

THE ROUGHYEDS

V BLACKPOOL PANTHERS

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V

Played

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PANTHERS**

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Damien Munro		Liam Bretherton
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Simon Svabic		Chris Hough
Marty Turner		Martin Gambols
Paul Norman		John Hill
John Hough		Liam McGovern
Andy Isherwood		Steve Molloy
Simon Haughton		Mick Redford
Martin Elswood		Matty Leigh
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Tere Glassie		Ian Parry
Carlos Mataora		Garry Smith
Danny Nanyin		Gus Martin
Gareth Barber		Chris Ramsdale
Will Cowell		Martin Roden
James Kirkland		Steve Ormisher
Mark Roberts		Gareth Jones
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TOUCH JUDGES: M Leach, L Carson
4TH OFFICIAL: D Merrich

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Northern Rail Cup
RUGBY LEAGUE

SUNDAY 13TH FEBRUARY 2005
KICK OFF 3.00pm

THE ROUGHYEDS

V BLACKPOOL PANTHERS

From The Pen Of

A look back at Oldham players
of old
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In The News

Looking forward to the
new season ahead
Page 12



BOUNDARY PARK

Special Feature

Oldham RLFC 2005

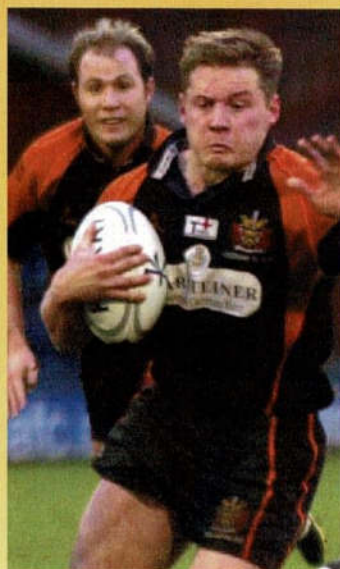
The New Look Oldham RLFC - see page 17



Northern Rail Cup
RUGBY LEAGUE

SUNDAY 13TH FEBRUARY 2005
KICK OFF 3.00pm

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Bernard Ganley 1950-61
John Etty 1954-56
Derek Turner 1955-59
Bob Irving 1964-74
Martin Murphy 1966-82
Andy Goodway 1979-85 & 1993-94

The views expressed in this matchday magazine do not necessarily reflect those of the management and staff of Oldham RLFC (1997) Ltd.

We would like to express our thanks to the Oldham Evening Chronicle, League Publications Ltd, Phil Burdge and all concerned for the use of photographs.

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Club Records - 1998-2004

Trans-Penine Cup
Finalists - 1998

Northern Ford Premiership
Club of the Year - 2000
Grand Finalists - 2001

MOST APPEARANCES: John Hough, 189 - Jan 1998 - September 2004
CONSECUTIVE APPEARANCES: Phil Farrel, 67 - *April 2nd 2000 - March 15th 2002
*John Hough was on the team for every match February 1st 1999 - April 16th 2001 (82)

TRIES IN A SEASON: Nick Johnson, 25 - 2004

GOALS IN A SEASON: Pat Rich, 146 - 2000-2001

POINTS IN A SEASON: Pat Rich, 320 - 2000-2001

DROP GOALS IN A SEASON: Neil Roden, 7 - 2001-2002

TRIES IN A CAREER: Mark Sibson, 60 - 1999-2002

GOALS IN A CAREER: Pat Rich, 254 - 1999-2001

POINTS IN A CAREER: Pat Rich, 576 - 1999-2001

DROP GOALS IN A CAREER: Neil Roden, 18 - 2000-2003

TRIES IN MATCH: Mark Sibson v Wigan St. Judes, 4 - Feb 8th 2000 at Boundary Park
Mark Sibson v Queensbury, 4 - Jan 28th 2001 at Boundary Park

David Gibbons v Chorley Lynx, 4 - Jan 30th 2001 at Boundary Park

GOALS IN A MATCH: Simon Svabic v Swinton Lions, 10 - Apr 6th 2003 at Boundary Park

POINTS IN A MATCH: Gareth Barber v Dewsbury Rams, 26 - Apr 2nd 2002 at Hurst Cross
(7 goals, 3 tries)

DROP GOALS IN A MATCH: Neil Roden v Workington Town, 2 - Dec 17th 2000 at Derwent Park
John Braddish v Hull KR, 2 - Dec 16th 2001 at New Craven Park

HIGHEST SCORE/WINNING MARGIN: v Yorks Wasps, 70-6 - Apr 1st 2001
at Huntington Stadium

v Queensbury (am), 64-0 - Jan 28th 2001
RLCC 3rd Rnd at Boundary Park

www.roughyeds.co.uk



The Chairman's Thoughts

with CHRIS HAMILTON

“With that in mind lets really get behind the lads today and set the tone for the season ahead”

After what has seemed like an endless close season (five months) we are now ready for the off as we start the Northern Rail Cup competition for 2005.

As we have said several times already the end of last season was bitterly disappointing to all concerned and resulted in wholesale changes at the club which has seen virtually a new team arrive at the club.

Like every other team at this stage we will start the season with high hopes and lots of expectation and certainly this competition is one in which we have, since its inception, under performed having never progressed beyond the group stages.

Hopefully this year will see at least a change to that scenario and Gary Mercer and all the lads have been working hard in pre season towards goals like that.

If you look at the two divisions this time around I think you would find it even harder than before to pick your league winners or even your top sixes and with a mix of both first and second division sides in each group of the Northern Rail cup it should certainly make for some very interesting games.

With that in mind you need look no further than today's opponents Blackpool who will be playing their first ever competitive match and will be sure to be fired up. With several interesting signings including our former player coach Steve Molloy we will have to be on our guard and playing to our potential to take the two points on offer today.

We know from personal experience that playing at Blackpool can work and after today we wish Henry Morris and everybody connected with the new club good luck.

Back to our own team and there is no doubt that we have added some real quality with our signings this close season and although our losses in the pre season games were not what we would have wanted this time it has been more important to get the new lads playing together and gelling as a team. Our preparations have also been hampered by the seemingly never-ending attempts to get our three Cook Islands Internationals over to this country.

With that task now completed our shortage of size in the front row that was only too evident in our three games so far should be removed and we will have the ability to put teams on the back foot.

One thing is for sure though nobody has ever won the Northern Rail Cup or the LHF National One Grand Final from the points they gained from pre season friendlies and in that respect we start off from the same point as every other team.

With that in mind lets really get behind the lads today and set the tone for the season ahead and start to make Boundary park a place where no other team wants to come to.

Thank you to everybody who has attended today and to all of our supporters for your ongoing support throughout the off-season.

Enjoy the game

Christopher Hamilton



From The Touchline

with Gary Mercer

Good afternoon and a warm welcome to everyone, to Boundary Park for our 1st competitive match for 2005.



I'm sure you will agree significant changes have taken place with a huge turn-around in playing staff. Recruitment has been slow, as many considerations, had to be taken with 12 of last seasons 1st team players moving clubs for various reasons, so it was important that the personnel, I was to bring in were of good quality and even better than the previous playing staff.

Recruitment is vital when expectations are high, with a club like Oldham with a great Rugby League history and pedigree; I knew it was important to make sure I got it right! I am a big fan of a big pack which is both mobile and assertive and by that we have had some quality individuals put pen to paper.

The new Kiwi, Cook Island influence is strong with Marty Turner from Melbourne Storm and Tere Glassie, Jonathan Wilson and Carlos Matoera making up the Cook Island contingent. The inclusion of Simon Haughton will give the squad the experience required, which is always important to a newly formed team.

And too bring all the new players together and getting them to gel into a collective unit as one which is a challenge for both Keith Brennan and myself. Having already played 3 pre-season friendlies, the highlight for me is the progress of the younger contingent in Danny Naryn and young James Kirkland. They have both shown a great appetite to do well and if they continue their progress, you will see the push for a regular 1st team jersey in 2005.

To sum up the majority of the new signings, they all have one thing in common ambition, to make the next step and to further their careers beyond the part time environment. They are a great set of lads and I am enjoying working with them and hopefully they will take on board the knowledge and experience gained, to prolong and progress their careers.

I would like to welcome Mark Lee and his Blackpool squad to Boundary Park, today in our first official outing for 2005 season. Mark has also assembled a new look side, and I wish them all the success in their National 2 competition.

