

Old Spot!

Your Independent Match Day Newsletter
News and Views, Facts and Figures



Orrell Supporter reads of massive defeat at Kingsholm?

GLOUCESTER'S NEXT MATCH v ORRELL	Issue 3
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Old Spot's Sheditorial

Now before we all get carried away with how well things are going here at Kingsholm let us not forget that there is a world out there who have their own ideas about how the game should be played. We saw some of the results of those ideas when we made the trip to a spine-numbingly cold Memorial Ground last Friday to see our Local Heroes take on Otago. While I am happy to report that Messrs Benton, Catling, Fidler and Mapletoft did not disgrace themselves, sadly we saw an eclipse of an England team which bordered on planetary proportions.

I cannot remember seeing All Black outside half Culhane kick the ball out of hand. What I do remember is seeing some of the biggest players I have ever seen running with the ball, staying on their feet in the tackle and handling the ball as if born to the task. The Otago backs were even better. Northern Hemisphere rugby has much to learn still but at least we now have a core of Gloucester players being exposed to this level of rugby on a regular basis. This can only be good for the club in the long run.

Three of the Otago side are only 20 years old and considering that this provincial side ended in the bottom half of the Super12 competition and that they were missing four All Blacks including Kronfeld and Wilson, I was left feeling that the gulf between the two hemispheres was widening rather than shortening.

Maybe its time Gloucester renewed their effort to afford an influential overseas player.

Also in this issue.....

Richard Hill and Scott Benton gave the post-match press conference following the Bristol Pilkington Cup match.

As Gloucester threaten to win some silverware in the apparently ill-fated Anglo-Welsh competition, CodPiece! takes conspiracy theory to its logical conclusion (well, logical to Gloucester supporters anyway!)

As usual Ol' Babber previews the match with the fellows in Amber and Black.

Please feel free to write to us, we welcome your comments.

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Why not visit our internet site? <http://www.glawster.demon.co.uk>

Club News

Just in case you haven't heard yet, the Northampton game has been rearranged for Tuesday with kick-off at 7.30. The next edition of Old Spot! will be available at that game.

Squad News

The latest reports on the fitness, availability, representational honours, gossip, new arrivals, departures, First XV and United squad members.

Audley Lumsden's groin strain has still not cleared up and it is likely that he will be out for at least couple of weeks.

Nick Smith's Achilles tendon problem is proving to be a little stubborn.

Phil Vickery still has a hamstring injury and will be out of action for at least another week.

Chris Yelland's knee problem has cleared up and he has resumed full training.

Peter Glanville has returned from South Africa and plays in the United side who face their Orrell counterparts.

Adey Powles is still on loan to Lydney and it is not clear when he will be returning to the club.

The Club will be having a meeting with Ian Smith shortly and both sides are aiming to resolve the situation. As we go to press this meeting could have taken place on Friday morning but more likely it will take place early next week. The Club are unable to confirm whether or not Smith has received a definite offer from another club.

Phil Greening is confirmed on the bench for England's trip to Dublin on February 15th.

Incredible as it may seem, no Gloucester player has been picked for England's sevens party that will defend the title in Hong Kong.

Match Report

Gloucester 18, Bristol 12

As with the game with West Hartlepool, there were a number of interesting supporting events. But what should have been a match of match-ups turned into a load of cock-ups!

We were looking forward to Greening v Regan, Sims v Shaw, Benton v Jones, Mapletoft v Burke and Hull v Catling. But Paul Burke cried off before the game and the rest of the Bristol team seemed resigned to Division 2 next season. Gloucester, on the other hand, were so far below par as to be almost unrecognisable. However it is a very pleasant feeling to reflect that even when Gloucester play so bad they can still win, plus the fact that we have now become accustomed to Gloucester playing decent rugby.

Richard Hill later said that it was the most error-strewn game he had ever seen in his life. It can't possibly get worse!! I started to count the number of messed up moves and dropped balls but lost count early on. I even checked to see if Saverimutto was playing but no, Tiny Don and Big Martin were Richard's choices to bamboozle the Bristol defence today. The problem was that they bamboozled themselves as over-complicated scissor movements and dummies fooled everyone including the poor soul who was supposed to get the ball.

