

22 OLDHAM Team Check BRADFORD 6

MICK BURKE	1	KEITH MUMBY
STEVE ROBINSON	2	PHIL FORD
DES FOY	3	STEVE McGOWAN
BRYAN MCCARTHY	4	GARY MERCER
KEVIN MEADOWS	5	ROGER SIMPSON
36 PETER WALSH	6	RUSS STEWART
STEVE PETERS	7	PAUL HARKIN
NEIL CLAWSON	8	BRENDAN HILL
IAN SANDERSON	9	PETER NOBLE
HUGH WADDELL	10	DAVID HOBBS
PAUL ROUND	11	KELVIN SKERRETT
COLIN HAWKYARD	12	KARL FAIRBANK
MAL GRAHAM	13	WAYNE HERON
GARY WARREN	14	NEIL ROEBUCK
TOM NADIOLA	15	DAVID REDFEARN
TERRY FLANAGAN		

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Record Transfer Fee Paid: £65,000 to
St. Helen's for Paul Round August 1987
Record Try Scorer: Reg Farrar, 49 tries,
1921-22 season
Record Goal Scorer: Bernard Ganley, 224 goals,
1957-58 season
Record Point Scorer: Bernard Ganley, 28 points
v Liverpool City, April, 1959
First Game: 21st October, 1876 v Stalybridge
Highest number of points scored:
Bernard Ganley, 2,881
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1913-14, 1919-20, 1924-25, 1933-34, 1956-57,
1957-58, 1958-59
Runners-up: 1908-09, 1911-12, 1918-19, 1921-22,
1954-55, 1966-67, 1968-69, 1986-87
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1909-10, 1921-22, 1956-57, 1957-58
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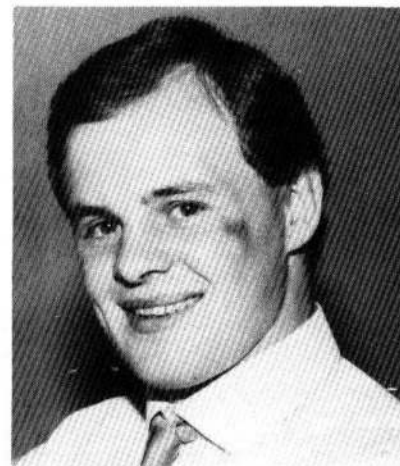
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PLAYERS PROFILE

Paddy Kirwan



PLAYER PROFILE NO. 4

Full Name: Michael Patrick Kirwan
Nick Name: Cast-iron Kirwan
Birthdate: 25-3-61
Birthplace: Oldham
Marital status: Debbie/sons Neil, Adam
Occupation: Civil engineer
Car: Volvo
Fav. TV Show: Hello Hello
Fav. Film: Midnight Express
Fav. Music: Diana Ross
Fav. Food/Drink: Curry rice, coffee
Fav. Reading: Leon Uris
Hobbies: Squash
Fav. Other Sports: Soccer
Likes about game: Friends made
Dislikes about game: Monday mornings
Superstitions: None
Fav. position: Scrum-half
Fav. ground: Warrington
Best moment: Picked for GB Colts
Worst moment: Torn ligament (v Halifax)
Hardest player to tackle: Neil Holding
Hardest tackler: Kevin Tamati
Fav. all-time player: Roger Millward

CAREER WITH OLDHAM

Date signed on: June 17, 1979
Debut: v Huddersfield (A)
4.11.79 (non-playing). substitute.
Appearances: 171
Tries: 34
Goals: 0
Drop goals: 0
Total points: 119

Note: Changes in the value of the try, from three points to four, mean that the above figures will not tally on present-day values.

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1983 B.B.I. AWARDS DIPLOMA OF EXCELLENCE. Slalom D – for bottled lager.

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1984 MONDE SELECTION MADRID. Gold Medal and Certificate.

Slalom D – for bottled lager.

1984 MONDE SELECTION MADRID. Gold Medal and Certificate.

Slalom Lager – for bottled lager.

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1986 B.B.I. AWARDS SILVER MEDAL – Slalom International – for bottled lager.

