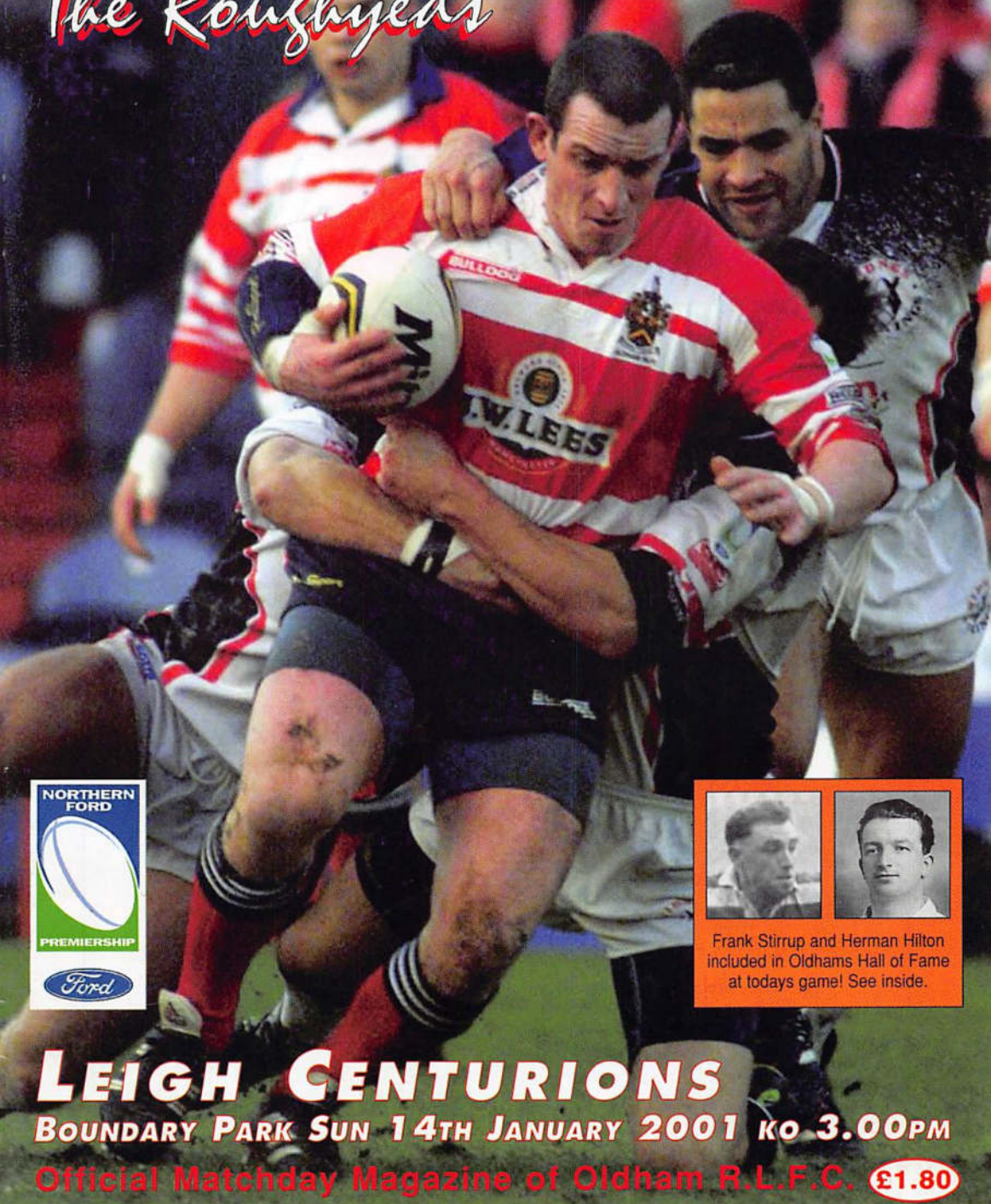


OLDHAM RLFC

The Roughyeds



Frank Stirrup and Herman Hilton included in Oldham's Hall of Fame at today's game! See inside.

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Up Front

... with Christopher Hamilton



WELCOME back to Boundary Park for this mouthwatering clash against Leigh Centurions. Both teams are still unbeaten and today's contest will be a massive game for both teams even at this early stage of the season.

We are also expecting a record attendance for the new Club at today's game to beat the 3,796 who attended the first home

game of last season against Rochdale. We hope that lots of you who are reading this programme will be attending for the first time and like what you see enough to return again.

There has been some confusion this week over the half price ticket offer we have made to Super League Season Ticket holders. I must stress that this offer has been made to Season Ticket holders of **ALL** Super League Clubs and it was Wigan who maximised their public relations expertise in getting the offer to look like it applied to their members only. The idea behind this scheme is obviously to increase our crowds but we are not naive enough to think that we musn't look after our own fans.

With this in mind we are hoping to announce soon that Oldham Season Ticket holders will be able to get the same half price deal to Super League games. Timing meant we had to announce our offer first but we are always looking at marketing opportunities and we will shortly be announcing other incentives to attract more people to see the great games that Oldham provide in the NFP.

To those of you watching us for the first time enjoy the experience and to our loyal supporters **please** keep up your very vocal support for the team.

Best wishes.

Chris Hamilton



The Roughyeds

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FRONT COVER

Paul Norton surrounded by
the Widnes defence

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS MATCHDAY MAGAZINE DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THOSE OF THE MANAGEMENT AND STAFF OF OLDHAM RLFC (1997) LTD.

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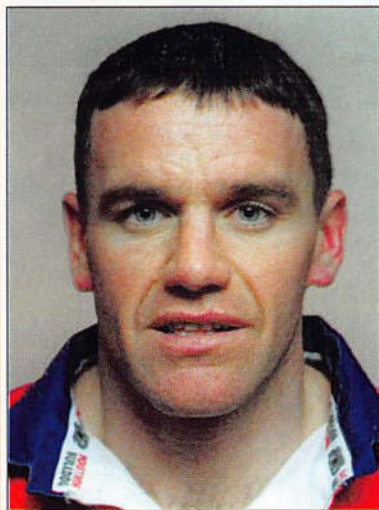
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FORD FOCUS . . . with Mike Ford



A BIG WELCOME to everyone who has chosen to watch today's game. Given Leigh's terrific form and their enthusiastic and vocal following, plus various initiatives on ticketing, today we are hoping to break the new Roughyeds crowd record. We hope everyone enjoys what should be an absolute humdinger of a match because, with both sides unbeaten, today something has to give.

We hope our own fans will stay with us and show patience because whatever else happens Oldham will be going all out to grab the points. But it is important to remember that Leigh are the form side in the competition and their fans will be equally anxious for a win. Like ourselves Leigh are a well structured, well organised and well balanced

side with good players right across the park and a particularly dangerous and incisive full back in Neil Turley.

