## GLOUCESTER RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB





Peter Arnold ...



# **RIGHT UP THE SHARP END**

I suppose it's been on the cards for months now. Neither of today's sides will know its fate for next season until the final klaxon goes at around 4.30 this afternoon. Of course, the win over Bath helped a lot, as far as Gloucester is concerned, but the fact remains that whichever side wins today will stay in Division One, and the loser - won't.

As far as we know, that is. If the RFU had acceded to the Professional Clubs' request that there be no relegation this season, which seems extremely sensible to me, bearing in mind the turmoil that the whole game is in at the moment, then our annual visit from the very welcome Saracens contingent would have had no particular significance other than pride. We could have settled back and enjoyed the traditional, happy, end-of-season game which was always so enjoyable, and retired to the bar as part of the all that a good time is had by.

Of course, it could change again. Remembering the somersault which the RFU turned over the Will Carling Captaincy affair, less than a year ago, then one is forced to the conclusion that they are quite capable of performing similar acrobatics over the relegation issue, at least three times before breakfast.

But no one is even thinking about that, today. The fact is that we are in for one of the most gut-churning games any of us can remember, right at the end of a season more curious than anyone can recall.

Sarries will certainly be no pushover, as they showed against Bath, and to a lesser extent, against Bristol, last week. In both cases, if the Saracens' kickers had had a little more luck, then Gloucester would have been in a more parlous state today. We hope it won't come down to shots at goal, however. Both sides have the potential to score tries in plenty, which is what the game is supposed to be about, after all. Both sides can call on a very formidable pack, and it could be that the whole thing will be decided up front. Both sides have had injury problems, too, and a great deal will depend on who actually gets out on to the field. Although Saracens supporters will forgive me if I remind them that we did beat Bath with seven reserves in the side.

I could wish that today's game wasn't quite so important. For all the obvious reasons, of course, but also because I've always had a regard for the Saracens club. Founded in 1876, they are of the same vintage as Gloucester, and are certainly not the archetypal London club, which your average Sheddite views with a sort of amiable disdain. Over the years I have had one or two happy little sessions in the Sarries Clubhouse, and if it weren't for the fact that we are in such a 'them or us' situation, I would hope that they stay in the First Division. I'm sure we can all think of clubs we'd rather see go down than today's visitors.

No such luxury is allowed us today. Whichever way things go today, it looks as if we won't be playing each other next season, unless a Cup draw goes that way. But again, we don't know. If the Professional Clubs do form their own League and Cup structure, then we could all be doing it all over again this time next year.

Let's forget all that, just for the moment. If it is to be our last welcome to the Sarries for a season or so, then let's make it a good one. Nice to see you, chaps.



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#### TIM SMITH

If ever a player hasn't had the recognition he deserves, it's Tim Smith. I know - it's part of the mythology of Gloucester RFC to make that sort of declaration about any number of blokes who have worn the cherry-andwhite strip with distinction, over the past century and more, but in Tim's case, it would be difficult to argue otherwise. For him to hang up his boots without even a sniff of an England Cap is a rank injustice.

This isn't biassed opinion on behalf of a much-respected and valued player: I believe the statement can be amply justified.

It was the thrice-accursed Divisional Championship that did for Tim's chances. When Our Mr. Smith was coming to the height of his powers, the

decree went out from Twickenham that they were going to select the England team from that artificial competition. No doubt, they had their reasons at the time, but the idea never worked - as was demonstrated by the whole series of England sides which only featured one or two of the Divisional Champions - and quite a few players in Tim's situation missed out as a result.

At the time, the three best full-backs in England were playing for South West Divisional clubs: Martin of Bath, Webb, then of Bristol, and Tim Smith of Gloucester. Only one of them could play at a time, and Tim missed out. If the County Championship had continued in its original form, instead of falling victim to the same misguided policy, Tim Smith would have had opportunities to show what he could do, and could well have fought his way into International contention. And, if he'd got the nod, he assuredly would not have let his country down.