Within a few minutes of the start, Bristol took the lead with a Tainton penalty. From the restart Greening took exception to the manner in which Corkery bundled him out of touch and slammed the ball straight into his face. Corkery's nose resembled a squashed tomato for the rest of the match.

It took a mere 8 minutes before the refereeing jury in The Shed reached their verdict. Following some rather strange decisions over the put-in at a series of scrums, our Foreman shouted "Referee! You're crap!". Clearly annoyed by being unmasked so soon, said referee gave another penalty which Tainton gladly converted. Tainton knew he wasn't going to get any chances at a conversion so he took all opportunities that came his way.

Mark Mapletoft finally got his chance and slotted over a penalty after some good work by Devereux to reduce the deficit to 3 points. Simon Shaw was clearly having a bad day at the office especially after O'Brien showed him the yellow card for being tardy around the pitch. It only got worse as Microtoft brought him down inches from the Gloucester line.

The England lock's day was to be made thoroughly miserable as the hard-headed yet mild-mannered Chris Catling gave him the benefit of his head early in the second half and Shaw had to leave to field for medical treatment.

Towards the end of the first half the forwards decided that the girls had had enough opportunities to score, stuffed the ball up Tony Windo's jersey and pushed him over the line for a welcome score. Microtoft slotted over the conversion.

There was still time for Dave Sims to throw a punch that only a blind man with very dark glasses and who is looking in the wrong direction would miss. Sadly this description didn't fit the referee and after showing Sims the yellow card (with Shaw's name on it!), he awarded a penalty which Tainton popped over. The end of the half couldn't come soon enough for Richard Hill as he stormed onto the pitch to tell our boys that some slight improvements were necessary.

Half-time score: Gloucester 10 Bristol 9

The game opened up slightly after half-time but not by much. Mapletoft missed a drop-goal opportunity. Mike Peters was pushed out of touch inches from the try line. Simon Devereux seized a loose ball from a line-out and from the resulting maul a penalty for offside was given. Mapletoft scored to stretch Gloucester's lead to 13-9.

Another sizzling 20-yard run from Catling after a Hull clearance woke the crowd up again. But with only 15 minutes left, Tainton brought Bristol too close for Gloucester's comfort with a penalty.

Scott Benton almost found touch with a delicate kick but Hull retrieved. However the discarded England full-back put his feet into touch. Sims easily caught the throw. Greening peeled away and as he was tackled slipped the ball to Benton who took only one further step before planting the ball down to score. Mapletoft failed with the conversion.

Although Bristol tried to get back towards the Gloucester 22, superb tackling at crucial moments prevented any progress. As the referee blew for full-time, you could hear the sighs of relief - or were those prayers for Wakefield in the draw for the Quarter Finals??

Teams:

Gloucester: Catling; Peters, Caskie, Roberts, Lloyd; Mapletoft, Benton; Windo, Greening, Deacon; Fidler, Sims (captain); Pearce, Carter, Devereux.

Tries: Windo, Benton; Conversion: Mapletoft; Penalties: Mapletoft (2)

Bristol: Hull; Tiueti, Martin, Maggs, Breeze; Tainton, Jones; Sharp, Regan, Hinkins; Eagle, Shaw; Corry (captain), Rollit, Corkery.

Press Conference

This week Scott Benton joins Richard Hill in the Press Conference. But first here's Richard with his comments on the win over Bristol.

Q: What did you make of the first 20 minutes or so ?

RH: Error-ridden. I haven't seen us make that many mistakes in a game this season. I'm not sure whether it's nerves as Cup rugby often gets very tense and it can lead to a lot of errors. To be fair I thought that Bristol didn't make so many errors as us, although we dominated for most of the match and 2 tries to nil at the end of the day is a good margin. But we still did silly things like chucking the ball away in the 22 and we were trying to slip passes that weren't on and we got into good scoring positions and let them get back into the game with a knock-on or poor pass and so gave a scrum and possession to them. So it was disappointing. Our restarts weren't very good and we put ourselves under pressure.

Q: They spilled a lot of ball though...

