

game line-up

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OLDHAM SQUAD	Played	FEATHERSTONE SQUAD
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CHRIS BAINES		DANNY KIRMOND
JASON BOULTS		WAYNE MCHUGH
GENO COSTIN		JON WHITTLE
ANDY CRABTREE		DEAN COLTON
ANDY GOREY		DALE CARDOZA
IAN HODSON		RICHARD BLAKEWAY
JOHN HOUGH		PAUL HANDFORTH
DREW HOUSTON		GARETH HANDFORD
SIMEON HOYLE		PAUL HUGHES
GARETH LANGLEY		STUART DICKENS
CRAIG LITTLER		STEVE DOOLER
RICHARD MERVILL		IAN TONKS
PAUL O'CONNOR		JAMES HOUSTON
MARK OGDEN		JAMIE FIELD
STUART OLDHAM		TOMMY HAUGHEY
LUCAS ONYANGO		CHRIS ROSS
NEIL RODEN		
WES ROGERS		
LEE SANDERSON		
IAN SINFIELD		
KRIS SMITH		
MICHAEL STOUT		
SAID TAMGHART		
TONY TONKS		
ALEX WILKINSON		
LEE WINGFIELD		

FEATHERSTONE

match officials

REFEREE: Mr P Taberner TOUCH JUDGES: J DARBYSHIRE, R AINSWORTH
4TH OFFICIAL: A Smith

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(see New Kids On The Block, page 18)

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Trans-Penine Cup
Finalists - 1998

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Club of the Year - 2000
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MOST APPEARANCES: John Hough, 228 - Jan 1998 - Sep 2006

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

James Bunyan v Featherstone Rovers, 4 - Apr 12th 2004 at Boundary Park

GOALS IN A MATCH: Simon Syabic 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 (amt), 64-0 - Jan 28th 2001 RLCC 3rd Rnd at Boundary Park

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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Football Club (1997) Limited

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Frank Stirrup 1950-62

Bernard Ganley 1950-61

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John Etty 1954-59

Derek Turner 1955-59

Kevin Taylor 1962-77

Mike Elliott 1962-79

Bob Irving 1964-74

Martin Murphy 1966-82

Terry Flanagan 1979-89

Andy Goodway 1979-85 & 1993-94

We would like to express our thanks to the
Oldham Evening Chronicle, League Publications
Ltd, Phil Burdge and all concerned for the use
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www.roughyeds.co.uk

boardroom **view**

with Chris Hamilton



Tonight we bring up the curtain on the 2007 Co-operative National League campaign with the first fixture of the new season.

We, as a club are delighted that the league has been able to secure a new sponsor for divisions one and two as the standard of rugby has been increasing

year on year and it certainly deserves backing. To have the support of such a well known name is testament to this and the Oldham club hopes that the sponsorship is a massive success over the course of its initial two year deal.

The game against Featherstone is an ideal one to start the league off with as it brings to Oldham a team who have made no secret of the fact that their sole aim this year is to get out of this division and their recruitment during the off season is proof of this with a number of players with Super League experience joining them.

It will certainly be a big test for us but after a long and difficult period in the club's history we have won three of the last four games and believe you me it is a while since we were able to say that!

Last Sunday ourselves and Barrow became the only two remaining second division teams in the Carnegie Challenge Cup after winning at Keighley. It certainly wasn't a vintage performance particularly as we made far too many mistakes with the ball in the first half but the lads showed a lot of character to turn it around in the second half and get into the hat for the fifth round.

As a result of that our home game against Swinton which should have taken place on 13 May will now have to be re-arranged but we are hoping to have a new date for this by the time you are reading these notes.

Since our last home game we have welcomed Ian Hodson back to the club and he showed us what we have been missing at Keighley. We have also signed Lee Sanderson, Lucas Onyango and Tony Tonks to further strengthen the squad and we wish them all the very best in their careers at Oldham.

Thank you, as ever, for your support in the recent games, certainly at Swinton it was almost like a home game and your vocal and physical support is very much appreciated as is demonstrated by the team at the end of each game.

We are hoping for a decent crowd tonight on the back of recent results and I am sure the Featherstone fans will be in good voice as both sides look to get their league season off with a win. Please get behind the lads as they try to get those vital three points.

Enjoy the game

Chris

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deek's coach approach

with Steve Deakin



Welcome to Boundary Park for our first league game in Co-Operative National League Two, and welcome to Featherstone, who are sure to provide us with a stiff challenge.

I think everyone who has watched us regularly so far this season will be in agreement that our performances have been solid rather than spectacular. It does take time, of course, for a new team to gel, for combinations to start working properly and for systems that are possibly new to a lot of the players to be accepted and understood.

However, in recent games we have shown we are capable of producing good football, notably at Swinton and in the second half at Keighley.

The challenge for us now is to make sure we can produce that form consistently, not only over 80 minutes but on a match-to-match basis.

If we can start doing that we can then justifiably claim to be a football team.

As far as recruitment goes Bill Quinn has publicly announced that he wants to see us out of this division as soon as possible.

The recent signings of Lee Sanderson, Lucas Onyango and Tony Tonks will considerably strengthen the squad and if more reinforcements are needed, for whatever reason, then I'm sure the club will do everything it can to bring in more new players.

One big difference from last year is in the POSITIVE vocal support the team is now getting from the supporters. This was particularly evident early on in the Northern Rail Cup when results didn't quite reflect our performances.

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Fans have stayed patient with us, and that was very noticeable again in the first half at Keighley last week when things were not going too well for us.

Believe me, it does make a big difference and the patience the fans demonstrate is a huge help to players when things are not going quite right.

It has certainly helped us to start heading in the right direction in the build-up to this evening's start of the league campaign, which has yielded three wins out of the last four outings, all of them away from home at East Hull, Swinton Lions and Keighley Cougars.

As I said at the start I'm sure tonight's game will provide us with a tough challenge, but it's the sort of challenge we have to meet and overcome if we are to get out of division two at the first time of asking.

It's certainly a game that will give us a clear indication of how far we have come towards reaching our objective which is to get out of this division as soon as we can.

We are all delighted, obviously, to be in the fifth round of the Carnegie Challenge Cup. Cup runs arouse great interest among supporters and I daresay a lot of our fans were glued to their TV sets last night to see who we would be playing in the next round.