If you want proof of that, you only have to think back ten days or so. When Gloucester scored that amazing early try against Bath, I don't suppose anyone would have wanted to take the consequent touchline conversion kick. But up stepped Tim Smith, with as much aplomb as he would have shown at Tuesday evening training, and slotted the thing with no trouble at all. Seven points are very different from five in those circumstances, and indeed, the kick proved crucial. The end of that game was heart-stopping enough, but would you really have wanted to see Gloucester defending a two-point lead, rather than a four-point one ?

That's Tim Smith for you: ever a man for the pressure situation.

Of course, there have been times when he's infuriated us, landing almost impossible kicks, and then missing them in front of the posts, but that's all part of a personality which will be sadly missed out on the Sacred Turf. It's a pity that we are now to be deprived of seeing that electrifying break up into the line, the occasional outrageous dummy, the rock-solidity under a high ball with eight hairy great forwards pounding down at him, the tactical awareness with which he kicked from the hand.

So now, as happens to all of us, Tim has decided to hang up his boots. He's probably right to let us remember him while still a feared opponent for any side which visits Kingsholm. At the time of writing, of course, I don't know if he has been selected for today's game, or indeed, for last Wednesday's outing to Leicester, but if not, then there are far worse ways to take one's leave of Kingsholm than in the side which beat Bath, and far worse stages on which to take one's final bow than at Twickenham as part of a County Championship-winning side, as I'm sure Tim himself would acknowledge.

I don't know if the Club will find a job for him, but whatever happens, I hope he doesn't shake the dust of Kingsholm from his feet totally. We should certainly miss the pithy comment (whether he's pithed or not), and the quirky sense of humour from around the clubhouse.

So, 'Hail', Tim Smith. But we hope, not 'Farewell'. Thanks for everything.

#### DON'T BIN IT YET

Note for Members. I know this is last game of the season, but don't be tempted into a fit of wild abandon, and toss your Membership Card lightly into the nearest waste bin when you leave the ground. We shall certainly have an AGM coming up, and I gather, at least one Special General Meeting well before we all foregather again.

If you want to speak and/or vote, or even just attend, those occasions, then you won't be admitted unless you can produce a valid Membership Card. You have been warned.



#### WE GET LETTERS

And how. I've had a whole sheaf of correspondence recently, for reasons which are thoroughly understandable. I won't have room to reproduce all of them, so here's a judicious selection.

And, while I'm on the subject, thanks to everyone who has written to me during the course of the whole season. Please keep them coming next season: they represent one very good way for a programme editor to keep in touch with what supporters, and others, are thinking, especially those who regularly travel long distances to get here, and who I don't get to see during my normal peregrinations around the City.

Pride of place must go today, I'm sure you will agree, to the Club Captain, who must have had a great deal on his mind lately, yet pauses to send a message to all of us. Thanks, Dave !

#### Dear Peter,

I would be grateful if, in the final programme of the 1995/6 season, you would express the thanks of all the players to our loyal supporters for the magnificent backing they have given to the team throughout the whole season.

Of course, the wonderful support of the packed ground on the evening of the victorious Bath match springs immediately to mind, but any of the players will tell you that there is far more to it than that. Even in the blackest days of the first half of the season, when some clubs would have seen their supporters deserting in droves, our support never wavered. The shed, quite naturally, gets all the publicity in this respect, but people who watch their rugby from all parts of the ground have shouted just as loudly ever since last September, and there can't be a club in England with such a loyal band of travelling supporters, either.



All the players will tell you that the sort of backing which we habitually get from our crowd does certainly make a difference. It spurs you on to greater efforts, and

keeps you going when you may be feeling tired towards the end of the game. It's important that every player gives 100% throughout every game, and encouragement of the type we always receive helps no end in achieving that. It can also have the reverse effect on opposing sides, who are again becoming a little nervous about visiting Kingsholm.

We have the best crowd of supporters in club rugby, and we're grateful for it. Can we please have just one more effort today, to help us close the season with a vital win and in style?

Thanks again, everyone.

Yours sincerely, Dave Sims

Now follows what is probably the most poignant letter I have ever had to publish, as will become obvious.

Incidentally, did you notice that a Soccer player has just been sentenced for breaking an opponent's jaw? He got two weeks.

