've written this year, which isn't a situation that anyone likes. You'll know the reasons — an absolutely malignant refusal by whatever Gods decide which teams come out first in the Cup draw, to confer a home fixture on us, and an unbalanced League programme. There's nothing anyone can do about the former, but the latter should be ameliorated by the decision to add one more side to the First Division next season, ensuring five home and five away games for all concerned.

There is also the fact that it takes about five seasons to make alterations to the fixture list. If we're playing away, then, by definition, our opponents are playing at home, and that's the way they like it, so they often don't welcome changes with open arms, as we wouldn't in similar circumstances.

Every season has its blank spells, but this one has been a bit extreme, with everything appearing to conspire against us. One consolation, I suppose, is that the pitch hasn't taken a battering by being played over constantly during one of the most horrendous spells of weather most of us can remember.

THANKS TO EXEL LOGISTICS REGIONAL SERVICES

The name may not be familiar, but if I told you that today's generous Sponsors are the renamed Distribution Division of NFC, then all will become clear to you. Anyway, a rose by any other name smells just as sweet to Peter Gould, who organises such matters for Gloucester RFC, and we're extremely grateful to Dave Hodges and his cohorts for their continued sponsorship and support.

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What's more, they support Gloucester RFC, which says quite a lot about them. So, if you have anything which wants moving, or storing, for that matter, why not ring Dave Hodges on Gloucester 505577? He won't let you down.

WELCOME BOTH WORSHIPS

We're quite used to seeing our own Mayor, Eric Ede — and most of his predecessors, come to that — here at Kingsholm, but today, we are honoured by the presence of the Worshipful Mayor of the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell, Councillor Jim McKenzie, as well. What's more, he's brought his brother, Gordon with him, who also happens to be a Councillor in that part of the Birmingham area.

He's here as a guest of our generous Sponsors, who point out that they have comprehensive distribution facilities in that neck of the woods, but if pressed, Councillor McKenzie would probably admit that his presence has more to do with the importuning of one Mike Price, erstwhile Mace Bearer in the City of Gloucester, lifelong Tump habituee, and now rejoicing in the title of Mayor's Sergeant in Sandwell.

So why have our very welcome and distinguished guests come to see a Gloucester v. Harlequins game? Well — if the alternative was watching Moseley, what would you do?

RING 0898 122 971

Our recently-inaugurated Clubline is going great guns. You're ringing up in droves, getting early team news, having a go at a competition, finding out that tickets for Cup Matches are to be on sale at such-

and-such a time and so on.

It's a very welcome innovation, one enjoyed by some other Clubs for some time. To give you an idea of the success we're enjoying, in the first two days of operation, we had more phone calls than Pontypool had in their first week.

So keep ringing. It gives me a chance to keep you updated in the arid wastes of time between programmes, and makes a few pence for the Club every time you do so. And do get in touch and tell me what you think about it.

DIG DEEP FOR THE CATHEDRAL

Gloucester Cathedral and Gloucester RFC have three things in common. They both have a profound effect on the image which the City presents to the outside world. They both attract many thousands of people to Gloucester every year. And they've both got the builders in.

You'll certainly be aware that there is a major Appeal in progress at the Cathedral, named 'Gloucester Cathedral 900 Year Fund'. When approached, the Club gladly — and uniquely — gave permission for a collection to be made for that worthy cause. Normally, our appreciated friends from St. Johns Ambulance are the only organisation to be granted that privilege, for obvious reasons, but apart from the collection following the Hillsborough disaster, I can only remember a similar exercise being mounted for the Sam Doble fund, after that great full back's tragic death.

So give generously, but don't regard today's collection as any sort of a precedent. It really does have to be something very special to stimulate such an exercise.

We probably shan't do it again for another 900 years.

GOODIES TO COME

We may have had a dry spell, but there's a vintage period to come. Following our away match at Cheltenham on Tuesday, we have a most attractive home game against Llanelli next Saturday, then following the Cup Semi Final at Northampton, replacing the original fixture with London Irish, incidentally, on the 24th, a tough home League game against Orrell to finish off the month. See you along the way.

TAILPIECE

I'm not about to mention names, for fear of assault and battery, but a good friend of mine took his Welsh wife to the Wales game at Twickenham. Leaving the ground, he waved a fist in the air and shouted "We stuffed the Welsh!"

"Well, here's one you won't, tonight!" came the instant response. Collapse of stout party.



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TALKING RUGBY

with

Steve Fraser



Four months ago Will Carling's presence at Kingsholm would have been an incitement to violence.

England's skipper plummeted in popularity around these parts when he reached into the hat and paired off Wasps and Gloucester in the third round of the Pilkington Cup!

And I can't imagine he was flavour of the month at The Stoop after landing his own side a date at the Recreation Ground which eventually saw them exit to the holders, Bath.

Sudbury, scene of Gloucester's heaviest defeat of the season, was the last place the Cherry and Whites would have chosen to launch their campaign. But subsequent events have shown he did us a favour.

Richard Mogg's last minute try on January 27 lifted a cloud that had settled over the club since that traumatic 29-4 defeat back in October. Gloucester have not looked back since.

True, they lost a meaningless Friday night fixture to a half-strength Bath side stripped of their international contingent. But when the results mattered, the Cherry and Whites have never been in danger.

It now looks probable that what Carling drew out of the hat in November was effectively an elimination contest to select the eventual finalists.

Northampton and Moseley have played their part by removing two potentially awkward obstacles in Leicester and Bristol but it will be an upset of major proportions if either can prevent an all West Country final on May 5.

The question is, had Harlequins and Wasps held sway back in January, could anyone left in the tournament have denied them an all London final? I doubt it.

Much has been made of Gloucester's challenge to league leaders Bath but a Harlequins victory this afternoon would establish them as the nearest challengers, perhaps jointly with Wasps.

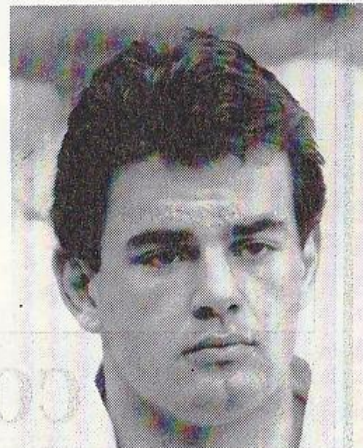
Quins have stumbled just twice in the league this season — predictably against Bath but also against London rivals Saracens. They are just a point behind Gloucester and have not given up hope of being in at the kill,

should Bath slip up between now and the final league match of the season on April 28.

They come to Kingsholm with the distinction of having more players in the England side for next Saturday's Grand Slam decider with Scotland than any other club.

It is a pity that fear of injury has denied today's crowd the opportunity of seeing England's supremely gifted skipper in action but he can repay us all by leading his side to victory at Murrayfield next Saturday.

Harlequins will perhaps forgive us at Gloucester for hoping Messrs Skinner and Winterbottom will save their best form until then!



Will Carling... missing today but it will be worth it if he leads England to glory next weekend.

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