

FIRST DIVISION

RUGBY

P R O M A G




FOUNDED 1873

Vol 1/13

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SHOCKS FROM THE ENGLAND SELECTORS

THE  PILKINGTON
CUP

Westbury 

**GLOUCESTER
v
BRISTOL**

at Kingsholm
Saturday 25th January 1997
Kick off 3.00 pm


FIRST DIVISION
RUGBY

Quite like Old Times!

Not exactly, of course, because the shadow of the professional game casts itself over everything, even a fixture as respected and long established as Gloucester v. Bristol at Kingsholm. However, attitudes and atmospheres can't be changed by simply altering the rules and the structures of the game. A signature on a cheque, however many zeros it has on it, cuts very little ice with your traditional Gloucester supporter, or with the hordes of 'Bris' followers who we can confidently expect to attend today. The spectres of old players, past exploits and great occasions in previous seasons will be breathing down our collective necks today.

It was a sad blow when the weather deprived us of our eagerly-anticipated trip to the Memorial Ground on the Sunday after Christmas. Judging by my own, fairly amateurish, not to say, bibulous, researches, the number of Shedheads and lesser mortals contracted to trot down the A38 on that day was large, even by our usual standards, and it would have made a good pipe-opener after the somnolence engendered by the over-indulgence of the Festive Season. However, the Gods of Chance do smile on the Righteous, occasionally, and the Pilkington Cup draw provided us with ample consolation for our earlier loss.

Apart from anything else, it meant that we shall welcome Bristol to Kingsholm twice this season, and that can't be bad. It won't have escaped your notice that our final, scheduled, fixture in the League programme at Kingsholm is, at the moment, against Bristol. So, sometime between now and then, we shall be trekking to the Memorial Ground to play the postponed one. Probably in the evening, I believe, but that's by no means the first time we have travelled to face the Old Enemy under floodlights. Wasn't Malcolm Preedy's

legendary drop-goal (with an overlap of fourteen outside him, according to Keith Richardson), achieved under those conditions?

If you believe everything you read in the tabloids - and broadsheets, for that matter - Gloucester always have a big advantage when they play at home. Sure - the support does inspire the team to greater efforts, and some younger opponents can find the atmosphere intimidating, but Gloucester v. Bristol is one of the exceptions which prove that particular rule. The sheer tradition of the fixture; the number of times that it has been played, the proximity of the two famous old grounds, mean that both sides feel, in some way, 'at home', whether they're playing here or there.

And the Cup is a great leveller. Form book goes out of the window, as it always does when today's two sides meet anyway. All right, so Bristol haven't been doing as well as they would like, or as the team sheet would suggest, recently, but I don't think anyone should be deluded by that. This is Gloucester v. Bristol, and 'that's it and all about it', as they say in these parts.

I probably speak for all regular Gloucester supporters when I say that I'd hate to see a First Division without Bristol in it. Unfortunately, if the 'four down' rule stays, it looks as if it could be Gloucester who deprives them of their place in it, if anyone does. Nothing we can do about that, but it's a nasty little quirk of fate, nonetheless, and not one we would have wished.

But let's forget all about that for the next few hours. This is a Cup game, there to be savoured on its merits. We hope everyone does just that, and whoever goes into the draw on Monday, that Bristol will enjoy their time with us

Peter Arnold

3 Gloucester News

Here's to the Next Time

As I mentioned, this is the first of a whole trilogy of Gloucester v. Bristol games to which we can look forward. I'm told that a date has now been agreed for the postponed League fixture at the Memorial Ground: it's to be played on Tuesday, February 18th, under floodlights.

Just one small shadow on the horizon. A little bird tells me that the RFU has decreed that the match shall take place two weeks earlier, on Tuesday, February 4th. No one seems to be very worried about that, however, the feeling being that if the alternative date has been amicably agreed between the two clubs - as it has - then the Powers That Be will gracefully accede to the arrangement. Which seems reasonable to me.

While on the subject of fixtures, we don't have a First XV one next weekend. At least, not at the time of writing, and having had three fairly tough assignments in as many weekends, the lads will probably be happy to have a breather.

You'll note that, accordingly, there is a blank space in your fixture lists against 'February 1st', that being the date next Saturday. However, that's the day when England meets Scotland, so it would probably have been more correct to quote Friday, January 31st as a date for a game. Sorry to be nit-picking, but I do like to get things right when I can.