Hope you enjoy the game, and lets all get behind the boys, for the forthcoming 2005 campaign.

Yours in Sport

Gary

Q&A

WITH GARY MERCER

UltimateRoughyed asked

Will you still be registered as a player just in case we suffer a few injuries during the season!?

Gary replied

No not as a player.

Matt asked

The majority of people that post on this message board are passionate about the club. In your opinion and from your experience with SL clubs, what are the key things fans can do to help drive Oldham back to the elite?

Gary replied

Just your vocal support to the team, game day get some "Drums" beating to boost the boys

Loyal Supporter1 asked

Firstly can I congratulate you on bringing some real quality to the club. Don't think too many people can argue with the squad this year.

My question is the following:

At this level fitness tends to win most games. Therefore, how much emphasis will be put on stamina building compared to skills and designing set moves?

Thank you for your time. Good luck for 2005 - The Year of the Roughyeds

Gary replied

Our Pre-season started 2nd week in November, the boys have worked hard. Stamina is a must in all sport, and we have to build a solid base, to carry us through. Everything I have learnt in my playing days and early coaching years, has been put in place here at Oldham. As for skills and set moves, they are too important but, this time in the season, fitness and stamina building are paramount.

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So the new season is upon us and everybody is looking forward to the start of what should be a very exciting campaign. Here in the community department our season just keeps on going year round, and we've managed to make a smooth transition from last years playing staff to this years.

The early stages of 2005 have seen our schemes being delivered by both Marty Turner and Simon Haughton, Simon is very familiar with such schemes after spending time in the community department down at the Wigan Warriors, but Marty isn't so familiar with proceedings. Thankfully I think he's finally getting the hang of it!! He needn't worry though, more support from the other side of the world will soon be arriving in the shape of our three Cook Island internationals, who will all be getting involved and visiting schools in your area.

Also negotiations are currently underway with our strategic partners in our community programme to discuss the positives and the negatives of last seasons, as well as new and innovative ideas for 2005, which will hopefully allow us to reach a greater amount of children within the borough.

Watch this space next time for inside information, when the players give you feedback on the scheme, and how they think it benefits the community.

AD

PREDICTIONS LEAGUE

This season will see a brand new competition launched by Oldham Rugby. It will involve you testing your knowledge of the game (lack of knowledge for some of us! Including me) against other supporters, for the right to claim first place, £500+ worth of prizes, and bragging rights to being the most informed supporter within the borough.

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And it is not just the size of the player turn over which is startling, but also the importance of the players who have left. Play-making half-backs, all the props, and the whole of the back-row, as well as most of the centres, represent not only the core of any side but most of its periphery too. So I think we can regard this off season as a genuine revolution in the club's playing staff.

It would be wrong, before looking forward, not to speak warmly of some of the leavers and to thank them for their contributions over recent years. I would personally wish to highlight in this respect Neil Roden, Lee Doran, Phil Farrell, Dane Morgan, Martin McLoughlin and, of course, Steve Malloy himself, not to mention Keith Brennan, although it is good to see Keith still with us in a new capacity. These seven have given excellent service for which I, for one, am very grateful.

The question, though, is whether such a revolution is sensible. To answer this, we need to look back a little and to consider objectives. When the new club was formed in late 1997 the initial aim was survival- and when you think back to the nightmare second half of 1999, at Spotland, with "crowds" regularly below 1000, and a final position next to the bottom of the whole competition, the fact that we were still here at the start of 2005 is itself a major bonus. Let us not forget that, nor allow what are, in comparison trivial differences individuals may have with the management of the club to blind us to the achievement it represents. Massive thanks are still owed to Chris Hamilton and his team, I feel, - and I only wish they were more universally supported.

Into the new century though the objectives became more ambitious. They were, and continue to be, success in the Division 1 play-off series. It is in this context that the revolution needs to be evaluated. We have qualified for the play-offs every season, which is a form of success in itself. But since the near-miss of 2001, we have not gone forward, as the following summary makes clear:

- 98 5th in Div. 2.
- 99 17th in NFP.
- 00 6th in NFP. Lost in major semi-final.
- 01 4th in NFP. Lost in Grand final.
- 02 9th in NFP. Lost in minor semi-final.
- 03 5th in Div. 1. Lost in elimination play-off.
- 04 4th in Div. 1. Lost in elimination play-off.

Other statistics, notably our points against figures, make exactly the same point, that, since 2001, we have performed respectably but have lost momentum. (The actual figures for average points conceded for the last 4 years in league matches are 14.9, 20.5, 27.8, 27.9)

My conclusion? That the decision to try to create a new side, to take us further forward, is brave, but correct. Of course whether or not the strategy is successful remains to be seen!

Ian Wilson.

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As Ian Sees It!

So here we go again in the brave new world of 2005, and isn't it new, too! By my reckoning we retain just eight players who would have been regarded as regular first teamers last season- messrs. Barber, Cowell, Dodd, Elswood, Goddard, Hough, N. Johnson and Svabic. At the same time no less than 15 players have gone and, as I write, ten new ones arrived, to join the above eight plus the fringe youngsters who also remain.



In Yer Face!

with GEOFF COOKE



In the months since the end of last season Oldham R.L.F.C. has lost two of its furthest travelling supporters and two of the best friends the club could ever wish for.

Tony Davies-together with his wife win-had travelled from Durham to every home and away match since 1961. Tony, a Welshman, trained at Southport Art College and obtained a degree from Manchester College of art in the early 50's. He came to teach at Crompton House School, living in Shaw. It was at this time that Tony's love of Rugby League, and Oldham in particular, was born. As with his many other interests rugby became his and Win's passion. In 1961 Tony left Oldham to set up the Art Department at Durham Technical College and thus began the years of trekking back and forth to watch Oldham.

An accomplished musician, Tony was a talented organist having started playing at 14. He was also a photographer of such repute that his work was in demand by churches and cathedrals throughout the country such that his mammoth journeys took him to far flung outposts such as Exeter, Truro, St. David's, Ely, Lichfield etc. His prize exhibits, however, were of his beloved Durham Cathedral and his work for the organ builders Harrison and Harrison on the restored organ in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, a work requested by the Queen.

As a steam train enthusiast Tony was also many a time to be found chasing famous locomotives, sometimes stationing himself in the most precarious of positions in order to capture the precise image he required. At one time Tony also taught night classes in art, his most famous 'pupil' being I. S. Lowry who, even as an older man, thought he still had something to learn.

Always a fund of good stories, and cheerful despite his ailments, Tony would have given anything to assist the development of Oldham Rugby. Our condolences go to his widow, Win, daughter Sian, son-in-law Simon and grandson Tom.

Jack Stephens was an equally remarkable man and devotee of Oldham Rugby. Born in Poland, Jack was returning from school one day to find his family home set ablaze by invading german forces. At 14 Jack joined the polish resistance taking part in various operations until being captured late in the war. Liberated by the British he joined the British Army and served in Italy before settling in Oldham. He worked for a while in the mill before landing a job with Littlewoods whom he served for 42 years. Towards the end of his life Jack had attended a reunion of Polish comrades in Canada and he had returned to Poland despite finding the memories of the war distressing. He has a daughter by his first marriage who lives in Australia plus one granddaughter and two grandsons. He was especially close to and proud of his grandson George aged 21 who is a serving para-trooper recently engaged in Iraq. Jack's love of Oldham Rugby came through his widow and second wife Clarice, a lifelong fan of the club. Jack and Clarice met on the same day that George was born, an event the couple always regarded as a lucky omen. Jack and Clarice travelled from their home in Timperley to watch Oldham, another example of loyal devotion. Jack Stephen's was one of nature's gentlemen for whom nothing was too much trouble. Oldham R.L.F.C. will miss him. Our sympathies are extended to Clarice on her loss.



For this season the format for this page will be to take a look at players who have represented both Oldham and the opposition of the day.

from the pen of
MICHAEL TURNER

To begin our new season and remember players who have represented both clubs we need look no further than the current Blackpool set up and the return to Boundary Park of Steve Molloy.

I'm sure that all Oldham fans will wish Steve and the Blackpool club, well in this ambitious venture to re-establish a Rugby League presence in the Lancashire seaside town and no doubt "Molly" will be striving hard to make a big impact today against his home town and former club.

it would be another two years before he would sign for Oldham, his last minute winning try definitely left an impression on the then, table-topping Roughyeds.

