

Old Spot!

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

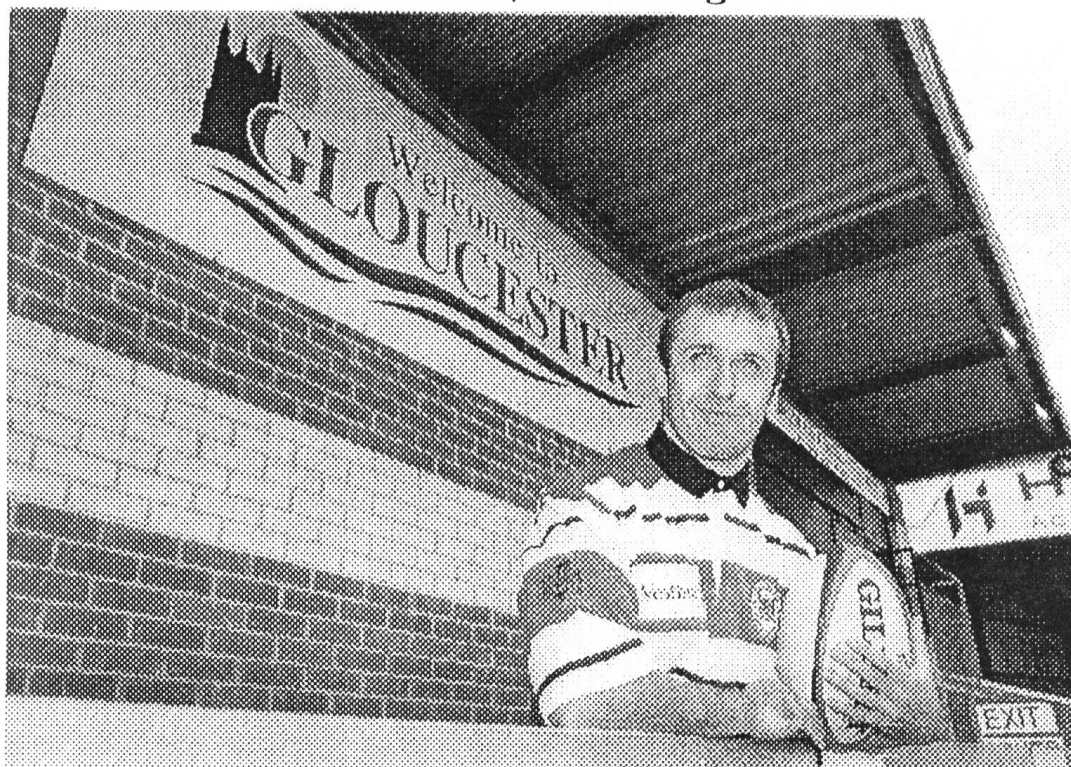


photo: Brandon Malone/Action Images

GLOUCESTER'S NEXT MATCH
vs BRISTOL
Courage Club Championship
Saturday April 26, 1997
Kick off - 3.00 p.m.

Issue 8

April 25, 1997

50 pence

Old Spot's Tump Talk

Today sees the last home match of the season. It also sees the end of the beginning for the professional era. As from next season, Gloucester will have (or at least plan to have) a full-time squad of 26 players, with the squad as a whole numbering 46. We will be welcoming Philippe Saint-André and no doubt some other foreign internationals. I wholeheartedly agreed with Mike Nicholls when he said: "I want to see First Division rugby at Kingsholm". I cannot see how anyone else can think otherwise. Next season promises to be a great season for Kingsholm. Thank you John Hall!!

This coming week will also see the announcement of the identity of Mr. Big. The suspense is killing me.....NOT! Come on now Mr Foyle, enough is enough, tell us today and get it over with. If it is Tom Walkinshaw (or as the latest rumour goes, Damon Hill), does that mean we'll be getting Murray Walker to commentate: "AND THERE GOES MAPLETOFT!!"

In today's bumper issue we have secured not one, not two, not three but four interviews with top personalities from Kingsholm. Richard Hill, Mark Mapletoft, Phil Greening and Audley Lumsden all found time to give us their thoughts and we'd like to thank them again for their time. I hope you enjoy reading this edition as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Today sees a potential world first for Gloucester. Today's match will be covered "live" on the internet. Play-by-play and score-by-score coverage will be given. We may be one of the last teams to get foreign help but we're right at the forefront of technology, especially when it helps to spread the Gospel of Gloucester.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped with Old Spot! this season: Adrian, Chris "Inch-High", Irwin, Vikiy, Ellie and Tom. Thanks also to all the contributors, especially Matt Chandler, the Osman family, Ian and Gill Catling and all those who took the trouble to write in (especially Lee Farrow!). Special thanks go to Ol' Babber and to Codpiece! himself (true identities are withheld to protect the innocent!) because without their help, encouragement and tireless efforts, we would all be stuck with just Promag for our regular matchday reading. Thanks also to Ed and Bob from Shedhead because they were a source of inspiration. Lastly, a big thank you to everyone who bought Old Spot! This may be the last edition ever – who knows what is around the corner?

And finally a plea to the RFU – Get some decent referees!!

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>

An Investor Calls

The best game in rugby at the moment is certainly "Spot The Investor". The amount of wealthy people who suddenly seem to want a piece of Gloucester is mind-boggling. And, let's be fair, I joined in with the best of them last week. I had binoculars with me at the Quins game (sad how the eyes are going in one so young!) and had them trained - as instructed by a very good source - on a particular hospitality box to see who Coochie was with. And I can tell you he was wearing a very smart brown overcoat, immaculate hair, and obviously liked a pint (well his glass was nearly empty!) - and he looked every inch the smart entrepreneur.