All of which means that the next time we shall all be gathered together will be Saturday, February 8th, when Orrell are here for their League engagement. That's another one which Gloucester simply has to win to be sure of avoiding the drop zone, so I've no doubt at all that Richard, Dave and the boys won't be taking things at all lightly, in spite of the Wigan club's disastrous season so far. You won't want to miss the occasion.

After that, we're back to the Friday evening syndrome, for a 'friendly' visit to Newport, on February 14th. Always a good trip if you fancy a nice stroll around the bowling green on your way to the match. The rugby will probably be entertaining, too.

That's followed by the rearranged trip to Bristol as aforementioned, on Tuesday the 18th, hopefully. At the time of writing, I haven't heard about coaches for the away games, but I've no doubt that something will be arranged, and it's worth enquiring at the office.

As it will for the next Saturday, February 22nd, should a win today, and an away draw in the Pilkington Cup Quarter Finals make such things

necessary. We did, after all, reach the Semi Final stage last season, and it would be nice to do at least as well again, wouldn't it?

One last thing on the fixture front. At the time of writing, no arrangements have been made for the postponed Northampton League encounter, here at Kingsholm. Of course, you might know differently by now: if not, we'll let you know as soon as something is decided.

Getting Wired

Elsewhere in this issue, God and the Publishers willing, you'll find a 'How he sees it' piece by Steve Hawker. Steve is the guy who runs the unofficial 'Glawster' Web page, if you happen to be into the Internet and things like that. Sort of an electronic 'Shedhead', but fractionally more polite.

While contacting Steve, via his computerised wizardry, I was tempted to trawl around and see what else was available about rugby in Cyberspace. Almost immediately, I came across a World Wide Web page maintained by one Steve Uglow, in which he lists all the clubs who have official or unofficial pages in similar vein, with his own comments on them.

And there was Steve Hawker's 'Glawster' page. Steve Uglow gives it by far his warmest accolade. "A real fans' page," he warbles. "A great read."

Nice to see it, especially as the list includes such eminent clubs as Bath, Bedford, Bristol, Leicester, London Irish, London Scottish, Northampton and Sale, none of which get the compliments that our own Mr. Hawker does.

If you're interested, but haven't got round to getting yourself wired yet, I find the whole thing much more simple to get around in than most people think. You certainly don't have to be a computer nerd to use the Internet. Let's face it - if I can do it, anyone can.

One suggestion. If you are tempted, but don't want to commit yourself to making the (relatively small) capital investment, you could always trot along to Gloucester's first 'Cyber Cafe', just in Barton Street, a bit further up than B&Q, and try the thing out for yourself over a cup of coffee. It's a good way to dip your toe in the water, and see if Cyberspace is for you.

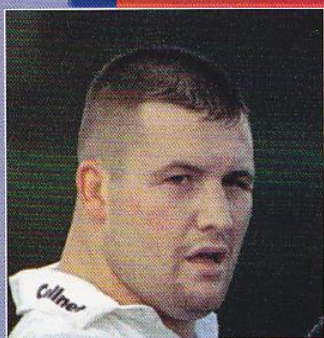
Steve Uglow's page is only one rugby-oriented Internet source of information and entertainment. There are absolutely scads of others, based all over the world. All for the cost of a local phone call.

Peter Arnold

A Tale of Two Hookers

NOBODY likes being number two in any sport - but Bristol's Mark Regan and Phil Greening of Gloucester will give anything to have that number on the back of a white jersey with a red rose sewn onto the left breast.

There have been numerous contests for England positions over the years between players, most notably the current eternal triangle in the centre between captain Phil de Glanville, ex-England skipper Will Carling and the Rolls Royce of centres Jeremy Guscott.



Then there was the battle which raged for years between Brian Moore and Graham Dawe for the England hooking berth.

Barrister Moore kept farmer Dawe sat on the England replacement's bench for a record 34 occasions. Rotweiler Moore and the granite hard Dawe were ruthless about each other.

Moore said: "To detail all my conversations with Graham Dawe over the first seven years that I knew him would take no time at all - there weren't any! To detail how he was in dogged and relentless opposition to me at club and international level would take considerable time to tell."

When Moore retired from international rugby to ply his trade with Richmond and Dawe faded to the pastures of Bath's

first and second teams, so Regan must have been confident as he took over the England spot which seemed his without challenge.