Others who have represented the "Roughyeds" and the old Blackpool Borough club include the threequarter from the mid 1950's Peter Fearis, local prop forward Ken Payne, stand-off half Tommy Warburton, full back Brian Curry and of course international forwards Bob Irving and Hugh Waddell. "Hughie" caught the attention of the Oldham supporters and officials alike when he starred in a shock win for the Borough in a Lancashire cup tie at Watersheddings on September 16th 1984. Although

Perhaps the best deal the Roughyeds ever struck with Blackpool was just before the cup signing deadline in January 1973. A shrewd piece of business brought in the services of loose forward Johnny Farrell and the ever popular second rower or prop, Fred Hall. The workman-like Farrell played 59 matches for Oldham over three seasons, whereas local lad Fred gave seven years of sterling service to the Roughyeds cause amassing a total of 191 first team appearances.



An Oldham line against Blackpool, including Irving, Hall and Farrell, that demolished the seashiders by 55 points to 3 on March 18th 1973 at Borough Park.

Back Row: A Daley, A Wainwright, F Foster, K Wilson, M Elliott, R Irving, F Hall, K Taylor, T Gorman.
Front Row: T Davies, C Hill, M McCone, P Larder, J Farrell, C O'Brien.



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In The News with ANDY DEAKIN

So pre season didn't bring the results and/or the performances that many of us expected, and it would seem that difficult times may lie ahead. The games against Rochdale, Leeds and Halifax were always going to be tough affairs, with both Rochdale and Halifax going into the game on the back end of a promising off season of recruiting, and Leeds being Leeds. Yet all these games bore certain similarities which will give hope to the majority of our supporters, and even to the darkest of gloom mongers.



It could be witnessed by all and has been constantly re-iterated by GM that the team is severely lacking bulk up front, which reaffirms the notion that the front row is vital in gaining the upper hand, and creating the opportunities for the backs to do their stuff. No disrespect to Paul Norman (Nev), or Danny Nannyn, (who I hope you agree have been playing out of their skins in all the pre season friendlies) they are our only two recognised props at the time of writing, compare this to our opponents who all fielded 5 or more throughout the entirety of the games. And that's not all; if you were to compare the physical attributes of the opposing front rows then it is clear to see why we struggled in the battle down the middle. Rochdale currently possess excessive amounts of beef in the front row in the shape of Andy Leatham and Gareth Price, Halifax have an enormous front row with Andy Hobson and Ryan McDonald providing the steel up front, and Leeds, well we'll say no more about that. Which is why there is plenty to be cheerful about when considering the up coming season, we would be in a far worse scenario if during pre season we found that the backs were just not good enough since we have completed our signatures for the season in those positions. It is obvious even to the untrained eye that we are desperate for our own big units to put the opposition on the back foot, but don't panic the cavalry our on the way in the shape of three Cook Island

internationals. Tere Glassie, Jonathan Wilson and Carlos (I'll stick to just Carlos for now, due to potential misspellings) are all on their way over to stiffen up the front row (Carlos at hooker?) and hopefully provide us with the necessary fire power to dominate the opposition. There is also the distinct possibility that since this article was written more recruits will have been brought in.

So lets forget about the pre season friendlies, today is the real deal, and we must get it right from the word go!

Today's opponents are Blackpool and at first sight you might be forgiven for thinking that this game could be a walk in the park, but write them of at your peril. I have been mightily impressed with Blackpool's pre season performances, and think that Mark Lee's team deserve a great deal of respect if we are to get the right result against them.

As for the winners of the Northern Rail Cup I don't think you'd be far wrong when picking from Castleford, Whitehaven or Oldham (not being bias! Honest!), Halifax being the dark horses that they are may also come into the equation.

Anyway that's a rap for this week, only one thing left to say.

The greatest game is back, don't you just love it!!!!!!

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Walkerbout

With Brian Walker



Walkerbout

After the successful exhibition 'Roughyeds the Story' held at Gallery Oldham in the late summer the Oldham RL Heritage Trust continued its activity during the close season by the introduction of the cotton retro-shirt in the club's original colours of amber and black for the Christmas market. These sold out quickly so a back-up order has been placed and is now due for delivery.



Gareth Barber models the repro of Oldham's first ever shirt

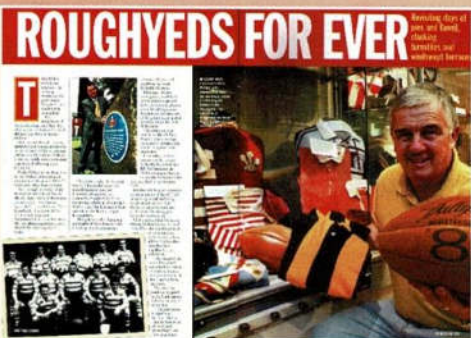
Thanks to the help of Roughyed's fan Charlotte Deakin the Trust is about to launch its own website (www.orldheritagetrust.org.uk). Initially this will explain the workings of the Trust, have detailed information surrounding the players in the club's Hall of Fame plus news of any new products available (the amber and black retro shirt for example) and will be built up over the next few months into a vibrant and exciting site.



Tim Hughes presents the Heritage Trust Cup to Andy Isherwood for his Oldham man-of-the-match performance against Hornets in this season's Law Cup

The Trust is currently considering a number of new ventures for 2005 the first of which will be the launch in the spring of a new Oldham book. There have been hundreds of rugby league books published over the years (albeit a small number when compared to say union) some fans being in the envious position of having as many as a dozen relating to their club. Well known publishers Tempus have four excellent collections of league and union books **Images of Sport**, **100 Greats**, **Rugby Voices**, and **50 Finest Matches** most league clubs being represented in at least one category some in all four. Oldham are not in any so we will begin to put that to rights with the launch of **Images of Sport**, Oldham RLFC during May.

Watch this space.



The Roughyeds exhibition attracted over 3,000 visitors

There were more than a dozen rugby league titles released for the 2004 Christmas market yet no more than one or two found their way into Oldham's town centre book shops and by the end of January, W.H. Smith's, whilst still offering a varied choice of union titles, didn't have one league book in stock. The sole (but excellent) choice at nearby Ottakars was Barrie McDermott's 'Made for Rugby'.

I couldn't even get Smith's to order me a copy of the latest Gillette Rugby League Year book, which in recent years has replaced Rothmans as our sport's textbook, without paying a £2-50 supplement. Oldham is slap-bang in the middle of rugby-league-land and there can be no excuse for this book not being available off the shelf never mind having to pay over the odds. When 'Roughyeds' was published the Christmas before last, Ottakars pitched in selling over a thousand copies in less than two weeks, Smith's wanted it on 'sale or return' but needless to say didn't get it. I kicked up a fuss then and again

about the Gillette book so much so that their regional manager had a copy delivered to the house! I wouldn't expect to find a copy of a guide to Shaw and Royton in a bookshop in the middle of Bristol but I DO expect the popular rugby league books, especially those with an Oldham slant, to be available in our town centre book shops 12 months of the year or at least whilst still in print.

I intend to briefly review on this page any new league book released during the season and as many as possible of those published pre Christmas. In each case I will provide an ISBN number and the relevant publisher but if you can't get a copy from your retailer or at least get them to order at the flyleaf price kick up a fuss!

Remember that the Chronicle also stock a number of titles (and promote them) and consider visiting the excellent Sportspages in St Ann's Square, Manchester who stock the majority of league books.

Beyond the Heartlands



The History of the Rugby League Conference

Julian Harrison

often than not in towns and even counties that has never had a rugby league team before.

The book's author, Julian Harrison, was the first full-time administrator of the new venture and one of the key people involved in its launch. This then

'Beyond the Heartland'

The growth of the RL Conference since 1997 has been one of the most important developments in rugby league's history responsible for the game being played by amateurs, in summer, throughout the UK, more

is the 'inside story' of rugby league's most dynamic and fast growing competition and of the talented men and women who made it work.

When the then chairman, Lionel Hurst, who saw the creation of the Conference as being one of the most important innovations since the sport's conception at the George Hotel in Huddersfield in 1895, addressed a gathering of MPs in the House of Commons in 1998 he said that there was a clear aim to have 'a team in every town'. Harrison has now done the competition a great service by charting their achievement so far, right through to the TotalR.com sponsored 70-team affair of 2004 and the formation of National League 3.