But then he could equally have been the gasman!

He did however bear a passing resemblance to "Mr. Arrows" pictured in the paper on Monday, and therefore gave Radio Gloucestershire the great line: "Tom Walkinshaw has already signed up Damon Hill - now he's after Richard".

Still, we might know by this issue who has over two million in readies. I wish it was me, just to be at the heart of the club with the best coach in the country who says that the Leicester game was the pinnacle of his career leave alone captaining his Country or countless honours with Bath.

We already know the first big signing. But who else is to follow? Two of Monday's papers said, "Gloucester to beef up squad with French imports".

Strange, I thought LeBœuf was playing the round ball game with Chelsea.

We must trust Richard Hill in his dealings and I'm sure he is well aware that money won't buy success. Indeed, how reassuring is his search for players where the love of rugby is closer to the heart than the Cheque Book. Let's hope Monsieur Saint-André has love to spare!

Money is not the answer to all ills - ask John Hall or Mark Evans, the latter now replaced as Saracens coach by one of those big money foreign imports.

So, look wisely, Gloucester. Spend wisely, Richard.

And so thoughts turn to August.

The changes due at Kingsholm by May should set the tone for our anticipation of a new season. And how perfect it would be if the new English Rugby Partnership actually got to grips with the fixtures. Just think, whenever we left Kingsholm we wouldn't have to consult our diaries before knowing when we would return. Nor would we face a backlog of games caused because nobody had the sense to realise in advance the importance (or otherwise) of the World Cup Sevens. They might even schedule the Five Nations over consecutive weekends without spreading it over 10 weeks. As long as there are no league games when France are playing - we might lose key players!!!!

Finally, a word of thanks to Courage who, junior clubs would acknowledge, have contributed a great deal to rugby since leagues first began. So it's now the Allied Dunbar Premiership. Sponsors for everybody else are conspicuous by their absence. The RFU says no clubs outside the top two divisions will lose out. But when was the last time you actually believed anything that came out of Twickenham?

- Mark Graham

PS Whatever happened to the Anglo-Welsh Cup? - weren't we in with a chance of winning that?!

Richard Hill

Nearing the end of his first year of a five year contract, Gloucester coach Richard Hill discusses some of the issues that are attracting his attention.

Old Spot: How is the recruitment progressing? Have you finalised your squad for next season?

Richard Hill: I personally am happy with the way the recruitment has gone over the last 6 weeks - that's been my number 1 priority really - to ensure that we've got a stronger squad for next season. Out of the people we've looked at no-one has actually turned round and said they're not interested. We are looking to get 4 or 5 internationals and the likelihood is that I will recruit 4 or 5 other good players to come in as cover for the top positions. Martyn Kimber, for example, won't be available until at least Christmas so we're going to need some cover at outside-half. We've been very lucky that the locks and half-backs have kept fit right the way through the season. It's not worth paying a massive amount of money because you don't want them to be your first choice - but you want somebody who is happy enough to come in and develop into a good second choice if you need them. So we're looking to take on ten new players and as those ten come in, ten will go out at the bottom end.

OS: Are you going to trim the squad immediately?

RH: I shan't be saying at the end of the season: "Bang! That's it! You're off!". I'm certainly not going to do that, it's not a nice way to do things, I'd rather do it amicably with the player concerned. It's always hard to let someone go and I don't like doing it.

OS: Will you get a pay-rise?

RH: No, I am happy with what I receive from the club

OS: Now that the dust has long settled, what was the real reason behind you leaving Bath and coming to Gloucester?

RH: I've made no secret in the past that I wanted to coach. I was coaching England "A" at the time and I thought it would be a good opportunity to coach at Bath. But when John Hall gained control at Bath I was actually quite happy to coach the second team. Brian Ashton was the first team coach and I had no pretense to coach the first team. I said I wouldn't mind coaching the United side because I'm going to need coaching experience if I'm going to be coaching the England "A" side. But the only post he offered me was the chairman of selectors. John Hall, for some reason, didn't want me to coach, maybe just to get rid of me. Mike Teague gave me the opportunity to come to Gloucester, one or two other clubs had asked me to join, and he was very persistent and persuaded me to do it. Since I've joined everyone connected with the club has been brilliant. They've given me the authority to do what I think is right and fortunately things have worked out.

OS: How would you have coped with playing professional rugby?

RH: I think I would have loved to have played as a professional! If actual playing is the job, you're doing something you enjoy and I think it's a fantastic opportunity for anybody. Otherwise trying to fit all that training in with a full-time job means you have no spare time at all. If you're a professional player then you have more quality time and you're not rushing everywhere. I would have really enjoyed it! If I'd have been a professional rugby player I should have been a better player than I was.

OS: What would your reaction be if some of the part-time players were unable to give up their jobs and become full-time professionals?

RH: That would be very difficult. I'm met 12 players out of the 46 and I have told them that I want them to go full-time. I don't think we can afford to have people here who have part-time jobs, really. I'm hoping the remuneration offered will be enough for them to finish their jobs.

OS: Will any players will be leaving at the end of the season?

RH: I am very confident that we will keep all our players.

OS: What were the best and worst moments since you joined the club?