RH: Yeah, they did make mistakes but I think we made more. With the amount of possession and territory we had there should have been a big scoring margin but we made life very hard for ourselves. The players all know that, we're quite sensible. They know that they haven't played well and at least they've been through a hard battle and they do say it's sometimes good to play a game like that where it's a hard old scrap as long as you come out on top - it brings your feet back down to the ground and we've got a lot of work to do. We know it was an absolute shocker, but we won and the players are delighted they've won. The front row are very pleased - they've had a very good afternoon. I think Bristol's strength is in their scrum and today there were several 5-metre scrums where we were rock-solid. In the end Sharp was in trouble with Andy Deacon and had to go off in the end so I was very pleased front-row wise because that's the biggest strength Bristol have got and we actually won that battle up front.

Q: You were reported as feeling sorry for Bristol in the week...

RH: Yeah, I don't like any club going through that - it's not very nice.

Q: Do you feel even more for them now ?

RH: Well, not now, I won't feel sorry for them in the Cup. But obviously, that's it now, I'm not going to go on all season saying we're sorry for Bristol because at the end of the day it's going to be very tight. It's going to be a very big game for us at the Memorial Ground in the league and on today's performance I would say Bristol probably played one of their better games of the season.

Q: What did you say at half-time ?

RH: I asked someone to tell me what on earth was going on because I have never seen so many errors in all my playing career. It was absolutely dreadful - dropping passes, chucking loose passes away, we score and then give away a penalty in front of our posts and get them back in the game straight away. We also failed to take three restarts. I just could not put a finger on it. At half-time I said "Will someone please tell me why on earth we are making these mistakes ?"

Q: And what was the answer ?

RH: No-one had a genuine answer. But what was pleasing at half-time was that they were very determined to go back and put the matter right. We didn't do very much towards that I must admit, it was still a very scrappy game.

Q: Do you agree that the forwards in the end just got it together and had the edge on Bristol ?

RH: Yeah, I think so, they certainly had driving play and we were very effective in the line-outs but we still did commit suicide on many occasions.

Q: There did seem to be this spirit that we all bang on about with Gloucester. There did seem to be a moment when everybody decided they didn't deserve to be playing like this. It was almost a battle of wills and yours was bigger.

RH: Yeah, I think this is where a little bit of self-belief comes through and they all believed that we were the better side. I think they were, but they were just playing so badly and no-one really knew why, but at the end of the day they didn't let it rattle them and they just kept going. They know that they haven't done the basics very well but they battled through it and they'll put that right next time.

Q: Scott Benton's try was well worked wasn't it ?

RH: That was good, yeah. I think Sims did very well against Shaw and I think in the second half in particular he was head and shoulders above Shaw. He dominated the line-out and the try came from Sims' catch. I thought Sims had one of his best games in the line-out today, I'm very pleased with him.

Q: Is that now 10 victories in a row ?

RH: Well, 6 league games and 2 cup wins certainly. It's very important for the club that we keep winning. Gloucester aren't yet in the league of the Quins, Bath, Wasps or Saracens - we haven't got the flowing talent. A lot of it will be grafting this year and so we're not going to expect to see exciting, flowing rugby from Gloucester at a very early stage of development. Sometimes we have to battle it out.

Q: How pleased are you with Scott Benton's progress concerning his early-season form ?

RH: He's a different player now than he was early-season. He's playing with a lot of confidence now, plays with his head up and plays a very sensible game. He's dangerous. He outshone Robert Jones today without a shadow of a doubt and he's coming on leaps and bounds.

Q: Gloucester had a very strong game defensively, don't you think ?

RH: Yeah, apart from a funny 5 or 10 minute spell in the second-half we defended very well. But I was disappointed that the referee didn't give us as many turnovers as we deserved. That does surprise me, because we were turning them in the tackle and holding them off the ground and the referee would say "Scrum to Bristol" - it should not have been a scrum to them - it's just his interpretation of the rules. But we are very good as forwards at hitting people hard and turning them - Simon Devereux and Andy Deacon are particularly good at that.

Q: How do you think the back-row combination worked today ?