That said the foundation of Oldham's success to date had been our ability to 'tough it out' against strong opposition, as our victories against Rochdale and Widnes showed. Even though we did not control the football as well as we might in these games we displayed great discipline in defence and great mental toughness which makes us a very hard side to beat. A side which can ride a dodgy spell has a lot going for it and this is exactly what we did when Widnes got on top in the third quarter of the game on New Year's Day. We realise that we have not shown as much variety in attack as we would like so far but we are working on that. Besides when all your opponents study your match videos it is as well to have one or two moves up your sleeve. Let's hope we can produce something a bit special today.

Thanks for your support and stick with us.

Mike

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Michael's Match



... from the pen of Michael Turner

TODAY, as we welcome to Boundary Park all our friends connected with Leigh RLFC, we also celebrate the induction of two new members into the Oldham RLFC "Hall of Fame". As fate would have it the two players were born in each of today's opposing towns. **Herman Hilton** was Oldham born and bred. Regarded as one of the finest forwards ever to grace the Oldham colours, he rose to become captain of the club, had a successful tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1920 and remains one of only three Oldham skippers to raise the Challenge cup after the 1925 victory over Hull Kingston Rovers at Headingley.

The second inductee, a native of Leigh, is the renowned **Frank Stirrup**. As talented a footballer as ever played for the "Roughyeds", Frank was a member of the great 1950s team, usually employed in one of the half back positions but who also provided useful cover for full back or the wing positions when required. Frank was club captain in the championship winning campaign of 1956-57. That was of course the season when Oldham won every trophy except the Challenge cup and the older supporters of the club will need no reminding that the Wembley dream ended in a five points to nil defeat on a snow covered, mud heap of a pitch at Leigh in the third round of the famous competition.

It always seems to me that every happy memory of that stirring championship win over Hull at Odsal is always counter balanced by the recollection of that infamous defeat at Hilton Park. However, for the record, Oldham played Leigh on three other occasions in 1956-57. The first league encounter was at Watersheddings in August where Oldham recorded a 20 - 0 victory. The return match in the following April produced an even more convincing win for the "Roughyeds" by 40 - 13. The semi final of the Lancashire cup at Leigh on September 19th was the other fixture. Again Oldham were triumphant. This time the score was eighteen points to nine, with all the Oldham tries scored courtesy of the "Leigh connection", with Alan Davies (2), Frank Pitchford and Frank Stirrup himself, crossing the whitewash for the Roughyeds. Ironically Oldham's other most famous import from the opposition, Bernard Ganley, did not play in the game leaving Jack Rogers (2) and Dick Cracknell to kick the goals.

The Oldham team that day was:

J Rogers, R Cracknell, D Ayres, A Davies,
J Etty, F Stirrup, F Pitchford, K Jackson,
J Keith, D Vines, S Little, C Winslade,
D Turner



In keeping with the joint Oldham / Leigh and "Hall of fame" theme, here is a rare team photo of the Oldham team featuring Herman Hilton in the match at Leigh on October 28th 1922. The match was the 2nd round of the Lancashire cup with Leigh securing victory by thirteen points to eight. **Back Row:** Jack Collins, Sid Rix, Jack Kendall, Bob Sloman, Herman Hilton, Rod Marlor, Ernie Knapman. **Front Row:** Ned Thomas, Bob Beynon, Jim Finnerty, Evan Davies, Maurice Tighe, Alf Tomkins.

ROGER



ROGER

TODAY'S game has the potential to be a truly magnificent advertisement for the Northern Ford Premiership.

Those who doubt the value of pulling power

of rugby league outside Super League should be here today to soak up the atmosphere and experience the intensity of a match which will keep a good crowd entertained from start to finish.

Leigh have already played in front of a record NFP attendance this season when the Hilton Park faithful turned up in force at the Auto Quest Stadium to help their team to an impressive win against Widnes, watched by nearly 7,000 paying customers.

As for Oldham, each of their holiday games against Rochdale Hornets at Spotland on Christmas Eve and Widnes at Boundary Park on New Year's Day attracted nearly 3,500 supporters and the kick off each time was put back ten minutes because of congestion at the turnstiles.

The Roughyeds management is optimistic that, given anything like a decent day, the clash of the two hitherto unbeaten teams this season will beat the crowd of 3,796 that watched the Oldham-Rochdale game on December 27, 1999 and thus establish an attendance record for the new club.

The public won't be fooled. They are starting to back both clubs in numbers because they like what they see and they recognise the enormous strides taken in recent years to revive the sport in what were once hot-beds of the game.

Leigh were down and out when Ian Millward took over three years ago, but look at them now under the stewardship of a fellow Aussie who shares Millward's meticulous attention to detail, Paul Terzis.

Round about the time that Millward began his rescue act in Leigh, rugby league at pro level in Oldham had been laid to rest with the liquidation of the Bears.

Chris Hamilton and his fellow comrades-in-

arms almost immediately set to work on building a brand new club and only three years down the track we can all marvel at what has been achieved so far, accelerated to no small degree since the appointment as player-coach of Mike Ford at the start of last season.

Oldham and Leigh are fighting back, regaining the support of loyal fans, growing in stature by the day, establishing firm roots to sustain long term development and, above all, cocking a snook at those in our sport who believed that long established clubs in traditional areas alongside the M62 were hardly worth a second glance when they fell on hard times.



PAST glories will be recalled by many today when Herman Hilton and Frank Stirrup are installed into the Oldham club's J. W. Lees Hall of Fame.

Like so many Oldham players down the years, Frank 'Mr Football' Stirrup came from Leigh where he still lives to this day, close to Hilton Park.

Appropriately, many of Oldham's 'Leigh Lads' of the fifties and early sixties will be among the ex-Watersheddings contingent here today to share with Frank Stirrup and with the representatives of the late Herman Hilton their big occasion.

Alan Davies, Vinny Nestor, Geoff Sims, Bernard Ganley, Bob Pugsley, Martin Murphy and Brian Matherhall will be among the ex-players who, weather permitting, will be introduced to the crowd.

They possess a treasure trove of memories from days when rugby league was, shall we say, full of characters, full of entertainers and flowing over with naturally-gifted stars who were like magicians when a rugby ball was places in their hands.

Frank Stirrup was one such talent, but you can't recall what Stirrup did for Oldham without remembering in the same flashback the contribution of his fellow half-backs and fellow 'Leigh Lads' Frank Daley and Frank Pitchford, both of them, sadly, no longer with us to share this special day.

What memories. What a glorious chunk of Oldham sporting history.

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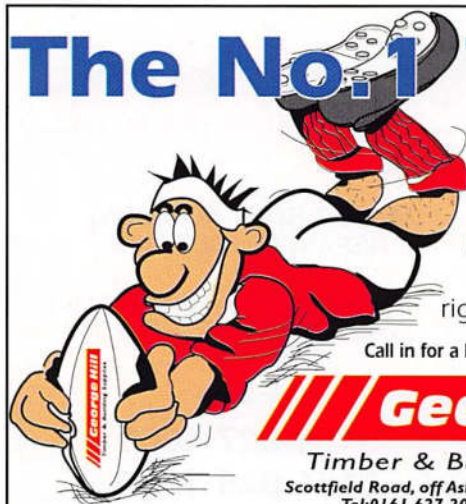
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ARE PLEASED TO BE PART OF THE TEAM





Alliance Action

... with Haydn Walker

SINCE my last programme notes we have had two games, at home to Rochdale and away to Hunslet. Both games resulted in excellent wins with several of our younger players really showing up well.