RH: The Leicester game is probably the highlight, followed by the Saracens game at the end of last season, and then the Bath game here which was a tremendous occasion. The Saint-Andre signing was also a highlight, to get someone like him, that was a good one. As far as the downers are concerned, losing at Orrell was the lowest point. It was dreadful and we played absolutely awful. Also losing to Bristol away in a very bad game.

OS: Yes, a terrible game with a terrible referee!

RH: Oh yes. Mr Doug Chapman.

OS: What factors were involved in turning the team around last season?

RH: We highlighted the things that we were doing wrong and tackled them one at a time. We would work on one or two things in training every week. The main thing was ball retention. But unless you identify all those areas that are going wrong and you look at one or two at a time then you'll lose focus. That is a philosophy we've employed ever since.

OS: Do you think there will be any negative aspects of the forthcoming investment due to higher expectations, for example?

RH: It can only be good - the playing side should improve massively next season - it's exciting for me and it will be excellent to be able to work with these lads during the day.

OS: How will the forthcoming overseas tours affect the club?

RH: We've got fewer players involved than other clubs and we have only got a handful of players going on representative tours. Next year I would hope that we get a lot more representative honours. For the clubs who a got a larger contingent, it will make their pre-season preparation more difficult. We're going to finish on the third of May and have a good three week rest and start pre-season training on 27th of May. Initially we'll be working on conditioning and they won't see a ball until July. The trip to Italy is verbally confirmed and we'll have a good couple of games out there.

OS: Have you made a decision on next season's captain?

RH: Ultimately I will select the captain. I do want somebody that the players are happy with and we're at the stage where we're finding out the groundswell of opinion. If there's a common consensus on who it should be and I'm happy with it then there'll be no problem!

OS: Thank you, Richard.

RH: No problem, Steve.

Audley Lumsden

Among the players that Richard Hill has brought to the club is his old Bath team-mate Audley Lumsden. Audley is one of the most experienced players at Gloucester and Old Spot caught up with Audley during a rare break in his busy schedule.

Old Spot: You're probably known to most Gloucester supporters as "the player that came from Bath". Had you always played your rugby there ?

Audley Lumsden: Yes. I started playing at Reading but then I went to Bath when I was 18.

OS: How was life at Bath - do you have many fond memories of your time there ?

AL: Yes - I was there for a long time, about ten years or so and we won a few things and had a good team spirit at the time.

OS: Were there any particularly outstanding moments for you ?

AL: Perhaps being able to get out on the pitch and help win the Cup in my last year - as well as winning the Middlesex and national sevens.

OS: You left Bath and came to Gloucester in the summer - why was that ?

AL: Basically, Hilly gave me the chance to play at Gloucester - he seemed quite keen to have me here and it allowed me to carry on with my job. It seemed like a good challenge at the time.

OS: You probably know Richard Hill better than most people at the club. Has it been hard adapting from playing alongside him to having him as your coach ?

AL: No, not really. In the couple of seasons after he'd retired we'd learnt to "forget" about him as a player. At the end of the day he's a very good coach and there haven't been any difficulties.

OS: I read that he helped you overcome a serious neck injury when you were both at Bath...

AL: Yeah, we used to do a lot of training together at the time. That injury kept me out of the game for 13-14 months but then again, it wasn't as bad as it could have been.

OS: How does being at Gloucester compare to being involved at Bath?

AL: Well, the expectations aren't quite so high at Gloucester. At Bath you went onto the pitch and expected to win every game so it's different here. But there are similarities too - there's a good team spirit at Gloucester just like at Bath. But at Bath you're surrounded by a lot of internationals and a lot of big egos whereas at Gloucester people just muck in. At Bath you just get resigned to the fact that the same people will be picked every week, with some players assured of a place because of who they were rather than how they were playing at the time.

OS: What do you think Gloucester could do to achieve the same sort of success that Bath have in recent seasons ?

AL: You've got to have a good group of players. Gloucester have already got a good team spirit and some good players but they need a lot more of them to put pressure on the First Team. The squad needs to develop self-belief and that comes from winning matches.

OS: Have you seen any evidence of that happening this season?

AL: Yeah, the win against Leicester was a good example. All the players could see that they made a few wrong decisions and should have won the Cup game and then everyone went into the league game knowing that we could win.

OS: How has professionalism affected you? Have you found it difficult combining your teaching and rugby careers?

AL: There's a lot more training that I've got to fit in - but if you don't do it then you get left behind by the full-timers. It could become a problem in the long-term. Generally speaking, clubs will have to increase their number of full-time players and perhaps that will become easier as older players leave and younger ones come in who are prepared to go full-time. Personally, I don't honestly know whether I would go full-time if given the chance.

OS: Does being involved with the rugby teams at your school help your own game?

AL: Yeah, I help out with the fifth years and the first-team squad - where we've got a lot of very good, talented players. It does help my game because as a coach you have to think about the game a lot more than you do as a player and you become a lot more tactically aware.

OS: How do the students react to your "other career"?

AL: They give me a bit of stick if they see on the TV that I've had a bad game ! But they appreciate it, which is nice - it gives them something to aim towards. But sometimes at training they like to try and show that they're better than me !

OS: What have been your best and worst moments since coming to Gloucester?

AL: The best moment was beating Leicester ! The worst was probably watching the lads lose the semi-final because I thought we should have won. Getting injured at Moseley was also pretty bad.

OS: Has it been a fairly frustrating season for you - with your injuries and coming in and out of the first team?