Any further comment of mine would be superfluous.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all the supporters of Gloucester Rugby Club for the overwhelming support that has been given to Simon and our family since his unbelievable conviction and subsequent nine-month prison sentence.

Knowing that so many people share our outrage at the injustice of what has happened has helped us immensely during this very traumatic time. On behalf of Simon we would like to thank everyone who has written to him to keep his spirits up. Considering his situation he is coping well.

As Simon's appeal failed last week, his release date is now 6 July. He has been following Gloucester's steady progress and will be listening to the game on his radio, let's hope he'll be back playing First Division rugby on Kingsholm turf come September.

Once again, thank you all for your continuing support.

Frank and Eileen Devereux and family

It isn't often we get a View from the Other Side. People on the round-ball scene must have been looking with raised eyebrows at the turmoil in Rugby Union, because they've seen it all before. After all, it's only a few seasons since the Premiership Division came into being, and is there really much difference between that system and the proposal of the Professional Rugby Union Clubs to run their own League ? And of course, Soccer has been living with contracts, and related disputes, payment of players, and all the rest, since before most of us were born. They even had red and yellow cards well before we did, and, it must be said, seem to handle them rather better than we do at the moment.

How long, I wonder, before we see transfer fees in Rugby Union ?

So it's nice to get a letter from an established Soccer man. Mind you, Colin Peake, until recently a respected Inspector of Constabulary, does have a foot in both camps, as will become evident as you read his contribution. After all, you have to keep 'Er Indoors happy, don't you ? Not that Colin is the first chap to find he has dual loyalties. Many of us will recall that

Not that Colin is the first chap to find he has dual loyalties. Many of us will recall that Gloucester City's Dick Etheridge was often here before his son John moved on to Northampton, and then the Land of Shamrock and Guinness.

Thanks, Colin. Might take you up on it next season.

What has life been like for me this season? Well first of all I am not seen at Kingsholm very often on match days because I am the Managing Director of Forest Green Rovers, a semi-professional football club of the round ball variety. But Gloucester Rugby Club lives in my house and surely by now my surname gives the game away. I had better not say too much because 'her in the office' know how to dish it out. Just ask Dave Sims, because you have to thank her for knocking him into shape over recent months. Joe 'Yorkshire Pudding' Picken, cannot take the credit for it all.

For most of our respective seasons, whilst I have lived with the hope of promotion you have lived with the fear of relegation. In saying that, I know what the latter is like, and it brings home to everyone different emotions. Geraldine has never wavered in her belief that the lads would retain their status. Confidence is a vital ingredient and the 'fair' one, as Peter Arnold calls her, has had enough for the whole squad. A will to win is also vitally important and whislt my statement may not go down too well with many in The Shed, Bath and Leicester over the last few years have been streets ahead of the opposition with it. I have been fortunate to speak on occasions to Richard Hill in depth, and I can tell you he personifies that will to win, so perhaps everything that comes up the A46 from 'Barf' is not too bad.

I dashed from my duties on the 10th of this month and managed to squeeze into the ground as 'Glawster' took the field. 'By God I thought! If they cannot do it now when will they?' I came out of the ground having almost lost my voice and several who know my pedigree challenged me, (or that's how I felt). Why, should I be shouting for a rugby team? I am renowned for my vocal support of my own club but I cannot change my attitude. If I go to support a team than that's what I do, whether its a national or club team. I dare not say it too loud, but I even cheered for Cinderford Town in the FA Cup this season. Well, at least I did after they knocked us out but I gave them hell for the three matches it took them to beat us.

I was therefore amazed to see many around me silent. Were they interested onlookers? Could there be such a creature on such an occasion? Were they struck dumb with the brilliance of it all? Or were they followers of the other lot but couldn't admit it because they lost? True supporter are worth their weight in gold because they never lose faith.

That brings me on neatly to the subject of Tim Smith. I was so pleased for him, especially when he has announced his retirement. He has been a loyal member of the club and the young ones will have many a glory day ahead in years to come.

By the way what do you call a Skoda motor car with Phil Greening, Dave Sims and Pete Miles in the back seat ...? (A nice car!)