ISBN: 1903659-17-5. Stocked by Sportspages and available direct from London League Publications, PO Box 10441, London E14 8WR in exchange for a £12-95 cheque.

TODAY'S OPPONENTS

Blackpool Panthers

WILLIE SWANN (Captain, halfback) Born 25 Feb 1974

A former Junior Kiwi who also played for Samoa in the 2000 World Cup, Willie was appointed Panthers' captain after joining them from Leigh where he had spent four successful seasons culminating in the NL1 Grand Final win over Whitehaven.

ERIC ANDREWS (Winger) Born 11 Feb 1982

A prolific scoring winger, Eric was tempted back into the professional ranks with Panthers after sitting out the 2004 season. A former Wigan junior who joined Leigh in 2002, he scored in 15 consecutive games for Chorley Lynx in 2003, just two short of the all-time RL record.

DANNY ARNOLD (Winger/ Fullback) Born 15 Apr 1977

A former GB Academy and Scotland international, he passed the 100-try career milestone two seasons ago and starred in Saints' Wembley successes in 1996 and 1997. Danny averages a try every two games in a senior career that began in the Centenary season.

DANNY BARTON (Back row forward) Born 7 Sep 1983

Looking to build on the big impression he made in 2004 when he scored 6 tries in 24 Lynx appearances with some strong running pack performances.

MIKE CALLAN (Prop/ second row) Born 8 Aug 1983

Regarded as a highly promising and athletic prop forward prospect, Mike gained Super League experience with Warrington in 2002 and joined Panthers after an injury ravaged 2004 season with Leigh, looking to get his career back on track.

BRIAN CAPEWELL (Stand-off/ loose forward) Born 21 Oct 1977

One of the tallest players in the game, at 6ft6. He ensured his place in local folklore with a sensational match-winning 55-metre drop-goal with the last kick of Chorley's last ever game, against York.

JON CHAMBERLAIN (Back row forward) Born 1 Jun 1982

A GB Students international, who played against Australia Students in Dec 2004, John was recruited by Mark Lee from Wigan St Patricks earlier in the year and immediately impressed with the way he adapted to the professional game.

MARTIN GAMBLES (Halfback) Born 8 Mar 1980

A talented, attacking halfback, Martin played alongside current team-mates Matthew Leigh, Eric Andrews and Martin Roden in Wigan's Alliance ranks before joining Gateshead in 2001. He was a regular in the Lynx side for the last three seasons when he became a consistent try-scorer.

GLEN GODBEE (Centre/ halfback) Born 1 Jun 1976

One of Panthers' two overseas signings, Glen was recruited from Australian country football after leading Mullumbimby to their first grand final win for 44 years in NSW Group 1.

JOHN HILL (Prop) Born 7 Oct 1981

A tough as teak prop, John had a tremendous season for Lynx in 2004 when he was one of the cornerstones of the side. He played in a total of five Super League games for Warrington prior to moving to Victory Park where he formed a fine front row with fellow ex-Wolf Ian Parry.

CHRIS HOUGH (Halfback/ hooker/ loose forward) Born 30 Aug 1981

One of Panthers' first signings, Chris was recruited after impressing in Doncaster's ranks last season. After making his first-team bow with Rochdale in 2000, he spent a season at Batley in 2002 and the following year kicked 98 goals for Swinton, where he was top points-scorer.

JAKE JOHNSTONE (Centre) Born 6 Dec 1977

A Cumbrian from Carlisle, Jake played for the Border Raiders before they folded in 1997 and after a spell with London Broncos emerged as a first-team regular with London Skolars in 2003, where he was also a useful goal-kicker. Jake joined Chorley last season following a short spell at Swinton and soon became a regular in the three-quarter line.

GARETH JONES (Prop/ second row) Born 14 Oct 1982

A former Wigan junior, Gareth's 2004 season with Lynx was hampered by a knee injury that restricted him to six first-team appearances but he is highly regarded by the coaching staff and expected to make a big impression this year.

EDDIE KILGANNON (Centre/ winger) Born 4 Dec 1977

A regular in the Lynx ranks in each of the last three seasons after joining them from Widnes, Eddie scored two tries and was Man of the Match in Chorley's last ever game against York to cap another consistent campaign.

MATTHEW LEIGH (Back row forward) Born 24 Feb 1978

A former skipper of Wigan's successful Alliance side, Matthew gained Super League experience with Salford in 2000 and has since clocked up over 100 first-team appearances in three seasons at Barrow.

JAMES LOMAX (Back row forward) Born 20 Oct 1981

Recruited from Oldham last season, James made 12 first-team appearances in the Lynx ranks, eleven off the bench, and is expected to push hard for a first-team place with Panthers.

GUS MARTIN (Prop/ back row forward)

Panthers' second Australian signing, Gus joined up with the squad in January after impressive performances in the Wynnum-Manly side (Wally Lewis's old club) that play in the Queensland State competition. He also previously played alongside Glen Godbee for Mullumbimby.

LIAM MCGOVERN (Halfback/ hooker) Born 6 Oct 1984

A much-prized signing by Panthers' coach Mark Lee, Liam was an outstanding junior player and toured Australia with GB Youth side in 2001. A product of the famous Widnes amateur club Halton Hornets that produced David and Paul Hulme, Liam follows his father Terry into the professional ranks.

STEVE MOLLOY (Prop) Born 11 Mar 1969

One of the game's outstanding props, Steve has a wealth of experience at the top level and was one of Panthers' first recruits. With around 450 senior games under his belt Steve has represented Great Britain, England and GB Under-21s during an illustrious career and toured PNG, Fiji and New Zealand in 1996.

STEVE ORMESHER (Three-quarter) Born 5 Apr 1978

A former St Helens junior who also tasted rugby union with Orrell, Steve made his senior bow with Lynx in 2002 and became a regular in the second half of last season scoring some fine tries.

IAN PARRY (Prop) Born 2 Apr 1981

After gaining Super League experience with Warrington, Ian was a regular in the Lynx side in each of the last three seasons and capped a fine 2004 campaign by being named as one of the props in the NL2 All Stars side at the end of season awards evening.

CHRIS RAMSDALE (Utility) Born 25 Apr 1982

Son of former Wigan favourite and Lynx general manager Dennis, Chris has earned the tag of 'Mr Versatile' during the last five seasons at Chorley when he chalked up a total of 93 appearances with some of his most impressive performances in the hooking role.

MICK REDFORD (Centre/ second row) Born 24 Jun 1981

Signed from the Leigh East ARL ranks, Mick made an impressive start to his professional career by becoming a regular in Lynx's successful 2003 campaign when he soon became a crowd favourite for his wholehearted displays in the centre or second row.

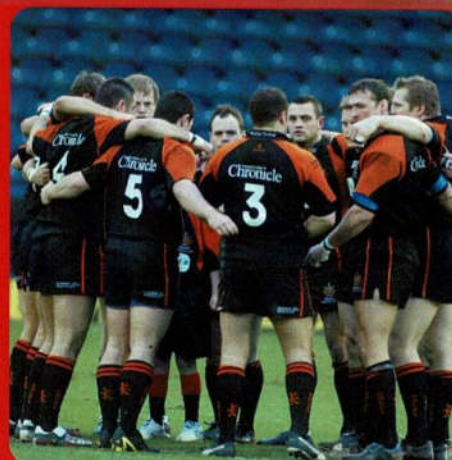
MARTIN RODEN (Hooker/ utility forward) Born 26 Dec 1979

Another former member of the successful Wigan Alliance side of the late 1990s Martin first played first-team football with Lynx in 2000 and returned to the club in 2002 following a season with Leigh. He is nearing 100 senior appearances.

Club Profile

Oldham RLFC

WHO would have imagined, when the Oldham players walked off Boundary Park to drop the curtain on the 2004 season, that the next few months would see the Roughyeds playing and coaching staff almost completely dismantled and rebuilt?



Judging by noises coming from the boardroom within days of the 33-28 home defeat by Featherstone in the first round of the play-off at Boundary Park on September 19, wholesale changes of personnel were going to be inevitable.