AL: No, not really. Over the years I've had to get used to being injured - but when I'm fit I feel that I can contribute well to the side. It's just been bad luck, I suppose.

OS: You're listed as being able to play full-back or wing. Which do you prefer and why?

AL: I prefer to play at full-back because you're more involved in the game whereas it can be very difficult for a winger to get involved. If you've got a full range of skills then it's better to play at full-back where you can get involved in all aspects of the game.

OS: How do you rate Chris Catling and the other wingers at the club?

AL: Cats is a good, talented young player and I think he's got a good future ahead of him. Mikey Peters has got good pace and Mike Lloyd is very strong, runs some good lines and defends very well.

OS: Do you think we need to sign some high-profile backs to be able to compete more next season?

AL: I think so. If you've got a good player in midfield then you're going to want to give the ball to him which gives the side more options. If you have someone like Jeremy Guscott there in the centre and you pay them a lot of money you're not going to let them do nothing ! Their presence makes the rest of the side more ambitious and confident. They could also help us develop the more open game which we've already shown we can play a couple of times this season.

OS: How do you see your future - both at Gloucester and perhaps as far as representative rugby is concerned?

AL: Ha ! I don't know about that ! I just feel that when I'm fit and play as well as I can then I can make a useful contribution to a side. I can't see why I shouldn't be at Gloucester in a couple of years' time - I don't have any intentions of going anywhere else.

OS: Thanks very much, Audley.

Don't forget the Gloucester website on the internet. Latest information, views, archives, photos, interviews...

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

Mark Mapletoft

Is he a full-back or a fly-half? Even England's selectors can't decide. One thing that is certain is that Mark Mapletoft is a highly talented footballer. How does Mark rate his season and what does the future hold? Read Mark's very own words.

OS: How well do you think that your first full season back from injury has gone?

Mark Mapletoft: It's gone very well – I couldn't ask for anything more really. Being included on the England tour to Argentina was probably more than I had expected at the start of the season.

OS: Why did you choose to switch from full-back to fly-half this season?

MM: It's something that I'd always wanted to do, but I never really had the opportunity either at school or at Rugby and I've had the ideal opportunity at Gloucester this season – Chris Catling coming here to fit in at full-back gave me the opportunity of switching to fly-half and Richard Hill offered me the chance. Also playing at fly-half in the pre-season in South Africa obviously helped as well.

OS: Do you think you have become as good a player at fly-half as you were as a full-back?

MM: Obviously it takes a while to adapt to a new position. However it's probably trickier to move from full-back to fly-half than say from inside-centre to outside centre or right-wing to left wing – even the back-row may be able to switch around fairly easily. But when you move to a position that needs completely different skills it can take time to adjust. It's just ironic really how I've been picked at my old position for England !

OS: How do you react to your selection for England at full-back rather than fly-half?

MM: Obviously players would like to be picked to play in the same positions that they play for their clubs, but I would play anywhere if it meant that I could go on tour with England to Argentina. In any case I think that going on the tour provides me with a great opportunity to develop as a player.

OS: Do you think you've had to develop a new personality almost in order to play at fly-half and play the role of play-maker?

MM: Well, I'd always considered myself as someone who could create things at full-back anyway. I didn't feel that I was just there to catch the kicks and punt it back – I always liked to get involved in counter-attacking, which was good because the opposition didn't always expect you to do that. I think I've taken those aspects with me to fly-half where doing the unexpected can help a lot.

OS: Have you received much specialist coaching this season?

MM: Richard Hill has helped me a lot with the more general aspects of my game and within that mould I'm able to provide my own interpretation of the fly-half role. I haven't really received much specialist goal-kicking coaching even though I've been picked for my goal-kicking for Argentina. It's quite ironic really how I've been picked as a goal-kicker for the tour because that was something that I'd promised myself that I'd never do! But it's all gone very well this season, I've been able to keep in a steady groove which has helped my game develop.

OS: If we go back to the time before your injury, when you were on the verge of signing for Bath - Do you ever think back to those times and say to yourself - "Why didn't I go ahead with it?"

MM: No! I probably would if I was unhappy here but I'm not!

OS: Was it always your ambition to be a top rugby player?

MM: No, I didn't even start playing until about 1984-5 at school - and that was only because we had to! Nobody had any idea at the time that the game would turn professional and I'd never really considered it as a career option!

OS: What would you be doing now if you weren't a full-time player?

MM: I'd most probably be doing what I'm doing now and still be at college. I'm still studying part-time for my MA in Leisure Management at Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education. Who knows what I'll be doing in the future - I may still be involved with rugby as a coach.

OS: How important to you is the prospect of being the country's leading points scorer?

MM: I think it's probably more important to the side than myself. We need to have someone who can regularly score points from penalties if we find it difficult to score tries. I'm sure that if I had not been successful then the club would have got someone else in who would be - so that thought has always kept me on my toes. Basically, you have to practice as much as you can but there's no substitute to playing in matches. There's still some forwards at the club who think that they are better kickers like me, like Rob Fidler and Tony Windo, although I'm not too sure of their kicking abilities myself!

OS: Out of all the star fly-halves you've played against this season have any of them struck you as particularly impressive?

MM: Stransky. He was a handful in all departments!

OS: How do you rate Gloucester's season?