1986 B.B.I. AWARDS DIPLOMA OF EXCELLENCE –

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1986 B.B.I. AWARDS DIPLOMA OF EXCELLENCE –

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SECOND ROUND	– £1,600 to losers	£1,100
THIRD ROUND	– £2,825 to losers	£1,700
SEMI-FINALS	– £4,750 to losers	£3,000
RUNNERS-UP	– £9,000	£6,000
WINNER	– £16,000	£12,000

THE ROUND BY ROUND DATES, INCLUDING TODAY'S ARE:-

FIRST ROUND	– WEEKEND OF 14/15 NOVEMBER 1987
SECOND ROUND	– WEEKEND OF 21/22 NOVEMBER 1987
THIRD ROUND	– WEEKEND OF 28/29 NOVEMBER 1987
FIRST SEMI-FINAL	– SATURDAY, 12 DECEMBER 1987
SECOND SEMI-FINAL	– SATURDAY, 19 DECEMBER 1987
FINAL	– SATURDAY, 9 JANUARY 1988

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MATCH REPORT

Oldham v Fulham

(Preliminary round, John Player Special Trophy)

A crowd of more than 3,000 saw Oldham make progress to the first round of the John Player Special Trophy with a 36–8 win over Fulham at Watersheddings last Sunday in a match marred by the serious leg injury received by Paddy Kirwan.

Although Fulham tried desperately hard and had the advantage of a lot of ball from the scrums, they rarely threatened to break down our defence once Mick Burke had twice come to the rescue early on by smothering dangerous little chips from Huw Rees.

Oldham led 12–2 at the interval and took a firm grip afterwards to finish up with six goals from Peter Walsh and six tries from Colin Hawkyard, Paul Round (2), Ian Sanderson, Peter Walsh, and Bryan McCarthy.

Paul Round won the John Player man–of–the–match award, chosen by the Press, and there were other contenders in Mick Burke, Peter Walsh, and forwards Colin Hawkyard and Mal Graham, both of whom worked desperately hard to top the tackle count with a narrow lead over Ian Sanderson.

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'WATERSHEDDINGS SCENE'

(News and views from inside the club)

IAN MacCORQUODALE

A tribute to the work being done at schoolboy level by our assistant coach Iain MacCorquodale comes from Ray French, the former Great Britain RL and British Lions RU international who is now the BBC commentator and RL correspondent for Today and the Rugby Leaguer.

Ray watched the display put on by Oldham boys before the Test against Papua New Guinea and wrote as follows in his Leaguer column:

"Despite preparations for the TV broadcast of the Test match I managed to sneak a view of the Oldham lads who were displaying their skills at Central Park."

"Noting that the lads were in the charge of my ex-teaching colleague Iain MacCorquodale, who did some fine work for my school junior teams, I knew the quality would be first class."

"I was not disappointed. Well done, all concerned. You were a credit to what can be achieved from sensible and sympathetic coaching by men who know what they are doing."

IAN BATES

We are sorry to report that Ian Bates, our popular little scrum—half from Dewsbury, faces a lay-off of several weeks after an accident in training.

Ian fell awkwardly during a training routine and his shoulder came into contact with Leo Casey's knee. Ian was immediately in great pain and the worst fears were confirmed the following day when x-rays showed that he had fractured a bone in his shoulder.

"The doctors have told me it will take at least three weeks to heal and possibly longer," says Ian, "but I will be doing everything possible to see that I am training again soon."

GARY WARNECKE

Gary Warnecke, the Aussie centre who played for the club last season and the season before that, is back in the area after spending several months in Europe and he has been having talks about a possible return to Watersheddings.

He was due to have played in the 'A' team against Rochdale last Thursday evening and by the time these notes are read definite decisions may have been made, one way or the other.

STEVE ROBINSON

Many supporters were probably taken by surprise at the appearance of the Saddleworth winger Steve Robinson in the No 2 jersey when we played at Keighley a fortnight ago.

Seven days before that, 24-year-old Steve scored a hat-trick of tries for Rangers in their terrific Lancashire Cup win over Blackburn, the holders, in St Helens and his performance coincided with the decision to give Richard Irving a well-earned rest.

The Oldham club invited local lad Steve for a trial at Lawkholme Lane, after which it was agreed by all concerned that he would have another game against Fulham last Sunday in the John Player Special Trophy.

Underlining the co-operation that is now evident at all levels of the game in Oldham, Rangers coach Ray Hicks was only too happy to leave Steve out of his side at Worth Village last Saturday to give him the best possible preparation for his big match on Watersheddings the following day.

FRENCH TRIP

There is a possibility that the club may be making a trip to France at the end of the season. A prominent figure in the French game was a spectator at our match against Barrow, as a guest of former club official Keith Potter, and he invited the club to go to France next May to play against the Limoux club.