Few fans, though, anticipated the sheer scale of the comings and goings that turned the club upside down and inside out as late summer turned to early autumn, enveloped Bonfire Night and then reached out to Christmas and the New Year.

Long before Big Ben rang in 2005, and fireworks lit up the sky to herald the New Year, it was evident that the Roughyeds would be looking at the 2005 season -- the club's eighth -- as the dawn of a new era.

As far back as last October, directors and co-owners Chris Hamilton and Sean Whitehead, had appointed New Zealander Gary Mercer as head coach to succeed local man Steve Molloy. **Cont over...**

Club Profile Oldham RLFC

"You can be sure we will have prepared as hard and as thoroughly as we can for what could be the most important game of the season"



Cont...

Mercer became the club's sixth team boss behind Paddy Kirwan, Mick Coates, Mike Ford, John Harbin and Molloy... four Oldhamers, one Yorkshire-born Australian and now a man fiercely proud of his native New Zealand and his Maori blood.

"I've taken on a challenge — and I've always liked a challenge," commented Mercer, who for the first time since he left New Zealand behind to join Bradford Northern 18 years ago finds himself operating as player or coach outside the highest level of the sport.

His enthusiasm and his infectious passion remain as strong as ever. Only the other day, at a pre-season lunch for club sponsors, he talked of the day he took over at the Roughyeds and found he had only eight players training. Since then, they have grown steadily in number. Now, there are 23 under contract, with the prospects of more to follow.

The squad as it currently stands (roughly in the order the players signed or re-signed) reads like this:

Damian Munro, Mark Roberts, John Hough, Gavin Dodd, Gareth Barber, Jon Goddard, Paul Norman, Alex Wilkinson, Simon Svabic, Martin Elswood, Will Cowell, Craig Farrimond, Marty Turner, Adam Sharples, Andrew Isherwood, Danny Naryn, Carlos Mataora, Simon Haughton, Nick Johnson, Tere Glassie, James Kirkland, Jonathan Wilson and Andy Gorey, who is in the second of year of a two-year deal.

Of those there are ten new boys — Munro, Roberts, Norman, Wilkinson, Turner, Isherwood, Mataora, Haughton, Glassie and Wilson.

In future editions of the match-day magazine — it's far more than a programme these days — each new signing will be featured in detail and pictured.

For now, suffice to say that they have all come on one-year contracts, Turner, Mataora, Glassie and Wilson from the other side of the world and Munro, Roberts, Norman, Wilkinson, Isherwood and Haughton from much nearer home.

Roberts is no stranger to Oldham fans because he was here on loan from Warrington for four games at the back end of last season.

Munro and Wilkinson are Oldhamers who have come "home" — from Leigh and Hull respectively — while Norman and Isherwood have also been recruited from Leigh and Haughton has arrived from Wigan Warriors via Orrell Rugby Union.

The club's overseas quota player is scrum-half Marty Turner, a Kiwi from Christchurch, who has played most of his rugby with Melbourne Storm and Storm's feeder club up in Brisbane.

Glassie, Mataora and Wilson, all Cook Islanders, come on the recommendation of Gary Mercer's friend and former Kiwi Test team colleague Kevin Iro, who now manages the Cook Islands representative team.

Glassie and Wilson have played a lot of rugby in Australia, while Mataora has played most his club rugby in New Zealand.

Glassie, a 27-year-old forward and the most experienced of the Cook Islanders, and 21-year-old Mataora, a utility midfield man (hooker, half-back or loose-forward) were due to arrive in town last Monday morning and there is every chance they will be included in the squad for the first time today.

Wilson was expected to arrive later in the week, so it wasn't known at the time of writing whether he would also be given a run or whether Mercer would hold him back for next week's game at Rochdale.

Among the players who left the club at the end of last season were Lee Doran, Martin McLoughlin, Dane Morgan, Ian Watson, Lee Marsh, Steve Molloy, Neil Roden, Paul Southern, Phil Farrell, Ian Marsh and Jon Roper.

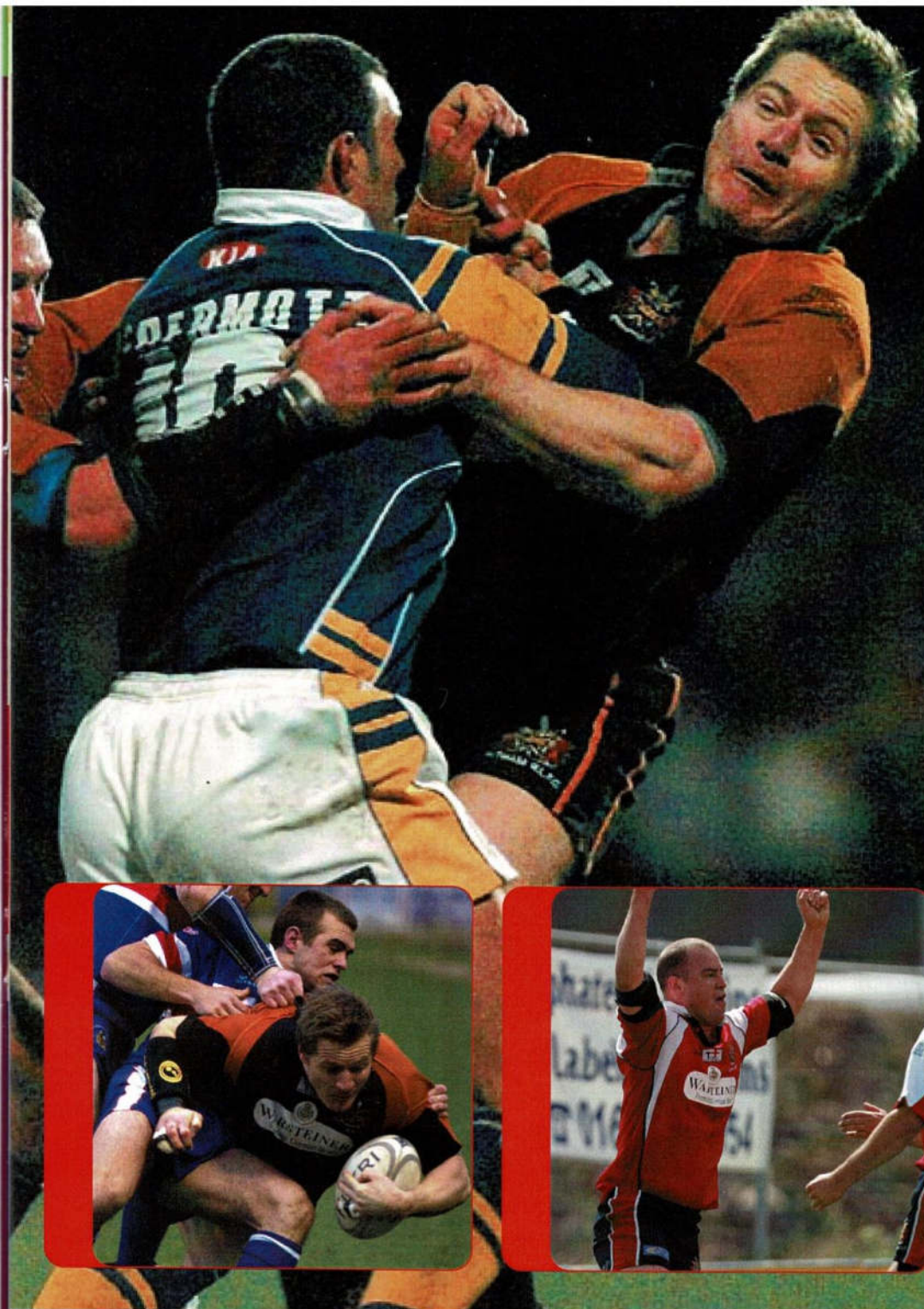
Keith Brennan retired as a player, was appointed academy coach and later promoted and upgraded to Mercer's assistant coach when the decision was taken to abandon an under-21s side for one year only.

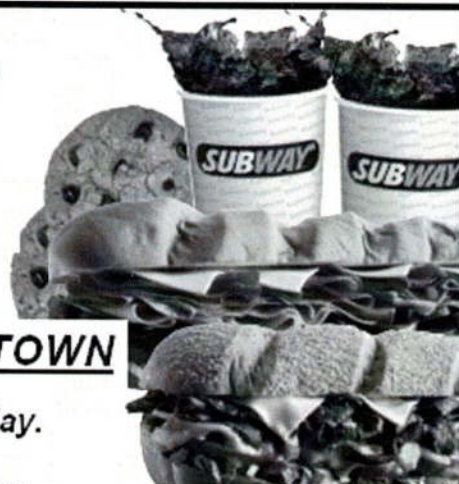
Andy Proctor, who was Steve Molloy's No 2 last year, accepted the offer of an academy coaching job with Huddersfield.