MM: A success - there's no other way to describe it. We've achieved what we set out to do - to stay in the First Division and we also managed to get to the semi-finals of the cup again, although we probably underachieved in Europe. We've also seen the younger players come on and the senior players have also improved a lot as well. Most of the players here are still not full-timers so we've done very well to achieve what we have.

OS: Do you sometimes get fed up with the forward-dominated game Gloucester tend to play?

MM: Well, it would be easy for me to feel that way but I try not to!

OS: Which aspects of your game will you be looking to work on over the summer?

MM: My goal-kicking! You've got to keep practising just to stay at the same level, let alone improve. I think I need to keep working on all aspects of my game really - you can always improve your game.

OS: How do you rate your performances with the England "A" team this season?

MM: I don't feel I played particularly well against Otago and South Africa, but perhaps those weren't the best platforms for players to express themselves. I thought I played OK against Ireland "A" and I was very pleased with the game against France "A". It was a bonus really to play for England "A" this season and it was probably the way I played in those games which meant me being included on England's summer tour.

(continued on Page 12)

Letters Page

Lots of questions raised this week. As Prime Ministers have said for many years: "I refer the honourable gentleman to my earlier response." – or in this case, see the previous interviews!

From: Chris Donnelly

Do you have any inside information on the proposed backer? If it does turn out to be Richard Branson, do you think that he read my letter on the letters page that suggested him as a backer? Seriously if it is him I think he approached the club NOT the other way round, and I think I know what might have prompted him!!!!

What about these rumours that were mentioned on Rugby Special suggesting that Scott Benton might be going. Do you think that is just a reference to the back page of Saturday's Western Daily Press, if so he didn't say for sure that he would go, only if they didn't announce the backer soon and get in new signings. Do you think he'll go? Hope not as he has a bright future.

From: Linda Cameron

Do you know anything to support the rumour that Scott Benton is leaving Glos? I heard it from John Inverdale as a "throw away" comment on last Sunday's "Rugby Special".

From: Rob Dickinson

Looks like an interesting week. Like everyone else I have very mixed feelings about what is happening, but our current centres/wings just don't have the pace (or class) to survive in the first division.

From: Lee Farrow

Well, whose next? I hear that Lamaison has just signed a contract with his club, so he won't be coming over. But it has now got to the stage where everyone with more than about £20.00 in the bank is Mr. Big and every rugby player in Europe is a target for Glaws!

What about last Saturday's game? Pearson was appalling even by his remarkably low standard! Still, with the Irish doing the business at least it doesn't matter! From what Richer Dill was quoted as saying on Teletext, it looks like no one will be leaving. In today's Western Daily Richer says he has verbally agreed a three year contract with Scott and his intention is to extend everyone else's contract before the start of next season.

Is it the last home game already? What are we going to do for the next 4 months?

From: Gary Miele

Tom Walkinshaw! does this mean we need to have girls with brollys at the start of the match standing around the players!!!! What does he know about GLOUCESTER RUGBY???????

And finally a letter from France.....(phew!)

From: Jacques Roca

Me and my friend Christophe Juillet who played with Philippe, are happy for him playing with your team.

Good luck.

Best of Times, Worst of Times

Ed and Bob of Shedhead asked us to provide Old Spot's top ten best and worst moments of the season as well as our player of the season. After some consultation we decided on the following:

Old Spot's Top Ten Best Moments of the Season

1. Craig Emmerson's run against Leicester in the Pilkington Cup culminating in Chris Catling's try - surely one of the greatest moments at Kingsholm for many a year.
2. Richard Hill getting his long-overdue ovation at the end of the Leicester league game.
3. The Final Whistle in the League win over Leicester.
4. Dave Sims sprinting from the half-way line to score against Newbridge.
5. Spreadbury giving us two penalty tries against Wakefield and the crowd chanting "Spreadbury, Spreadbury".
6. Phil Vickery's bone-crunching tackle after he came on as replacement against Northampton.
7. The look on the faces of the defeated Leicester players after the league match, especially Garforth who had been taunting The Shed all night. It was clear they knew their title chances had gone up in smoke that night.
8. Richard Hill signing a 5-year contract and his subsequent statements committing himself to honouring it in full.
9. Any time Chris Catling gets the ball.
10. The thought that someone had to ring Bath to tell them that we had to cancel the league match because we got to the semi-final of the Pilkington Cup.

Old Spot's Top Ten Worst Moments of the Season

1. Stransky's second drop goal in the semi-final.
2. Losing to Bristol at the Memorial Ground in a terrible game with a terrible referee.
3. John Fowler lying on top of Mapletoft while Sale score the winning try.
4. Losing at home to Sale on the first home game of the season.
5. Simon Devereux's try disallowed in the semi final.
6. Injury time in the Leicester League game. It redefined the meaning of the word "stress".
7. Bristol/Northampton/Leicester cancelling the league matches.
8. Steve Lander - need we say anymore?
9. Waiting 15 minutes to get served in the bar at Wakefield after the match. I hope the RFU do something about it.
10. Promag!

Old Spot's Player of the Season

Chris Catling - surely the best signing Richard Hill has made so far.

OS: Do you think there is a significant gap between yourself and players like Alex King and Mike Catt?

MM: Not really. Perhaps playing for those particular clubs has helped them - but we all need to have developed the basic skills needed at fly-half.

OS: What was your reaction when you heard that a backer was coming into the club?

MM: I think it is a very good move for the club if they feel that that's the best way to go. I'm not sure how long the big-money men will stay in the game, though. Some of them are in it for the love of the game and others are just there for the dividends. But nobody really knows how it's all going to turn out in the long-run. In terms of strengthening our squad and making sure that we stay at the forefront of English rugby it's a great move.