RH: The back-row was working well. I mean Nathan Carter today had an absolutely superb game. I was so impressed by him, he's just getting better and better. He's absolutely everywhere, taking ball, pinching ball...If you actually watch on video what he does it's absolutely staggering the work-rate he gets through. He's just king amongst the forwards, he really is.

Q: And Ed Pearce had a good game again...

RH: Yeah, a frustrating game for him, he didn't get as much ball in the hands as he did against West Hartlepool, but it was a more defensive game for him and that's what we're looking for from him. (Exit RH, enter Scott Benton stage left...)

Q: Well played Scott, did you enjoy it ?

SB: Yeah, it was alright. A typical Cup game really and a big derby game - obviously it was a bit scrappy in parts but quite a good win.

Q: Richard was saying that you are playing with your head up - by which he meant that you are now playing with confidence. Do you feel more confident and more at home ?

SB: Yeah, obviously doing a lot of work with Richard Hill has brought my game on 100% and myself and Tofty are getting a good relationship at half-back which hopefully can take us both onto greater things.

Q: How's your game improved particularly ?

SB: Every game gets videoed and then the following week Richard and myself go through the game. We're doing a lot of passing and a lot of box-kicking and a lot of the time we sit down and watch the video of the last match and then we go out and put things right.

Q: Did you feel that you maybe got some ideas as well from Robert Jones - his box-kicks aren't too bad are they ?

SB: Yeah, well as I say I grew up especially watching Robert Jones - I thought he was an outstanding player. It's the first time I've ever played against him and whilst I hopefully wanted to learn something I obviously wanted to show him what I can do as well.

Q: How do you think you came out of that battle today ?

SB: Alright, I'm quite pleased. (grins broadly)

Q: Why did you come to Gloucester, Scott ?

SB: Well, I'd been going well in the Third Division with Morley then I got the chance to come down to a First Division club. I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it. Also at the time I joined, Richard Hill also joined the club as well so it wasn't a bad time really. And playing down here with the crowd as it is, it's outstanding.

Q: Looking forward to Friday's game ? [for England 'A' vs. Otago]

SB: Yeah, obviously it helps with me and Tofty playing together again - hopefully we can keep going from strength to strength.

Q: Well done, Scott.

Letter

More correspondence from the internet. This week I received an interesting letter from Richard Mander.

Look, just because a crummy city like Gluster has managed to leak onto the big 'T' you mustn't get carried away with all your technocrapity. I am one of the worlds most brilliant undiscovered reflectors who happened along to the game against W Hartlepool today.

If you are prepared to read on I can provide you with the ultimate account of what went really went on. Guaranteed completely Coker-free. I am not particularly close to the subtle niceties of this game. I base my observations on the behaviours that I imbibe from the atmosphere at the hell hole you reefer to as Killsholm. Some thoughts.....Phil 'Greeding' trashed good Glooster pissement on at least 3 occasions by finding himself at the 'centre' of attention when he should have been foraging around else where. (Do you understand what I am talking about here?)

Methinks the 'Porka Donna' factor has taken root already. No doubt he made a major contribution to today's game but somebody must tell him that his is just too plain ugly to be one of the girls. Now, more classic revelations that 99% of the oiks at the game would have missed. I genuinely believe that Mabeltot will end up as the Catts whiskers for England, but based on what I saw today he must work on his positional kicking. His punt from Longford Lane was just crazy. Unless he develops a better understanding of where he is on the pitch he could just turn out to be another Rob Andrews.

Glad to see that you have finally made it onto the world wide shed.

Yours.....

And so we've decided to give Richard a fair crack of the whip and so here's his view of the Cup game against Bristol a couple of weeks ago.

Oafs or Winning Wags?

The sun shone brightly on the righteous and the not so righteous on Saturday. The place was the Shed at Kingsholm, a ramshackle corrugated covered stand, the lower bowel of Gloucester Rugby Club, eagerly waiting to expel its West country rival from the Pilkington cup in a froth of wind and bruising banter. Opposite, in the safety of the Grandstand the patrons sat and marvelled at the brilliance of this holy grail.

Shedders trickle in from 2pm onwards to claim their place at the heart of the clatter. Allsorts, but mainly guys who would love to tell their boss where to stick his new team meeting idea. Older guys who remember the glory days of Burton and Brinn

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and if pushed, admit a sneaking regard for the Teague league. Those days of forward glory.