Unfortunately my duties today mean that I shall be with my club as it is our last home league match of the season but after our result I shall be looking out for yours. Thank you for a great evening on the 10th, it was better than Leicester last season. Finally, if a couple of thousand of you, are not doing much next season on a Saturday, pop up and see me at 'The Lawn' but remember, you have shout for my team! Its only fair, surely! Colin Peake

### HOW MIKE COLEY SEES IT

I suppose, as far as Gloucester is concerned, the new era started with the news that Mike Coley was to come to Kingsholm as Chief Executive. It was President Truman who had a sign on his Presidential desk which read: THE BUCK STOPS HERE, and Mike must have had a considerable dose

of that feeling when he arrived to sit in a very hot seat indeed. Richard Hill has, quite deservedly, had a great deal of credit and of praise heaped on his highly competent shoulders, but make no mistake, Mike Coley's influence has been immense. I thought it only right, therefore, to ask him to write this page for the last programme of the season. Thanks a bunch, Mr. Coley. It has been great working with you, and I hope we can continue to do so for many years

to come.

#### A REVIEW OF THE PAST SEASON - OFF THE FIELD

I am sitting in my office on Tuesday 23rd of April, five days from the end of the 1995/6 season and I still don't know what is happening next year. So it seems does nobody else in the rugby world. Neither the RFU, TV companies, The Sponsors or the Clubs. What a state of affairs! We must look to the non rugby man or woman the most disorganised amateur bunch of sporting administrators in the sporting world. Come to think of it, most Rugby people must think the same way. I will, if I may, go back over the last season to restate a few facts and them see if I can see the way forward.

August 1995 — The International Board meet in Paris when the governing body of world rugby decided to make the game "open". They said that they would hold another meeting in Tokyo in September to ratify their decision and that it would be up to each individual Union on how they should implement these changes. (IRB board members must get more Airmiles than Everyie) Fergie).

September 1995 - The RFU imposes a moratorium on the professional game until the end of the current season and announce a Commission to be set up to investigate the open game. Not one senior club was invited to join this commission. The senior clubs (the top ten plus Northampton as the relegated club from last season) formed England First Division Rugby Ltd (EFDR), each with one share and one director on the board. EFDR was to be the voice of the senior clubs. As the RFU didn't represent our views on their commission we produced our own report which we published and gave to the RFU two weeks before their own report in November. Oh, by the way, every Rugby Nation grasped professionalism, except France who said that they would remain amateur!

November 1995 — EFDR started negotiations with the RFU on the way forward. The RFU said that they couldn't finalise anything until their new Chairman had been appointed at a special EGM in January 1996. But they took on board the fact that not one English club could sustain the professional game unless they received the TV and sponsorship revenues from those competitions in which they participated. In our discussions with TV and sponsors we were told that between £700,000 and £1 million pound per club would be available from new competitions. We told the RFU that we only wanted the new money, they could keep the five nations TV money and the gate money for their part in running the game. We would wish to run our own show but under their

umbrella. A professional game run by professionals. January 14th 1996 — The RFU EGM, the most shambolic meeting I have ever had the misfortune to have been present at. The first three hours were taken up in voting for the new chairman. There were two candidates, John Jevons-Fellows the unanimous choice of the RFU executive committee and the man with whom we had been making good progress, following the commission's report, and Cliff Brittle an outsider who had employed a public relations company to lobby all the junior clubs and counties for their votes. After many long winded and in most cases totally irrelevant speeches from supporters of each candidate, (we didn't actually hear from the candidates themselves) the meeting had had enough and asked for it to be put to the vote. After about an hours delay, (they had four tables in which to record about 600 proxy votes) Mr. Brittle got the vote. The junior end of the game had won the day. We now were faced with a man who had no experience in running a senior club and who really wasn't interested in our problems. And what about the commissions report? The main reason for us being in Birmingham. Well the meeting was so peeved off about all the time wasting and the fact that they were not going to be allowed to vote on the commissions report they threw everything out. All to be voted on at another EGM, date to be decided. It was to take another ten weeks to

organise another EGM. Time continued to march on. In the meantime EFDR had been very busy. We had formed working groups to talk to the Players, TV companies, Sponsorship consultants, and other Clubs within other Unions. We had agreed a draft contract with the Players Union, formed a joint venture company with the second division clubs, (England Professional Rugby Union Clubs EPRUC), formed a European Rugby Clubs Association and from these conversations had a very good idea on what we wanted as a structured season. It was agreed by all that we wanted more meaninfgul home games, a good rugby product, and the need to generate more revenue to pay the players wages.