OS: Do you think we'll see many dramatic changes on the field next season?

MM: The standards in the First Division next year are going to be just as high as this season - especially with the big-money sides coming in from the Second Division. Plus as more sides obtain more money that will mean more internationals in the sides and so life in the First Division won't get any easier! Our younger players should continue to develop next season into even better players, such as Chris Catling, Scott Benton, Rob Fidler, Phil Vickery, Ed Pearce and Trevor Woodman. They will all be putting pressure on the established players and so we should see even better play from those players. But we must also be careful not to expect too much at this stage...we'll just have to wait and see!

OS: How badly do you think we need to bring in new players?

MM: That's not for me to say - it's all up to Richard Hill and how he sees the game. But I think it's fair to say that we obviously need to do something somewhere !

OS: How likely do you think it is that we will see Mark Mapletoft at Kingsholm in say 3 to 5 years time?

MM: Again, I can't really comment because it's not my decision. I've still got another year to run on my contract and then it's up to the club if they want to keep me.

OS: But looking at it from the opposite angle, are you happy enough at the club so as not to be tempted away?

MM: I'm very happy at the club! I'm very pleased that my job is now here at the club and that they've let me carry on with my academic qualifications. We now just need to show everyone that we can challenge at the top !

OS: Do you have any ambitions?

MM: If you set yourself ambitions and don't achieve them it can be a great disappointment. You can easily hold yourself up to be someone that you're not. Basically you have to give all you've got to become the best you can be !

OS: And finally, do you have any message for the supporters?

MM: The support that we receive both at home and away is very well appreciated by all the players. We'd like to thank all the supporters not just for their support at the big games such as Leicester and Northampton but for all the other games this season as well. In fact, you'd be surprised at how much the support is appreciated by all the players!

OS: Thanks very much Mark.

MM: No worries.

Phil Greening

This was supposed to be a full-blooded, no holds barred interview, but technology let us down....

Old Spot: How's your arm injury? Will you be fit for the Bristol game?

Phil Greening: It's OK – it's got a lot better since Saturday. I'll be out of action for the rest of the season, although I should be OK for the England tour.

OS: That means you'll have missed out on playing against Regan for the second time this season – are you disappointed?

PG: A little bit, but I'm not too bothered really. Anyway, he's supposed to be a bit doubtful himself for Saturday's game.

OS: Some people compare your rivalry with Regan to the Moore/Dawe confrontation. How true is that comparison?

PG: It's not at all like that. We get on really well with each other and we're good friends.

OS: What do you think you've got to do to nudge ahead of him in the pecking order?

PG: Well, I've just got to keep on playing as well as I can. Especially now I've got my chance on the England tour I can show them that I'm the man! I can't really think of any specific aspects of my game.

OS: How did you rate Keith Wood last weekend?

PG: He's a very good player and he saw a huge amount of the ball in that game. He plays a similar sort of game to me – he likes getting the ball in his hands and running with it, but he's the man. It was really good to be able to talk with him after the game as well!

OS: Was he the toughest opponent you've come across this season?

PG: I'm not sure. I think he was the best opponent in terms of his style, but I'm not really sure he was the greatest "hard man." None of my opponents really stand out in my mind.

OS: Do you think there is a big enough gap between you to justify him getting picked ahead of you for the Lions' tour?

PG: Yeah, definitely – he's a great player. He's way ahead of Mark Regan.

OS: How disappointed were you not to get on the Lions' tour?

PG: Not at all. I'm still only young and I've got my place on the England tour which I'm really looking forward to. It was superb to get picked in the squad of 62 and to be included as one of the top players in the British Isles!

OS: You've had an outstanding season all in all – what will be your most cherished memories of it?

PG: The win against Leicester and also the way I played against Bath – I don't think I've managed to repeat that performance all season. With those few big wins we had as well as another good cup run I think we've had a successful season. I can't really remember a lot about the game against Wales – it all happened so quick!

OS: Your rise to national fame has really taken off this season – how do you think it's all affected you? Do you find all the media coverage a bit intrusive?

PG: Yeah, a bit. I just think that it's funny how a year ago I was struggling to get into the England "A" team and then suddenly I'm reading about myself in the papers all the time! I'm just trying to live my life as a 21 year old and be the most professional player that I can at the same time!

OS: How important is your connection with Spartans to you?

PG: It's very important, obviously, because it's where I started off. A lot of internationals tend to get a bit big headed but at Spartans they make sure that they keep my feet on the ground! It's great because I can still go out on the town with all my old mates! Coaching down there also helps me think about the game more and to understand it better.

OS: So do you think that Gloucester have had a successful season?

PG: Yeah. We've had some good wins and despite a lot of people saying after those first five defeats that we were going to go down we've been able to turn it around and turn a few teams over. It's basically down to Hilly really – he's helped develop our game and make us believe in ourselves a lot more.

OS: So will the season just fade away now that we're safe?