After the win at Keighley a reporter (I think it was Matthew from the Chronicle) asked me who I would like to meet in the next round. To start with, you don't have any choice in the matter. More importantly than that, as I told him, is the fact that the next round of the cup is a few weeks away and my only concern, as soon as the game finished at Cougar Park, was our next challenge: tonight's game against Rovers.

I know it's an old cliché, but we take one step at a time -- one challenge at a time. Right now, the cup draw and the next round are the last things on my mind. Believe me, my thoughts and those of the players have been on one team only --- Featherstone Rovers --- since 4.30pm, or thereabouts, last Sunday afternoon.

Enjoy the game,
Deaks



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news desk

by Roger Halstead

BIRTHDAY BOY'S TOAST TO FUTURE SUCCESS!



**BILL QUINN ...
new owner**

MARCH 21, 2007 represented a milestone in the history of Oldham RLFC (1997) Ltd when it was announced that legalities were complete and that Bill Quinn was the new chairman and owner with a 75 per cent shareholding and a controlling interest in the company.

Four days later, and on his 41st birthday, he had double cause to raise a glass in celebration, given that the Roughyeds' first competitive win against professional opposition in a year had coincided with his match-day debut as legally-confirmed and publicised new chairman.

It was originally thought, when Roughyeds broke news of the pending boardroom changes in February, that Bill would be buying 52 per cent of the shares with Chris Hamilton and Sean Whitehead each retaining 24 per cent.

By the time legalities were signed and sealed a few weeks later, however, further talks and negotiations at boardroom level had resulted in Bill taking 75 per cent, leaving Chris and Sean each with 12.5 per cent after their phenomenal feat in keeping the club alive over the previous two years in the face of £250,000 tax demands.

Bill has spoken several times since of his admiration for all Chris and Sean achieved in keeping the club afloat against massive odds and of his continuing support for his fellow directors and for Chris in his role as chief executive.

The new chairman has also urged rugby league fans in the town to get behind him and the three-man board as the club sets out on its rebuilding programme.

At that stage talking exclusively to fans via the club's official website, he outlined his hopes and ambitions for steering Roughyeds up the rugby league ladder with a new stadium and a place in Super League as ultimate goals.

He said he was passionate in his belief that he and his fellow directors, Chris and Sean, must have the support and backing of rugby league enthusiasts in the town.

This was his message:

"Chris and myself have been spending a lot of time talking to agents and players in a bid to strengthen the squad. Injuries have hit us hard, but the squad needed strengthening anyway.

"This is all part of the rebuilding programme which Chris, Sean and I have been discussing for several months.

"Now that everything has gone through from the legal point of view, the rebuilding can start.

"MY INTENTION NOW IS TO PUSH THIS CLUB AS FAR FORWARD AS WE CAN GO AND AS QUICKLY AS WE CAN GO.

"The most important and most immediate thing is to get out of NL2 as soon as we can; get into division one; and build a decent team that can work well at that level.

"Off the field, one of the most important things is to start looking at the stadium issue. Chris and Sean will soon be introducing me to the leaders of Oldham Council and we will take things from there.

"Ultimately, I would like to see us back in Super League but there is a lot of hard work to do on and off the field before we get there and we are going to need the backing of everyone in Oldham who wants to see Roughyeds heading back to the top.

"I've been enjoying talking to new players. I want them at our club. I want the team to put defeats behind them and to get into a winning habit. Once we achieve that, we will have started the long haul back.

"People might wonder why I was going to buy 52 per cent of the shares in the company, and then ended up with 75 per cent. It was to show that, having been around for a few weeks, I was even more committed to the club and to the task I was taking on, and I wanted to further demonstrate my belief in the club and in Chris, Sean, coach Steve Deakin, the players and the fans.

"I can promise that everybody at the club will work hard to take it forward --- and we want supporters behind us every inch of the way.

"There is no point, and nothing to be gained, in supporters criticising what we are trying to do while staying away.

"We want the fans down at the club, supporting us. The ones who are prepared to back us at the turnstiles and pay their money have a right to criticise and we will take those criticisms on board. But don't stay away. That benefits nobody.

"Hopefully, and now that everything is settled legally, we can all start to enjoy the changes we introduce as and when they happen.

As I have said before I am in this for the long haul --- and with the backing of the fans, the town and the council we can take this club a long way.

with Geoff Cooke

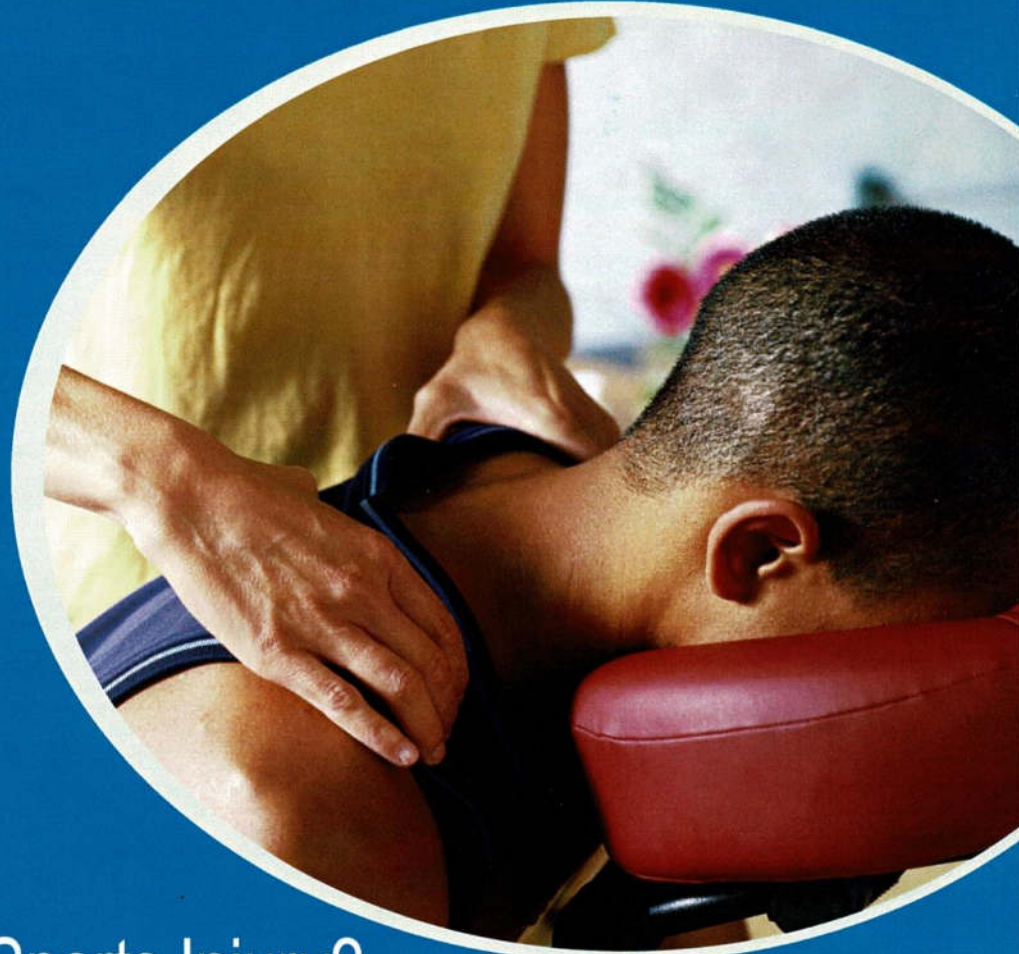
cooke-ability!

