

Old Spot!

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



GLOUCESTER'S NEXT MATCH
v LEICESTER
Pilkington Cup
Saturday March 29th 1997
Kick off - 3.00 p.m.

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Old Spot's Tump Talk

The only ingredient missing from this thoroughly English Farce was that the leading man kept his trousers on. The problem being that no-one seems to know who the leading man is. I refer, naturally, to last weeks postponed League match (due to be televised live on Sky) with this weeks Cup opponents.

Up to the Friday before the England - Wales game, the match was on - according to the two clubs. However a spokesperson at the RFU told us that both clubs had been faxed informing them that the match was postponed and would be played on April 8th. Kim Deshayes (formerly of EPRUC, now known as the English Rugby Partnership) was too busy to explain to anybody how such a mess could arise.

No problems for Messrs Johnson and Rowntree occurred at Cardiff and so Leicester were happy to confirm the fixture. Yet on Tuesday, Will Greenwood received his call-up papers a second time (although he was only going as cover) and the match was called off.

Anyone who heard David Foyle on Radio Gloucestershire were left in no doubt how Gloucester RFC felt about the whole sad situation. The RFU respondent predictably waffled for two minutes and offered no respite for Gloucester's suffering. What sort of a message does this give to potential corporate sponsors? And who had the stupid idea of scheduling a full Courage League weekend at the same time as the World Sevens tournament? This embryonic professional game is still being run by amateurs.

All the way along Sky Sports just sat back and waited. What else could they do? Eventually they had no live game to cover because there was insufficient time to re-organise the Bristol-Sale fixture. So perhaps we, as paying supporters, can draw the crumb of comfort that television does not control our sport...

...yet.

News reaches us that Rob Gough is to leave the Jockey at the end of April. This is sad news indeed. Everyone at Old Spot! wishes Rob and his family the best of luck for the future.

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

Write to:

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

The End of the Road?

There should have been no problem. True, the car had broken down. True, I was stranded and the family would be at home forlornly waiting for their trip to see Granddad. And, true, this was going to cost me a small fortune. But I had phoned the RAC, those new Knights of the Road.

The nice lady at the end of the phone warned me there was a possible seventy-five minutes to wait. So, the only thing to do was settle back with the paper, open at the sport page of course. But heavy eyed, sleep was just seconds away.

I then seemed to be in a strange world of sport, like those Star Trek episodes where someone has fallen foul of the space-time continuum and present and past has become jumbled. It was a terrific sporting Saturday with FA Cup semi-finals, the Grand National and Pilkington Cup semis all on the same day. But the papers were full of the sensational news that Liverpool so needed a win that they had brought back their men of steel, Tommy Smith and Ron Yeats, as well as Roger Hunt. They were old men now but we were told how their experience would compensate for their age, and they would inspire the youngsters around them.

In this election year out of retirement had come 'Party Politics', a winner of the '92 election year Grand National, and apparently the horse was now a clear favourite to win this years race.

So, on to Kingsholm, where at least sanity would prevail - none of this philosophy in the West country! But then open the programme (this one not THAT one) and surely a misprint - J. Fidler - must be R! And - what's this , Catling not fit - there's a P. Butler at full-back.

And then, relief. I was woken by knocking on my window. The blue and white van with the flashing amber lights was the re-assurance that both my sporting and mechanical nightmare was at an end. And then, as suddenly as relief flooded over me , the nightmare returned. Glancing down at my paper, the RAC man said, "So, I see Rob Andrew's back in the England squad, then! Thought he'd retired."

RAC - Rowell's Andrew Clanger!

So I read the paper very carefully - and it seems that Andrew is required as cover for Mike Catt. Rowell is quoted as saying that there are no other fly-halves who can kick

RAC - Rowell: Another Clanger

Is this statement factually correct? I was under the impression that the leading English points scorer was a fly-half who has actually played for England A - Mark Mapletoft?

And, accepting the arguments that he is probably next in the pecking order to Alex King and lacks big match experience, we are building for the World Cup and should be looking now at the credentials of all the candidates. Indeed, Rowell said after the game that the difference between the Lions and England is that the tourists are picking a side for now and he had to pick one for two years hence!