PG: No way! We still want to win our local derbies! We can also start playing the more open game that we want to develop for next season! (OS: *Oh, hang on a minute me batteries are running out...*)

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
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
	29th	Pilkington Cup S-F	Leicester	H	L	13-26
April	5th	Courage League	Saracens	H	W	9-6
	8th	Courage League	Leicester	H	W	32-30
	12th	Courage League	Sale	A	L	12-52
	19th	Courage League	Harlequins	H	L	11-27
	26th	Courage League	Bristol	H		
	30th	Courage League	Bath	A		
May	3rd	Courage League	Northampton	A		

Club Statistics

Courage Club Championship Division 1 (as on April 23rd)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	Diff
Wasps	20	16	1	3	617	369	33	248
Leicester	20	14	0	6	568	362	28	206
Bath	19	13	1	5	679	347	27	332
Sale	20	13	1	6	576	421	27	155
Harlequins	19	13	0	6	674	346	26	328
Northampton	19	10	0	9	459	388	20	71
Gloucester	19	10	0	9	408	473	20	-65
Saracens	19	9	1	9	443	398	19	45
Bristol	20	7	0	13	392	588	14	-196
London Irish	19	5	0	14	442	636	8	-194
West Hartlepool	20	3	0	17	347	742	6	-395
Orrell	20	2	0	18	280	815	4	-535

First XV Playing Record Summaries

1996/7 Season	Total	Home	Away
Played	39	22	17
Won	22	15	7
Lost	16	7	10
Draw	0	0	0
Points F	985	649	336
Points A	889	359	530
Win %	56.41	68.18	41.18

All Courage League	Total	Home	Away
Played	142	73	69
Won	68	47	21
Lost	67	24	43
Draw	7	2	5
Points F	2382	1437	982
Points A	2394	1014	1390
Win %	50.35	65.75	34.06

First XV Player Appearances and Scores

	Gloucester Career						
	App	Try	Con	Pen	DG	Pts	PPG
Eral Anderson	12	3	0	0	0	15	1.36
James Bashford	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Laurie Beck	59	11	0	0	0	55	0.93
Scott Benton	39	10	0	0	0	50	1.29
Warwick Bullock	17	1	0	0	0	5	0.29
Nigel Cane	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Nathan Carter	21	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Don Caskie	194	34	0	0	0	170	0.88
Chris Catling	24	5	0	0	1	28	1.27
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	5	2.50
Andy Deacon	149	12	0	0	0	60	0.41
Simon Devereux	94	14	0	0	0	70	0.78
Scott Edwards	5	1	0	0	0	5	1.00
Craig Emmerson	12	1	0	0	0	5	0.63
Gareth Fenwick	13	2	26	16	0	110	8.46
Rob Fidler	55	3	0	0	0	15	0.29
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	5	5.00
Alex Gallagher	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Pete Glanville	102	15	0	0	0	75	0.74
Phil Greening	49	6	0	0	0	30	0.56
Chris Hall	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Adam Harris	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Peter Hart	18	0	4	0	1	11	0.65
John Hawker	139	17	0	0	0	85	0.62
Paul Holford	106	43	0	0	0	215	2.03
Martyn Kimber	63	9	15	8	18	153	2.43
Andrew Jarrett	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00

First XV Player Appearances and Scores

	Gloucester Career						
	App	Try	Con	Pen	DG	Pts	PPG
Tim Lacey	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Mike Lloyd	35	18	0	0	0	90	2.57
Audley Lumsden	16	8	0	0	0	30	2.50
Mark Mapletoft	56	22	96	108	5	629	11.23
Neil Matthews	2	1	0	0	0	5	2.5
Andy Metcalfe	10	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Alex Morris	4	0	8	5	0	31	7.75
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	33	15	0	0	0	75	2.27
Adey Powles	38	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Martin Roberts	117	16	79	57	0	409	3.50
Alastair Saverimutto	19	19	3	2	0	107	5.63
Dave Sims	201	27	0	0	0	135	0.67
Ian Smith	336	52	0	0	0	260	0.77
Nick Smith	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Andrew Stanley	137	25	0	0	0	125	0.91
Dave Timmington	4	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Phil Vickery	14	1	0	0	0	5	0.36
Richard Ward	6	1	0	0	0	5	0.83
Kester Wilkinson	1	1	0	0	0	5	5.00
Tony Windo	135	29	0	1	0	148	1.10
Trevor Woodman	9	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 The Holes In The Nets Are Small Enough, Brussels!)

One of the worst-kept secrets in this country right now concerns the very first job for the new Government at the end of next week. I can reveal that the spies are being sent to the place where they can keep secrets in a bid to find out just how to do it.

I am reliably informed by Ms. Money Penny (who was never able to keep a secret) that the lads will be coming to Kingsholm to get some tips.

"We are all very impressed that you have been able to keep the lid on just who the investor at the rugby football club is," she purred.

I did remind her that seven people did know – the six directors and the person him/herself.

"Don't mention seven to me," she snapped. "James has done the dirty on the country... you know he's driving a BMW now?"

"Anyway. Whitehall is full of leaks – can't keep a secret for five minutes. The PM only has to open his mouth and there's a leak," she said.

"Yes, I had noticed," I replied.

"Up here, we're very impressed," she said. "Unbelievable – more than three weeks and still the Press cannot find out. You sure managed to foil 'em."

"Yeh, David's not bad at keeping the hounds at bay," I suggested.

"Tell me, what's Sir John doing at Gloucester? Come to think of it, it's like Gloucester is taking over Newcastle – first John Hall and now Rob St. André. But that nice Richard Hill fellow was saying that ...

"Now Ms. M," I interrupted, "Our John Hall is not a 'Sir' and our signing this week was Phillipe Saint-André and not Rob Andrew."