At a meeting of EFDR on the 5th March we had agreed on a motion put by myself, that for the 1996/7 season only, for the sake motion put by myself, that for the 1996/7 season only, for the sake of achieving unity of purpose and for equability with the Welsh clubs, the English first division would go to 12 clubs and a review would be taken at the end of 1997. This was carried by over the two thirds majority needed. (9 clubs to 2). Also at this meeting we agreed the structured season. A twelve club English Conference playing on a home or away basis, a 24 club Anglo Welsh league, split into two 12 club leagues, a European Cup Competition (20 clubs) and a secondary European competition of 32 clubs. This would give around 15 meaningful home games per season per would give around 15 meaningful home games per season per Club. We did not agree with any form of Divisional rugby, we agreed with only one player's contract which should be with the clubs and we agreed to release players to play International rugby. We were now ready to open negotiations with the new elaberment W. Prittle chairman Mr. Brittle.

chairman Mr. Brittle. 21st March 1996 — Six months after the game in the rest of the World went open. EPRUC, together with representatives of the England players met with the negotiating committee of the RFU led by Mr. Brittle. He was in bullish mood. "I am mandated to say no but not yes" This was his opening statement. "The RFU are £35 million in debt and until this is paid off the Clubs will get nothing" said David Robinson, treasurer of the RFU. It was plainly clear that

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Mr. Brittle did not want to negotiate. We were getting nowhere fast. We were treated like naughty schoolboys who would be soon sorted out after a visit to the Headmasters study and six of the best. The meeting broke up with nothing resolved.

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11th April 1996 — The whole board of EFDR met with representatives of the second division clubs and, after a long meeting, issued a statement advising each club within EPRUC that the we would not participate in RFU competitions next season in their proposed current structure. We also asked Bill Bishop the RFU President to join the negotiating team and break the log jam. To date nothing has been done. Apart from the RFU



upsetting the other four five Nations Unions by splitting away to do their own TV contract. Having given us a hard time for wanting our just and fair share they then go and do the same thing to the other home Unions. Unbelievable! So what of the future. I wish I knew. I am currently looking for

So what of the future. I wish I knew. I am currently looking for a new Club Sponsor. I would like very much to start marketing Boxes, Boards, Advertising pages in programmes and other sponsorship activities for next season. I can't. I don't even know when next season starts! I, therefore, want a crystal ball to tell me what will happen. I only hope that the RFU come to the table very soon or they might find that we have taken our bat and ball somewhere else to play. They need us, the clubs, the players and the supporters more perhaps than we need them. As Summer approaches may I wish you all a relaxing time so that by September or perhaps August you will be in good voice to support the Cherry and Whites in Wales, France, Italy and England. Who knows? A shambolic mess, it sure is. Who siad it is only a game? Thanks for your support this year from all here at the Club. See you next season.

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#### WELCOME MISS HUDD

We have a Match Mascot of the feminine pursuasion today, which is a very fine thing indeed. Her name is Danielle Hudd, she has attained the age of seven years old, lives in King's Stanley, and attends Leonard Stanley Junior School.

I'm told she is 'a bit of a telly addict', but that she tempers this with a love of reading, writing and drawing. She would like to be a teacher, when she grows up, and already practices on her younger sister Ashleigh, which sounds like an older sister.

She attends Kingsholm with her mum, but is the granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. Dave Mann, ardent followers of Gloucester wherever they may be, and are devout and practicing Sheddites. The note I have concludes "woe betide anyone who stands in 'their' place, and opposing teams who hust 'their' boys."

Sarries in the Shed - you have been warned.

Thanks Danielle. Good to see you.