The board of directors are currently considering the suggestion and providing the cost is not exorbitant the trip may well come off as it has the support, in principle, of senior coach Eric Fitzsimons, who believes there are several benefits to be derived from establishing good relationships with the game across the Channel.

COACHING POSTERS

A new series of four top-class, full colour posters on coaching is now available. The action posters, measuring approximately 26" x 20", have been produced by the National Coaching Scheme and are ideal for display in the home, office or club.

Prices £1.75 each, or £7 for the set, plus £1 packing and postage, they are available from Phil Larder, Rugby League National Coaching Scheme, Britannic Building, 3 Upperhead Road, Huddersfield HD1 2JL.

FLASHBACK

DO YOU REMEMBER?

A regular feature in which we delve into the photographic files of the Oldham Evening Chronicle. This week: Golden Oldies!



1. The Oldham players celebrate after winning the Second Division title with a victory over Hunslet at Batley on May 6, 1982.



2. Sunday, August 12, 1979 — and Phil Larder, now the game's National Director of Coaching, makes a break for Oldham against St. Helens.
3. Oldham v St. Helens again, this time on February 6, 1983. A young Terry Flanagan in action, with Des Foy and Alan Platt to his right.



FACE IN THE CROWD

JACK DEARDEN — our man on the terraces

IT is always nice to be able to write about good news — especially on injuries — so a special mention today for three players, one past and two present.

Firstly, big Ian Sherratt, who is over the worst after his glandular fever, and was a spectator when we won at Keighley a fortnight ago. Says Ian: "The medical experts think I contracted the illness in Australia, although they cannot be sure."



"One thing is for sure: I've got itchy feet to play again and, with luck, I will be able to start training about Christmas. I will have to build myself up, though, because I'm two stones lighter."

Secondly, little Steve Patterson. After two years out of the game with a back injury, Steve made a terrific comeback in the recent 'A' team game against Dewsbury and one hopes that he now has much better luck as he starts to rebuild his promising career.

The former player I want to refer to is that great ex-stalwart Fred Hall, whose son Martin is the 'A' team captain.

Says Martin: "Although still nowhere near fully recovered, he is making some progress. He always attends 'A' team matches and still manages to give me encouragement."

Fred was not only a popular past player, but a well-liked and respected Oldhamer throughout the town and we all look forward to his continued progress.

On the playing side, it is good to see that Mick Burke has signed a three-year contract and I'm sure we can all look forward to seeing him produce the sort of top-class displays that earned him so many honours in the game.

The transfer-listing of nine players will have surprised some of our fans but Eric Fitzsimons has now completed his "honeymoon period" and has decided to examine certain longer-term issues.

The Great Britain team made a sound start to the season with a 42-0 win over Papua New Guinea, but I was surprised to hear of Paul Groves's sudden move up the ladder.

From the relative obscurity of 'A' team Football at Salford, he was transferred to St. Helens, got a game for Lancashire, and suddenly found himself in the Test team.

If Beardmore is unavailable, we are obviously struggling for cover but, with limited choice, I think Mal Reilly could do himself a favour by having a look at our own Ian Sanderson, who must have been bitterly disappointed at not breaking into the Lancashire squad.

Finally, a word about the Kiwi referee who handled the Barrow game. He pleased a lot of supporters by allowing the game to flow and not interfering unless absolutely necessary. He handled a couple of explosive situations well, although he did have a few problems with the scrums.

JACK DEARDEN

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CORKY'S COMMENTS . . .

Iain McCorquodale — on the local scene.

BEFORE today's game against Bradford the Oldham schoolboys will give a 20-minute display which will be similar to the one they put on before the Great Britain v Papua New Guinea Test match at Wigan.

A total of 26 boys have represented the team this year and there is no doubt that there are some stars of the future in this list :

Richard Badby, Richard Barber, Martin Birch, Lee Bradbury, Matthew Collins, Craig Dobb, Joe Diveney, Jonathan Eastwood, Chris Eckersley, Antony Grimshaw, Martin Hawkyard, Daniel Lovett, Andrew Leddy, Michael Lowther, Mick Martindale, Phil McAndrew, Mick McLean, Phil McLean, Theo Negros, Philip Russell, George Slicker, Martin Swan, Billy Tindall, Andrew Timms, Dave Ward, Jason Wardle.