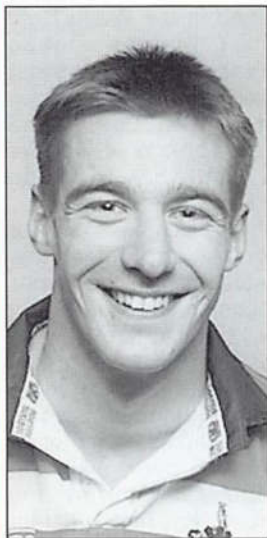
Hornets is always a tough game and our friends from the other side of the M62 came with their usual intent. Our boys simply brushed Hornets aside in the first twenty minutes racing to a 24-0 lead. It was a case of slick handling and excellent support play throughout the team and Hornets could not live with us. Some sloppy defence on the last



Gareth Barber

tackle allowed Hornets back in the game but they never really threatened as the game went on. Gareth Barber was outstanding at stand off, while Kevin Mannion, returning after injury, was equally impressive. Youngsters Dave Newton, Alex Peet and Matty Williams also showed up well.

The trip to Hunslet saw us field the youngest



Kevin Mannion

ALLIANCE TEAM FIXTURES

Dec				
6	Keighley	A	7.30	L16-36
16	Workington	H	2.30	P
21	Rochdale	H	7.30	W24-0
Jan				
3	Hunslet	A	7.30	W26-10
10	Leigh	A	7.30	
18	Widnes	H	7.30	
Feb				
3	Whitehaven	H	2.30	
15	Hunslet	H	7.30	
22	Batley	H	7.30	
March				
17	Whitehaven	A	2.30	
22	Featherstone	H	7.30	
29	Doncaster	A	7.30	
April				
4	Batley	A	7.30	
19	Doncaster	H	7.30	
May				
3	Featherstone	A	7.30	
10	Keighley	H	7.30	
19	Workington	A	2.30	
24	Rochdale	A	7.30	
31	Leigh	H	7.30	
June				
7	Widnes	A	7.30	
13	Top Five Play Offs			
14	First Division Grand Final			

Alliance side since the club's formation, no fewer than nine of the side having played Academy football last season. The Academy connection didn't end here, though, with a cameo performance from coach Mark Knight being very popular with the boys. Indeed Mark got on the scoresheet with a fifteen metre burst, this burst having miraculously lengthened to thirty metres by the time we arrived back in Oldham.

The 26-10 win was pleasing in the fact that we came back from a 10-6 half time deficit. Keith Brennan, Gareth Barber, Lee Doran and Gavin Johnson all had big games on the night.

Probing The NFP

NOT HAVING a fixture last week cost Oldham one place in the league table as Doncaster's victory at Gateshead moved the Dragons up to 4th and dropped the Roughyeds to 5th. However, Oldham do have two games in hand and one of the highlights (or lowlights if you're a Doncaster fan) of the holiday period was Featherstone's thumping home win by 34-4 against the Dragons (after I'd tipped the visitors to win, of course). Evidence again that Doncaster don't travel well beyond their well publicised 'House of Pain'.

Today's visitors had a terrific Boxing Day win at Widnes (25-20) followed by two comfortable outings against Swinton and Chorley. This leaves the Centurions, like Oldham, unbeaten at this stage, so once again today's game promises to be an absolute cracker as was the New Year's Day fixture with Widnes which the Roughyeds came back to win in the last quarter.

Their two defeats by Leigh and Oldham had relegated the Vikings from the top eight but last Sunday's 26-16 defeat of Workington combined with Hornets defeat of Swinton to lift the Vikings into eighth spot at the Lions expense. This meant that at this early stage the top eight was the same as finished last season, albeit not in the same order.

The other undefeated sides at this stage are Keighley who defeated Gateshead, Hull K.R. and Sheffield to give themselves a two point lead before today.

Dewsbury again stand high in the table with wins against Batley, Hunslet and York. Meanwhile Featherstone and Hull K.R. occupy 7th and 8th with seven points each and could not be separated on Boxing Day when they fought out a hard earned 6-6 draw at Craven Park.

At the opposite end of the table Whitehaven, Chorley and Gateshead have yet to register a point and with Whitehaven the team without a game today, Gateshead at home to Dewsbury and Chorley visiting Workington that state of affairs is unlikely to alter.

Given that York Wasps are no great shakes, it looks like there are seven sides

looking to mount a challenge for the top eight. Swinton and Rochdale are among the hopefuls but on the evidence of last week's dismal game between the two (Hornets winning 8-4 thanks to an Ayres try and two goals by Wood) neither looks strong enough to mount a serious threat. Hunslet's young side is probably too inexperienced as yet, so to me the realistic sides with potential are Barrow (particularly difficult to handle on home soil), Batley, also with the potential to be extremely difficult opponents on their awkward little pitch, Workington and Sheffield, two sides with sufficient muscle to make life hard for anyone not prepared to show 100% commitment.

Meanwhile one or two players have been on the move lately. The return of halfback Leroy Joe from Hull K.R. to Whitehaven will be a welcome boost for the hard pressed Cumbrians. Utility man Jimmy Walker left Doncaster for Hull K.R. and will

give the Robins some much needed selection options. And today's visitors Leigh now have Willie Swann available for selection after recovering from an injury sustained in the World Cup. Martin Crompton signed permanently for Widnes, Sheffield have recruited Scott Rhodes from Leeds and Hornets took Wes Rogers



Wes Rogers

from Oldham plus B.A.R.L.A wingman Wayne McHugh from Redhill.

As for today, Oldham v Leigh is too close to call, an odd error on one side or the other perhaps enough to settle it. Other top games are Hull K.R. v Doncaster and Keighley v Featherstone but I will be bold here and go with two home wins. There are intriguing, evenly balanced contests as well at Hunslet (v Batley) and Rochdale (v Barrow), I expect one away win and one at home. In the other games Widnes will turn over Swinton, Workington will dispose of Chorley and Sheffield will win at York. Now how's that for sticking your neck out?

GC



LEIGH CENTURIIONS

OUR VISITORS today are one of the most successful sides outside Super League and harbour ambitions to step up to that level. Beaten Grand Finalists last season was a set back but despite the loss of Stuart Donlan, Mick Higham and Heath Cruckshank the Centurions remain formidable opposition. The club has a great deal of stability and although Ian Millward departed for St. Helens, his replacement Paul Terzis has been able to continue the run of success and has added significantly to one of the strongest and largest playing staffs in the N.F.P.

