They need no introduction at all, Bath have long been Gloucester's arch rivals and I'm delighted to offer them a hearty welcome to Kingsholm today.

There's something very special about playing Bath, it doesn't matter whether everything depends on it, or seemingly very little, Bath v Gloucester matches are always passionate affairs and I'm sure today's encounter will be no different. So not that any added spice is required, but today does give us the first opportunity to welcome Bath to Kingsholm as European Champions. Their win over Brive earlier in the year was a triumph for English Rugby. And despite our rivalry I'll openly admit that I cheered Bath on all the way that day, and was delighted to do so.

Since the high of that victory Bath have managed to maintain those highest of standards. And although on the face of it the club's domestic season hasn't been a success yet following that early exit from the Tetley Bitter Cup, don't be too surprised if they have more silverware in the trophy cabinet before too long.

I have no fear of Bath and their players but have the greatest of respect for the Club. Long before the money men enabled others to put out top class sides Bath were setting the standards. The current mix of local players and imports, of seasoned internationals and young and up and coming stars has produced an impressive array of talent that proves the cheque book isn't the only way to secure success.

But in saying all that I feel confident that Gloucester will match Bath in all respects today. At Kingsholm we are a most difficult side to beat, we've got the winning habit and are determined to keep hold of it, I'd just like to see at least some of that rub off on our games away from Gloucester. With the support I know you will give us today behind the team look out for our pack taking the battle to Bath, and watch for our exciting backs stretching the more famous names that our visitors will bring with them. Many of today's head to head encounters leave my mouth watering. For example, how often do rugby fans get the chance to see two of the world's great wingers in Ieuan Evans and Phillipe St Andre playing against each other? And how will Guscott and De Glanville cope with our two stars in the centre?

So I await the start of this game with eager anticipation. And hope our senior players can do what our Colts have already done, and beat Bath.

John Fidler
Jeremy Guscott, Phil de Glanville, Leuan Evans, Nigel Redman and the list could go on and on. These are established household names. They are all stars of the rugby world and they all play for Bath. Throw in names like Matt Perry, Mark Ragan and Mike共计 and you begin to realise and appreciate why Bath have been the top team in England for so long. They are perhaps the one team that’s full of names that even a non rugby enthusiast would be instantly familiar with. The clubs record is simply outstanding, and amongst the highlights they can boast being the only English team to win the League and Cup double, and they’ve done that more than once, and not forgetting that they’re the only English team to be crowned Champions of Europe.

Many of us delighted in watching that excellent BBC documentary “The Rugby Club” and seeing at almost first hand Bath fall someway from grace. It’s said we British love to build individuals and teams up, only to reveal in knocking them down again. And during that docu-

soap we certainly saw Bath knocked down. To lose one coach was careless, to lose two in a single season was a scandal. But to their credit, and not to many people’s great surprise Bath have bounced back, and how better to silence the critics than to win the European Cup. The job done in a relatively short space of time by coach Andy Robinson and his willing helpers Jon Callard and Nigel Redman, has been little short of outstanding. Callard, the kicking machine, who now also coaches says there’s no secret to the success:

“We didn’t turn from a great side to a bad side in one season. The players were still basically the same that had brought us so much success in recent years. But in some ways we lost our direction, and with it the Bath spirit seemed to go. This year we’ve gone back to basics, put in a lot of hard work, and we’ve got back to the Bath that I and every one else knows.”

Bath will admit that the European Cup was this season’s main priority, and Callard admits it’s been difficult to be successful at home and abroad.

“The days of one Club, usually us, dominating every competition are gone. The standard of the game has got so much better since professionalism. And whereas a few years ago we only had a couple of Clubs who got near us, now almost everyone in the Allied Dunbar Premiership is strong.”

Today’s game is important to Bath, as old adversaries Gloucester and Bath, yet again battle it out again for the sake of West Country pride in their rugby.