Back here, Mercer and Brennan have a huge job ahead of them in what promises to be an exceptionally tough season in both Northern Rail Cup and then, even more so, in National League division one.

With so many new faces in his squad it will be fascinating to see if Mercer can bring out the best in them as a team and thus whip up and retain the enthusiasm of the supporters.

One thing is for sure — the new boss is so passionate, so positive and so determined to make his mark at this level of the game that there are unlikely to be few dull moments this season, if any.





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Throughout the season we will be organising several events (the majority of which are free to members) however places are obviously limited. It will be up to you to claim your place so please keep your eyes open for a list of up and coming events, which will be published in the match day programme, on the "Kids" page of the official website and in the press.

The first mascot of the season is 11yrs old Ethan Shaw. Ethan is a pupil at Hulme Grammar School and his hobbies are Rugby and Cricket. His favourite player is Gavin Dodd. Enjoy your day Ethan

Carole and myself would once again like to thank all our sponsors from last season and hopefully by the time our next home programme is on sale they will be on board to help us once again.

As always good luck to Gary and the Lads.

See you all soon,
Janet and Carole

TODAYS MASCOT

Ethan Shaw

Age: 11

Hobbies: Rugby and Cricket

Favourite Player: Gavin Dodd



Hi KIDS

Welcome to all our members old and new, to the first game of what we hope will be a great season for our club. For those of you who have never been members before the Roughyed Kids is a great way to make new friends as well as supporting O.R.L.F.C

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As the season draws to a close, please remember to support the Roughyeds by coming along to the Quiz Evenings and other social events, which will continue throughout the off-season.

Please watch the local press for details and keep in touch.

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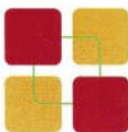
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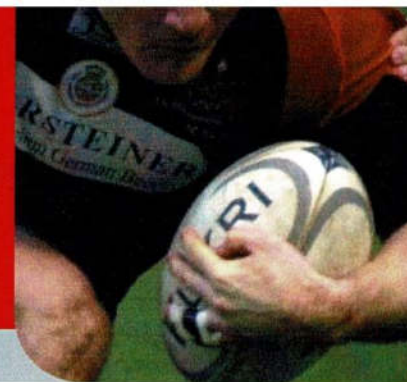
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On this day

Don Yates looks back to February 13th yesteryear



Elsewhere in this publication, Michael Turner has written a piece about players who have served both Oldham and Blackpool Borough. It was exactly 40 years ago, on Saturday 13th February 1965, that one such player, Bob Irving, made his senior debut.

He was 16 years of age and had joined Oldham the previous month from the Huddersfield St.Josephs junior club. Irving played in the second-row of an Oldham team which defeated Keighley 26-6 at Watersheddings. Centre John Donovan was the star of that particular victory scoring three of the six Oldham tries. Stand-off Stan McLeod, loose-forward Stuart Whitehead and substitute Bill Patterson were the other try scorers and full-back Frank Dyson landed four goals. The Keighley full-back Garfield Owen kicked three goals for the visitors. Irving went on to make 296 appearances for the Roughyeds and scored 80 tries before joining Wigan in August 1973 for an £11,000 transfer fee. Whilst at Watersheddings he represented Yorkshire, Great Britain under-24s, England and made eleven test appearances for Great Britain, touring Australasia with the British Lions in 1970, the last time Britain beat Australia in a test series. He later played for Salford, Barrow, Blackpool Borough as player-coach and Swinton where he ended his playing career in 1983. Bob Irving settled in Blackpool where, sadly, he died of a heart attack in April 1999. He was only 51 years of age.

One of the best Oldham performances of recent seasons occurred four years ago, on Tuesday 13th February 2001, when Hull Kingston Rovers came over to Boundary Park for a re-arranged fourth round Challenge Cup-tie. The Robins played superbly in the opening 30 minutes and deservedly led 6-2. At that point Dave Gibbons and Jason Clegg combined to put stand-off Gareth Barber through on the half-way line and he raced half the length of the pitch for a great try which, when converted, gave Oldham an 8-6 half-time lead. After the break stubborn defence, a try from centre Dave Gibbons plus two more goals

from winger Pat Rich and a Neil Roden dropped goal, enabled Oldham to win 17-6. Although only four years have elapsed since that match, only Gareth Barber and hooker John Hough remain at Boundary Park from the team that beat the Robins.

In 1960 Oldham reached the Challenge Cup semi-finals but only after overcoming Huddersfield in a difficult first round tie. That tie was staged at Watersheddings on Saturday 13th February and resulted in a 13-11 victory for the Roughyeds. Each side scored a try, winger Vin Nestor for Oldham and centre Ernie Ashcroft for Huddersfield. Skipper Bernard Ganley landed five goals for Oldham and rival full-back Frank Dyson landed four for Huddersfield. The Roughyeds led 8-4 at half-time before a crowd of 14,062. On the same afternoon Blackpool were knocked out of the competition by Leigh who won 10-2 at the St.Annes Road Stadium. Hooker Weir landed a goal for Borough who, at that time, were led by lively young scrum-half Tommy Bishop who went on to gain international recognition and star in many big matches both here in England and across in Australia.

Next Sunday Oldham visit Rochdale where they will be hoping for a much better result than the one they suffered at Spotland on Sunday 13th February 2000. That afternoon Hornets knocked Oldham out of the Challenge Cup by a comprehensive 30 points to fourteen scoreline. They crossed for seven tries to Oldham's late consolation effort touched down by substitute prop Danny Guest. Centre Pat Rich converted that try and also landed four penalties but it was a sad afternoon for the Roughyeds and especially for prop Leo Casey, sent off for a high tackle on Rochdale full-back Lee Maher.

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LEAGUE WEEKLY

Danny Lockwood, publisher

HERE we go for the biggest and best yet, the Engage Super League – sponsored by that famous household brand, Engage! Hey, it works for me! But my didn't the RFL cut it close? Just four days from kick-off before Red Hall made the big announcement. We have to hope that it was a slick piece of theatrical stage management and not a panic last-minute sell – because it certainly shouldn't have been.

The fact is that Rugby League has never had it so good. The record crowds for the Gillette Tri-Nations series, the bumper attendance for Leeds's Carnegie World Club Challenge showdown with Canterbury last week – they show just how the game has captured the British public's mood. There are lots of demands on the sponsorship dollar, make no doubt. But equally there are few marquee sports that can promise the kind of thunderous exposure and product allegiance that Rugby League offers.

It's also important to stress the unique nature of the Rugby League family. From your community amateur club, through the National Leagues, to the top of the very tree, companies who form a partnership with this sport find themselves truly valued and respected – and key into an unrivalled loyalty from the clubs and fans alike. I was surprised at the weight of cash Sky threw at the England Cricket Board to snatch the international game away from Channel 4. Test matches and one-day internationals apart, even first class county cricket is generally watched by only four men and a whippet. But maybe that's because cricket truly is a sport designed to be watched from the sofa.

My last visit to a test match, England v South Africa 18 months ago, was notable only for two things: Geoff Boycott ('Sir' Geoff to we Yorkshiremen) came up and told my wife she has a gorgeous bum. She has, but I was still considering dropping 'Sir' Geoff one on the chin, until it became apparent we were stood right in front of him and 'Lord' Freddie Trueman. Oops. And the other thing was that the test cameras meant the big screen was there – thankfully, because I don't think I saw a single dismissal at the first time of asking!

You're just ogling that scantily clad beauty three rows over when up goes the cry "Howzat!" and all you see is a forlorn bloke plodding back to the pavilion. You have to watch the highlights on telly when you get home just to know what you 'saw'.

Well my plan for Super League X is not to miss a single try – and you just know there are going to be some beauties. And months from now the names Engage and Northern Rail are going to be on every rugby fan's lips. I just hope the RFL never do a sponsorship deal with a brand of haemorrhoid cream...