At full back this term in Donlan's place is NEIL TURLEY the son of Leigh's assistant coach the widely travelled Norman Turley. A product of Wigan's Academy Turley junior was out of the game injured for nearly a year before being snapped up by the Centurions.



Phil Kendrick

In the threequarters Leigh boast an embarrassment of riches. ALAN HADCROFT is a former Leigh East wing or centre with ten tries to his name last term. Big centre PAUL ANDERSON was good enough to be chosen in the N.F.P. Team of the Season last year. Formerly with St. Helens and Sheffield Eagles he scored 16 tries and 17

goals in 1999-2000 and is definitely one to watch out for. PHIL KENDRICK signed for Widnes from Rose Bridge in Wigan and is another solid performer with good hands. He is also a reliable stand by goal-kicker. ANDY FAIRCLOUGH is a versatile player able to fill several positions. He began with Wigan St. Patrick's, signed as a pro with St. Helens and arrived at Leigh via Salford. DAVID JONES is well known to Oldham followers having played with the Bears. A no-nonsense wing Jones has also appeared, since leaving Wigan St. Pat's, with Wakefield, Rochdale and Lancashire Lynx.

At halfback Leigh have a wealth of choice. New signing SIMON SVABIC could be out injured today but the former Oldham Bears Academy player has already made a big impact since his transfer from Salford. Last week former Salford half-back partner JOHN DUFFY played stand-off. A Scottish international Duffy first signed pro in 1996 for Warrington. Last season LIAM BRETHERTON quickly became popular as a loan signing from Wigan before making his move more permanent. 45 points, in 5 games was certainly going some. Bretherton has also done service at Warrington and Whitehaven. Also sidelined at present is club captain KEIRON PURTILL who played 30 matches



David Bradbury

last season and is an astute playmaker with a sound kicking game.

Up front the Centurions feature no fewer than three ex-Oldham prop forwards. The redoubtable TIM STREET has been a crowd pleaser wherever he had played which includes Wigan, Swinton and Hull. Now in his third spell at Hilton Park Street is never less than a handful. DAVID BRADBURY has added a bit of weight since his Oldham Bears days and has moved into the engine room of the pack. From Leigh East Bradbury moved to Oldham, Salford and Huddersfield and was on the 1996 Great Britain tour to New Zealand and P.N.G. Then there is PAUL NORMAN a former Wigan St. Jude's and Golborne Parkside player with 29 appearances to his name last term. In addition to the ex-Oldham men Leigh boast the formidable DAVE WHITTLE once on Wigan's books and a star performer in the N.F.P. last term as well as for Wales in the recent World Cup.

At hooker following the departure of Higham and Anthony Murray to Barrow, the Centurions can choose from two newcomers. 21 year old JOHN HAMILTON arrives after 3 seasons as understudy to Keiron Cunningham at St. Helens. Meanwhile NEIL RODEN's brother MARTIN has moved from Wigan in search of first team opportunities.

In the back row SIMON BALDWIN is one of the best known running forwards in the league. He first played under Steve Sims at Leigh who took him with him when Sims went to coach Halifax. An England international Baldwin has also played at Sheffield. He gave Oldham no end of trouble last year at Hilton Park.

CHRIS MORLEY represented Wales in the World Cup. The 27 year old had six seasons at St. Helens where he won Challenge Cup Final and Super League Grand Final medals before moving to Warrington, Salford and Sheffield. He is an outstanding addition to Leigh's squad.

ADAM BRISTOW is the Centurions Australian quota player formerly with Western Suburbs. He appeared in all 34 of Leigh's fixtures last season and is noted for his phenomenal workrate.



Adam Bristow

Finally RADNEY BOWKER is a 21 year old ex-Leigh East back player with great natural talent. One who could come on to scheme and opening if the play is tight.

Walkerbout . . .

. . . with Brian Walker

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STIRRUP AND HILTON JOIN THE ELITE!



Stirrup the Oldham player with 224 1st team appearances between 1950-1960.



Frank Stirrup and Gus Risman, Oldham coaches 1959-62.

THERE has already been a fair amount of publicity in respect of mercurial Leigh born half back Frank Stirrup, and former international forward, Herman Hilton being inducted into our Hall Of Fame. So, straight away, a big Oldham welcome to today's game to Frank and his family, along with many of Frank's playing colleagues from those halcyon days of the 50's.



Herman Hilton with the Challenge Cup in 1925.

Unfortunately there are no known relatives of the Oldham born Hilton, the last Oldham captain to hold aloft the Challenge Cup, or indeed of any players surviving from that most successful period in Oldham rugby history.

Weather permitting, Frank and his colleagues will be introduced to the crowd either just prior to kick off or during the half time interval. After the match the guests will be officially welcomed by club Chairman, Chris Hamilton, before making their way to the Hall of Fame display at the Clayton Arms. Why not join them?



The last player to join the elite was full back Martin Murphy, pictured here with Fellow Hall of Fame Members, (left to right), Bernard Ganley, Alan Davies, Bob Irving and John Etty.

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Cook(e)ing up a storm



WAKEFIELD TRINITY WILDCATS Coach John Harbin has called for a reduction in the number of overseas players in the British game. And no wonder. After his club's experience last season it does make sense. Naturally the N.F.P. has already tackled this problem by limiting the recruitment of overseas players to one. Except, of course, this can be circumvented - a la Workington Town - because of the five years domicile rule. This means that most Super League clubs actually have more than the allowable five overseas recruits because some players are off quota and others, for reasons I do not immediately understand, qualify for British, Irish or various other E.C. Countries passports. As John Harbin says 'If a Super League club has ten, eleven or twelve players who don't qualify to play for Great Britain, then we can hardly blame a coach like John Kear in the World Cup if we are not strong enough to take on Australia and New Zealand'. In this country we can produce young stars when we give them the opportunity, but too often we don't. I couldn't agree more. And just to add support to the argument let me pose the following question: 'Is it any coincidence that the England cricket team is once again beginning to look capable of competing with the best in the world now that each county is limited to one overseas player and that county academies are starting to bring on quality young players? Is it time for R.L. to learn the lesson?'



Apropos the above just look at some of the names coming to Super League this year:- Michael Hancock (Salford) Kevin Walters (Warrington), Brandon Costin (Halifax), David Furner (Wigan), Brett Mullins (Leeds), Tony Martin (London), Peter Shiels (St. Helens), Robert Mears (Leeds), Andrew Frew (Huddersfield), Daniel Gartner (Bradford), Nigel Roy (London), Jim Dymock

(London), David Kidwell (Warrington), Ben Kusto (Huddersfield), Mitch Heals (Castleford), Shane Rigon (Bradford). That's sixteen Australian players occupying spots that could be taken by British players. And I haven't included absolutely top quality



Daniel Gartner

players like Adrian Lam and Matthew Johns whose signings can be least be justified on a 'nothing but the best is good enough' basis. Not only is it 16 squad spots, but it's also 16 air fares, 16 housing bills, 16 sponsored cars and, if I know rugby players, 16 gas and electricity bills etc. etc. Is it me or is all this really worth it?