By Keith Malcolm
Final game against Bedford a week or so ago. Scott Benton was, of course, away on England duty, but Ian Sanders was available and was on the bench for the game.

'Stanley', as Laurie is, somewhat mysteriously, known among his squad colleagues weighs 13 stone and stands at 5' 10". He has a partner, Faye Nash and an son who is named Jack. He lists his favourite colour as green, is inordinately fond of the music of Oasis and solivates at the thong of curry and pasta, although it isn't clear whether he means separately or both together. Like me, he has a great fondness for that marvellous film 'Forest Gump'.

He also tells us that, before joining the professional ranks, he held various jobs, including stints as a drayman and a warehouseman.

One insight into Laurie's character is given by the fact that he regards 'training' as one of his leisure interests. And it

shows on the field. He lists his most admired player is Mike Teague, and he is by no means alone in that.

His favourite moment in rugby is simply 'joining Gloucester', although he admits that being invited to join the England Under 21 squad, for whom he appeared as a reserve twice, runs that occasion close.

His ambition? To hold down a regular First XV place. Now why doesn't that surprise me?

Laurie Beck is one of those players who will probably never hit the national headlines, but we couldn't without him and others of his calibre. He's one vertebra in the solid backbone which makes Gloucester RFC what it is, and we're fortunate to have him.
MARK’S MARK

Hearty congratulations to Mark Mapletonfor deservedly winning the Allied Dunbar/Rugby World Player of the Month Award for March 1998. Apparently, his achievement of 1,000 points for Gloucester in record time had a lot to do with the selection.

It occurs to me that his 18-point match- winning performance against Bedford in the Cheltenham and Gloucester Cup Final wasn't even included in the reckoning, so perhaps there are more honours in prospect for our pocket genius.

They tell me that the Award consisted of a T-shirt, an engraved trophy and a bottle of champagne, which probably made him popular in the clubhouse last Saturday.

Well done, Toby! I Nice to see your talents recognised.

IF ONLY...

Someone once wrote that "if only" are the saddest two words in the English language. We now know what he meant. If only Mark Mapleton ‘s fortissimo drop-kick had been a few feet further to the left last Saturday, If only Saracens had not put it across the injury ravaged Bath on Good Friday, If only those two things had happened, then today’s game might well be the most important one we’ve had this season, with a decisive role in the outcome of the 1997/8 Premiership title.

As it is, we’ll just have to live with what we’ve got. Which is no hardship at all. Gloucester v. Bath is always the highlight of the Kingsholm season, and nothing which has happened in the past few weeks is going to change that. If you’ve been around for the past decade or so, then I don’t have to tell you about the long and pulsating history of the meeting between our two great clubs: meetings which have never been less than

enthralling, and at times have approached classic, even epic, proportions.

I haven’t seen either of today’s teams at the time of writing, of course, but it is to be hoped that Bath’s walking wounded are back in action next week, and that last Saturday’s enormously hard game against

Newcastle Falcons hasn’t left Gloucester with too many injuries. We wouldn’t want to see today’s encounter played out between half-strength sides, after all. Nothing less than the best is good enough for Gloucester v. Bath.

Recent history would seem to indicate that there are two evenly matched sides trying conclusions out there today. That’s something of a change for Gloucester, who for year after year, had to start the game as underdogs. Not that things always turned out that way, because we were always likely to win the affair, whatever the sides on paper and the expert pre-match analyses decreed. On more than one occasion we have upset the Bath apple cart, and we have also gone down agonisingly close at times. I can’t imagine that either side is going to run away with it this afternoon, but again, I could be wrong. Bath will certainly be smarting over that Saracens defeat, and will wish to show the world that they’re still the best side in England, and can’t be written off that easily.

Conversely, we’re quite certain that we were robbed last Saturday, and thoroughly deserved to win a game that had everything. Against that background, we couldn’t ask for better opposition to make our point against today’s respected and welcome visitors. Whatever the newcomers from the North East may think, Bath is still the side everyone wants to beat, which is as it should be.