Their results to date are as follows: St. Helens won 40-4; Warrington won 44-0; Wigan lost 8-10; Leigh won 38-6; Barrow won 24-0; Salford won 52-0. In total, points for 206, against 20.

At future Oldham first team games, town-team players who are members of the Junior Roughyeds (Supporters' Club junior section) will be acting as ball boys.

Tickets are available today at 50p for a raffle, to be drawn during the second half, for a souvenir ball signed by the Wigan and Manly players at their recent world club champions game at Central Park.

The ball was kindly donated by former Oldham schools' star Richard Russell and all the organisation has been done by our hard-working Supporters' Club committee.

Twenty-four hours after the Oldham open-age inter-league team beat Rochdale to go into the quarter-final of the BARLA competition, the Oldham under-19s beat Humberside 18-14.

St. Anne's and Oldham under-19 coach Steve Deakin submits the following report:

A late try by Bloor and a goal by Buttle put Oldham under-19s into the next round of the inter-league trophy after a thrilling encounter with Humberside at Higginshaw.

After conceding two early penalties, Oldham went 6-4 up with an intercept try by Parkin, goaled by Buttle. In a see-saw game, Humberside snatched a 10-6 lead before Weldon crossed for a good try, improved by Buttle, to put the home side 12-10 ahead at half-time.

In the second-half, Oldham's discipline left a lot to be desired and two further penalties allowed the visitors to take a 14-12 lead. Neil Flanagan replaced Bloor, who had received a rib injury, but Oldham could not get more points on the board.

In a last throw of the dice, Bloor returned to the game in an effort to inject the vital touch and he scored the last-gasp winner to put Oldham into the next round.

Outstanding for the local side were centres Parkin and Brearley, scrum-half Paul Kay and loose-forward Tessier. But the most crucial factor of all was the defence of captain and second-row Weldon, whose display showed why he was selected for Great Britain against the Kiwis.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Oldham RLFC for granting us use of their facilities to prepare for the game. Without the Oldham club's help, our preparations would have been severely hampered.

In the quarter-final next Sunday, the Oldham under-19s are at home to the winners of the Widnes-Castleford clash, while the town's open-age team goes to Bradford in their quarter-final on November 28.

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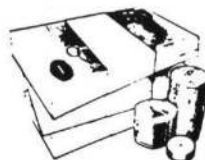
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THE BOSS TALKING...

(A personal view by Oldham coach Eric Fitzsimons)

A game against First Division opposition today is greeted with both hands. Last year it was bread and butter stuff. Without being disrespectful to Bradford it was a run-of-the-mill fixture. This season it's something special for us and that puts the pressure on our visitors today.

They know we've looked forward to this game at every level of the club. They know our supporters will get behind us — and that has a big influence on results sometimes. The squad is stronger than when we played Warrington, and a little wiser. Although Bradford have the advantage of week in and week out pressure football, this is a cup match and doesn't it make a nice change to be the underdogs? May the better team win. I'm confident in our ability to carry it off.



It was good to have the opportunity to trial a local amateur in the first team at Keighley. Steve Robinson has played with distinction for Saddleworth and the town rep side, both under Ray Hicks. Young Richard Irving's loss of form could not be ignored any longer and it gave us the chance to have a look at Steve at professional level. His performances against Keighley and Fulham underlined his potential.

Richard will regain his confidence and his previous form and I feel he will be a stronger player for his experience. The lack of cover on the wing forced us to play him much longer than we should have done. Now we have competition for the wing places and that's good news for the club.

Locally, we have a great deal of raw talent and we have some excellent coaches whose opinions I respect. Every genuine lead is followed up and, as has been demonstrated with Steve Robinson, if the opportunity is there we have no qualms about pitching the lad in at senior level because a player who is turned 21 should be capable of coping.

If no opportunity exists to go in at senior level, a trialist must come through the 'A' team and therein lies the problem with local talent. To do the lad justice he should train with our lads for at least three sessions before playing. He should get at least three games in the position of his choice and he should give himself up exclusively to the club for the period of his trial if he wants to give himself maximum benefit.

Some lads want to be signed without trials. This is acceptable in the case of lads with international honours, at the age of 19 or under, in the amateur game. We then have a chance to mould them into good professionals.