So can we say with any certainty that at the end of this year's Five Nations it is:

RAC - Retirement of Andrew and Carling

- Mark Graham

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Counting Easter Chickens

Even the Ministry of Transport was on our side - lining our route to Twickenham with its very best cherry and white cones! From early in the morning the M4 was full of cars, bikes, mopeds and tractors with Gloucester scarves trailing from them as the cherry and white tide swept towards London Town. Spotted on the inside lane was Gloucester's trusty team bus - even given a special spring clean for the occasion - cruising at a steady 35 mph. I'm sure I caught a glimpse of a "Drive carefully - children on board" sticker in the back window, but I couldn't be sure as they turned off towards the Service station - obviously heading for a newsagents for some boiled sweets.

Under bright spring sunshine the Twickenham car-park was already filling up by around mid-day. No sooner had the Shed turned up than the air was thick with smoke as people got their barbecues on the go - getting ready for a few bacon sarnies. My freshly starched cherry and white shirt was soon ruined by some punters eager to get stuck into their cans of beer which were still feeling a bit shaken up after their eastward journey. There was pop an' scran everywhere as the Glawster fans revved up for their big day!

Old Spot! was there in force as well - yet another bumper edition an' full colour an' all! Count on them to come up with the goods on the big occasion! They whipped out a thousand copies within the hour with no problem as the crowd had been so mightily impressed with their efforts on semi-final day!

Suddenly the barbecue smoke became much thicker and as everyone coughed their guts up the Glawster bus emerged into view - the boys were here at last! Richer led his team off the bus and despite invitations by blokes in big suits to "follow them upstairs for a little chat about some work that was going" he went straight to the dressing rooms!

Then, with just 10 minutes to go before kick-off, the great "referee's assistant" in the sky smiled on us as the sun disappeared and the heavens opened. It absolutely hissed down and the hallowed Twickenham turf was soon transformed into a mud-bath - excellent conditions for rugby! In the match itself Tony Spreadbury awarded Glawster 4 penalty tries as well as numerous penalties as he caught the 'Quins offside time and time again. Revenge was ours after the humiliation at the Stoop back in August - Gloucester 80 'Quins 0 !

As Simsy lifted the Cup the roof lifted off our adopted Shed for the day. In the post-match interviews, Greening, Fidler, Benton, Mapletoft and Catling all announced that they were going to sign 5 year contracts with the club. Richer was unavailable for comment - you couldn't get to him through the crowds of generous businessmen who were desperate to sponsor a club which so obviously had a dazzling future!