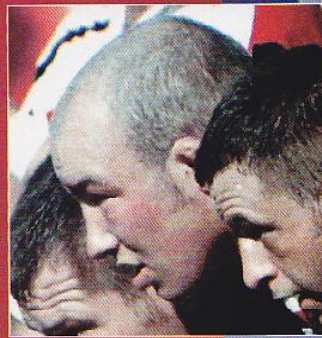
Then came along Greening and, this season, the rivalry which seems to haunt the England number two jersey reared up again between two new contestants.

Regan is rock hard, a supreme scrum-mager who likes nothing better than to get into the meat of a ruck or a maul and dig the ball out. An unseen worker who is part of the engine room of the England pack and has a genuine good arm to throw the ball in as well..

Greening is more of a runner, willing to take the ball on from first phase and batter his head into the heart of the opposition to set-up second or third phases of possession yet never forgetting he has to work in the set-pieces.

Regan will be in possession of the jersey for England's opener against Scotland on February 1, but he is sure to feel the same pressures that Moore discovered in his long, personal battle. Any let-up, and Greening will step into his place.

That is why today's dual between the pair of them, with a place in the Pilkington Cup to the winner, is such a fascinating contest.



Whither Smithy?

It was with very mixed feelings that I learned that Bristol had made an approach to Gloucester to acquire the very significant services of Ian Smith, while he still has eighteen months of his contract to run.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not criticising today's visitors for doing so. This is a very far cry from the situation when Wasps tried to sting us for Phil Greening. In my view, there's a world of difference between making a predatory swoop on the best young hooker in England, simply because he's just that, and offering terms for an established International player who is having trouble getting his First Team place at his present club. As everyone knows, Scotland has kept faith with Ian Smith, to their own great advantage, but that can't go on indefinitely, especially with Rob Wainwright back in the fold.

I, for one, wouldn't blame Ian if he decided that his best interests would be served by making the short trip to Bristol. On the other hand, he could find it something of a 'frying pan into the fire' job: With Messrs Corry et al. doing the business at the Memorial Ground, the back row would not appear to be an area where Bristol are particularly weak. Furthermore, if all today's welcome visitors will forgive me for mentioning it, there isn't any guarantee that 'Smithy' would find himself in a First Division club, come next season. Tactless of me to mention it in present company, but them's the facts, hard and unpalatable as they may be.

So, 'Good Luck' and heartfelt thanks to Ian Smith if he does decide, or has decided by now, to make the move down the road, always providing the two clubs can reach a mutually agreeable settlement. Personally, however, I hope he stays.

Ian Smith's long service for Gloucester, as player and as Captain, together with his clutch of Scottish Caps, which put him up among the Gloucester

'most capped players' ranks, has made him one of the club's post-war legends. The exploits of his father, Dick, who played in the same position, even more times, are equally legendary. They are Gloucester's only pair of father-and-son Barbarians.

Such traditions have gone by the board this season, and it's a pity. The departure of Ian Smith would be only another straw in that particular wind.

Do what you think's best, Ian. And thanks for all your services, whatever you decide.

HEARD BUT NOT SEEN

Was having a chat with the amiable Landlord of the Whiresmiths Arms, the other evening. Super pub in Southgate Street, if you don't know it. He was telling me about a game in which he played on the Widden Old Boys Ground in Tuffley Avenue.

Apparently, a considerable pile-up occurred, during which the ref. heard an anguished grunt from somewhere at the bottom of the heap. Fearing someone had received a nasty, he blew up instantly, and supervised the peeling-off of the recumbent bodies. There at the bottom was (wouldn't you know it) a prop forward.

"Are you alright?" queried the concerned official.

"Some bastard kicked me, ref!"

"Where?"

"Don't know. I just heard it!"

HOW ELSE WOULD YOU DO IT ?

I was fascinated to see a headline on Teletext, last weekend. It read, 'PROP DOUBLES UP FOR MOSELEY'

Well, he could hardly do it standing upright, could he?

Peter Arnold

17

Gloucester News

How Steve Ha

The Day Gloucester St

Steve Hawker, as I have mentioned elsewhere, is the chap who maintains the unofficial 'Glawster' Web Page, and a great success it is too, even after just a few months in operation. Internet buffs will find his email address at the foot of the piece he has so kindly prepared for me.

His Internet involvement brings him into contact with rugby buffs, especially devout and practicing Gloucester supporters from, quite literally, all over the world. Indeed, for some of them Steve's Web Page is the only contact they have with the club, and very grateful they are for it too.