After that age it is as important that we get to know the lad's character, as well as his ability to perform alongside professionals. For that reason, signings, without trials are a risky business. We will never abuse the 'trial' system at Oldham. It is not in our interests, neither is it in our hearts. We know what a game in the red and white means to the local lad. If he is on trial it will be done properly and if he is unsuccessful, he will be told why and what to do to improve his game. He will then continue to be monitored back at his amateur club to see if he has learned from the experience.

We do have problems with numbers on occasions and we are pleased with the response of local clubs, coaches and players in helping us out when, for example, the 'Cumbrian flu' epidemic takes players out on the Friday before Barrow. Iain took eight professionals up there and seven local lads performed with pride. They were not trialists. They were just proud to have the chance to wear the red and white, and Iain and I were proud of them. The relationship is good, I feel, and as long as we are not abusing it, it will continue to be so.

At different times this year 23 local boys have been asked to help us out and we have yet to have one refusal. It is a measure of the affection that most local players hold for the senior club that they have willingly assisted us, and proudly worn the club ties with which they were presented.

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JOHN PLAYER SPECIAL TROPHY — FACT FILE

- * The John Player sponsorship of the Rugby League started in the 1967-8 season with the player of the match and player of the season awards which ran until 1971-2.
- * In 1970-71 a goalkicking competition was introduced for one season only.
- * From 1972 to 1980 the winner and runner-up of the BARLA National Cup entered the competition. In 1980-81 the winner only entered and then there was a lapse of two seasons before the winner and runner-up were again invited to enter from 1983-4.
- * From 1979 to 1982 the John Player BARLA sevens was played as a curtain-raiser to the main trophy matches. Prize money was £3,500, £4,500 and £5,000 and the winners were Waterhead, West Hull and Pilkington Recs.

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Appearances & Scorers

SEASON 1987-88
(to date — 11 possible)

	APPS (inc. Subs)	T	G	DG	PTS
Atkinson K.	7	1	27	—	58
Irving R.	9	1	—	—	4
Hawkyard C.	11	2	—	—	8
Meadows K.	11	4	—	—	16
Edwards J.	6	—	1	—	2
Peters S.	5	—	—	—	—
Kirwan P.	9	2	—	—	8
Sherratt I.	4	1	—	—	4
Sanderson I.	11	4	—	—	16
Waddell H.	11	3	—	—	12
Worrall M.	6	2	2	—	12
Graham M.	11	4	—	—	16
Flanagan T.	10	2	—	—	8
Round P.	11	8	—	—	32
Sherman P.	3	—	—	—	—
Copeland T.	3	—	—	—	—
Morrison T.	1	—	—	—	—
Bardsley M.	2	—	—	—	—
Marsden R.	1	—	—	—	—
Burke M.	6	3	—	—	12
Walsh P.	6	5	20	—	60
Bates I.	3	1	—	—	4
Clawson N.	6	1	—	—	4
McCarthy B.	5	5	—	—	20
Foy D.	4	1	—	—	4
Trialist	2	—	—	—	—
Nadiola	1	—	—	—	—

John Player Special Trophy

The winners of today's clash between Oldham and Bradford will know tomorrow morning who they meet in round two.

The draws from here on in will be made through the BBC local radio network covering the second, third and semi-final rounds. The draw ceremonies will be staged at the studios of BBC radio Leeds at 7.50 am and transmitted to other local radio stations throughout the North of England.

If Oldham are successful in today's tough tie against the Yorkshire Cup winners watch the local Press for details of ticket arrangements for the next round, which will be played next weekend.

OLDHAM RLFC FIXTURES & RESULTS 1987-88

Opponents	At	F	A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Aug 20	Whitehaven	3	122															
Sep 2	Kempsey	3	724															
Sep 13	Barrow	5	524															
Sep 20	Sarnfield	3	114															
Sep 27	Douglas	2	206															
Oct 4	Huddersfield	1	729															
Oct 11	Carlisle	2	174															
Oct 18	Barrow	1	789															
Nov 1	Kempsey	1	789															
Nov 8	FALHAM	1	319															
Nov 15	Barrow	1	319															
Nov 22	Workington	1	319															
Nov 29	Douglas	1	319															
Dec 6	Barrow	1	319															
Dec 11	Barrow	1	319															
Dec 26	Rochdale	1	319															
Jan 3	Sarnfield	1	319															
Jan 10	Whitehaven	1	319															
Jan 17	Workington	1	319															
Jan 24	Widnes	1	319															
Jan 31	Challenge Cup	1	319															
Feb 14	Challenge Cup	1	319															
Feb 21	Featherstone	1	319															
Feb 28	Workington	1	319															
Mar 6	Workington	1	319															
Mar 13	Workington	1	319															
Mar 20	Huddersfield	1	319															
Mar 27	Sheffield	1	319															
Apr 1	Rochdale	1	319															
Apr 4	Runcorn	1	319															
Apr 10	Widnes	1	319															
Apr 17	Carlisle	1	319															



More £1,000 winners in our Lifeline draw. Left to right: Robert Meyrick (winner), Chris Sykes (winner), Ray Hill (commercial manager), Jim Collins (prominent supporter), Amanda Sykes.