Because tonight's game has been brought forward Oldham and Featherstone have the honour of kicking-off the new Co-operative National Leagues and, despite tomorrow's televised Leigh v. Widnes game, there could hardly be two better known clubs to kick start the new season.

These notes were written before the result of the Keighley cup tie was known but following Oldham's convincing win at Swinton, Roughyeds fans will be in much better heart than might have been the case. For, make no mistake about it, not only did Oldham win at Swinton they won in style. Perhaps a bit early to start shouting the odds but not too soon for some well overdue optimism.

The appointment of Tony Smith as Great Britain Coach will have produced groans in many quarters as yet another Australian heads up our national team. As you know I am not one of those who believes the national Coach has to be English. In my view you always appoint the best man for the job irrespective of nationality. And if any further proof were needed just reflect on what the F.A. have achieved with the England soccer team. Steve McLaren when you could have had Phil Scolari or Gus Hydynck, both with proven track records of success at international level. So, if Smith's the best man for the job - and he has a good record in British club rugby - let's back him. And, hopefully, we can see some new faces in the team instead of Brian Noble's old pals act. The only downside to Smith's appointment would be, if the rumours are correct, that Hull K.R. lose their excellent Coach Justin Morgan to Leeds. Oldhamers know what it feels like to lose a coach because of international needs, having in the past lost both Jim Challinor and Frank Myler that way. The last thing Hull K.R. need when trying to establish their credentials in the top flight is to lose a man of such obvious influence.

If I have a favourite Super League side it is (for no apparent reason) Wakefield. So it's very gratifying to see John Kear's side riding high in the league. If in any way this is because of the salary cap then I'm all in favour. And if salary cap regulations mean young fullbacks with everything to prove (Wigan's Chris Ashton) desert to Rugby Union so be it. Because all those decrying the deal with Northampton are way off the mark. Has Rugby League fallen apart because of previous departures? Of course not. The production line of talent is far too strong thanks to our amateur and Academy structure. Anyway, when it all blows up in his face he'll be back. And with Michael Withers on board I don't think Wigan are scratching around for a replacement, do you?



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**LITTLE BIG MAN JOINS THE JET SET
AFTER HIS FLYING START TO 2007**



PAUL O'CONNOR

PAUL O'Connor, little man with the heart of a lion, will have mixed feelings when he packs his bags towards the end of May to head off on a 14-week trip to the other side of the world.

The bang-in-form Roughyeds' full-back is eagerly looking forward to the holiday of a lifetime yet, throughout his time in Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand and Thailand, he will keep one eye on what's happening back home to the team and the club he left behind.

Already this season, and the Co-operative National League Two campaign has still to get underway, 22-year-old O'Connor has done more than enough to become a fans' favourite here at Boundary Park.

Accolades don't lie. Three man-of-the-match prizes and the odd champagne-moment award are ample proof that the little chap from Widnes has been on the top of his game as

Roughyeds have used the Northern Rail Cup to prepare for what is sure to be a massively competitive Co-operative NL2 campaign, starting this evening with the visit of fancied Featherstone Rovers.

All things being equal he will squeeze in the first half a dozen league games before he heads off into the sunset.

By the time he gets back on September 11 Oldham will have completed their regular fixtures and will, hopefully, be getting ready for an assault on the top six play-offs. O'Connor is contracted to Oldham to the end of November, but whether we will see him in a Roughyeds jersey after the home game against Barrow Raiders on May 20 depends on many factors.

If Steve Deakin's men were to finish top of the division, for instance, and gain promotion automatically the season would be over for them while Paul was still adventuring his way around Thailand.

On the other hand, if Roughyeds failed to make the play-offs there would again be no point in Paul dashing back.

For Oldham to call on their reliable No 1 come mid-September they will have to be getting ready to be involved in play-off drama and excitement and coach Deakin will have to take the view that he can use a man who has been away on a three-month sabbatical while others have been sweating blood all summer in the Roughyeds' cause.

All that apart, Paul will have to be able to show that he is in fit shape physically to be thrust into play-off action after all those weeks away from the sport.

"There are a lot of imponderables," he said, "but to be honest Deaks and I haven't spoken about it much. We have been concentrating more on what is happening now rather than what might happen at the end of the season.

"I decided to go travelling at the end of the 2006 season. I had completed my Masters at Leeds Met and after spending most of my life up to that point in study I thought it was time for a change and time for a look at a bit of the world.

"It was half-way through the close season. All my travel arrangements were in place, but when Oldham knew I was going to be around until the end of May they gave me a fantastic opportunity --- a chance to play AND travel. It was just too good to throw up."

Deaks knew what he was signing, of course, because O'Connor had previously impressed him while playing three games for Roughyeds on loan from Widnes last season, these against Rochdale, Batley and Doncaster last July.

Similarly, Paul knew what he was coming to --- and he was chuffed to get the chance to play the sport he loves, having previously come to accept that if he was going to travel the world he would almost certainly have to take the full 2007 season off.

It wasn't the first time he had come to a similar decision. In his first year at Liverpool Hope University he put rugby league on the back burner, concentrated on his sports studies, and merely played a bit of soccer and social rugby union at weekends for recreation.

All that was to quickly change in his second year at Liverpool. But where did it all start? Where did Paul acquire and then develop his interest in rugby league?

"My brother David is two years older than me and, basically, I just followed him through St Bede's junior school in Widnes and then on to Widnes Tigers," recalled Paul. "Our Mum and Dad only got interested when we did. You see, the only thing in Widnes really for kids is rugby league --- football and rugby union don't arouse much interest.