Phil Greening in full flight

Fixtures - The Last Chance Lottery

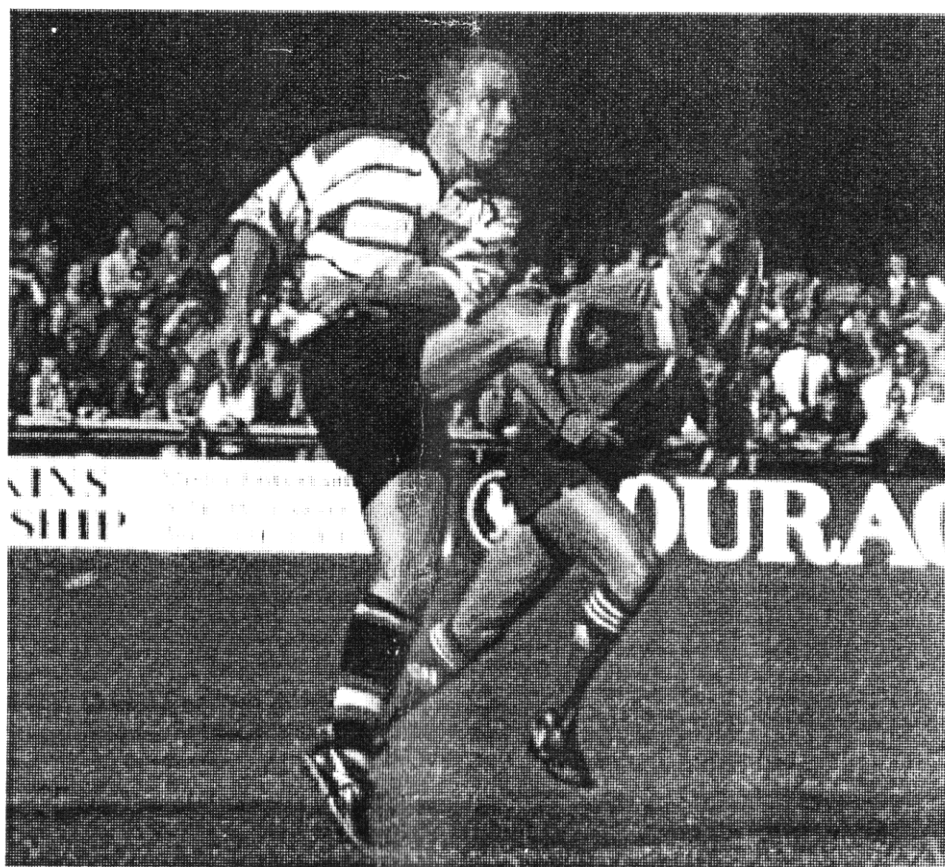
As the clocks go forward tomorrow, Gloucester will be acutely aware that the season is now fast approaching its conclusion. We have just 7 more League games (and one cup final!) to go before the accountants come in to weigh up the first professional season. Unfortunately, we only have until May 3rd to get through those matches - in other words 5 weeks! If you think that could prove testing for Gloucester's first-team squad who (including all competitions and friendlies) have already played 36 games this season, then you may also wonder how on earth London Irish and Wasps are going to fit in 8 League games in those same 5 weeks - although I doubt if you'll lose too much sleep over it. Such fixture congestion at the end of a long season could turn the outcome of the league into a lottery.

The fact is, the domestic season has become so packed with additional fixtures that not only the Test players are in danger of "burn-out", but regular club players also. This season, Gloucester will have played 44 (hopefully 45) matches in 35 weeks - bearing in mind that in reality it's probably less than that since the League makes way for the Five Nations as well as 2 or 3 weeks of frozen pitches. What's more, even though they may play in only the 30 or so key games of the domestic season, further involvement in the Anglo-Welsh and European Cups as well as Five Nations rugby would mean that a Test player would play far more matches than his southern-hemisphere counterpart who normally plays less than 30. I would also argue that although in many way rugby may be mirroring developments in football, any comparisons with football's Premier League are misleading. Manchester United may have played around 50 matches by the end of the season, but, in relative terms, do First Division rugby clubs have anywhere near the same resources to be able to do that? Go down to Bath and ask John Hall what he thinks !

OK, it may be argued that competitions such as the Anglo-Welsh leagues (and while we're on the subject - does anyone know what's going on there ?) and the European Conference are useful as a means of squad development - and I would agree wholeheartedly. But what I do object to (to be said in a Frank Bulldog voice) is the way in which these fixtures are planned. Firstly, they arrive in "blocks" - which meant that Gloucester could only play 4 League games between the beginning of October and the New Year which to my mind is ridiculous. Secondly, these fixtures fill up Wednesdays and Saturdays which could otherwise be left to Courage League games so that the League season is spread out more manageably. Even if the Anglo-Welsh and European competitions were to be played by "Development" squads, these matches still take up precious Saturdays and Wednesdays ! As far as friendlies are concerned, surely we have to ask ourselves if they should find their way onto professional calendars anymore. They should only take place when there is no chance of playing Cup or League games - possibly in a block of fixtures from mid-December to mid-January when clubs can lose a lot of money from fixture cancellations due to heavy frosts. To say that professional players should be prepared to "earn their money" doesn't make any sense either - full-timers are usually held back for the key League and Cup matches anyway.

Instead of the current chaotic "system", surely it would be better to space out the League and Pilkington Cup competitions over the season. As far as the Anglo-Welsh and European competitions are concerned, these fixtures should be able to run at times when they cause least disruption to the League - although in practice they are more likely to be played when sponsors and television allow.