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WITH THE SUPPORTERS CLUB

KATIE Brereton, our Rugby Queen, has accepted an invitation from the Supporters' Club committee to continue in office for another year, and that's a decision which will prove popular by all supporters and particularly those who know Katie personally.

She is a real Oldham fan — just like Dad! — and is keen to promote the interests of the club at all times. In recent weeks she has been doing the half-time draw for the Junior Roughyeds but over the next 12 months she will be happy to do a public relations job for Oldham Rugby at presentations etc around the town so long as the organisers make arrangements through the Supporters Club.

Katie, Mick Parrish and Neil Clawson judged the fancy dress parade at the Halloween dance and special thanks go to them, as well as to Harry and Elsie at High Fry (Fish and Chips), Raper Street, for their kind donations to the Junior Reds half-time draw.

Tickets for our big Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve dances are now on sale, priced £2.50 for adults and £1.50 for accompanied juniors.

Our match videos are on sale at £10 and are also available for hire.

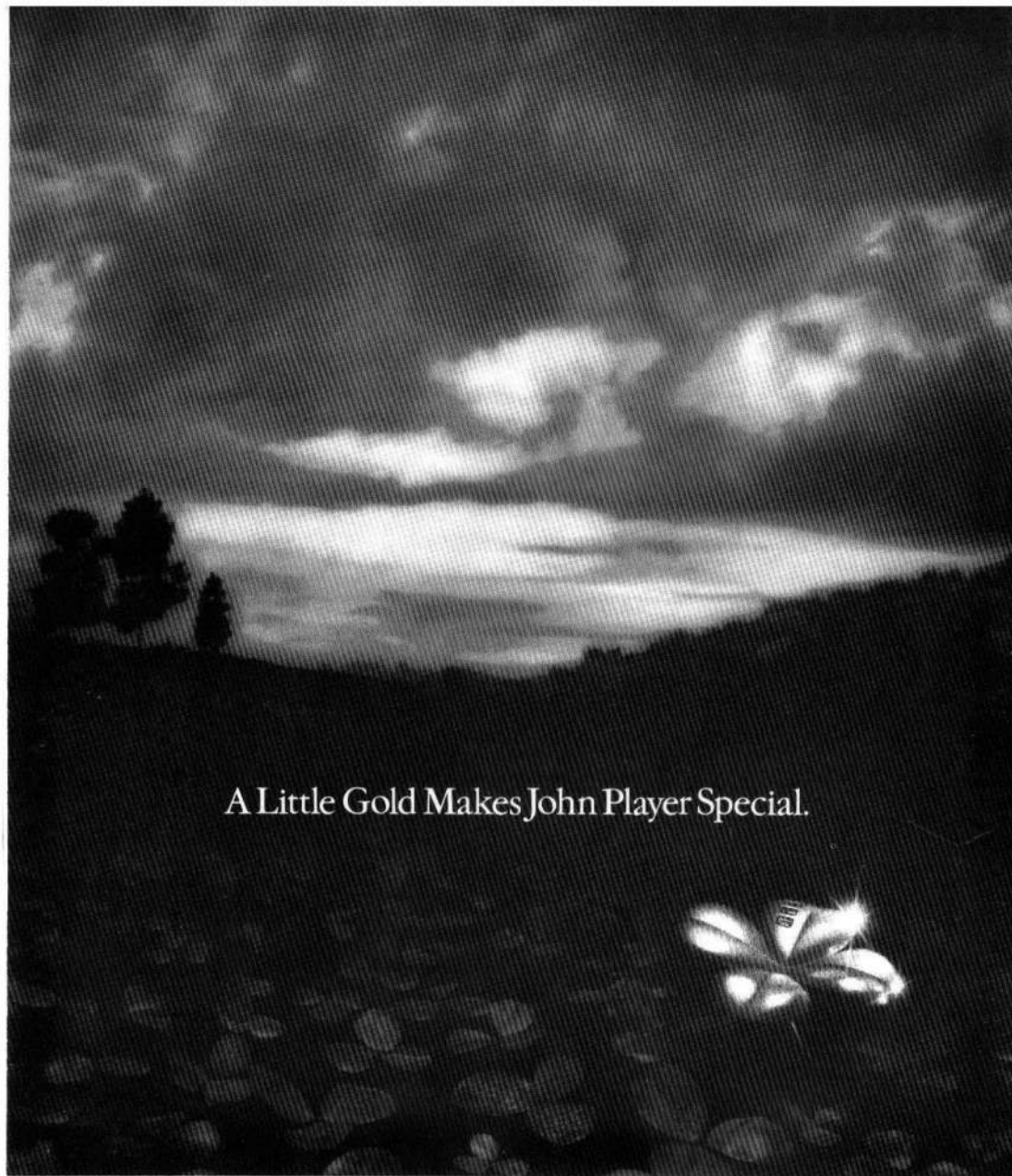
Finally, we welcome all Bradford supporters to today's match and invite all home and away fans to use our canteen facilities around the ground.