"I went to Tigers when I was aged eight or nine but a couple of years later the team disbanded and the lads who were left moved en bloc to St Maries. I played for Maries until I was 18 and went off to university."

It was at the start of his second year that he heard the university rugby league squad had some decent players who took their sport seriously. He accepted the challenge and was soon to become heavily involved with the Students Rugby League.

He had no trouble getting into the Liverpool Hope side which,

in his first year with them, defeated Leeds Met in the final at Warrington to lift the BUSA Cup. Paul played on the wing and occasionally at hooker.

With a name like O'Connor, a brave heart and no small amount of skill and expertise, he soon had Ireland Students enlisting his services and he played in the green shirt of his great-grandparents' homeland in the 2004 Home Nations tournament against England, Scotland and Wales down in Swansea.

His all-action performances in that tournament earned the little guy a spot in the Great Britain and Ireland Students' squad for the 2005 series against Australia. Paul played on the wing for a British side that was beaten twice by the Aussies, first at Dewsbury and then in Warrington at the Halliwell Jones Stadium.

The Brits were coached by Gary Wilkinson (later to guide Sheffield Eagles to promotion from NL2) and included Martin Ainscough, now Leigh's stand-off, as well as a few others who are now scattered around the Co-operative National Leagues.

While O'Connor was winning student international honours, he was also attracting the attention of hometown Widnes.

And in a hectic period of his young life he joined Widnes Academy, graduated at Liverpool Hope, started a Masters at Leeds Met in sport and exercise science and was picked to fly to Australia in the summer of 2005 with Ireland Students for the World Cup.

The Irish finished last in competition with England, Scotland, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and France, but Paul had a "great time" in Queensland where he developed his appetite for more world travel.

Back home, his studies continued in Leeds and he also signed a part-time contract with Widnes in time for the start of the 2006 season.

He had already played for Widnes in the 2005 senior academy grand final, in which the Vikings were beaten by Leeds, and he was to play for Vikings again in the 2006 final, this time beaten by Halifax at The Shay.

In between, he played ten first-team games for Widnes, plus the three first-team games he enjoyed with Oldham at the bottom end of NL1.

"I was tempted to stay with Oldham then," he explained, "but Steve McCormack (Widnes coach) said the decision was up to me and that, if I wished, I could go back to Widnes and fight for a first-team spot.

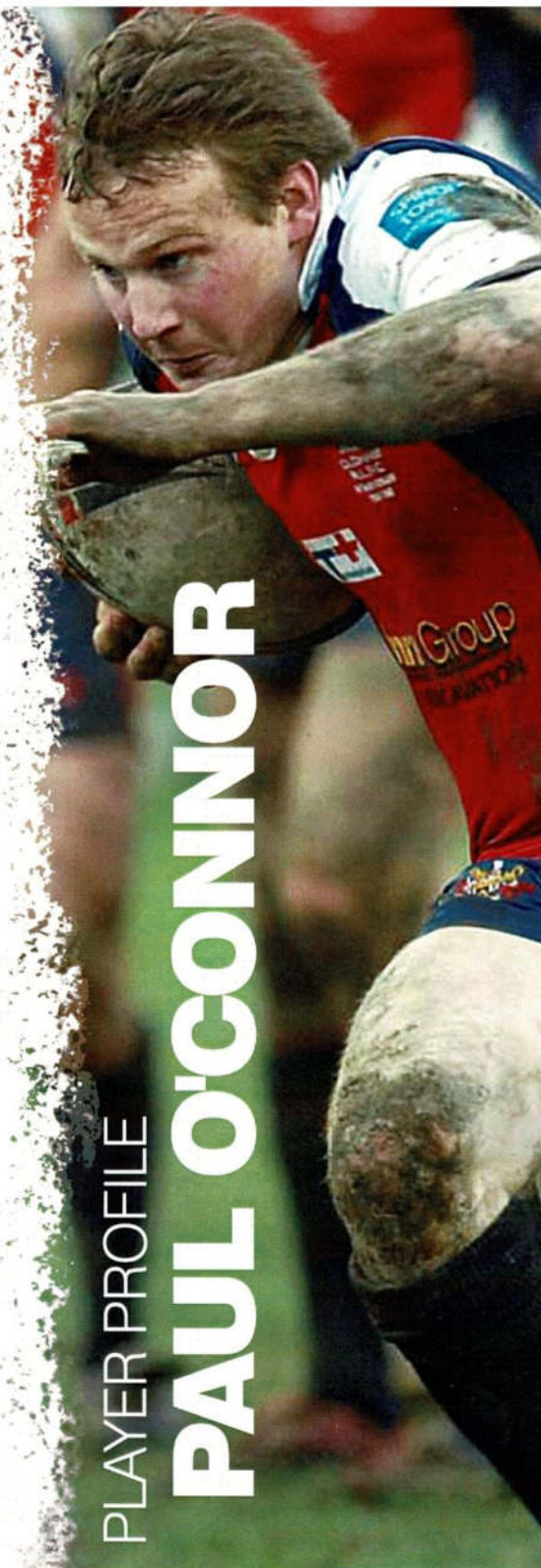
"I went for it, but it didn't happen and so at the end of last season I made the decision to head off on my travels. Then Deaks rang me and you know the rest.

"I'll be sorry to leave at the end of May because I'm really enjoying myself here. The atmosphere is a lot different than last year. Then we were fighting against relegation. Now, we are all geared up towards the target of promotion, and that is bound to make a big difference.

"It will be a very tough division, but if we can do well home and away against the likes of Featherstone and Celtic Crusaders and reach a good level of consistency I think we will be there or thereabouts.

"I'm pleased at the way things are going on a personal level. At Widnes I felt I could have been pushing for a first-team place and I like to think my form for Oldham so far this season has reaffirmed that.

"None of us is getting carried away, though. We haven't won many games and we know we can all improve our individual performances."



PLAYER PROFILE
PAUL O'CONNOR

AROUND & ABOUT

with The Heritage Trust



Bernard Ganley collects RL Championship Cup.

50 YEARS ---- WHERE'S IT GONE?

Next month there will be an important milestone in the history of Oldham Rugby League Football Club. On Friday May 18th it will be 50 years to the very day since Bernard Ganley lifted the Championship trophy at Odsal to the delight of thousands and thousands of Roughyeds fans. And, for at least of those of us still around, surely a day of celebration.