To arrive early for the Bristol game gets you a pair of spectacles for the price of one and at £8 for the thrill of balancing on a concrete step you need to go for the full Monty.

Game one is warm-up time. Traditionally played in front of the shed, it's time for the visitors to face up to the opposition. Rather like the novice hurdler at Cheltenham its important to measure up to one of the key obstacles before the tapes go up.

For Bristol, jeers segue into a tuneless chorus of "Going down, going down, going down". It's an obvious line maybe but look at the new electronic scoreboard. Can you see a 3 flickering on the Home side? No sorry it's just my imagination buoyed by a couple of Longford Inn lagers.

Now it's time to shine up the cherry with a surge of adrenaline. The shed has been lifting its line-out jumpers for years. Now its legal. But before the set piece practice, time for some general ball skills. 5 minutes of quick handling- military tattoo style. Squad paired up by position or status?. I'm not sure but Greening is with Mapletoft.

Time to test out the jumpers now. Devereux, Fidler and Sims. Giants from the age of Grymm and definitely not the kind of people to end your no claims bonus on. But here, for the Greening arm they look almost balletic. Devereux misses one, so the move is repeated to perfection.

Game two starts at 3pm and for 10 minutes Bristol flatter to deceive. 6 points up due to Gloucester being too pumped up and the fact that Tainton must be wearing ear plugs to drown out the cacophony of shed abuse as he strikes. Every Bristol decision brings the Kiwi ref closer to Dodo status and every Gloucester call hauls him back to Sainthood. But this is no place for consistency and logic. Even Gloucester's own Trinidadian wing suffers the arrows of political incorrectness as he spills a high ball to the tune of "What more do you want Peters? The sun's shining isn't it?"

The shed reach the height of unthinking sabotage on a Mapletoft penalty. As he settles on the oval, Bristol have had the audacity to send on two medics to recover a stricken body. This deliberate gamesmanship is too much for the partisans who bay their disapproval. It's still ringing in Mapletofts ears as he turns away from a badly struck place kick.

All in all it's a fairly skill free encounter, where brute force eventually wins out and Gloucester have this in spades but then they started 3 points up anyway. Didn't they?

— Richard Mander

Fixtures and Results

August	23rd	Friendly	Pontypridd	H	W	15-5
	31st	Courage League	Harlequins	A	L	19-75
September	7th	Courage League	Sale	H	L	12-16
	11th	Anglo-Welsh	Newbridge	A	W	26-17
	14th	Courage League	Saracens	A	L	11-41
	21st	Courage League	Bath	H	L	29-45
	28th	Courage League	Leicester	A	L	14-32
October	2nd	Anglo-Welsh	Dunvant	H	W	64-16
	6th	Courage League	Wasps	H	W	28-23
	12th	European League	Ebbw Vale	H	W	59-7
	16th	European League	Begles Bordeaux	H	L	10-17
	19th	European League	Swansea	A	L	9-62
	27th	European League	Bourgoin	H	L	9-24
November	2nd	European League	London Irish	A	W	29-13
	5th	Friendly	Combined Services	H	W	32-7
	9th	Courage League	West Hartlepool	A	W	23-14
	16th	Courage League	Orrell	A	W	49-3
	19th	Friendly	RAF	H	W	33-7
	23rd	Friendly	Wakefield	A	L	24-29
	30th	Anglo-Welsh	Newbridge	H	W	76-0
December	7th	Courage League	London Irish	H	W	29-19
	10th	Anglo-Welsh	Ebbw Vale	A	W	22-15
	15th	Friendly	Moseley	A	L	7-22
	21st	Pilkington Cup R5	Leeds	H	W	55-20
January	11th	Courage League	London Irish	A	W	21-20
	18th	Courage League	West Hartlepool	H	W	37-10
	25th	Pilkington Cup R6	Bristol	H		
February	8th	Courage League	Orrell	H		
	14th	Friendly	Newport	A		
	18th	Courage League	Bristol	A		
	22nd	Pilkington Cup Q-F	Wakefield	A		
	25th	Anglo-Welsh	Ebbw Vale	H		
March	4th	Courage League	Northampton	H		
	9th	Courage League	Wasps	A		
	14th	Friendly	Bedford	A		
	18th	Friendly	Army	H		
	22nd	Courage League	Leicester	H		
	29th	Courage League	Bath	A		
	29th	Pilkington Cup S-F				
April	2nd	Anglo-Welsh	Dunvant	A		
	5th	Courage League	Saracens	H		
	12th	Courage League	Sale	A		
	19th	Courage League	Harlequins	H		
	26th	Courage League	Bristol	H		
May	3rd	Courage League	Northampton	A		
	10th	Pilkington Cup Final				