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DIRECT FROM THE BOARD

A regular feature in which a member of the board will take you behind the scenes.

This week — DAVID GARDNER

IT is no secret that I am also a director of Stockport County soccer club and I am often asked how I compare soccer with Rugby League, soccer fans with rugby supporters and so on.

Well, I had my eyes opened to the commitment and loyalty of Rugby League folk one Autumn evening about three years ago.

I was standing on the popular side at Watersheddings, watching Oldham v Widnes, and after the match I offered the two chaps next to me, with whom I had got talking, a couple of free tickets for a cup—tie between Stockport County and Liverpool.

They told me very politely that they were only interested in rugby and I realised at that moment how the Oldham fans are totally committed to the club and the game.

I also think RL supporters are more demanding. You can watch ten soccer games and get one good one. You can watch ten RL matches and get one bad one. Winning alone isn't enough for the rugby spectator. He wants his side to win well...and that's what we are all striving to achieve here at Watersheddings.

You can't please everybody all the time, but eight league wins out of nine is good going and the response from the public so far has been terrific.

Oldham is certainly a rugby town and if all our wonderful fans can each play their part in trying to introduce a friend, neighbour or work mate to this great game of ours I feel sure that, eventually, we will be able to achieve what Wigan have achieved since they were last in the Second Division.



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FOCUS ON BRADFORD

BRADFORD come proudly to Watersheddings today as Yorkshire Cup holders despite a succession of setbacks that have had to be overcome.

Perhaps the biggest blow of all was the decision of former Welsh RU star Terry Holmes to retire on medical advice only two years after picking up a reported £80,000 for turning professional.

Then came the terrible injury blow to evergreen prop Jeff Grayshon which resulted in the veteran campaigner breaking a leg against Hull KR the week before the Yorkshire Cup final replay against Castleford.



Thirdly, some of the Northern players were involved in the much-publicised county cup final replay brawl with Castleford, which involved players of both sides being called to a special meeting of the RL management committee last Tuesday to answer charges of bringing the game into disrepute.

Finally, the news broke last weekend that Northern could face closure unless their gates, which average about 3,500, improve dramatically.

Chairman Jack Bates was reported as saying that most of the problems are caused because of the poor facilities at Odsal where the council have spent £3½M in the past three years.

Lack of covered accommodation in the vast Odsal bowl is one of Northern's biggest complaints and officials report that they need to pull in at least 2,500 more fans per match otherwise they will have to sell their best players.

John Woods went for a reported £40,000 to Warrington last close season and an early blow which resulted in Phil Hallewell breaking a leg produced a stand-off problem which was filled initially by the switch of full back Keith Mumby.

The arrival of two New Zealanders — Gary Mercer and Russ Stewart — eased coach Barry Seabourne's back division problems and allowed Mumby to revert to full back, where he is still one of the safest in the business.

The capture of Hull KR scrum-half Paul Harkin for £40,000 has proved a shrewd investment, while the two Kiwis are also doing nicely — Test man Mercer at left-centre and Stewart at outside-half.

There is little doubt, however, that Northern's strength lies in the pack, and in a big front-row comprising former Oldham man David Hobbs (pictured) at No 8, Brian Noble at hooker, and in-form Brendan Hill, a huge man, at blind-side.