As always, Bath are welcome to Kingsholm. We hope they enjoy their visit.
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**Referee:** Nick Cousins  
**Touch Judges:** Geoff Warren, Geoff Williams
THE UPS AND THE DOWNS

The various Gods of Chance have been in a particularly capricious mood this season, at least, as far as Gloucester players are concerned.

I suppose that the writing was on the wall when Phil Vickery started off the campaign as to all intents and purposes, the heir apparent to the England hookers’ shirt. A succession of injuries allied to a lack of form put paid to that, and he has only just got himself back into the reckoning by putting in a highly creditable display in England A’s win over Ireland. I wonder if his selection for that game means that he is in the reckoning for this summer’s tour party?

It’s all ill wind, they say, and the good luck side to that equation fell to Chris Forsey, who, thrust into the furnace by injuries to both Neil McCarthy and Greening, seized his chance with both hands and forced himself into the first-choice Gloucester spot.

Then, there was the Philippe St. Andre affair. Having barely scratched the Kingsholm turf at the start of the season, he reclaimed the Captaincy of the French side, only to succumb to a nasty injury which deprived both France and Gloucester of his scintillating services. He looks as if he’s back with a vengeance now, but in the meantime, Rob Jewell made an impact to such an extent that he won Caps on the wing for England Colts.

And, talking about wingers, what about Bryan Johnson? Virtually unknown at the start of the season, he has impressed everyone on his introduction to the side, scoring an unforgettable try against Saracens. Then he goes and gets himself concussed while playing for England A. I suppose he might just have been an outside bet for the tour, and it is to be hoped that his enforced three-week layoff hasn’t put the cockers on that.

Then there was the Phil Vickery affair. He virtually forced himself into the England side where he put in a blinder of a performance against Wales. That silky statistic business was resolved, although it couldn’t have done his confidence any good. Then he got a shoulder injury which sidelined him for the rest of the Five Nations campaign. There simply ain’t no justice.

There have been other little misgivings at fortune, too. Dave Sims, Rob Fiddler, Mark Cornwall and Scott Benton (who was within a whisker of getting on the pitch at the England v Ireland game), all had injuries just when they could have most done with staying fit.

All these misfortunes appear to be resolved now. Perhaps the luck might turn our way for the last few games of the season.

We did, after all, win the Cheltenham and Gloucester Cup, didn’t we?

NIGHT OFF FOR ROB?

We only have one more home First XV jamboree this season, that against Sale in May. That does not mean, however, that there aren’t any major Kingsholm occasions to come along and watch. On Wednesday, 29th April, we have the County Cup Final.

I suppose that welcome visitors to Kingsholm supporting the opposing sides may well have trouble appreciating the importance which any Gloucester rugby supporter attaches to what is, after all, a local rugby occasion. It might be equally surprising to learn that the conversations around the pubs are just as likely to be about the doings of Gloucester Old Boys or Cotney Hill as it is to be about Gloucester RFC.

To them I can only say, that over a century or so, the strength of our so-called ‘junior’ clubs has been the foundation of Gloucester’s success. To an extent that is still so, even in an era of professionalism, transfer fees and all the rest.

If you doubt that, take a look at the Gloucester pack. Every one of the first choice eight, with the exception of Phil Vickery, has come up through the local ranks, and has held his own against just about every pack in the country, regardless of their price - even country at birth.

That can’t be anything but healthy. After all, players don’t spring into this world fully armed, so to speak. They have to learn the trade somewhere. And you can’t go on building a side by simply attracting big stars from all over the place, otherwise you end up by taking in each other’s washing.

This year’s County Cup Final features Nation, who are old hands at this sort of thing of course. They will be opposing Spartans, and I find it quite surprising that this is the first time that the good old Red Ants have reached the ultimate round of the competition.