That means that Steve has a unique perspective on the Kingsholm scene, so I thought it would be a good idea to share his thoughts with you. And they are his thoughts. As always, they don't necessarily represent the views of anyone else, including the club and yours truly.

So here are Steve's impressions of ...

THE DAY GLOUCESTER STOOD UP TO BE COUNTED.

As the season staggers into the New Year the professional cream seems to be rising up to the top of the league, making the divide between rich and poor, professional and not-so-professional as black and white as a pint of London Irish's Guinness. With almost half the League season gone, the outside investors and boards of directors have introduced some sort of apartheid into the League, with the elite minority looking to break away leaving the rest to fend for themselves. And so the particular creek down which rugby union is now paddling leads us towards a situation not dissimilar to that of football's Premiership - with only a handful of rich clubs ever likely to win the Championship who have the buying power to pick off the underpaid talent of the stragglers at the

bottom, so that the rich get richer and the poor poorer (Hey! How about a Socialist Shedhead Party at the forthcoming election?). In other words, we have a First Division of "titans" and subservient feeder clubs.

But if that is the way things are going - how does the "Greening debacle" fit into the equation? According to the "Premiership Model" outlined above, Gloucester (by no means a rich club) should surely have sold Greening to their wealthy "superiors" a few places (and inevitably a hundred miles east) up the table? That way everyone would have been happy, Wasps would have consolidated their position at the top and Glaws would have gone away, doffing their cap, grateful for the cash which they could re-invest in fresh talent ready to sell at a later date. But Glawster have decided not to play ball and the fact that David Foyle and the committee told those cockney vultures to get lost should fill every Glawster supporters' heart with joy!

To have sold Greening would have given a clear signal to the rugby world that Glawster wanted to opt out from top-flight competition and were content to function as a "school of excellence" for the London clubs - in effect selling the fruits of a local rugby culture to distant corporate interests. Instead, Glawster have taken the brave decision to slug it out on their own terms with the big boys with the big wallets. In my view, the decision not to sell a prime asset at a time when clubs are effectively deciding whether or not they want to compete at the highest level in the professional era is, along with the appointment of Richard Hill, the most important and far-seeing decision the club has made for many years.

Whilst this week's decision is to be wholly welcomed by Shedheads everywhere, that still doesn't alter the fact that although Glawster have decided to become a fully self-contained unit both in financial and player development terms, the context within which they operate is being irreversibly transformed. Firstly, there is the RFU-

Peter Arnold

Hawker Sees It Good up to be Counted

EPRUC confrontation to take account of, whose outcome will basically decide who is entitled to compete for big money. If the RFU does announce (as is widely expected) that only 2 teams will be relegated from Division One this year, to be automatically replaced by the top two in Division Two, this will have both a positive and a negative effect. On the plus side, this will mean that we continue to get 22 league fixtures per season rather than the proposed 18 - the league is still surely the most exciting format for domestic rugby and in my view, the more league games the better. Financially it makes sense for the clubs to have these games rather than Friendly fixtures and the yet-to-be-developed Anglo-Welsh League because the Courage League and the Pilkington Cup are what the fans want to see. On the negative side (as far as the poorer clubs are concerned), it will mean that the moneyed clubs such as Bedford, Newcastle and Richmond will raise the stakes throughout the league as they compete with other clubs to strengthen their squads by offering players more and more money. Therefore, even though Glawster have developed a solid club infrastructure it becomes even more important to get financial affairs in order, which means being able to reward top players accordingly so that they are not lured away.

The problem is, how to do this without selling out to corporate interests who will begin to exert pressure on clubs unless they get a "reasonable" return on their investments (is that what is happening at Bath at the moment?) The impression I get is that the major sponsors and Sky are only interested in the high-profile fashionable clubs - especially if they are within the M25. Barry Preece and Gareth Chilcott have done a marvellous job in attracting sponsorship to the club - just a glance at the names on the advertising boards at Kingsholm gives some indication to the level of national interest they have attracted to the club. But to be able to attract the major investment which will be needed for clubs to compete in the next millennium we must fundamentally change the way in which the club is perceived by big business.

Chilcott acknowledged (in The Citizen's "A Whole New Ball Game" at the beginning of the season) that this was a major problem for the club, because for some reason that I don't quite understand, large numbers of partisan supporters who regularly turn up aren't attractive to major businesses - presumably they would prefer crowds of 2,000 yuppies with cash to burn?

Who's Afraid of Relegation?