50 years ago! Where's it gone? I was eleven at the time living in a terraced house - complete with the obligatory outside loo and a tin bath hanging on a nail on the backyard wall - hardly a Charlie Winslade pass from Watersheddings' popular side stand. Posters displayed in the downstairs window of half a dozen houses in our row offered coach seats to Bradford for Saturday's big match. Oldham vs. Hull...3/-. Success was one of only a handful of things not rationed at that time, so, despite post-war austerity business was brisk.

Coaches were commandeered from all over the county. Ours was an old job from Wigan. The driver said that the very same coach had taken Oldham fans to the 1927 Challenge Cup final when the Watersheddings' side played Swinton at Central Park and that it had been spirited away during the war so as not to be called in for scrap!

Coaches and cars (but mostly coaches) snaked over the Pennines wagon train formation. There were crates of bottled beer on board - a couple of which were compliments of the Wellington on Ripponden Rd where Oldham stalwart Percy Carter was mine-hoist. I remember the moans when the driver had to make yet

another comfort stop. On the basis that we didn't want to get snarled up with the Hull wagon train we parked on a side street miles from Odsal.

Although the lead changed hands four times and there was an exciting climax the 1956-57 Championship final wasn't a classic. All the indicators had pointed to the fact that it should have been. Oldham had won 33 league matches that season - a record for the competition at that time - their 893 points (remember only three points for a try in those days) being the greatest haul since Wagstaff's rampant Huddersfield side clocked-up 996 way back before the First World War. The Roughyeds had earned themselves the reputation of being a team that played open rugby to some style whilst opponents and reigning champions Hull, renowned for the strength of their pack, also had a set of backs that given the opportunity could take advantage.

The Oldham Evening Chronicle's reporter of the period, wrote of his hometown side, "Not for a long time on the field of rugby have so few brought so much colour into grimy Oldham life. Off the field too, Oldham have managed to keep things hotted-up in the world of controversy; retirements, transfer requests and revolts have all helped them to be the most talked-about team this century. But Oldham will be best remembered for its rugby.... its charming, hair-raising, honest-to-goodness, fan-winning rugby league."

At the end of that season's campaign Oldham sat proudly at the top of the single division of 30 clubs with 66 points whilst the Boulevard side finished runners-up with 60. The top four clubs

played off for the two final spots. 20,000 spectators were shoehorned into Watersheddings to watch Oldham beat fourth placed Leeds 22-12, whilst Hull slaughtered third placed Barrow 45-14.

The match was played on a bright, late spring Saturday afternoon, the 62,217 Odsal crowd almost double that for the Hull vs. Halifax final the previous season and - unlike the modern era - the stadium wasn't awash with colourful favours but a sea of cloth caps, trilbies, uniforms and gabardine.

The two teams lined up as follows:

Hull: Colin Hutton: Stan Cowan, Geoff Dannatt, Carl Turner, Ivor Watts: Rowley Moat, Tommy Finn: Mick Scott, Tommy Harris, Jim Drake, Cyril Sykes, Bill Drake, Johnny Whiteley. (Manager-coach Roy Francis).

Oldham: Bernard Ganley: Dick Cracknell, Alan Davies, Dennis Ayres, John Etty: Frank Daley, Frank Pitchford: Ken Jackson, Jack Keith, Don Vines, Sid Little, Charlie Winslade, Derek Turner. (Manager-coach Griff Jenkins).

Referee: Matt Coates (Pudsey).

Colours: Hull - black and white; Oldham - red and white.

Oldham's centre Alan Davies, forwards Sid Little and Derek Turner, along with Hull's Welsh hooker Tommy Harris, had earlier in the season figured in the Ashes- winning series against the touring Australians and subsequently all four plus Hull's loose-forward Johnny Whiteley had been selected for the forthcoming World Cup.

In Oldham the match is still remembered as the Frank Pitchford final. Roughyeds' fans still talk about how in the dying minutes the explosive scrum-half had been instrumental in extending Oldham's lead from just one point to four and then in a moment of madness almost threw the match away. It started with Hull attacking the Oldham line with seven minutes to go and the game on a knife-edge. Scottish winger Stan Cowan dropped the ball only for the spring-heeled Oldham half to scoop it up, culminating in winger John Etty scoring an unconverted try in the corner pushing the score out to 15-11. Then came that moment of madness. Oldham fans were counting down the clock when Pitchford quite unnecessarily attempted one of his trademark long passes, only to give Cowan chance to intercept and fully make amends for his earlier error. All full-back Bernard Ganley could do was to stop the wingman from touching down under the posts. With the score at 15-14 in Oldham's favour, goal-kicker Colin Hutton had only to convert to win the game. It was all over bar the shouting. But, much to Oldham's relief and Hull's woe, the normally reliable kicker missed a sitter.

The Roughyeds' had started the match firm favourites but it was soon evident that the reigning champions weren't about to give up their title without a scrap. Hutton opened Hull's account in just the fourth minute when he kicked a penalty goal awarded for Oldham falling off-side. The Roughyeds' hooker Jack Keith was taking a pasting from Tommy Harris in the early scrums but despite being starved of the ball Oldham were first to cross for a try. In the 24th minute Welsh international second-row forward Charlie Winslade split the Hull defence with a magnificent break and passed the ball to Pitchford, who in turn put Etty in for the first of his brace of tries. Beating Harris the winger turned inside to score close to the post, allowing marksman Ganley an easy conversion to put the score at 5-2.

Just five minutes later Oldham were again in trouble when a fussy Coates pulled them up for being offside at the scrum. Hutton again took advantage to narrow the Oldham lead to just one point. Oldham's loose-forward Derek Turner was then held up over the line and second-rower Sid Little had a try disallowed for a double

movement but it was the Airlie-Birds who went into the break 6-5 in front, after Hutton dropped a goal seconds before the half time whistle.

It had been an unattractive first half. A combination of tenacious Hull tackling and Harris dominating the scrums had hardly allowed the Watersheddings' side to further practice the fast-flowing style that its fans had become to expect. And, worse was to come. Expecting the half time dressing-down to have the desired effect, Oldham supporters were driven to silence when just five minutes into the second half Hull's international loose-forward Johnny Whiteley made the gap for centre Carl Turner to break through and crash through a desperate tackle by Dennis Ayres to score under the posts. A delighted Colin Hutton added the extras to put the Humberiders 11-5 in front.