"Oh dear," she replied. "I thought that the lovely Rob – he is very nice, you know – was going to Gloucester. Oh well, my visits to Cheltenham will remain boring. Who's this Philip character?"

"Phillipe Saint-André. He's French...."

"A Frenchman? Mon Dieu! Transfer me to your season ticket department. Adieu, and remember to let our boys have all the inside info on how to keep secrets...oh stop it James..."

I tapped the ticket sales number into the telephone.

"Tickets," I inquired? "I have some crazy broad on the phone....."

"Allo, zis is Inspector Clouseau..... Phillipe Saint-André is going to play rugby in Angleterre? Zis is a national disaster! Allo, is zis Calais? Bon, tell ze trawlermen to block ze ports – and oui, block Le Tunnel under Le Manche Phillipe Saint-André is escaping to Angleterre...."

Meanwhile, in a sporting travel agency in Tewkesbury.... "Hello, Air France? A return from Charles De Gaulle to Heathrow for Tuesday, s'il vous plaît..."

Ol' Babber Looks *Forward*

With all attention focused on events off the pitch this week, with the arrival of our first major international signing, Philippe Saint-André, the ongoing speculation about the identities of the mysterious backer as well as the "4 or 5 internationals" Richard Hill says are lined up to come to Kingsholm, today's match may come as a bit of an afterthought for some. Put in the context of the First Division table, whilst Gloucester are now assured of survival amongst the elite, Bristol are equally aware of their predicament – a certain involvement in the relegation play-offs. So, with these issues already settled, it seems as if today's game may just be a matter of going through the motions as it were. Yet we would be forgetting the historical and partisan significance of this game – not only is the Gloucester–Bristol fixture widely believed to be the oldest club fixture in the world, but this match sees its 200th anniversary! And even if a place in the history books doesn't appeal that much to the supporters here today, the desire to beat the old enemy from down the road should be as strong as ever!

Bristol come into this game after having their impressive resurgence with wins against both Sale and Northampton nipped in the bud first by Harlequins and then extinguished by London Irish last weekend. Of course, they have not been helped in their cause by the loss of Regan, Shaw and Corry to injury – so that their pack, usually amongst the strongest in the First Division – has had to undergo serious reorganisation.

However, one regular first-team player who has managed to stay clear of injury and returns back to his old club today is their tight-head, Kris Fulman, who says that he is really looking forward to the contest in front of a large contingent of his friends and family – most of whom live locally! He is likely to be partnered in the front-row with the experienced Dave Hinkins and McConnell – a prop-turned hooker. Behind the pack, there are doubts over the availability of experienced scrum-half Robert Jones, although Paul Burke, the man whose goal-kicking won the corresponding fixture at the Memorial Ground back in February, should be fit. Although Bristol's back line perhaps doesn't have as much cutting edge as most sides in Division One, like Gloucester, they do possess some promising young players such as the full-back Lewsey and wing Tiueti who will be challenging the more experienced Paul Hull, for a place on the wing.

Now that the immediate pressure of relegation is off, Richard Hill is posed with some intriguing selection dilemmas. Does he give experience to some of the younger players like Vickery, Woodman and Fortey or will he stick by the experienced trio of Deacon, Windo and John Hawker? Will Dave Sims be rested after a massive effort of 30 games this season and Mark Cornwell given a chance against one of Shaw's likely replacements, Eagle or Adams? And what will he do with the centre pairing for this game – could it be the last time we see an all-British centre partnership at Kingsholm ??? It would surely be a shame if Richard Hill didn't use this game as a means to experiment a little with the more open style of play he and the team are trying to develop and even if those less experienced players aren't in the starting line-up, I would expect them to be given a run-out at some stage in the afternoon.

So perhaps we shouldn't expect the fire and passion that there would undoubtedly have been had Bristol not lost last Saturday – Bristol may well have an eye on the outcome of the clash between Coventry and Bedford – but we should hope to see an entertaining game which will provide plenty of pointers towards Richard Hill's thinking for next season.

How They Will Line up

Saturday 26th April 1997 Kick off 3.00 pm

GLOUCESTER
Cherry & White

BRISTOL
Blue & White

15	Chris Catling	Full Back	Josh Lewsey	A
14	Mike Peters #	Right Wing	Paul Hull	E
13	Craig Emmerson	Centre	Kevin Maggs	C
12	Don Caskie	Centre	Fraser Waters	D
11	Mike Lloyd	Left Wing	Ben Breeze	B

10	Mark Mapletoft	Outside Half	Paul Burke (capt)	F
9	Scott Benton	Scrum Half	Dean Dewdney	G

1	Tony Windo	Prop	Dave Hinkins	H
2	John Hawker	Hooker	Barry McConnell	I
3	Andy Deacon	Prop	Kris Fulman	J
4	Rob Fidler	Lock	James Browrigg	K
5	Dave Sims (capt)	Lock	Phil Adams	L
6	Pete Glanville	Flanker	Dave Corkery	M
7	Nathan Carter	Flanker	Richie Collins	O
8	Simon Devereux	No. 8	Eben Rollitt	N

16	Laurie Beck	Replacements	Darren Yapp	P
17	Audley Lumsden		Simon Martin	Q
18	Alex Morris		Robert Jones	R
19	Andy Stanley		Andrew Wadley	S
20	Trevor Woodman		Craig Barrow	T
21	Lee Fortey		Craig Short	U

Referee		Touch Judges
Chris Rees (London)		Keith Beaumont & Clive Leeke



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