Having survived a heart-stopping encounter with the Irish last week, Glawster are now beginning to open up a "cushion" between them and the bottom clubs (how long have I been waiting to say "Gloucester and the bottom clubs!") To see how much we've improved since last year's annis horribilis, I looked back at my programme for last year's cup tie at home to Walsall (Dec 23rd) when our record in the league was:

P	W	D	L	F	A	PTS
10	1	0	9	145	238	2

Today, it's:

P	W	D	L	F	A	PTS
10	5	0	5	235	288	10

What a difference a consistent kicker makes! I think that we are likely to finish with at least 18 points - the last quarter of the season could be a rough ride - but I think that we are now capable of beating anyone at home.

After having signalled that we will not sell out to the rich clubs and so agree to become a feeder club for evermore, a comfortable mid-table finish together with a good cup run to match last season's will start to confirm the suspicions of everyone outside of Kingsholm that at long last, the sleeping giant has woken and intends to march into the next century and beyond!

* Steve Hawker

* <http://www.glawster.demon.co.uk>

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Saturday 25th January 1997 Kick-off 3.00pm

GLOUCESTER 18
Cherry & White

BRISTOL 12
Blue

15	Chris Catling	Full Back	Paul Hull (I)	15
14	Mike Peters	Right Wing	Dave Tieueti	14
13	Don Caskie	Centre	Simon Martin	13
12	Martin Roberts	Centre	Kevin Maggs	12
11	Mike Lloyd	Left Wing	Ben Breeze	11

10	Mark Mapletoft 1c 2PG	Outside Half	Paul Burke (I) 4 PG	10
9	Scott Benton 1T	Scrum Half	Robert Jones (I)	9

1	Tony Windo 1T	Prop	Alan Sharp (I)	1
2	Phil Greening (I)	Hooker	Mark Regan (I)	2
3	Andy Deacon	Prop	David Hinkins	3
4	Rob Fidler	Lock	Simon Shaw (I)	4
5	Dave Sims *	Lock	Chad Eagle	
6	Ed Pearce	Flanker	Martin Corry *	6
7	Nathan Carter	Flanker	David Corkery (I)	7
8	Simon Devereux	No.8	Eben Rollitt	8

16	Laurie Beck	Replacements	Richard Smith	16
17	Martyn Kimber		Barry McConnell	17
18	Chris Fortey		Josh Lewsey	18
19	Mark Cornwell		Phil Adams	
20				
21				

Referee
P O'Brien New Zealand RFU

(I) International
* Captain

Touch Judges
C Hawke New Zealand RFU
S Walshe New Zealand RFU

Home Grow

England chose 63 players this week and duly acknowledged the Gloucester revival. Phil Greening may have to wait a little longer for admission to the front row but the lengthening

its first five League matches, most of them by the proverbial mile.

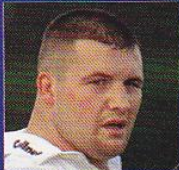
Greening, at 21 the youngest of the nine new players capped by England already this season,

has made such an impression that the Lions must surely take him to South Africa at the end of the season, especially now that their increased party makes

room for the addition of a

third hooker. The only question in my mind is whether Greening goes as second or third choice in the pecking order behind Keith

Hooker



Mark Regan



Phil Greening



Keith Wood

Kingsholm contingent reflects the club's increasing stature in the professional game.

They are currently the fifth most productive English club in terms of supplying players to the national cause which is no less than you would expect from a club representing the most passionate rugby city in the country.

The ranking is based on the selection of the three England teams for next week, the Calcutta Cup showdown against Scotland on Saturday and the Friday A matches against the Scots at Harlequins and Otago at Bristol. Bath head the list with ten representatives followed by Leicester with nine, Harlequins eight, Northampton seven and Gloucester six, not bad for a club which started the season losing

Wood, assuming the Irishman stays in one piece, always a dangerous assumption given his battering-ram style.

Without access to a multi-millionaires cheque book, Gloucester had no alternative but to pursue the much more satisfying policy of finding and nurturing their own talent. Their success in that department under the direction of

coach Richard Hill extends beyond the rapid development of Greening, out on his own as Mark Regan's challenger.