Hobbs was subbing a lot when Grayshon was doing his stuff in the front-row, but David now has the chance to come into his own and he will certainly want to do well today against his former colleagues.

Karl Fairbank, brother of our own Mark, and a strong-running forward who is forcing himself into Mal Reilly's tour plans, forms the second-row with Kelvin Skerrett, bought from Hunslet, while Wayne Heron is at loose-forward.

In the backs, Phil Ford is as dangerous as ever on the right-wing, with Mercer and Steve McGowan in the centre, and the left-wingspot going to Roger Simpson, Wayne Race or Richard Francis.

McGowan will be remembered by many Oldham fans for the way he scored a hat-trick against Frank Myler's men at Odsal a couple of years ago.

Northern have a formidable First Division record this season and they defeated Hull KR (a), Bramley (a) and Leeds (h) on their way to a Yorkshire Cup final against Castleford in which they drew 12-12 first time before lifting the trophy 11-2 in the replay.

FOLLOW THE 'A' TEAM

A Jekyll and Hyde performance saw the 'A' team go down 30-20 at Batley last Saturday, producing good attack but poor defence.

Batley had first use of the slope and scored two interception tries to lead 12-4 at half-time, Richard Irving having scored for Oldham after good work by Copeland and Marsden.

With the advantage of the slope in the second half, Oldham conceded two quick tries inside five minutes, but then hit back hard in the last quarter to score tries through Morrison, Bardsley and Hall, with Parrish kicking two goals.

A long pass by Foley set up the Bardsley try while Hall scored after a Casey break, Casey and Copeland were Oldham's best but despite valiant efforts of Hall to dictate, the side was in need of an old head to dominate in the middle of the field.

Team: Trialist; Irving, Parrish, Trialist, Trialist; Trialist, Copeland; Casey, Hall, Foley, Trialist, Marsden, Morrison. Subs: Myler and Bardsley.

The reserves were due to play Rochdale at Watersheddings on Thursday, having won three, drawn three and lost three of their nine Alliance matches to date.

COMMERCIAL CORNER

(Development Office topics with Ray Hill)

WE have just reached a vital target in Development affairs — 1,000 members of Lifeline, and still going up.

The trend is exciting and encouraging and we have to recognise the part played in all our money-raising schemes — mainly Lifeline, Cashline and Lottery — by the unsung heroes of the operation, the agents.

There are a lot of agents I haven't met yet, so I am planning to invite all agents to a night out in the social club, including buffet supper, some time before Christmas.

This will not only take the form of a festive season THANK-YOU for all they do over 12 months, but it will also enable myself and the staff to meet them all and let them know personally what a good job they are doing. Keep up the good work!

A busy time is approaching, of course, for the souvenir shop and I would like to apologise to all those people who have been trying to get their hands on the larger sizes of replica jerseys.

We are dependent upon the supplier but we are doing everything possible to get them in quickly so they can go on sale alongside an item which we believe will prove immensely popular for Christmas — ski jackets at £24.99 complete with the Oldham RLFC badge.

As Christmas approaches we are considering opening the shop AFTER home games, as well as before, but this will depend on whether we think there will be the demand. Don't forget, though, we are open usual hours every day of the week.

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PRESS BOX CHATTER

(Roger Halstead, Oldham Evening Chronicle)



Mick Burke's decision to sign a three-year contract and accept that he will probably finish his distinguished career at Watersheddings is a boost for the club judging by the way Mick has been performing in recent matches.

After his pre-season problems, first with knee trouble and then the demands of his job, Mick has settled down again and is playing with the stamp of skill and class that still allows him to lay claim as one of the best full backs in the English game, even at the age of 29.

Two terrific, head-on, bone-jerking tackles at Huddersfield proved that the former Widnes man has not lost his appetite for physical contact.

The way he twice collected difficult 'bombs' against Barrow, while under intense pressure, indicated that his timing and eye for the ball is still first class.

And Oldham fans will have lost count of the times he has come into the line perfectly to deliver a beautifully-timed and defence-splitting pass or to spot the gap himself and cross for the try.

In today's game we can expect to see two former Great Britain full backs in opposition and it will be intriguing to compare the contributions of Mick Burke and Bradford's Keith Mumby, another player who is still giving terrific service to the twilight of his career.

ROGER HALSTEAD



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