One Kingsholm alcholic, who will have a more than passing interest in the events of next Wednesday evening, is our genial Bar Manager, Rob Cough. Not only is he metaphorically rubbing his hands at the thought of the bar takings which will assuredly ensue, but he can claim to be a Red Ant himself.

He might even leave the bars to his competent assistants and join in the fun and games that evening, and there’s no doubt which side he will be cheering for. Should be a good match, and I do assure you, it will be an occasion worth coming along for.

And incidentally, you may have heard a rumour that Rob is thinking of giving the job up at the end of the season. I’ve taxed him on the matter and he quite categorically assures me that there is no truth in the story whatever.

That may be the best news I’ve heard so far this week.

ANOTHER BATTLE HOTTING UP

The Premiership isn’t the only top-of-the-table competition entering a very interesting run-in at the moment. Have you noticed how the Unions top point scorers list is hotting up?

The last such list published reads as follows:
1. STEVE SWINDLES, (MANCHESTER) 419
2. JOEL STRANSKY, (LEICESTER) 383
3. MARK MAPETOFT, (GLOUCESTER) 376
4. GARETH REES, (WASPS) 347

You'll notice that Toby has leapfrogged his Waas rival since the previous list was published. I note that last weekend, Mark scored 17 points to Stransky's 11, so he's closed the gap somewhat. On the other hand, Gareth Rees slotted 19 points, so he's made up a little leeway.

It seems a bit much to ask for Toby to overtake Swindells, but Joel Stransky looks to be well within his sights. Keep slotting 'em over Mark!

WANT THE LEAGUE LEADERSHIP BATTLE AT KINGSHOLM THIS SUNDAY
Watch Saracens v Newcastle live on Sunday in the Kingsholm Sportsbar, kick off 3pm.
Enjoy a pint and settle down to watch the big game.

TODAY AT KINGSHOLM

PRE MATCH ENTERTAINMENT
Please welcome our young players to Kingsholm today for their Pre Match rugby curtain raiser (subject to pitch conditions)

Widdow Old Boys v Gloucester All Blues
(Mini rugby)
Abbeysmead v Upton St Leonards
(Touch rugby)

TODAY'S MASCOT
JAMES CLARKE
James is 10 years old and lives in Westbury on Severn. He attends the local school and has an older brother.
His interests are: Football (Man Utd fan), ten pin bowling and swimming.

TODAY'S REFEREE
NICK COUSINS
Educated in Bristol Grammar School and Loughborough University, Nick was involved in rugby as a player, administrator, and coach before taking up the whistle. He was Secretary of the rugby club at Loughborough for three years whilst playing for the 1st XV as a winger. He went onto play briefly for Exeter before spending three seasons as player / coach at Sichtmouth. A move to London followed, where, illness unfortunately curtailed his playing career and he was persuaded to take up refereeing. Nick joined the London Referee Society in 1993, was invited to join the A List in 1998, and the RFU Panel in 1990. He has some international experience having refereed the 1991 season refereeing in Australia and having been invited recently to referee the Dubai 7s. Last season Nick refereed the Baltic Cup Final between Russia and Denmark as well as the final of the Middlesex Finals. Nick is the head of Physical Education at Shrewsbury College. Nick is married with four young children - he also has a brother, Robin, who has done a bit of ice skating.

MIKE METTERS CANCER RESEARCH APPEAL
An outstanding exponent of Kendo by the age of 10, Michael Metters went on to prove his sporting prowess by playing for Bath Rugby Club's Under-19's and Durham University. Nicknamed the Geisha by his colleagues at Durham in recognition of his Japanese mother and the courage and determination he displayed both on the rugby field and in his life in general, he was fiercely competitive, yet always caring and unwaveringly loyal to his friends.
At the age of 22 Mike was diagnosed with germ cell cancer. Over the next 5 months he battled fearlessly with the disease, dealing with demanding treatments without complaint, impressing the doctors and nurses who treated him as well as friends and family around him. Sadly, despite his courage and the best care available, Mike died on Christmas Eve 1997. His funeral was attended by 400 people from the three main communities in his short life: Durham University, Bath Rugby Club and his local community in Llandudno, Gloucestershire, where he grew up.
Now, after Mike's death, his friends are continuing his fight against cancer by raising money to ensure the Imperial Cancer Research Fund can continue its vital research into the causes, prevention, treatment and cure of cancer.
Please give generously today to help others in their fight against cancer.
Collection buckets will be available at the main gates on your way home.
Many thanks for your generosity.