(Since I wrote this I am pleased to note that Swinton Chairman and current R.F.L. President Malcolm White agrees. His proposal is two overseas players per club in Super League and none in the N.F.P.)



AND NOW A QUIZ

When is a contract not a contract?

Apparently whenever St. Helens say so.

When is winter rugby summer rugby?

According to Super League on Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

When is Wigan 'A' v St. Helens 'A' NOT a reserve team fixture?

Again, on Boxing Day.

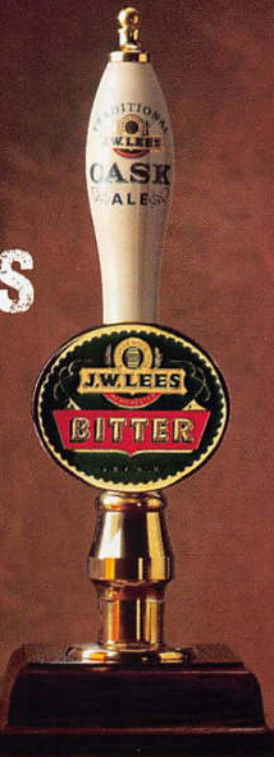
When did 24 of Huddersfield take on 22 of Halifax?

NO, not 1878, but New Year's Day 2001.



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..... Danny Guest



Q. When did you first start playing rugby league?

I started playing as a kid with my mates at our local rugby club; I was probably about 10 years old at the time. I really enjoyed it for a few years, but then I got into motorbike scrambling and started racing and my rugby was put on the back burner for a while. A few years on and at college I started playing rugby again. Encouraged by my parents and family I started to take it seriously, and soon

found how much I enjoyed it, especially playing the position of prop. I was told that good prop forwards mature physically and mentally from their mid to late twenties and even into their thirties, so I took the decision to turn professional when asked.

Q. As a professional, how has your career gone so far?

I first signed on for Keighley, where I learned so much about just being a 'pro' player. I have also played at Lancashire Lynx, The Oldham Bears and now am a signed on player for Oldham Roughyeds. I feel I still have much to learn and with a coach like Mike Ford I am making the right sort of progress.

There is a brilliant team spirit here at Oldham, we have good training sessions, we are all encouraged individually, and I really want to achieve full fitness so I can play a full game in an effort to further my long term ambition of playing at Super League level.

During the close season the squad had training on the army assault course where the Green Beret's train. It was hard but brilliant for confidence building: it was really good for the squad and gave us so much self belief.

Q. Do you admire any other rugby league players?

I think my favourite players of all time must be Paul Sironen and Ellery Hanley. These men showed their skills, stamina, speed and athleticism every time they played. I have also watched Dean Sampson and greatly admire him. One of the biggest games in my experience so far was against Leeds. It was tremendous, Iestyn Harris was a formidable opponent, as were many of the players from Leigh who we played last season in the semi final. However, my personal ambitions remain: full fitness, full games and, who knows, maybe Super League with Oldham.

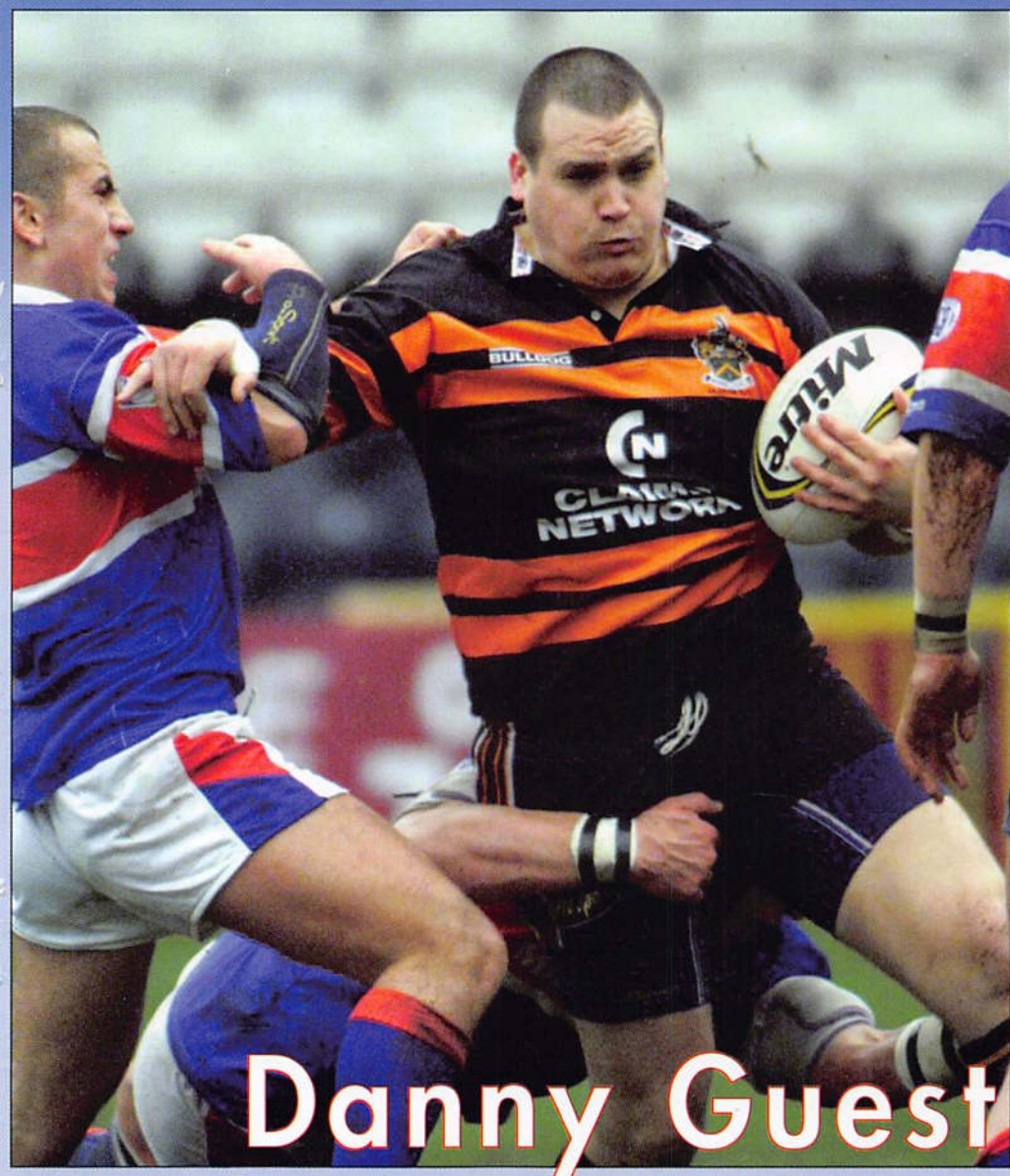
Q. How do you relax?