DANNY LOCKWOOD is the publisher of **LEAGUE WEEKLY** - out every Monday. For subscriptions call 01924 454448 or log on to www.league-weekly.com

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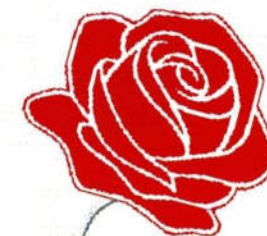
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2004 Final Statistics

DATE	FIXTURE	RESULT	SCORERS	ATT
1/2/04	Chorley (h) (NLC)	W64-14	t:N Johnson,Morgan,Goddard,Barber,Cowell,L Marsh,Elsworth,I Marsh(2), Watson,Dodd g:Svabic(5),Barber(5)	1,096
6/2/04	Castleford Panthers (h) (CCR3)	W16-8	t:N Johnson,I Marsh,Cowell g:Barber(2)	1,003
15/2/04	Leigh (a) (NLC)	L51-32	t:I Marsh,Morgan(2),Doran,Watson g:Svabic(6)	2,316
22/2/04	Swinton (a) (NLC)	W18-30	t:Goddard,L Marsh,Dodd,N Johnson,Bunyan g:Svabic(4),Barber	731
3/3/04	Sharlston (h) (CCR4)	W24-4	t:I Marsh(2),L Marsh,N Johnson g:Svabic(4)	1,301
7/3/04	Leigh (h) (NLC)	L10-54	t:Dodd,Goddard g:L Marsh	1,805
14/3/04	Warrington (h) (CCR5)	L10-44	t:Cowell,N Johnson g:L Marsh	2,859
21/3/04	Chorley (a) (NLC)	W10-40	t:Brennan,N Johnson(3),Southern,Dodd,Roden,Cowell g:Barber(4)	370
28/3/04	Rochdale (h) (NLC)	W56-12	t:Roden(3),Dodd(2),Doran,Morgan,N Johnson(3) g:Barber(5),Svabic(3)	1,214
4/4/04	Swinton (h) (NLC)	W42-15	t:Roden(2),Barber,N Johnson,Rich,Cowell(2),Elsworth g:Rich(5)	983
9/4/04	Rochdale (a) (NLC)	W12-48	t:L Marsh(2),Barber,Morgan,Dodd,Rich,N Johnson(2),Roden,Goddard g:Rich(3),Svabic	1,305
12/4/04	Featherstone (h)	W50-24	t:Bunyan(4),Dodd(2),Goddard,Roden,Cowell g:L Marsh(7)	1,320
18/4/04	Halifax (a)	W6-25	t:Roden(2),Brennan g:Rich(6) fg:Watson	1,807
25/4/04	Doncaster (a) (NLCQFQ)	L32-28	t:Farrell,L Marsh(2),Watson g:Rich(6)	835
2/5/04	Leigh (h)	L20-60	t:N Johnson(2),Farrimond,Farrell g:Rich(2)	2,104
9/5/04	Hull KR (a)	L29-22	t:Morgan(2),Farrell g:Rich(5)	2,121
23/5/04	Rochdale (h)	W26-24	t:Roden,Goddard(3),Svabic g:Rich(3)	1,243
30/5/04	Batley (h) I	L20-44	t:L Marsh(2),Morgan g:Rich(3) fg:Brennan(2)	1,541
13/6/04	Keighley (a)	W28-33	t:Brennan,N Johnson(2),Bunyan,Svabic,Watson g:Rich(2),Svabic(2) fg:Watson	1,153
20/6/04	Whitehaven (h) II	W31-22	t:L Marsh,I Marsh,Bunyan,Dodd g:Rich(2),L Marsh(5) fg:Watson	752
4/7/04	Doncaster (a)	L31-30	t:Dodd,I Marsh(2),Brennan,L Marsh g:Rich(5)	998
10/7/04	Halifax (h) II	W24-14	t:I Marsh,N Johnson,L Marsh,Barber g:Rich(3) fg:Watson(2)	850
25/7/04	Leigh (a)	L36-12	t:Roden g:Rich(4)	1,841
1/8/04	Hull KR (h)	W29-24	t:L Marsh(2),N Johnson,Roden,Goddard,Watson g:L Marsh,Roper fg:L Marsh	1,393
8/8/04	Rochdale (a)	L30-24	t:N Johnson,Dodd,Brennan,Roden g:Roper(4)	1,403
15/8/04	Batley (a)	W18-34	t:Barber(2),Watson,N Johnson,Farrell,Goddard g:Roper(5)	886
22/8/04	Keighley (h)	W31-20	t:N Johnson,Morgan,Goddard(2),Roden g:Watson(5) fg:Watson	1,202
29/8/04	Whitehaven (a)	L32-16	t:McLoughlin,Doran,Dodd g:L Marsh(2)	2,009
5/9/04	Featherstone (a)	L35-26	t:Goddard,Roden,L Marsh,Dodd(2) g:L Marsh(3)	1,397
12/9/04	Doncaster (h)	W29-26	t:N Johnson,Barber,Morgan,I Marsh g:Roper(6) fg:Watson	1,448
19/9/04	Featherstone (h) (EPO)	L28-33	t:I Marsh,Farrell,N Johnson,Barber,McLoughlin g:Roper(4)	1,970

I Played at Bloomfield Road, Blackpool - II Played at Victory Park, Chorley

	APP		TRIES		GOALS		FG		PTS	
	ALL	NL1	ALL	NL1	ALL	NL1	ALL	NL1	ALL	NL1
Gareth Barber	8(20)	3(14)	8	5	17	0	0	0	66	20
Keith Brennan	23(3)	15(1)	5	4	0	0	2	2	22	18
Chris Brett	(1)	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
James Bunyan	11(3)	6	7	6	0	0	0	0	28	24
Adam Clayton	(1)	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Will Cowell	17	5	7	1	0	0	0	0	28	4
Gavin Dodd	27	16	15	8	0	0	0	0	60	32
Lee Doran	31	19	3	1	0	0	0	0	12	4
Martin Elsworth	2(18)	1(10)	2	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Phil Farrell	19	18	5	4	0	0	0	0	20	16
Craig Farrimond	(6)	(4)	1	1	0	0	0	0	4	4
David Gibbons	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jon Goddard	30	18	13	9	0	0	0	0	52	36
John Hough	8(4)	5(4)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gavin Johnson	(6)	(5)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nick Johnson	31	19	25	11	0	0	0	0	100	44
James Lomax	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Iain Marsh	14(2)	8(2)	12	6	0	0	0	0	48	24
Lee Marsh	23(3)	12(2)	15	8	20	18	1	1	101	69
Martin McLoughlin	12(10)	11(8)	2	2	0	0	0	0	8	8
Steve Molloy	9(6)	7(6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dane Morgan	22	19	10	5	0	0	0	0	40	20
Danny Nanyin	(1)	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pat Rich	10	10	2	0	49	35	0	0	106	70
Mark Roberts	(4)	(4)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neil Roden	11(4)	10(3)	16	9	0	0	0	0	64	36
Jon Roper	9	9	0	0	20	20	0	0	40	40
Adam Sharples	(7)	(6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paul Southern	14(1)	12	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
Simon Svabic	6(5)	5(4)	2	2	25	2	0	0	58	12
Ian Watson	20	17	6	3	5	5	7	7	41	29

LEAGUE RECORD
P18-W10-00-L8
(4th, NL1/Elimination Play-Off)
F482, A503, Diff-21
20 points.

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TIME FOR ANSWERS

THE newly titled Northern Rail Cup has its big kick off today, with a host of questions surrounding the two professional National League divisions.

Will Castleford Tigers be able to follow in the footsteps of Huddersfield and Salford in making an immediate return to Super League, or will they struggle, as Halifax did last season?

Will Whitehaven be the force they were last year, and can they kick on and go one better in 2005?

Will a team from outside those two rise to the fore and provide a genuine title challenge? Would it be Halifax, Hull KR, Doncaster, Rochdale, Oldham, Batley or Featherstone?

Do Barrow Raiders have what it takes to compete in National League One, after promotion from NL2 last season? Peter Roe's side have found the going tough during their pre-season.

In the lower division, how will Blackpool fare in their first year back in the professional ranks? The early signs at the Panthers have been good, and there is no lack of optimism on the west coast.