Forthcoming Kingsholm Events

Wednesday 29th April
County Cup Match
Kick-off 7.15pm

Wednesday 13th May
RAF v Army
Kick-off 7.15pm

Thursday 14th May
Senior Combination Cup Final
Kick-off 7.15pm

Gloucester v Bath, 18th April 1998
supported by
EAGLE ASH
Phil Greening, Tony Windo, Dave Sims and Pete Glanville, they and many other current first teamers here at Kingsholm have all come through the thriving youth rugby set up that exists in Gloucestershire, and long may it continue to produce such talents!

Every school in the county, and dozens of clubs can claim that they are the ones who are producing the next generation of heroes for The Shed. To ensure that the best do rise to the top, coach Dave Pounton has recently taken up a new role as the Schools Liaison Officer for Gloucester Rugby Football Club.

"In and around Gloucester we've still got a thriving junior rugby set up. The kids still eat, sleep and breathe rugby, and my job is to make sure the best get even better," Dave, took up the post at Kingsholm in February, and has already cast his net far and wide for blossoming talent. Hundreds of youngsters have been watched, and a network of coaches and development officers have been holding trials for various age groups.

"The players I and my coaches spot will continue to play for their schools and clubs. What we do is to identify talent, and already happening and has proved to be inspirational to potential Shed Heads and players alike.

"The reaction the players get is tremendous. They enjoy the sessions and the kids are thrilled. As well as helping me in my work as a coach, it's also great PR for Gloucester Rugby Club." So the priorities for Dave are two fold, to promote rugby and to ensure that no potential young stars slip through the Kingsholm net un-noticed.

YOUTH RUGBY DEVELOPMENT
KICKING COMPETITION FINAL
11th April 1998
Supported by

EAGLE STAR

Gloucester v Bath, 18th April 1998

supported by
help create the next generation of first team players at Gloucester. If the Colts team is winning at the same time, then that is even better. But the results I’m chasing are national youth team caps and future first team appearances.*

"The youth rugby set up in Gloucester has always been successful. We benefit from rugby being the main sport in the county. The changes made by Richard Hill have added some structure to the system, and brought the Colts set up under the umbrella of Kingsholm. More than ever now we feel part of Gloucester Rugby Club."

One player who’s already making big strides towards senior recognition is winger Rob Jewell. He can already boast first team appearances in both league and cup competitions. And his Colts coach is confident he’s going to succeed.

"Rob is very quick and very strong. At a young age he’s already proving that he is an excellent player. I’m sure the professional game is going to thrust more and more teenagers into senior action, and in most cases that’s a good thing. It’ll always be easier for threequarters to make the transition, for front five forwards it takes longer. But my philosophy is the same as Richard’s, if they are good enough and strong enough then they are ready."

That philosophy is likely to pay dividends for Gloucester in years to come. It’s simple mathematics that demands that every club produces its own young players. As more and more money comes into the game from the financial backers, from sponsorship and from TV contracts then the price of players is likely to spiral. Recent transfers such as the deal that took Francois Pienaar to Saracens and Iwan Evans to Bath have already demanded fees in excess of a quarter of a million pounds so the need to nurture home grown talent is obvious. And with no less than three England Colts internationals in the current Gloucester Colts side, and many more pushing for places in the senior squad, the future of rugby seems to be safe in the hands of John Haines.

*The aim of my job is simple, I’m here to..."