Well, after working, college and training my time is precious, I like to watch motor cross racing on the telly, and spend time with my wife. We had our honeymoon in Turkey a while ago and we hope to return there sometime. We also fancy planning a holiday in the Caribbean, but, that's in the future. Meanwhile with plenty of encouragement from my parents and the great support I get from the fans at Oldham, I hope we all have a brilliant season.



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DEALERS

Iva Slateloose



THEY SAID WHAT?

"We did better in the second half when we executed our options." *Steve Deakin* (Guillotine or noose?)

"Mike Ford . . . coached BURNLEY to mid-table respectability in 1999 . . ." (*Workington programme 17.12.00*). He's a versatile chap that Mike Ford: he'll want Sven Goran Erikson's job next!

"Mark Sibson . . . An EXCLUSIVE attacker . . ." (*Workington programme 17.12.00*). Presumably he doesn't like tackling then? Or was he signed from Harvey Nicholls?

"Warren Barrow . . . signed REGULARLY from St. Helens' Alliance side . . ." (*Workington programme 17.12.00*). I suppose he's after the signing-on fees!

". . . but we have some big game performers who will perform in the bigger games." (*St. John Ellis*). Er, well, yes! And just how do they perform in the lesser games?

Martyn Sadler's "very inference that the Bulls were a superior side to all others had a negative effect on the way Bradford try to promote themselves." (*Letter writer to League Express*). Come again? So, presumably if you say Bradford are crap that will have a positive effect? Now that should keep Chris Caisley happy!

"We gave the Lions too much of the ball in the first half" was Lions' coach Mike Gregory's assessment. Ah ha! that's the secret of success at Swinton, don't have too much ball.

"Effort is synonymous with the player and you can't knock it" (*Lee Crooks*). Come again? Did Lee get that Reader's Digest dictionary for Christmas?

"I've never used injuries as an excuse, but . . ." (*Lee Crooks*). You know what follows, don't you?

"We should not have to put up with officials like this. His handling of the game around the play the ball was poor and in short this was just not good enough" (*HKR Coach Gary Wilkinson*). Guess who'd just lost (by 24-8 at that)! Mind you the referee was Steve Nicholson!

"They were for personal use only, your Honour. Honest." (*Bruiser Clark*). Alright then. I've made that one up.

"Seating is one of the areas where we don't meet the standard (of Framing the Future)." (*Castleford Chief Exec. Richard Wright*).

Now there's a bold admission from someone in Super League . . . I'll bet you at least ten of the NFP clubs meet the standard though [it's 2,500 seats for information purposes].

"Some players can be 33 but their bodies might only be 28 or 29." (*Frank Endacott*). Give me some of what he's on will you?

"It has made me realise that playing in winter is like a relationship with girls when you were younger; you can only remember the good bits." (*Alan Hunte*). Perspicacious chap that Alan Hunte! Mind you I only wish I had some good bits to remember!

AND TO FINISH WITH A FEW LITTLE GEMS:

"I think we all agree, the past is over."

"If we don't succeed, we run the risk of failure"

(*Both George Bush, shortly to be the most powerful politician on earth*)

"The unthinkable is not something we are thinking about at the moment." (*Peter Kenyon, Chief Exec. MUFC* – well he would be, wouldn't he?)

GUEST INTERVIEW...

JOHN HOLDSWORTH



NOW I know that John Holdsworth is not exactly top of the pops with Oldham fans, ever since he disallowed Paul Lord's 'try' against Warrington in the 1990 semi-final at

Wigan which might have taken Oldham to Wembley. But for commitment to the game of Rugby League you'd have to go a long way to find anyone more dedicated or enthusiastic. The last time I saw John he had retired from refereeing, but there he was running the touchline at an 'A' team game at Fartown and still coping with the verbal abuse with a smile on his face! That was some time ago now, so it was a pleasure to see him again at the Oldham v Widnes match on New Year's Day where he was acting as assessor of that day's match officials for the R.F.L.

As keen as ever, John now 54, told me he still referees amateur fixtures every Saturday. "After all, what else would I do... go shopping? No thanks, that's not for me." Clearly he still prefers being out in the middle giving as good as he gets. His other current functions are twofold. Obviously one of those is to observe, assist and assess, the current crop of referees. He rated Richard Silverwood, who controlled the Widnes-Oldham fixture, highly and on his performance that day one could see why. I thought Silverwood was excellent: he kept the game flowing and was always on top of things. Give or take a couple of marginal forward pass decisions, where he looked at his two touch judges and received no response, you would have been hard pressed to fault him. And that was on a pitch with 'tram lines' that made seeing the ground markings clearly very difficult! Thank goodness he got Oldham's two first half 40/20 kicks right!

Mr Holdsworth's second function is to oversee the appointment of match officials, whether in Super League, the N.F.P. or the National Conference. I gathered he had little time for officials who cried off matches without due cause (the dog's died, the wife's sister's cousin has twisted her ankle etc.). And I also gathered that the R.F.L. like to grade their appointments so the top games - at whichever level - get the best officials. So, you see, it's not entirely a lottery who's in charge each week. However, Mr Holdsworth seemed keen to 'fast track' promising young officials. Richard Silverwood was a good example at 23 years old, but even he had bags of experience having started officiating at 13. Another example he quoted was Oldham's Ian Smith who has gone through the ranks in the space of three years to become one of Super League's top officials, "and rightly so", said John.

I commented that the standard of refereeing was much improved and, though he seemed to agree with this, it was plain that John Holdsworth was intent on raising the standards even further. I know we all like to have a go at the men in the middle and that referees, like players, can make mistakes, but I thought the World Cup, when we saw referees from other countries, showed that our top men were the best. If Bill Harrigan is Australia's finest I'm glad we don't have him over here! Give me Russell Smith any time.

And on that day's game John Holdsworth gave a very favourable verdict - "two quality sides with lots of skill, good organisation and sound fitness levels". It could have been a verdict on his own performance as a referee, a job he started at 19 and carried out at the highest level of play from 1979 to 1996.

GC

Behind the Scenes

... with Dave Roberts

LISA SHERRATT - PHYSIOTHERAPIST

How have we done on the injury front so far?

We have done very well, Kevin Mannion's injury was causing a few problems, but we've sorted him out and after some re-hab have got him ready again.

What exactly is re-hab?

As well as Mike's training I give them separate sessions, like sit-ups, press ups, and, running drills. I make it hard work for them, so they don't want to come back for more.

How long have you been in the job?

Seven years, I was working for Rochdale, then during the Student World Cup I got talking with Haydn Walker and then Mike Ford, and here I am. We had some highs and lows at Rochdale, but it is great to be at Oldham



What are your favourite and least favourite grounds?

My favourite has to be Oldham because there is plenty of space to work in. My least favourite has to be Batley's Mount Pleasant, or Barrow's Craven Park where it is always freezing cold.

What is your most embarrassing moment?