#### TAILPIECE

To sum up the season would tax the pen of a Shakespeare or a Terry Pratchett, let alone that of a poor hack like yours humbly. I'll just regale you with a few of my own personal snapshots. Worst moment (so far)

The telephone call to tell me that Sale had beaten Gloucester, and that Saracens had beaten Sale. With all due respects to today's respected visitors, that really was the depths, provoking a cry from the Shed at the United game that afternoon, of *"We're doo-oomed !"* 

Best moment

Well, obviously, the final klaxon at the Bath game.

Most relieved moment

Watching Tim Stimpson's late penalty go wide at the West Hartlepool game.

Funniest moment

The look on Ben Clarke's face on being felled like a tree by a 5' 11" scrum half.

Summer well, everyone. See you at the Beer Festival on the Spartans Ground in June.

## Ed Martin

So, we come to the end of yet another season — and what a season it has been! No one really expected that Gloucester would turn Leicester over at Whelford Road on Wednesday night ('though many an "elver eater" did dream). But Leicester's 22-point wsin does not really put too much of a dent into Gloucester's point difference in the table. This means than an unsatisfactory draw today will see survival at the top of the game for Gloucester . . . the Cherry and Whites having the better points difference.

So it's all down to today. Gloucester v Saracens. Not exactly one of those rock 'em 'n sock 'em fixtures that is steeped in local folklore. In fact it was in the spring of 1968 that Saracens first ventured to these parts for a 3-3 draw at Kingsholm.

But after a torrid "league" season where, as we go into the final game of the season, the unthinkable can still happen. In short, today's clash with Saracens is, arguably, the most important fixture in the more than 3,900 matches played so far by Gloucester in club history.

While the match today should have a "health warning" for the feint-hearted, at least the short history of the Saracens fixture is on the side of the Cherry and Whites. Saracens have yet to post their first win at Kingsholm — they have tied with Gloucester on two occasions. Apart from the first visit, there was an indecisive 21-21 result in November 1989.

Now, there is this view that no one will be relegated from Division One, which is to expand to 12 teams for next season. Well, this is what the First Division clubs and Northampton are seeking. Alas, Twickenham is not warm to the suggestion.

In fact this has been a funny old season — and an incredible past six weeks or so. It makes the goings on of last century, when the issues of "broken time" payments created Rugby League, look like a proverbial Sunday School picnic.

England now wants to negotiate its now TV deal for the Five Nations, with Wales, Scotland, Ireland and France now insisting it's gonna be the four Nations. England booted out of the competition?

Just how much of this can be blamed onto "he who wants to rule the world" is debatable. But Australia's non-returnable export, one R. Murdoch, has a lot to answer for. Regular readers might like to refresh their memories by looking up this page in the programme for the Clifton match of last season when the Murdoch plan for world rugby domination (both union and league) was discussed.

But it takes two to tango. And what was it Will "His Premiership" Carling said some 10 months ago . . .

Oh yes, to tidy-up the season, there is the result of the picture caption — what was the young Gloucester hooker saying to the older referee (or the other way round). There were a lot of ideas, some printable, some unprintable. Those that were considered suitable for the eyes of Geraldine Peake were deemed eligible.

And the winner is . . . pass the envelope please . . . M. G. Chew of Millbrook Street in beautiful downtown Tredworth. He (or she) had two suggestions. The ref. is saying to the hooker: "No, I cannot stop the game to allow you to look for your toupee". Or, the hooker is saying to the ref: "Sorry, but all ringside seats are sold for my next fight." So a pair of grandstand tickets go to M. G. Chew for Gloucester's next Courage Divison One match (note the confidence).

Go. Glawster!

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Bath	17	15	0	2	537	238	30
Leicester	17	15	0	2	457	221	30
Harlequins	17	12	0	5	503	295	24
Wasps	17	10	0	7	405	319	20
Sale	17	9	0	8	327	333	18
Orrell	17	7	0	10	297	448	14
Bristol	16	6	0	10	263	380	12
Gloucester	17	5	0	12	258	360	10
Saracens	17	5	0	12	274	434	10
W Hartlepool	16	0	0	16	270	563	0