It is hardly surprising if the French and English clubs want to form their own competition as, generally speaking, they have proved to be the superior sides (not forgetting Cardiff's famous win over Bath, of course). Yet I don't think it would be a just solution to isolate the other home nations (as well as Italy and Romania) to the periphery either. If we are gradually moving away from domestic leagues and towards European Leagues (depending on what Sky, EPRUC and the RFU can agree on) then for pity's sake let's sort it out as soon as possible. The fixture list is a great illustration of the confusion caused by conflicting agendas within Northern hemisphere rugby at the moment. Only when this transitional phase from "shamateur" to professional rugby has ended will everyone involved in the game; players, coaches, supporters, sponsors media and governing bodies know where they stand and get a common sense of values in the game. Then we'll all be able to get back to watching rugby played by fully-fit players where everyone knows what's at stake.



Mark Mapletoft kicks for touch

An Old Head on Young

He's only 20 years old and he's played a mere handful of games for Gloucester yet he's one of the first names written on the team-sheet. Who is this remarkable young man who has made such an impact at Kingsholm? Old Spot reveals the truth about **Chris Catling**.

Chris was very much an all-rounder at junior school but didn't play rugby until he attended Whitgift School in Croydon. In the first match he played for the school he broke his collarbone but fortunately it didn't deter him.

Chris also played hockey, water-polo and cricket, and represented Surrey. As a young teenager he was most successful as a cricketer, playing and touring with his county, sometimes as captain, for several seasons. It wasn't until the sixth form that rugby became the dominant sport and Chris played for Surrey, London Division and England under-18s, when they achieved the Grand Slam of 1994.

Chris is in the final year of a Management Science degree at Exeter University. His commitment to Gloucester has affected his study time although he recently completed a successful dissertation on "A Statistical Analysis of Test-Match Cricket in England 1946-1995".

Chris may have chosen to go to Exeter because his girlfriend, Vicky, had also gained a place there. Fortunately her modelling career was not curtailed when Chris accidentally broke her nose on the Bouncy Castle at his parents Silver Wedding anniversary party!

During his first year at college, Chris played University rugby and had a very successful season with London Division and County Champions Surrey Colts. In his second year he joined Exeter Rugby Club, and also played for England under-21s and



England Students, including the Student World Cup competition in South Africa.

Chris decided to join Gloucester, as opposed to other interested clubs, because of Phil Greening (Phil had been his captain in the England under-18s), and Richard Hill being the coach. His mother Gill has been absolutely thrilled by Gloucester this season and she really enjoys being in the Shed - she decided at the first home match that she was too excited to sit quietly in the grandstand!

Chris rates the Wasps home game as his best game of the season. "I think the try I got against Wasps at Kingsholm was probably my favourite, as I had to work for it, it was my first league try and it was in front of a Kingsholm crowd. The drop goal at Bristol was just a surprise!".

ad on Young Shoulders



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Chris reckons that his worst performance came in the European Conference game against London Irish at Sunbury.

Despite a good start Chris kept dropping and fumbling the ball when defending the Garryowen and generally considered he'd had a bad game. However, things ended on a brighter note. "In the bar afterwards, a rich London finance types, he was p****d out of his head - he couldn't have seen the game, but he was buying Guinness and Port for all the Gloucester boys. When I turned round he said, 'You're the Number 15 aren't you? You'd better have two!'"

Kicking is not one of Chris' strong points. "I'm working on my kicking. I've had some sessions with Mark Tainton and Simon Hodgkinson, organised by the RFU, and its slowly improving but I need to practice all the time."

Not surprisingly Chris wants to play for the full England side, but he also claims an ambition to keep playing for Gloucester, "I'm very happy playing for Gloucester. The lads are a great bunch and I'm looking forward to being full-time next year.". Contract negotiations are almost complete and we all look forward to seeing Chris in a Cherry and White jersey next season.

The final word is from Chris: "My message to the fans would be that despite all popular belief I have started shaving! More seriously Gloucester has a real advantage over other clubs because of the Shed support. Playing in front of a noisy Kingsholm crowd is second to none and is something I always look forward to."

Old Spot would like to thank Gill and Ian Catling for their kind assistance by providing details of Chris' early career.