Middle Row Jumper



John Fowler



Dave Sims



Simon Shaw

Full Back



Tim Stimpson



Nick Beal



Chris Catling

n - Pays Off

Fly Half



Paul Grayson



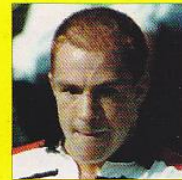
Mike Catt



Alex King



Paul Challinor



Mark Mapletoft

Five other uncapped players are all forcing their way up the England rankings. Judging by the latest national selections, Dave Sims, for instance, is right up there behind Simon Shaw as next in line for the middle-jumper's role, ahead of his Sale counterpart, John Fowler. Sims is the one Gloucester player on duty

of-season trip to Argentina. The same goes for Mark Mapletoft, ranked fifth in the fly half ratings behind Paul Grayson, Mike Catt, Alex King and Paul Challinor.

Mapletoft's half back partner, Scott Benton, is in pretty much the same position. He may have a long way to go with Andy Gomarsall, Austin Healey, Kyran Bracken and Nick Walshe all in front of him and Matthew Dawson returning soon from long-term injury but at least he's on the ladder and moving in the right direction. Rob Fidler's first appearance in an England A team gives him an early opportunity to prove himself a serious contender to Martin Johnson's throne as the England front-jumper par excellence. Who knows, with the Tiger otherwise engaged on Lions business this season, he might make the end-of-season trip to Argentina which is precisely where his father, John, made his England debut 16 years ago.

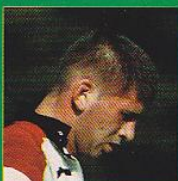
Peter Jackson

Rugby Correspondent, Daily Mail.

Front Jumper

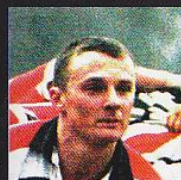


Martin Johnson



Rob Fidler

against Scotland A at The Stoop next Friday afternoon in what is effectively the England shadow XV. The other four are in the third XV, against Otago at Bristol next Friday evening. Each has a rough idea of where he stands. Chris Catling, third in line behind Tim Stimpson and Nick Beal, has the chance to push himself further into full back contention for the end-