Club Statistics

Courage League Division 1 – as on January 19th

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	Diff
Leicester	12	9	0	3	362	202	18	160
Wasps	11	9	0	2	303	233	18	70
Bath	12	8	0	4	474	256	16	218
Harlequins	12	8	0	4	438	248	16	190
Sale	10	6	1	3	291	194	13	97
Saracens	10	6	1	3	263	224	13	39
Northampton	12	6	0	6	272	256	12	16
Gloucester	11	6	0	5	272	298	12	-26
West Hartlepool	12	3	0	9	236	387	6	-151
Bristol	12	3	0	9	232	395	6	-163
London Irish	11	2	0	9	265	392	4	-127
Orrell	11	1	0	10	139	462	2	-323

First XV Playing Record Summaries

1996/7 Season	Total	Home	Away
Played	27	15	12
Won	17	11	6
Lost	10	4	6
Draw	0	0	0
Points F	763	506	257
Points A	573	228	345
Win %	62.96	73.33	50.00

Overall Pilkington Cup	Total	Home	Away
Played	74	33	41
Won	50	23	27
Lost	19	9	10
Draw	5	1	4
Points F	1355	710	645
Points A	711	279	434
Win %	70.95	71.21	70.73

First XV Appearances and Scores

	1996-7 Season						
	App	Try	Con	Pen	DG	Pts	PPG
Eral Anderson	10	3	0	0	0	15	1.50
James Bashford	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Laurie Beck	10	1	0	0	0	5	0.50
Scott Benton	17	5	0	0	0	25	1.47
Warwick Bullock	3	1	0	0	0	5	1.67
Nigel Cane	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Nathan Carter	10	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Don Caskie	13	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Chris Catling	16	3	0	0	0	15	0.94
Nick Cooper	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Mark Cornwell	6	1	0	0	0	5	0.83
Howard Dawson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Andy Deacon	14	1	0	0	0	5	0.36
Simon Devereux	16	2	0	0	0	10	0.63
Scott Edwards	3	1	0	0	0	5	1.67
Craig Emmerson	5	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Gareth Fenwick	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Rob Fidler	20	1	0	0	0	5	0.25
Chris Fortey	3	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Lee Fortey	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Alex Gallagher	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Pete Glanville	12	3	0	0	0	15	1.25
Phil Greening	19	3	0	0	0	15	0.79
Chris Hall	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Peter Hart	7	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
John Hawker	5	1	0	0	0	5	1.00
Paul Holford	7	4	0	0	0	20	2.86
Martyn Kimber	4	0	2	1	0	7	1.75
Andrew Jarrett	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00

First XV Appearances and Scores

	1996-7 Season						
	App	Try	Con	Pen	DG	Pts	PPG
Tim Lacey	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Mike Lloyd	15	11	0	0	0	55	3.67
Audley Lumsden	11	6	0	0	0	30	2.73
Mark Mapletoft	20	14	48	46	3	314	15.7
Andy Metcalfe	8	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Alex Morris	4	0	8	5	0	31	7.75
Charlie Mulraine	8	2	0	0	0	10	1.25
Bill Nicholls	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Lee Osborne	1	1	0	0	0	5	5.00
Nick Paisley	1	0	1	0	0	2	2.00
Ed Pearce	13	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Sam Pearman	2	2	0	0	0	10	5.00
Mike Peters	14	5	0	0	0	25	1.79
Adey Powles	5	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Martin Roberts	16	1	0	0	0	5	0.31
Alastair Saverimutto	13	9	0	0	0	45	3.46
Dave Sims	20	3	0	0	0	15	0.75
Ian Smith	9	1	0	0	0	5	0.56
Nick Smith	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Andrew Stanley	9	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Dave Timmington	4	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Phil Vickery	10	1	0	0	0	5	0.50
Richard Ward	4	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Kester Wilkinson	1	1	0	0	0	5	5.00
Tony Windo	20	3	0	0	0	15	0.75
Trevor Woodman	5	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Chris Yelland	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Rob York	7	3	0	0	0	15	2.14

CodPiece!