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	W	18-12
February	8th	Courage League	Orrell	H	W	30-0
	18th	Courage League	Bristol	A	L	13-18
	22nd	Pilkington Cup Q-F	Wakefield	A	W	25-21
	25th	Anglo-Welsh	Ebbw Vale	P	P	P
March	4th	Courage League	Northampton	H	W	19-6
	9th	Courage League	Wasps	A	L	10-36
	14th	Friendly	Bedford	A	L	19-58
	18th	Friendly	Army	H	L	29-36
	22nd	Courage League	Leicester	H	P	P
	29th	Courage League	Bath	A	P	P
	29th	Pilkington Cup S-F	Leicester	H		
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				

It is proposed that the match with Leicester will take place on Tuesday April 8th and the match with Bath will take place on Wednesday April 30th. These fixtures are not yet confirmed.

Club Statistics

Courage Club Championship Division 1

(as on March 26th)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	Diff
Wasps	16	14	0	2	516	301	28	215
Leicester	14	11	0	3	435	214	22	221
Bath	14	10	0	4	538	272	20	266
Harlequins	15	10	0	5	572	309	20	263
Sale	14	8	1	5	386	298	17	88
Saracens	13	8	1	4	330	271	17	59
Gloucester	15	8	0	7	344	358	16	-14
Northampton	15	7	0	8	310	316	14	-6
Bristol	16	5	0	11	312	483	10	-171
West Hartlepool	16	3	0	13	284	567	6	-283
London Irish	14	2	0	12	313	501	4	-188
Orrell	16	2	0	14	211	661	4	-450

First XV Playing Record Summaries

1996/7 Season	Total	Home	Away
Played	34	18	16
Won	20	13	7
Lost	14	5	10
Draw	0	0	0
Points F	908	584	324
Points A	748	270	478
Win %	58.82	72.22	43.75

Pilkington Cup Semis

	Total	Home	Away
Played	8	3	5
Won	3	0	3
Lost	4	3	1
Draw	1	0	1
Points F	95	32	63
Points A	97	45	52
Win %	43.75	0.00	70.00

First XV Appearances and Scores

	Gloucester Career						
	App	Try	Con	Pen	DG	Pts	PPG
Eral Anderson	11	3	0	0	0	15	1.36
James Bashford	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Laurie Beck	58	11	0	0	0	55	0.95
Scott Benton	33	9	0	0	0	45	1.36
Warwick Bullock	17	1	0	0	0	5	0.29
Nigel Cane	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Nathan Carter	15	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Don Caskie	192	34	0	0	0	170	0.89
Chris Catling	20	3	0	0	1	18	0.90
Nick Cooper	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Mark Cornwell	26	12	0	0	0	60	2.31
Howard Dawson	2	1	0	0	0	0	2.50
Andy Deacon	143	12	0	0	0	60	0.42
Simon Devereux	88	14	0	0	0	70	0.80
Scott Edwards	5	1	0	0	0	5	1.00
Craig Emmerson	7	1	0	0	0	0	0.71
Gareth Fenwick	13	2	26	16	0	110	8.46
Rob Fidler	49	3	0	0	0	15	0.31
Chris Fortey	7	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Lee Fortey	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Will Gay	1	1	0	0	0	0	5.00
Alex Gallagher	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Pete Glanville	99	15	0	0	0	75	0.76
Phil Greening	43	5	0	0	0	25	0.58
Chris Hall	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Adam Harris	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Peter Hart	17	0	4	0	1	11	0.65
John Hawker	138	17	0	0	0	85	0.62
Paul Holford	106	43	0	0	0	215	2.03
Martyn Kimber	62	9	15	8	18	153	2.47
Andrew Jarrett	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00