For the next 25 minutes Oldham dominated the game. The unfortunate Hull second-row Cyril Sykes (down injured) was penalised by referee Coates for not playing the ball. Ganley converted from halfway to reduce the margin to 11-7.

The Oldham forwards were now well on top with Derek Turner giving the Hull forwards a torrid time. Welsh prop-forward Don Vines got centre Alan Davies away. Davies in turn fed the ball to fellow centre Dennis Ayres, who scored just wide of the sticks. Ganley converted to take the score to 12-11. Pitchford, with the line open, was brought back for a forward pass, as later was Sid Little. Then came the Etty and Cowan tries.

Even then the game wasn't dead. In the last few seconds a Mick Scott kick settled behind the Oldham line only for John Etty to nudge Geoff Dannatt in the race to the ball. To Oldham fans' relief the ball was made dead, the final whistle blew and the celebrations could begin. Mr. E. Hardaker, the Hull FC chairman told the Oldham Evening Chronicle, "I'm satisfied with the result. Oldham were certainly the best team on the day and just about deserved to win", whilst Oldham's chairman, Mr. W. Howard added, "Even suffering an off-day Oldham still showed that they were worthy champions. It has been a great season." The Chronicle's man summed it up, "It was a rugged final with a fantastic finish, and though Oldham were not their normal selves they still left no doubt that as far as class went they were much better than Hull."

Looking back over all those years one of rugby league's oddities surely must be that a club of Oldham's stature, which, for almost all of its 80 years history had lorded it amongst the best, has, since that day in 1957, failed to reach the final of the Challenge Cup, Championship, First Division Premiership or even the John Player/Regal Trophy never mind winning it. Considering that there have been frequent periods during the last 50 years when the club, founder members of Super League, have been feared by the best and a trip to Watersheddings low on any club's wish list, it's quite remarkable. What odds would the bookies give last year's double winners St Helens against not appearing in another major final before 2057?

That being said, one thing's for sure, Alan Davies, John Etty, Frank Stirrup, Sid Little, Bernard Ganley & Co will be back in town on May 18th to celebrate in style. Why not join them. I am.

Watch the press for details.

Brian Walker

Does anyone have a copy of the Oldham RLFC Supporters' 1957 Year Book they could let us have?

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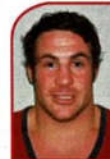
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new kids on the block by Roger Halstead

Roughyeds swoop for talented trio

ROUGHYEDS completed their third new signing in ten days over the weekend with the capture of young Bradford Bulls prop Tony Tonks, who spent the whole of last season out on loan at Doncaster Lakers.

A Normanton lad, he spent six seasons at Odsal --- including last year when he was loaned out --- and he isn't 22 until later this month.

He comes on the high recommendation of Bradford coach Steve McNamara and he will be a huge asset to Roughyeds as they seek to extend and improve the size and overall quality of their squad for the challenges that lie ahead in the battle to get out of Co-Operative National League Two at the earliest opportunity.

He was a full-time pro at Bradford where, in 2003 at the age of 18, he was named the junior academy side's most improved performer. It was felt he would benefit from a season in NL1 with Doncaster and he fulfilled the confidence Bulls had in him by playing in every Doncaster game bar three.

Part of his settlement agreement with Bradford was that he would be released without a fee and, in order to sign him on a deal until the end of November, Roughyeds had to fend off competition from other clubs, including interest from one club in France.

Tony said: "I am starting a new phase of my rugby career and I wanted it to be at a club that was moving forward and striving to go places. Having talked to Oldham I was left in no doubt that I could be a part of something good."

In the few days prior to the Tonks deal going through, Roughyeds had also underlined their intentions by recruiting half-back Lee Sanderson from Barrow and signing the former Widnes Vikings winger Lucas Onyango.

Lee is the nephew of former Oldham hooker Ian Sanderson, who played 76 games for the club between 1984 and 1989. He turned pro for hometown Leigh and later moved to London Broncos where he suffered a serious knee injury.

Brief spells followed at Rochdale and Barrow, to whom Roughyeds paid an undisclosed transfer fee to acquire the services of an undoubtedly talented player, who is hoping a change of club will bring a change of luck.

He made an impressive debut as Simeon Hoyle's replacement hooker at Swinton, but he couldn't play at Keighley in the cup because he signed after the deadline.

Lucas Onyango, aged 25, was also sidelined at Keighley for the same reasons but, like Tonks, he is sure to make his debut soon.

He is only the second high profile Kenyan rugby union player to change codes since Edward Rombo signed for Leeds in 1990.

Lucas, a flier, represented Kenya at RU sevens in the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester and also in the 2005 Rugby World Sevens in Hong Kong.

He had a brief spell with Sale Sharks and he was leading try scorer for Manchester RU Club in the 2004-5 winter season before signing a one-year contract with Widnes Vikings.

In an article in 'Springbok Rugby' in December, 2005, headlined 'Lucas Onyango goes League', Lucas said: "League is like playing a longer version of sevens with 13 men -- and you don't have many breakdowns like in sevens."

"There are no rucks, mauls, line-outs. It is fast and requires a lot of fitness, which we see a lot of at training with the fitness coach."

"It is good to realise my dream of being a professional rugby player. I would like to see more of the lads at home working harder to also realise their dreams of playing abroad."

"Rugby League is as big as football in the North of England and that's why it was easy for me to make the decision to cross over. The fans are really passionate and show up in thousands to the games."

"The coaches are great. I found it hard at first to learn the new rules, but practice makes perfect. I am working hard on it and I can't wait to show the fans and my new team mates what I am made of."



LEE SANDERSON



LUCAS ONYANGO

the bootroom

THE MEN WHO CARRY ROUGHYEDS' HOPES AND AMBITIONS INTO 2007.

ASHTON, Paul (half-back): Aged 27, Paul learned his trade at Saddleworth before playing for Halifax, Rochdale, Keighley and Swinton. Got his big chance at Oldham in 2006, initially on a week-to-week basis, and did enough to earn a full contract for 2007. Can play at scrum-half or stand-off.

BAINES, Chris (back-row): A young forward who also did enough for coach Steve Deakin last year, while on loan from Warrington, to win a contract for the latter part of 2006 and then for 2007. Toured New Zealand with Great Britain Young Lions in 2003. Product of Chorley Panthers and Wigan St Pat's.

BOULTS, Jason (prop): One of many new boys in the Roughyeds squad for 2007, 23-year-old Jason arrived on the recommendation of two of his former Halifax team mates, Jamie Bloom and Alan Hadcroft. Spent four years as a young pro with Bradford and then had two seasons at The Shay, missing only a handful of games.