The more cynical among you may not think that the Welsh may provide the key to rugby's future, but I would ask you to think again. Just as America is said to be a year or so ahead of us in terms of crime, television, music etc it could well be that our friends beyond the Forest are showing us the way we can expect our club rugby to go.

To begin with, the sudden onset of professionalism is already claiming victims in the Welsh game. Both Swansea and Llanelli have in recent weeks been forced to trim their squads in order to make ends meet as the promised fortunes upon which they had boldly built their empires failed to materialise. In fact, the Price Waterhouse report commissioned by the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) to look into club finances found that wage bills in the Welsh game were 128% of income! As Byron Mugford, the Swansea secretary was quoted in the Guardian (7th Jan) as saying, "We never received the level of funding initially indicated from television, the Euro Competition and sponsorship" Furthermore, the WRU has had to give loans to five Welsh First Division clubs totalling more than ?700,000 - just to keep them afloat. Now although in England, the RFU have come up with more money for the clubs than they were expecting, club accountants have been working within the realms of virtual economics - where they have based their calculations on money they hope to get from sponsors and benefactors, whilst at the same time binding themselves through lucrative contracts to buying players' loyalties. If wealthy club owners get cold feet and unless satisfactory financial arrangements are made between the RFU, EPRUC and Sky, English clubs could soon be emulating the Welsh - that's unless your club happens to think the best way to balance its books is to squeeze its fans and increase the gate prices to £18 !!!

Then there's also the case of Robert Howley, fined £2,000 by the WFU this week for not wearing his Reebok gear for international training. Clearly, the professionalisation of the game has gone so far as for the sport's governing bodies to start bowing to corporate interests! Would England fine their players for not sporting their Cellnet togs? Perhaps they would have been cautious to do so before the Howley incident, but now the precedent has been set - in Wales.

Furthermore, as the top Welsh clubs face fixture congestion next season as the Heineken Cup expands and the Welsh League One increases to 12 teams, the widely anticipated demise of the Anglo-Welsh competition is set to be initiated by the Welsh. Cardiff have said this week that they may pull out of the Anglo-Welsh league and Dunvant have also hinted they may follow suit as the competition has proved "anything but useful". Typical! Just as Gloucester were on the brink of winning something, the plug is pulled on the competition! But it's clear that this competition is very unpopular with clubs on both sides of the border and is seen by most as a means of "squad development." The Anglo-Welsh competition would only gain credibility after serving a probationary period of a few seasons, by which time it should have attracted the appropriate sponsorship and TV deals. But if you look at the trouble the European Heineken Cup has had to attract interest, then the obvious conclusion is that an internal competition would face even greater obstacles.

At the end of the day, as Stuart Gallacher, Chairman of Llanelli, was quoted as saying in the Guardian (7th Jan) "The game cannot sustain 12 professional clubs. If you look at the population and the income spent, the money is not there." In England, perhaps the money is there, but it rests in the hands of a few entrepreneurs, which surely doesn't provide a solid basis for the development of club rugby into the next century. Although the scale of the financial problems faced by Welsh clubs are far more acute than those presently encountered in England, the fact remains that clubs have had to surrender a great deal of control over their own destinies in order to compete in this brave New World of professional rugby.

So, one day soon, when head honchos at the top of the game (whoever they are, wherever they are) look to the future of the English game then they could do much worse than to look at Wales through Mystic Meg's crystal ball.

01 ' Babber Looks *Forward*

Have you ever been to one of those skiing resorts where you're merrily sitting in the ski-lift heading for the summit whilst to the side of you others are heading steadily downhill ? Nor have I, but I think this Matson scene sums up the current predicament of today's teams. Let me illustrate...