Scott Benton



Nick Walshe



Kyran Bracken

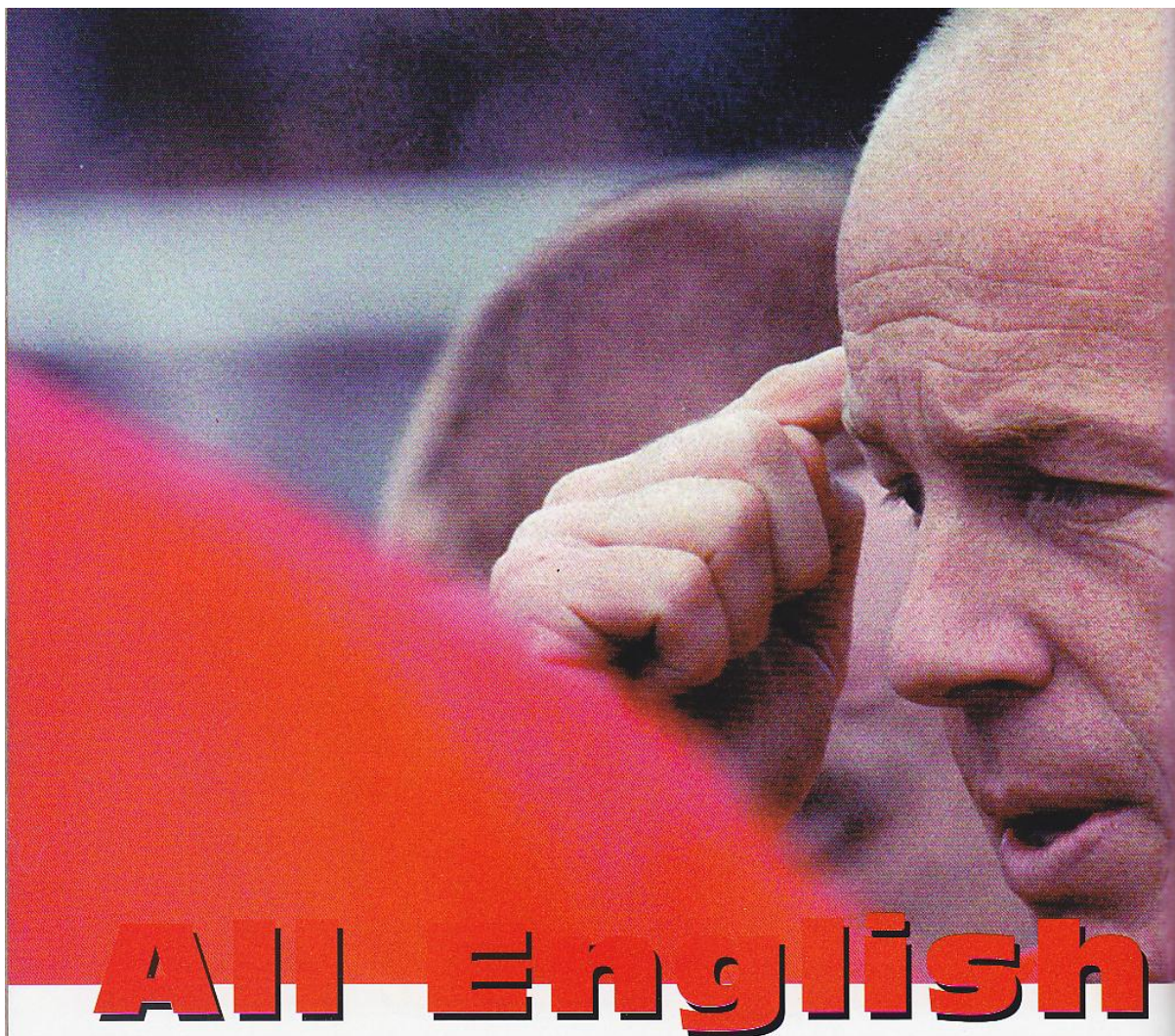


Austin Healey



Andy Gomarsall

Scrum Half



All English

HOW many Courage League One clubs can truly say that they could put a first-choice side onto their pitch which comprised almost entirely Englishmen?

With a bit of manipulation here and there with second-string players, maybe half would be able to put some side or another onto the field.

But, with the Courage League now looking more like the United Nations, only Gloucester and Leicester can honestly say they are English clubs in the true sense.

Leicester have thrived on their English stars like Will Greenwood, Dean Richards, Austin Healey, Rory Underwood, Martin Johnson and the legendary ABC front row club of Graham Rowntree, Darren Garforth and Richard Cockerill.

The Tigers, with all the spending power in the world thanks to their huge following and consistency at the top of the game, have only bought one real overseas player in South African star Joel Stransky.

Take him out and put Rob Liley into the letter J jersey, and there would be a complete English team.

The same is true at Kingsholm. Only wing Mike Peters is a foreign player - and his country is Trinidad and Tobago, hardly a world force in the game.

If Peters is injured, Gloucester need only to fill his place with ex-Bath and England A wing Audley Lumsden to complete their all-England side.

And it is a philosophy which is instilled with rugby director Richard Hill. His club are currently looking around for somebody to pump a few pounds into the side and he does not knock the signing of foreign talent who honestly want to play for the club and not just pick up a fat wage packet.