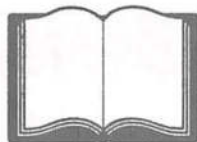
When I was working for Rochdale I had to run on the pitch with the stretcher and unfortunately I fell over it and hurt my pride more than anything else. To make it more embarrassing it was against Oldham.

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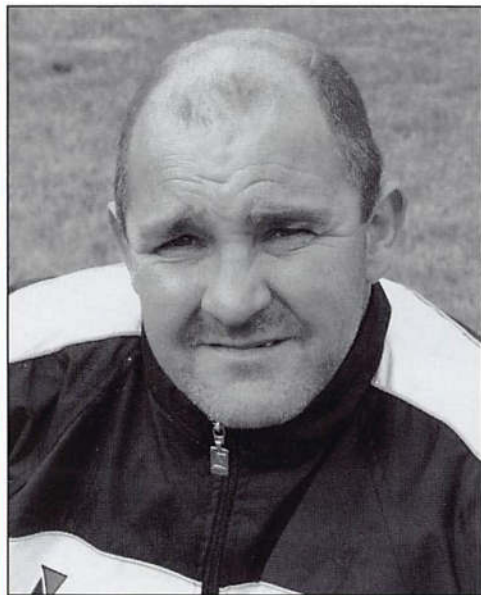
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Amateur Album



.....WITH DON YATES

YOU WOULD have to go a long way to find a player who enjoys his rugby league as much as Saddleworth Rangers prop Gary



Gary Ainsworth

Ainsworth. After a successful professional career which began twenty years ago, Gary still has no thoughts of retirement. 'When the bumps and bruises cause me trouble going to work on Mondays, then I'll pack it in', he said. Ainsworth began his career as a hooker with Saddleworth and turned professional with Leigh in October 1981. In those early days at Hilton Park, Gary received a great deal of encouragement from John Woods, a player Ainsworth regards as the best he has ever played with. 'He was very skilful on the pitch,' said Gary, 'but even better off it, helping the kids, like me, at the club.'

During spring 1985 Ainsworth left Leigh, moving on loan to St. Helens. His stay at St. Helens was brief, playing only the closing 12 matches of the season. But they were twelve sensational games. He scored eight tries in those matches including one on his

debut at Halifax, one against arch enemies Wigan in the Premiership semi-final and one in the Elland Road Final when Saints beat Champions Hull KR 36-16. Ainsworth then accompanied Saints to New Zealand where he played in all four matches of their mini-tour. On his return to Britain Gary learned that St. Helens would not pay the excessive transfer fee demanded by Leigh so he returned to Hilton Park. 'It was disappointing but there's nowt you can do about it. I just went back to Leigh and carried on playing.'

Twelve months later Ainsworth did move from Hilton Park and this time the transfer was permanent. He moved to Swinton where Gary met up with the best coach he has ever played under, Peter Smethurst. 'The training was always varied and he never told us to do something he couldn't do himself', he said. Ainsworth enjoyed tremendous success whilst at Swinton. He appeared at Old Trafford in two Second Division Premiership Finals, the first in 1987 giving him particular satisfaction. 'It was the highlight of my career', he says about the 27-10 victory over Champions Hunslet. Ainsworth won the scrums 11-4 in that final, when they were proper scrums too. He score one try and made a major contribution to the other four. Little wonder he became the first holder of the Tom Bergin Trophy as man-of-the-match. Two years later Swinton lost to Sheffield Eagles at Old Trafford as Ainsworth's spell at Station Road drew to a close. He later had a season and a half at Workington and twelve months with Trafford Borough, the second six months as player-coach. Ainsworth then returned to play amateur rugby firstly as player-coach with Fitton Hill, then St. Anne's, before moving back to his original club, Saddleworth Rangers.

The legs may be a little slower and Gary's added weight dictates that he has moved across the front-row to prop, but the enthusiasm and enjoyment remain and, it is hoped, will do so for another few seasons.

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... with Simon Winnard

THE LETTERS page of Rugby Leaguer usually offers some Monday morning talking points. The first issue of the year offered more than most with an amusing contribution from a Widnes supporter written before their visit to Boundary Park. Whilst I could only admire his undoubted devotion to his club, I smugly read on and couldn't help giggling away to myself at the content. The author grandly stated that his side were superior to any other club in the NFP competition and that I predict that we will not taste defeat again following their home loss at the hands of Leigh the week earlier, described as only a blip. What particularly tickled me was the thought that this person was possibly one of the so-called Vikings supporters who were seen to throw their scarves in disgust at their team as they huddled in defeat following Danny Arnold's second try. Pride usually comes before a fall.

The Oldham club has recently come forward and publicly stated its ambition to achieve Super League status. My feelings on the matter are well documented but I understand and acknowledge the desire to play at the pinnacle of your own sport. I also understand that there is a strong possibility that Mike Ford, who is widely predicted to one day become GB Coach, may be forced to look elsewhere to fulfil his ambitions in the game should Oldham not progress. Don't get me wrong, I'd love nothing more than to see the Roughyeds enjoy success at the very highest level in the game. However, the lack of competitiveness in the top flight concerns me when compared to the vibrant competition on offer in the Northern Ford Premiership.

Relegation from Super League is currently scrapped, make no mistake about that. Holding back aspirant clubs like Dewsbury from progressing through the ranks in a structured and financially stable manner is bad enough. However, what's even worse is

using minimum ground criteria to exclude teams whilst being apathetic to the various existing SL clubs which clearly still fall short of those standards and are blatantly doing nothing about it. This is a double standard - pure and simple and its killing the game.

What Rugby League needs is a level playing field and a feasible free flow of relegation and promotion similar to that of football's pyramid structure. Without this our present elite competition will remain the laughing stock of the sporting world. For three consecutive seasons we have seen the same five play-off teams and the same club propping up the rest. Sadly, I can see nothing but the same outcome this time around which far from enthruses me.

Let me ask you a simple question. Will you see a Super League game which doesn't involve Wigan, Bradford, St Helens or Leeds attract a similar attendance to the recent Widnes versus Leigh game? I seriously doubt it, but how on earth can this happen if the standard of the product is so much better at Super League level? The answer, in my opinion, is simply that the NFP offers a meaningful competition in which no fewer than half the league can force their way into the play-off picture.

If the club were to achieve its goal, I would of course be proud to support them every step of the way. However, not without a peculiar envious look over my shoulder, particularly as the traditional holiday fixture lists unfold in the good old winter league.

Today we see the visit of our old rivals Leigh who ran out deserving winners of last season's epic play-off semi-final clash at Hilton Park. Expect another bumper crowd and magnificent battle between two quality unbeaten teams as the NFP continues to produce the type of grass roots Rugby League which never flatters to deceive.



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'THE DON'



ON THIS DAY . . .