Can Workington Town kick on from the significant strides they last season and become Grand Final challengers?

Similarly, Swinton Lions have recruited very well - will they be a threat?

And will all of Dewsbury Rams' big guns fire, and their youngsters continue their rapid progression?

How will Keighley Cougars cope with dropping back down a division after relegation in 2004?

Can York continue to make the progress they have done on and off the field, after inspirational chief executive Steve Ferres leaves following their opening game with Castleford?

Will Sheffield and Hunslet be good enough to make the top six again?

How will Gateshead Thunder shape up, after a close season recruitment drive that has seen 19 new players arrive at the club from all corners of the Rugby League world?

And can London Skolars take their development on another level and become top six candidates?

So many questions, so much time for answers. But several of them will become clear in the opening weeks of the NRC, which again looks an intriguing start to the season.

Forthcoming fixtures such as Featherstone versus Castleford, Workington against Whitehaven and Blackpool hosting Swinton are enough to whet the appetite of any National League supporters.

It will be fascinating to watch.

A full report of today's game will appear in the 'Rugby Leaguer & League Express' on Monday.

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Fixtures - Northern Trains Cup Qualifying

DATE	OPPONENTS	CUP	VENUE	K. O.	RESULT	W/L	ATT
09/01/05	Rochdale Hornets	Law Cup	Away	15.00	8-24	L	1,404
21/01/05	Leeds Rhinos	Testimonial	Away	20.00	10-22	L	5,196
30/01/05	Halifax	Friendly	Away	15.00	12-34	L	1,443
13/02/05	Blackpool Panthers	NT Cup	Home	15.00			
20/02/05	Rochdale Hornets	NT Cup	Away	15.00			
27/02/05	Swinton Lions	NT Cup	Away	15.00			
06/03/05	Swinton Lions	NT Cup	Home	15.00			
06/03/05	Swinton Lions	NT Cup	Away	15.00			
13/03/05	Powergen Cup 3rd Rd	Powergen CC	TBA	TBA			
20/03/05	Blackpool Panthers	NT Cup	Away	15.00			
25/03/05	Rochdale Hornets	NT Cup	Home	15.00			
03/04/05	Powergen Cup 4th Rd	Powergen CC	TBA	TBA			
01/05/05	Northern Rail Cup Play Offs	NT Cup	TBA	TBA			
08/05/05	Powergen Cup 5th Rd	Powergen CC	TBA	TBA			
29/05/05	Northern Rail Cup Quarter Finals	NT Cup	TBA	TBA			
19/06/05	Northern Rail Cup Semi Finals	NT Cup	TBA	TBA			
26/06/05	Powergen Cup Quarter Finals	Powergen CC	TBA	TBA			
17/07/05	Northern Rail Cup Final	NT Cup	TBA	TBA			

Fixtures - National League One Fixtures

DATE	OPPONENTS	CUP	VENUE	K. O.	RESULT	W/L	ATT
28/03/05	Featherstone Rovers	NL1	Away	19.30			
10/04/05	Doncaster Dragons	NL1	Home	15.00			
17/04/05	Castleford Tigers	NL1	Home	15.00			
24/04/05	Hull K R	NL1	Away	15.00			
15/05/05	Whitehaven Warriors	NL1	Home	15.00			
22/05/05	Batley Bulldogs	NL1	Away	15.00			
05/06/05	Rochdale Hornets	NL1	Home	15.00			
12/06/05	Barrow Raiders	NL1	Away	15.00			
26/06/05	Halifax	NL1	Home	15.00			
03/07/05	Featherstone Rovers	NL1	Home	15.00			
10/07/05	Doncaster Dragons	NL1	Away	15.00			
24/07/05	Castleford Tigers	NL1	Away	15.30			
31/07/05	Hull K R	NL1	Home	15.00			
07/08/05	Whitehaven Warriors	NL1	Away	15.00			
14/08/05	Rochdale Hornets	NL1	Away	15.00			
21/08/05	Batley Bulldogs	NL1	Home	15.00			
04/09/05	Barrow Raiders	NL1	Home	15.00			
11/09/05	Halifax	NL1	Away	15.00			
18/09/05	Play Offs	NL1	TBA	TBA			
25/09/05	Play Offs	NL1	TBA	TBA			
02/10/05	Play Offs	NL1	TBA	TBA			
08/10/05	Grand Final	NL1	TBA	TBA			

Key

NT Cup - Northern Trains Cup
Powergen CC - Powergen Challenge Cup
NL1 - National League Division 1

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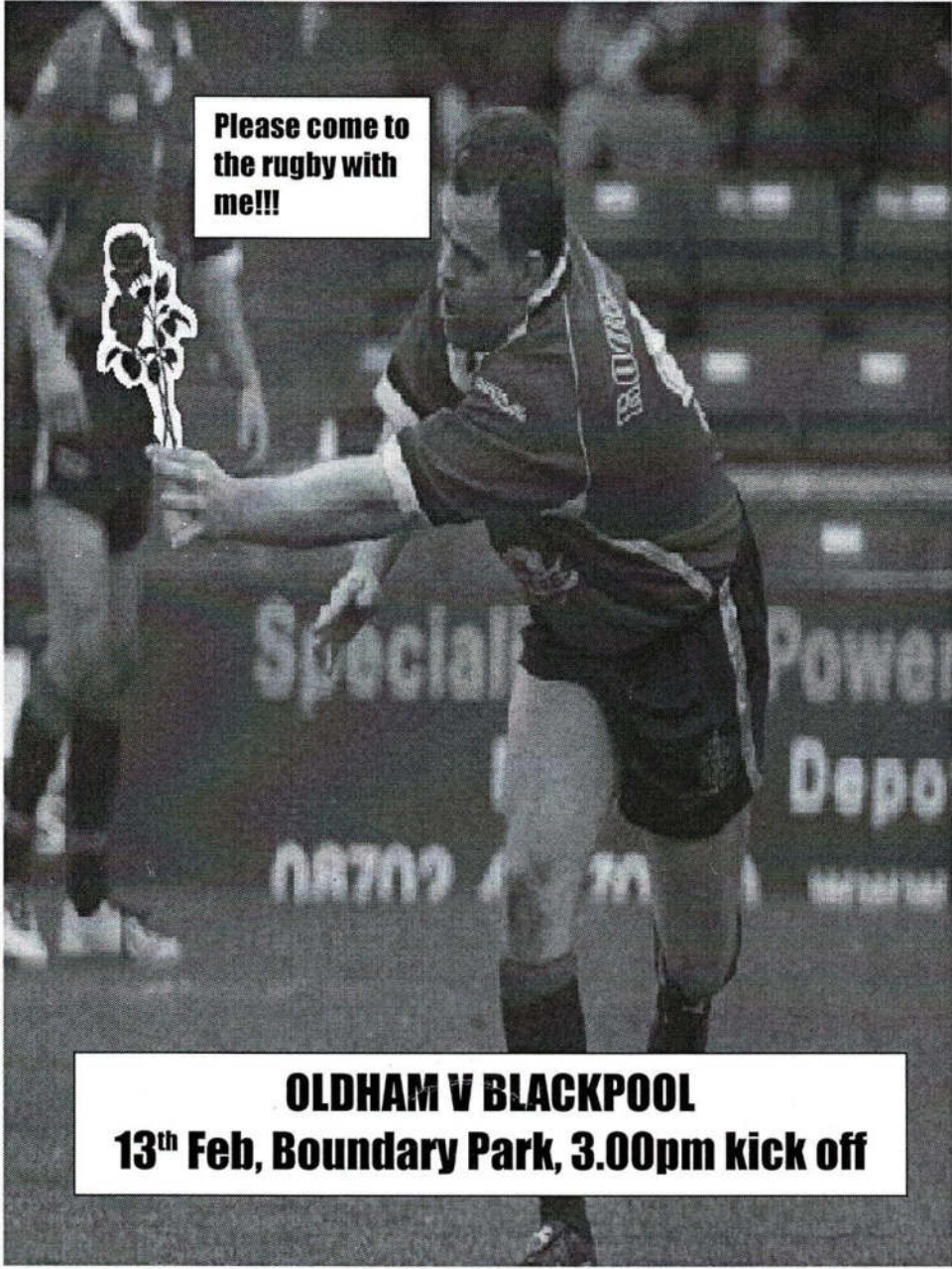
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