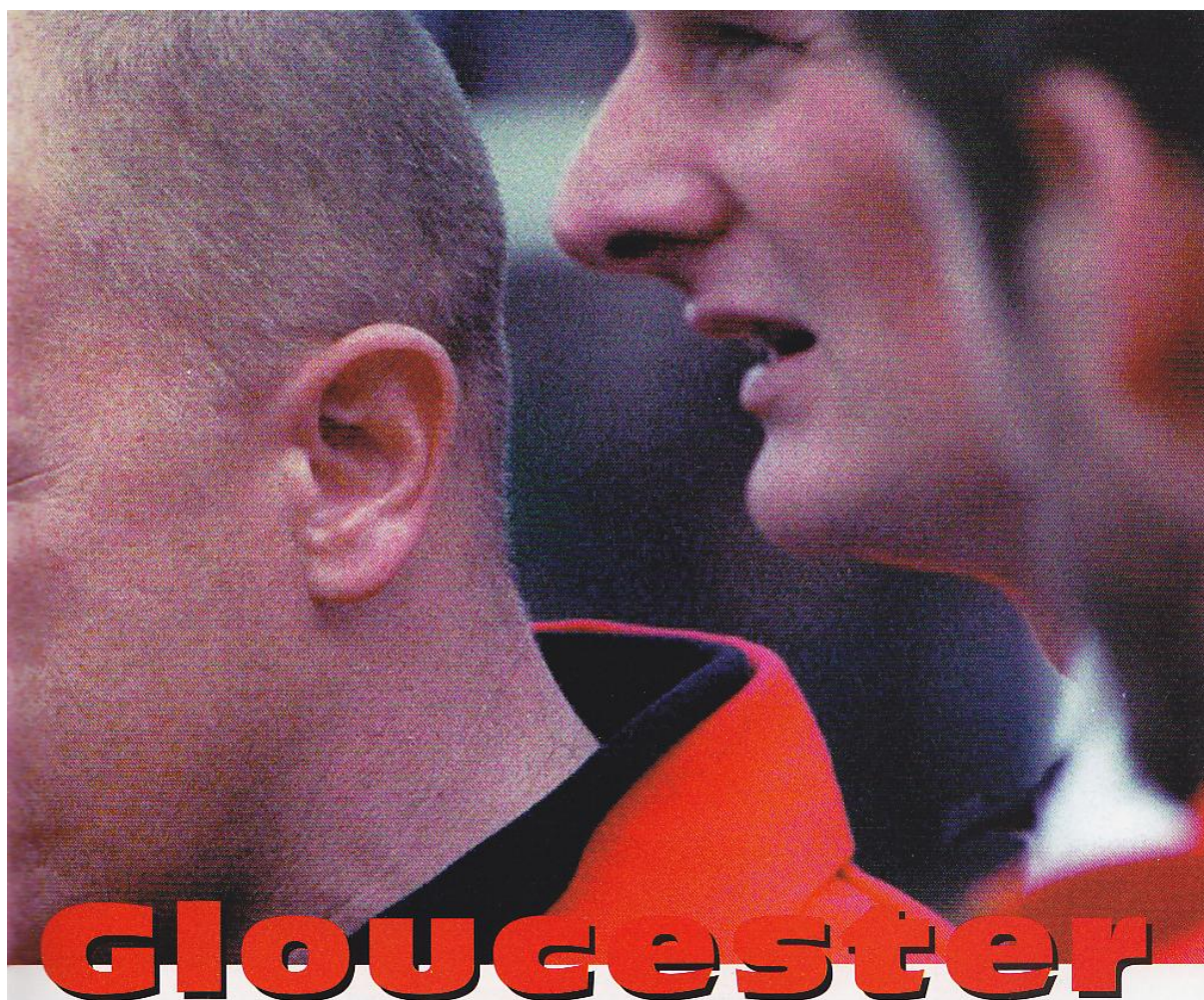
But he does not believe in the mass purchase of star names just for the sake of it, adding: "We are not decrying the money because, at the end of the day, Gloucester needs the money to keep the existing players we have got and buy young and, hopefully, English players.

"I'm not against foreign players because they have a different philosophy and, if you have got the right one, then they can certainly help and other people can benefit.

"But you can't flood the game completely at the expense of young English talent."

And Hill explained how vulnerable young talent, nurtured through a club like Gloucester, can be if they decide to take the money and run to a bigger outfit.

He added: "The danger young lads can face is if they move



Gloucester

to another club through a big money offer and, if they have a couple of dodgy games, they can buy an overseas player who they think is better and out goes that young player, no matter who you are.

"You have to be careful about clubs like Wasps and Bath, Quins and Saracens because a good English player may begin to think 'Hang on a minute. They are going to bring a big import in and I'm going to be in the second team'.

"I see a criminal thing like Francois Pienaar coming into the Saracens side and Richard Hill, who is going to win his first England cap at openside, is moved to blindside to accommodate him, that will do him no good in terms of his international development.

"Now can he afford to play at blindside week in and week out for Saracens? He wants to play for England openside and he won't do that if he is playing blindside for Saracens. So I feel saddened by that."

The Gloucester coach mentioned one particular player who could be in danger of becoming a victim of the overseas syndrome, former Kingsholm lock Richard West. Hill added: "Westy's days are probably numbered at Richmond with the arrival of Steve Atherton there but it is going to happen more and more. Far from it ticking

over, clubs are clambering crazily for any foreign player who sends a CV across. I find it staggering, really."

This all leads Hill to the same conclusion about the future of domestic rugby - and English rugby as a whole - if the surge of overseas players into the game continues.

He added: "It will end up with 80 per cent of foreign players in our first division and it saddens me when I see comments like one in which senior clubs would have to put a second XV into the Courage League otherwise English rugby will stagnate.

"If clubs like Wasps and Harlequins have to put second XV's into the Courage League to play English players, then that is a sad state of affairs. I just hope that the RFU sort something out before then.

"At the moment, we are seeing a lot of foreign players but, in the next 12 months, it is going to be absolutely crazy because more and more are coming in, and not less and less."

It is a frightening scenario - but one which could so easily come true to the detriment of English rugby.