Don Yates looks back to January 14th yesteryear

THIS AFTERNOON'S vital NFP match falls exactly 81 years after these two famous old clubs met on the old Mather Lane ground in a Northern Rugby League Championship match. Oldham had defeated Leigh 25-0 at home eleven days before they travelled down the East Lancashire Road on



Joe Ferguson

Wednesday 14th January 1920. The Roughyeds were able to complete a league double by winning at Leigh 10-2. Both Oldham tries that day were scored by winger Jim Finnerty whilst full-back Alf Wood and hooker Joe Ferguson each landed a goal. The Leigh points came from a penalty converted by full-back Tommy Clarkson.



Sam Williams

During the early years of our game there were two clubs from the Leigh area involved in senior competition. Tyldesley were the other club playing at this level between 1895 and 1901. On Saturday 14th January 1899 Oldham visited their Well Street ground, now the site of the Tyldesley RUFC headquarters, for a Lancashire Senior

Competition match which they won comfortably 33-2. The Roughyeds ran in nine tries that afternoon, three scored by winger Sam Williams.

Oldham's next home match, in a couple of weeks time, is against the Queensbury junior club in the Challenge Cup. Five years ago, on Sunday 14th January 1996, Oldham were a Super League club and so were exempt from this early stage of the competition but Leigh met Egremont Rangers, then riding high in the National Conference League. As good as

Egremont were, they could not match the professionals and the Hilton Park boys ran out winners 58-6. Chris Wilkinson, later to play for Oldham, scored a try and seven goals in that tie.

For many years the Oldham Junior League Champions were granted a fixture against the Oldham 'A' team during the following season as a reward for lifting the title. Those challenge matches created great interest in the town and provided the amateurs with some lucrative income from the collection taken at that game. On Saturday 14th January 1939, reigning Champions Ferranti provided the opposition for the Oldham reserve team but the professionals proved much too strong that particular year and ran in ten tries as they won by 40 points to five.

It was on this day in 1979, Sunday 14th January, that the Great Britain under-24 side met France at Limoux. Included in the British line-up was full-back John Woods, regarded as the most naturally gifted player ever to represent the Leigh club. He landed four goals that afternoon as the Young Lions defeated their French counterparts 15-3.

Fifty-seven years previously, on Saturday 14th January 1922, the senior Great Britain outfit met Australia in the decisive third test match of that 1921-22 tour. That test was staged at Salford on a muddy pitch, in freezing conditions and with snow and straw, which had protected the pitch from frost, piled up all around the playing area. The conditions did not suit the Kangaroos and were most certainly the decisive feature of the match which Britain won 6-0, scoring a try in each half. The first try came midway through the opening half and was scored by Oldham second-row forward Herman Hilton, a former local junior who was one of the greatest forwards ever to play for the Roughyeds. Also included in the British pack for that test was hooker Joe Cartwright, another outstanding forward who was a regular with his home town club, Leigh, for no fewer than 16 seasons. In direct contrast to the current international situation, Britain held on to the Ashes for the following 28 years.

Fixtures

Date	Opponent	Result	Att
DECEMBER			
3	Barrow	F - A	28 - 16 1,294
10	CHORLEY	H P	
17	Workington	22 - 6	1,295
24	Rochdale	10 - 6	3,402
JANUARY			
1	WIDNES	20 - 12	3,471
7			
14	LEIGH	H	
21	Swinton	A	
28	Queensbury (SCCC R3)	H	
FEBRUARY			
4	WHITEHAVEN	H	
11	Silk Cut Challenge Cup		
18	GATESHEAD	H	
25	Silk Cut Challenge Cup		
MARCH			
4	HUNSLET	H	
11	Dewsbury	A	
18	SHEFFIELD	H	
25	Featherstone	A	
APRIL			
1	York	A	
8	BATLEY	H	
13	ROCHDALE	H	
16	Widnes	A	
22	Batley	A	
29	KEIGHLEY	H	
MAY			
6	BARROW	H	
13	Chorley	A	
20	WORKINGTON	H	
27	DONCASTER	H	
JUNE			
3	Gateshead	A	
10	SWINTON	H	
17	Whitehaven	A	
24	Keighley	A	
JULY			
1	Hull KR	A	

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B.D.S., V.U. Manc

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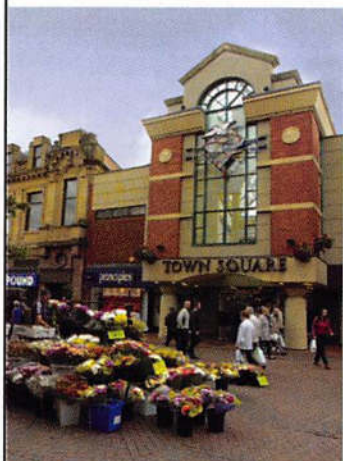
Oldham - a leading player at the heart of the North West

Take a look around the Oldham of the 21st century and you won't fail to be impressed with what's been achieved. There are now huge efforts taking place to ensure that the Borough remains in its rightful place at the hub of the North West region.

Two hundred million pounds and more has been invested in turning the town centre into a modern and vibrant place to shop and work. Money has also been spent regenerating and renewing areas like Westwood, Glodwick, Fitton Hill and Hathershaw, and building 23 new schools in just 20 years. An exciting new town centre Cultural Quarter is taking shape; new industry, new investment and more tourists are coming to the Borough and a state-of-the-art Business Management School is now open.



Oldham is already at the heart of the motorway network and now also benefits from the new M60 orbital route. Metrolink is also coming to the town, and the brand new £3.4 million central bus station has opened this year.



There are many other reasons which make Oldham a desirable place to live, work and visit - its reputation for hard work, commitment and down to earth friendliness are just some of them.

Put them all together and they make Oldham a leading player at the heart of the North West.

Enquiries about projects being undertaken by the Council, or any of its policies, to the Marketing and Communications Unit, PO Box 160, Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham OL1 1UG.

telephone 0161 911 4708, fax 0161 911 4936,
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or visit our website at www.oldham.gov.uk

OLDHAM 
Metropolitan Borough



TODAY'S TEAMS



OLDHAM

Coach Mike FORD

LEIGH CENTURIONS

Coach Paul TERZIS

Mark SIBSON	1	Neil TURLEY
Danny ARNOLD	2	Alan HADCROFT
Anthony GIBBONS	3	Phil KENDRICK
Pat RICH	4	Andy FAIRCLOUGH
Daryl LACEY	5	David JONES
David GIBBONS	6	John DUFFY
Neil RODEN	7	Liam BRETHERTON
Leo CASEY	8	Tim STREET
John HOUGH	9	John HAMILTON
Paul NORTON	10	Andy LEATHEM
Phil FARRELL	11	Simon BALDWIN
Ian SINFIELD	12	Chris MORLEY
Kevin MANNION	13	Adam BRISTOW
Mike FORD	14	Paul ANDERSON
Jason CLEGG	15	Martin RODEN
Danny GUEST	16	Radney BOWKER
Chris FARRELL	17	Dave WHITTLE

TODAY'S OFFICIALS

STEVE WRIGHT

MICK WILSON

M. GRAYDON 4th



REFEREE:

NICK

ODDY