Although I'm not usually a great lover of statistics, I think that the following sets of figures not only put today's game into perspective, but also demonstrate the wildly divergent paths these clubs have taken since the end of last season. Now even though this league season has only just reached its mid-point, Orrell have very nearly conceded as many points this season (462) as they did for the whole last season (477). In stark contrast, Gloucester have scored almost as many points as they did last season (275) in their 11 league games so far this season (272). Barring any mechanical failures today (which brings to mind Orrell's recent floodlight trouble - or was it a cunning plan to spare the team's blushes in view of their disastrous season?) both sides will have continued in their opposite directions by the end of today's 80 minutes.

There could be many reasons for Orrell's decline - but it was never quite the same at Edgehall Road once Dewi Morris left and before this season had started Simon Mason, Austin Healey and Dan Luger all headed south. The fact is that Orrell, with the youngest squad in Division One, haven't been able to find adequate replacements for them. Not only have these players left the club, but Mason is battling it out against Mapletoft to become the season's top goal-kicker and Healey has joined Greening on the England subs bench. The combination of the departure of these players, both in terms of the side's playing options and team morale, linked with the lack of a wealthy benefactor in a league where the financial stakes are being constantly raised goes some way to explaining why Orrell are propping up the rest of the Division.

With only one win this season and having just suffered 2 huge hammerings at home against Sale, Orrell will be hoping they can restore some pride in their remaining fixtures. Gloucester, as we all know, are aiming for their seventh successive league win and what better chance of getting it today ! After describing the performance against Bristol in the Cup as "error-ridden", Richard Hill will be looking for Gloucester to break down Orrell's resolve much earlier than when the teams met back in November, when Orrell dominated the first half, and to start turning pressure into points. Since his hat-trick against West Hartlepool Mike Lloyd looks a different player and Orrell's much criticised defence will have trouble stopping him as well as having to deal with the problems posed by the ever-increasing threat of Benton and Mapletoft. Obviously, Orrell's front five will not lie down and roll over, but Gloucester must be confident of dominating up front after having come out on top against the much sterner test of Bristol a fortnight ago.

After demolishing Orrell 3-49 in November, Gloucester have to start firm favourites to win - and the expectations of a landslide victory will be high. But perhaps this match will provide a new kind of test for resurgent Gloucester - to resist the temptation of becoming over- confident. If they are to become one of the country's best teams, Gloucester will have to find the right balance between respect and assertiveness against lower sides and in that respect, today's game will provide a useful indicator.

How They Will Line up

Saturday 8th February 1997 Kick off 3.00 pm

GLOUCESTER
Cherry & White

ORRELL
Amber & Black

15	Chris Catling	Full Back	Steven Taberner	15
14	Mike Peters #	Right Wing	Jim Naylor	14
13	Martin Roberts	Centre	David Lyon	13
12	Don Caskie	Centre	"Lua" Tuigamala	12
11	Mike Lloyd	Left Wing	Rob Hitchmouge	11

10	Mark Mapletoft	Outside Half	Matthew McCarthy	10
9	Scott Benton	Scrum Half	Steve Cook	9

1	Tony Windo	Prop	Michael Worsley	1
2	Phil Greening #	Hooker	Martin Scott	2
3	Andy Deacon	Prop	Stuart Turner	3
4	Rob Fidler	Lock	Chris Brierley	4
5	Dave Sims *	Lock	Chas Cusani	5
6	Ed Pearce	Flanker	Peter Angelsea	6
7	Nathan Carter	Flanker	Richard Higgs	7
8	Simon Devereux	No. 8	Jeff Huxley	8

16	Laurie Beck	Replacements	Jason Cunoick	16
17	Warwick Bullock		Paul Hamer	17
18	Mark Cornwell		Paul Rees	18
19	Chris Emmerson		Paul Newton	19
20				20
21				21

Referee	# International	Touch Judges
Ed Morrison	* Captain	S. Savage and M. Firby

Referee Ed Morrison does the double. He was in charge of Gloucester's League One match against Orrell at Edgehall Road last November