First XV Appearances and Scores

	Gloucester Career						
	App	Try	Con	Pen	DG	Pts	PPG
Tim Lacey	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Mike Lloyd	30	18	0	0	0	90	3.00
Audley Lumsden	12	6	0	0	0	30	2.50
Mark Mapletoft	50	21	91	92	3	572	11.44
Neil Matthews	2	1	0	0	0	5	2.50
Andy Metcalfe	10	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Alex Morris	4	0	8	5	0	31	7.55
Simon Morris	111	48	0	0	0	240	2.16
Charlie Mulraine	8	2	0	0	0	10	1.25
Bill Nicholls	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Lee Osborne	49	6	31	27	2	179	3.65
Nick Paisley	3	0	1	0	0	2	0.67
Ed Pearce	14	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Sam Pearman	2	2	0	0	0	10	5.00
Mike Peters	28	15	0	0	0	75	2.68
Adey Powles	38	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Martin Roberts	111	16	79	57	0	409	3.68
Alastair Saverimutto	19	9	3	2	0	57	3.17
Dave Sims	195	27	0	0	0	135	0.69
Ian Smith	336	52	0	0	0	260	0.77
Nick Smith	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Andrew Stanley	131	25	0	0	0	125	0.95
Dave Timmington	4	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Phil Vickery	13	1	0	0	0	5	0.38
Richard Ward	6	0	0	0	0	0	0.83
Kester Wilkinson	1	1	0	0	0	5	5.00
Tony Windo	129	29	0	1	0	148	1.15
Trevor Woodman	7	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Chris Yelland	3	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Rob York	12	6	0	0	0	30	2.50

Codpiece! *or...*

WELCOME TO THE PROFESSIONAL ERA OF RUGBY UNION!

Came across these letters yesterday

Dear Mr. Keeley,

I am writing to ask if you will consider postponing our Premier League match this coming Saturday. You see, we are in a little bit of difficulty. We are in the running to win the league title this season and unfortunately we have a bunch of players called up to represent their various countries in the Baharain Five-a-Side World Cup on the weekend of Saturday April 5th when we have a match against County.

We would like to postpone this match and we notice that in the rules we can do this as we have players representing their countries.

Must dash as I have to get the plane to Germany as I am watching Borussia Dortmund face Hamburg tonite.

Alex

March 27.

Dear Alex

No way, matey. The rules might say about having players on international duty, but this is for the real footy - you know, eleven a side. Anyway, Sky TV won't allow it. I have to point out that if you don't play as per the fixture list, you can find yourself with three points taken away. What chance the title then, Jock?

Good luck for the title.

Graham Keeley

March 29.

PS. How's Germany? Good luck against Dortmund.

Did you know ...

- That in the Cup semi finals, the only club that Gloucester has ever lost to is Bath?
- That the winning margin of any semi-final match played by Gloucester has never been greater than nine points.
- That Leicester are fielding eight internationals in their starting fifteen today for the first time in 73 years. This ties the record set when eight internationals took the field for Leicester in their match against Newport at Welford Road on October 20, 1923.
- Leicester are making their 15 Cup semi final appearance. Gloucester are making their ninth.

Ol' Babber Looks *Forward*

I'm tempted to say that there doesn't seem much point in taking too detailed a look at the "star individuals" in the opponents' side this week. Why? Well the short answer is that Leicester is a team of star individuals from Rowntree to Liley. On paper it would seem as though either Leicester or Wasps will win the Courage League and so for Leicester, Gloucester are just another obstacle between them and the League and Cup double.

But let's come back down to earth for a minute and look at this fixture as objectively as we can(!) Just in case you've been in the South of France for the last few weeks (as I'm sure many of you have) this is the Pilkington Cup semi-final against Gloucester at Kingsholm to be played one week after Leicester had called off the league fixture - no less! No doubt there will be a few people on the pitch who will feel that there is a score to be settled together with 12,000 fans who will be hoping to have a say in the outcome!

The Cherry and White supporters will be here to witness another crucial game as far as Gloucester's development under Richard Hill is concerned. They will know that at Kingsholm, in front of the most loyal (and vocal!) fans in the country, Gloucester are capable of achieving victories against even the most favoured opposition. So to be going into the match as slight underdogs will not disturb the Gloucester boys in the slightest. We have come to expect great things from this team at Kingsholm, so much so that we hardly seemed to raise a collective eyebrow when Gloucester gave probably their best performance of the season here almost a month ago to beat Northampton under the floodlights!