COSTIN, Geno (prop or back-row): A 22-year-old Aussie, Geno first established himself in the Queensland Cup with Wynnum-Manly, but last year played in the same comp for Logan Souths. A rugby workaholic, he puts in overtime on defence and, in possession, always runs strong and straight.

CRABTREE, Andy (hooker): Won Great Britain academy honours in his Wigan Warriors days. Came from Swinton this year. A tidy footballer with good hands and game awareness, he can also play loose-forward. Alert and alive at dummy half.

GOREY, Andy (winger): A scrum-half in his Royton Tigers days, Andy became a good full-back in the former Roughyeds academy side. It was as a winger, however, that he finished 2006 as the club's top try scorer with ten --- no mean feat in a losing side.

HADCROFT, Alan (centre): A robust middle back, 29-year-old Alan signed from Halifax for the 2006 season, but his campaign was marred by a series of shoulder injuries, notably at Barrow and Whitehaven. Future as a player in some doubt, but highly regarded as coach Steve Deakin's acting No 2.

HODSON, Ian (back-row): Initially rejected new offer for 2007 due to work commitments, but the Roughyeds door remained open and he re-signed in March after playing the odd game or two for Tyldesley RU Club. One of the club's better performers in 2006, he always gave maximum input, even when asked to play at stand-off.

HOUGH, John (hooker): First player to sign for the new Roughyeds club. Still here nearly ten years later --- that's loyalty with a capital L. Joined Warrington from Waterhead as a boy, but carved himself a niche in the annals of the new Oldham club when he signed as a free agent on December 2, 1997. Has played more than 230 games.

HOUSTON, Drew (second-row or centre): Once a youngster linked with Melbourne Storm, Drew had two seasons in the Queensland Cup with Storm feeder club Brisbane Norths before heading south to join

Dapto whom he helped to become champions of the Illawarra competition last year.

HOYLE, Simeon (hooker): Formerly with Keighley and Halifax, Simeon is a hooker of the old school --- tough in defence yet able to make things happen from dummy half. Helped Keighley to win promotion in 2003 in the same team as Paul Ashton, Richard Mervill and Ian Sinfield.

LANGLEY, Gareth (winger): Pacy, and a good finisher, 'Gaz' joined Roughyeds this year after five years at St Helens. He was Saints academy player of the year in 2005 and runner-up in 2006. Played at Salford as a teenager before joining his hometown club at Knowsley Road.

LITTLER, Craig (centre): Another Saints old boy, Craig was Langley's centre for four years at Knowsley Road. A year younger, he had the chance of another year with St Helens academy, but opted to sign for Roughyeds and continue his centre-wing partnership with Langley.

MERVILL, Richard (prop): Formerly with Halifax and Keighley, Richard joined Roughyeds for 2007 after playing Down Under in the same Dapto side as Drew Houston. Suffered a broken hand in one of his early games for Roughyeds, but goes into Co-Operative NL2 action in a good seam of form.

O'CONNOR, Paul (full-back): Signed for hometown Widnes after winning students' international honours for Ireland and for Great Britain. Looked good in three loan games for Roughyeds in 2006 and returned on a more permanent basis in 2007, although he will be away for 14 weeks on a pre-arranged trip Down Under.

OGDEN, Mark (stand-off): A 23-year-old from Queensland, Mark is an accomplished playmaker who can dictate from outside-half. He was in the Brisbane Broncos development squad as a teenager and in 2000, aged 17, he played for Queensland Schoolboys. Reliable goalkicker for Wynnum and Logan Souths.

OLDHAM, Stuart (winger): Formerly with St Helens and Swinton, Stuart played his first serious rugby with Sedgley Park and Liverpool St Helens RU clubs before switching codes to join Saints. Had two seasons with Swinton and became one of six Lions to sign for Roughyeds for 2007.

ONYANGO, Lucas (winger): A real flier, aged 25, Lucas grew up in rugby union in his native Kenya. Has played for Sale Sharks, Manchester and Leigh in Union, and also Widnes Vikings in League. Did well at Vikings before damaging a knee. Over that now and keen to make the most of his chance at Oldham.

RODEN, Neil (half-back): Neil rejoined Roughyeds from Leigh for 2007 after leaving the club initially to go to Batley in 2004. In his first stint here he scored 290 points (68 tries and 18 drop goals) in 142 games over four and a half seasons. Has overtaken Mark Sibson as the 'new' club's leading all-time try scorer.

ROGERS, Wes (prop): Aged 29, and club captain. Like Neil Roden and Ian Sinfield, has rejoined Roughyeds for a second spell. Signed for Widnes as a 15-year-old, then had three years at Swinton, one here, three at Rochdale and three more at Swinton before coming "home" for 2007.

SANDERSON, Lee (halfback, hooker): Signed in March after a difficult period with Barrow. Roughyeds paid an undisclosed transfer fee for the Leigh lad, whose uncle, Ian, was an accomplished Oldham hooker in Watersheddings days. Lee has previously played for Leigh, London Broncos, Rochdale and Barrow.

SINFIELD, Ian (back-row): Another experienced forward who has returned to his hometown club for a second stint. Brother of Leeds captain, Kevin Sinfield, Ian played in the first ever Roughyeds game at Rochdale on New Year's Day, 1998. Had four years here, then moved on to Rochdale, Keighley and Swinton.

SMITH, Kris (back-row or centre): Kris, aged 28, has been on the books of four Super League clubs, namely Leeds, Salford, London and Halifax. A product of the Eccles amateur club, he was snapped up by Leeds while still a teenager. Joined Roughyeds after four seasons at Swinton.

STOUT, Michael (second-row or centre): Signed from Swinton, Michael has a good turn of speed for a forward and likes to use it while breaking wide out. Played at academy level for both Warrington and Widnes. Chose to join Oldham after rejecting a Swinton offer for 2007.

TAMGHART, Said (utility): A French international, Said has represented his country at every level, including full Test matches against Australia and New Zealand. Came under Steve Deakin's influence when both were at UTC, better known now as Perpignan-based Catalans Dragons.

TONKS, Tony (prop): Roughyeds have high hopes of the 22-year-old Yorkshireman, signed from Bradford Bulls just prior to the start of the Co-Operative NL2 season. One year at Wakefield academy, then six at Bulls as a full-time pro, including last season on loan at Doncaster.

