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Lancashire Shield winners: 1975-76.



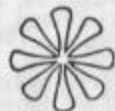
Centre Phil Ward scores.

Picture by Oldham Evening Chronicle

Harvey Ashworth

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OLDHAM OUTLOOK

Today we entertain Dewsbury after the hammering we took from a star-spangled Hull side at the Boulevard last Sunday. It must be a long, long time since we conceded 61 points in a match but Hull really are a side to be feared these days with a pack which cost more than £50,000 to assemble.

No Second Division side will live with Hull and it is no exaggeration to advance the view even at this early stage of the season that there are possibly only three promotion places still left open.

If we want to be among them we will have to play a good deal better than we have been doing of late but it is no use crying over spilt milk or bemoaning our bad luck with injuries.

We have to put the Hull defeat out of our minds, learn lessons from it if possible and soldier on in the knowledge that we won't be meeting sides of Hull's calibre every week.

We are all well aware of the team's weaknesses and failings but it is not easy to go out and strengthen when there is no money available.

We could have done with a good home draw in the John Player Competition after being drawn away to Salford in the Lancashire Cup and away to Barrow in the preliminary round of the Floodlight Trophy.

Sadly our luck was out again when the draw was made last Tuesday and we have to travel again - this time back to Humberside to take on the Kingston Rovers.

That will be another tremendous task for our players but we can only hope that the injury situation will have eased somewhat by next week and that coach Dave Cox will be in a much better position than last week when he had only six forwards available to choose from and had to go to the Boulevard with no forward sub.

Among forwards unavailable were Peter Jewitt (knee) Alan Forster (shoulder) Peter Frodsham (knee) Brian Hughes (recovering from concussion) Roger O'Mahony (suspended) Jim Reynolds (on holiday) and such long-standing injury victims like Gareth Owen and Warren Ryans.

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OUR VISITORS BY DON YATES

Oldham's extremely difficult start to the season continues this afternoon with a visit from Dewsbury, a club relegated from the First Division last season but a club many people feel will quickly bounce back into Division One.

They are undefeated in league football so far, having won at Doncaster 16-13 in the opening match followed by a 14-9 home win over Blackpool Borough last week. Their past results on this ground also make most favourable reading for they have won on four of their last five visits to Watersheddings starting with a 13-4 league win in April 1973 and a resounding 34-9 First Division success the following August. In November 1975 Dewsbury made two visits to Oldham, losing 15-6 on the first occasion in another First Division game but then knocking Oldham out of the Floodlit Cup with an exciting 11-9 victory. Dewsbury's last visit to Watersheddings was in February of last year when they met Oldham in the opening round of the Rugby League Challenge Cup. Alan Bates was the Dewsbury skipper that afternoon and he gave a typical captain's display, leading his Second Division side to a more comfortable victory than the final score of 15-8 would indicate.

Although Bates has since left Crown Flatt for Watersheddings, the two other stars of that cup win, Jeff Grayshon and Nigel Stephenson, are still turning out for Dewsbury and, by all accounts, have lost none of their skill or enthusiasm. Stephenson has been a prolific points scorer throughout his career which began in June 1967 when he was signed from Shaw Cross Boys' Club. He is the holder of the Dewsbury club records for goals and points scored in a season with the 26 tries and 145 goals, 368 points which he amassed in season 1972-73, the season when Dewsbury clinched the League Championship. Stephenson's high scoring feats have also won him representative recognition for he has played nine times for Yorkshire and he was also a member of the England team which took on Australia in the challenge match which brought the 1975 World Championship series to a conclusion.

Back-row forward Jeff Grayshon also represented England that evening and his tally of representative honours now stands at eight games for Yorkshire and six for England. He represented England in the 1975 World Championship when he was a try scorer in the decisive 16-13 victory over Australia at Wigan whilst his tremendous experience at club level includes a summer guesting with Australian club Cronulla.

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OUR VISITORS

Unfortunately, during that spell with Cronulla, Grayshon suffered an injury which kept him out of the game for much of last season. That injury, plus the absence of Stephenson who was in dispute, were the main reasons for Dewsbury's poor showing and eventual relegation last season but with both players now back in action the future seems full of promise so Oldham can expect another tough encounter this afternoon.

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Another Oldham attack is brought to a halt.
Picture by Oldham Evening Chronicle

MAN IN THE MIDDLE

The Trumanns Steel Referee of the Year for both 1977 and 1978, Billy Thompson, from Linthwaite, Huddersfield takes charge of this afternoon's match. He is regarded as the World's number one official who has been refereeing since 1963, reaching grade one status in 1967. Since then he has achieved every refereeing honour available including 17 major cup finals and 13 internationals with World Championship matches in Britain in 1970, France in 1975 and Australasia in 1977 when he refereed the Grand Final between Great Britain and Australia. Mr. Thompson is married with three daughters and works as an engineer with David Brown Tractors.

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With the Amateurs ALAN BURKE

Although Amateur Rugby League is expanding rapidly throughout Britain there is a desperate shortage - and that is of referees. This season 64 new teams are in the various leagues which therefore means at least 32 extra referees are required. However it seems most people are content to criticise the men in the middle without going on the field themselves to show how the job should be done.

At present there are only 6 active officials in the Oldham Referees Society who themselves see one possible source of new membership in players who are nearing the end of their careers. Therefore the local referees have offered to visit the town's amateur clubs to discuss the various aspects of refereeing. However before then the Oldham Society hold their monthly meeting tomorrow night at the Royal Hotel on Lees Road (7.45pm), to which anyone interested in refereeing is invited. Alternatively the Society's secretary John Ward can be contacted on 061-652-7304.

Next weekend several local teams will again be on the Lancashire-Cumbria Cup trail as both the 2nd round of the open-age competition and the opening round of the youth tournament are being staged. At open-age level only one local side, St. Anne's have been drawn away, whilst Saddleworth and Ferranti have both been given home ties against Crosfields (Warrington) and Widnes 'B' respectively. However, the hardest task faces Higginshaw who have been drawn at home against the winners of the competition for the past two seasons, Pilkingtons (St. Helens). County Youth Cup holders Saddleworth Rangers begin their defence of the trophy with a home tie against Leigh Miners Welfare next Sunday.

All the results of last season's national and local competitions can be found in the new BARLA handbook which is now available, priced 75p plus 25p postage, from BARLA Headquarters, Britannic Building, 3 Upperhead Row, Huddersfield. The 200-page edition also includes photographs of all the major cup winners, articles by Amateur Rugby League enthusiasts throughout the country, and a full report of the recent BARLA Pacific Tour.

The first steps towards County and International appearances later this season will be made in a few weeks when the opening matches are played in the BARLA Inter-League tournament, from which the players for the representative games will be selected. The Oldham open-age and youth town-team squads have still to be chosen by the respective coaches, Brian Churm and Brian Gartland, both of whom have retained their positions.



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