Gloucester already have a head start as no one outside of the Leicester camp is better placed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their players than Richard Hill, since many of them (Healey and Greenwood in particular) have benefited from his coaching in the England A squad. Richard will have impressed upon his rapidly developing team the need to repeat the solid defensive display against Northampton but he will also (hopefully!) have drilled into them the importance of controlled aggression and discipline when you are up against an immaculate world-class goal-kicker in Stransky, ready to take full advantage!

In terms of individual battles, this match is full of players with points to prove. Cockerill, despite making up a third of what is (or was ?) widely considered to be the best front row in the country has not been carried into the England team as many predicted. So England's number 3 hooker will certainly be looking to disrupt England's number one (!) whilst Rob Fidler will have an interesting afternoon in the company of Martin Johnson, widely tipped to be named as the Lions' Captain in due course. Scott Benton, arguably the favourite of The Shed, will also be relishing the contest with yet another "superior" opponent, the much praised (and rightly so) Austin Healey. By the end of today's game, Scott will have a fair idea of how far his game will have to develop before he can earn the recognition of which he is increasingly deserving. Mark Mapletoft, meanwhile, will be faced with potentially his toughest challenge yet in a battle of minds against one of the world's most experienced fly-halves. Mark will have to stretch his imagination and tactical kicking skills to the limit if Gloucester are to put Leicester under pressure.

In short, Gloucester may find that they will need to create more options than their 10-man game usually produces - Leicester are just too street-wise. It may be that by further incorporating the more expansive aspect of their game (to which we have been treated more and more) and by playing phases of "un-Gloucester-like" rugby that Gloucester will be able to make Leicester think and so disrupt their rhythm.

Of course it's a cliché to say that rugby is a sport which is won and lost in the head, but for me, this game will ask the most serious questions about Gloucester's mental toughness this season. If they can ride the wave of partisan passion which will doubtlessly be generated by the biggest crowd seen here for a long time then anything is possible. Leicester's players may have an advantage as far as coping with major occasions is concerned due to the players' experience of high-profile international games where you must quickly come to terms with the weight of national expectations on your shoulders. But then again, can these outstanding international players cope with the intense pressure when they wear the colours of the Tigers? Remember their major occasion so far this year against Brive, and how those Tigers froze and were made to look like mongrel-moggies despite playing in front of their typically enthusiastic fans?

This tie, to use another cliché, will be won by whoever wants it most. Perhaps, after so many recent seasons of fighting for our lives in the underworld of the First Division, the frustrations of this club and its supporters might finally be translated into a hunger which will bring us all something to get excited about.

How They Will Line up

Saturday 29th March 1997 Kick off 3.00 pm

GLOUCESTER
Cherry & White

LEICESTER
Green, Red and White

15	Chris Catling	Full Back	John Liley	O
14	Mike Peters #	Right Wing	Steve Hackney	N
13	Craig Emmerson	Centre	Will Greenwood	M
12	Martin Roberts	Centre	Stuart Potter	L
11	Mike Lloyd	Left Wing	Craig Joiner	K

10	Mark Mapletoft	Outside Half	Joel Stransky #	J
9	Scott Benton	Scrum Half	Austin Healey #	I

1	Tony Windo	Prop	Graham Rowntree #	A
2	Phil Greening #	Hooker	Richard Cockerill	B
3	Andy Deacon	Prop	Darren Garforth #	C
4	Rob Fidler	Lock	Martin Johnson # *	D
5	Dave Sims *	Lock	Neil Fletcher	E
6	Pete Glanville	Flanker	John Wells	F
7	Nathan Carter	Flanker	Neil Back #	H
8	Simon Devereux	No. 8	Eric Miller #	G

16	Chris Fortey	Replacements	Niall Malone #	P
17	Phil Vickery		Aadel Kardooni	Q
18	Andy Stanley		Dean Richards	R
19	Laurie Beck		Dorian West	S
20	Martyn Kimber		Bill Drake-Lee	T
21	Don Caskie		Leon Lloyd	U

Referee	# International	Touch Judges
Steve Lander	* Captain	Ashley Rowden & Bob Jenkins