WILKINSON, Alex (centre, wing): Played his early rugby with Royton Tigers and toured with GB schoolboys to Australia in 1999 and with England academy to New Zealand and Australia in 2001. While a young pro at Bradford Bulls, he had loan spells with London Broncos, Huddersfield and Hull before going part-time with Roughyeds to continue his studies.

WINGFIELD, Lee (second-row): Played for GB at amateur level in Russia, France and Australia, but desperately unlucky with injuries since he turned pro for Roughyeds on a two-year deal covering 2006 and 2007. In top form early this year, but then broke a hand before suffering a serious knee injury against Swinton on his first game back.

with Ian Wilson

roughyeds' roar!

I heartily approve of some of the things done by our leaders at the RFL. One example is their successful effort to generate what might be regarded as ethically-acceptable sponsors for the game, in Northern Rail, Engage, Leeds Met. and now the Co-operative movement - quite an achievement, in what I am sure has not been an easy market in which to operate. Another is the success in getting some National Leagues TV exposure. No doubt the aim is for the current deal with Sky to be merely the starting point - though this now will very much depend on the clubs involved, and how effectively they work to make a success of the coverage. I hope they are putting huge collective efforts into making tomorrow night's first broadcast something which will set a high standard. We will all benefit if the "product" is such that there are several broadcasters competing to get the contract next time it comes up.

In spite of some of the criticism they have received, I approve too of the move to a panel of full-time referees. There can be no denying that there have been a few high-profile errors made by refs in Super League matches during the first few weeks of this season - but so there have by full-time soccer refs and cricket umpires. They remain human beings, even if they are full-time! The long-term benefits of the move must surely be worth the additional cost to the game.

My enthusiasm is not so great, however, for the new points-scoring system. Whilst I am happy to acknowledge that it is worthwhile as an experiment, I am far from convinced - and I have not yet seen a convincing rationale for the decision to award a bonus point for narrow losers. There has been well-founded criticism aplenty of the possibility of a club being promoted on the basis of bonus points only, even though it has won fewer games than a rival. There is also a lack of positive incentive in the current system for a side to win by a decent margin. Suppose there is a 15-point margin between two teams with five minutes to go; there is then supposedly an incentive for the losers to score a try, to win a bonus point; but what incentive is there for the side in the lead to prevent them?

My criticism, though, is more to do with what the system assumes about what motivates teams and players. It makes the assumption that professional rugby league players will be persuaded to, in some sense, try harder if they have the chance of gaining a losers' bonus point for their side than if it were not available. I really find it very difficult to believe that this is the case - in which case, the whole system collapses in a heap! It will be interesting to see the analysis done of the system's impact, before a decision is made about whether or not to introduce bonus points on a permanent basis; but I think not!

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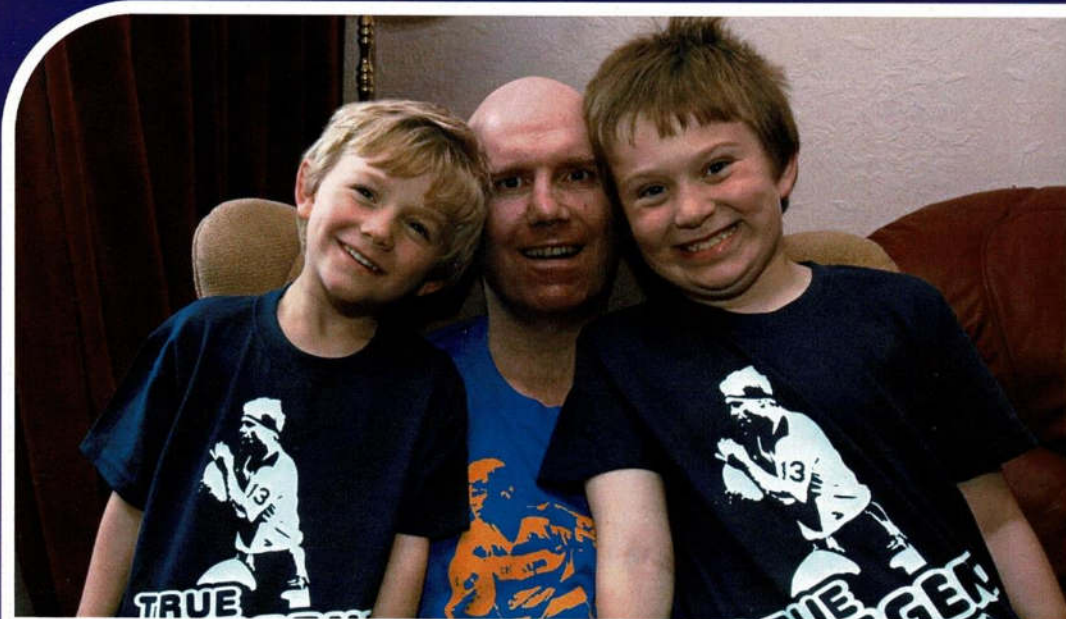
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carnegie challenge cup

by ROGER HALSTEAD

ROUGHYEDS will appear in the fifth round of the Carnegie Challenge Cup for the fourth time in the ten years since the 'new' club was formed for the start of the 1998 season.

Having won 26-10 at East Hull in round three on March 10, Steve Deakin's men triumphed 26-16 at Keighley in round four last Sunday to earn their spot in the draw for the last 16 when it was made on BBC television last evening.

Due to print deadlines this match-day magazine had gone to press earlier in the day, but you will all know by now what the luck, or the ill-luck, of the draw had in store for us.

We went into the mix with only one other Co-Operative National League Two side, Barrow, and with only three teams from Co-Operative National League One, namely Sheffield Eagles, Rochdale Hornets and Whitehaven.

The 11 Super League clubs involved were Huddersfield, Hull, Salford, Bradford, St Helens, Leeds, Catalans Dragons, Warrington, Harlequins, Wakefield and Wigan.

Most of them had easy wins against teams from lower divisions in round four, although Bradford didn't have it all their own way when beating Castleford 24-16; Wigan had it all to do to win 34-24 at Widnes; and Warrington removed Hull KR 38-10.

Our lads, meanwhile, were picking up their third win in four outings at Keighley, where we trailed 8-0 at half-time, but came good in the second half to record five tries by Gareth Langley (2), Kris Smith (2) and Paul Ashton, who also landed three conversions.

We trailed 16-12 as the tie edged into its last ten minutes, but three tries in the last ten took us safely through.

Ashton played a key role because it was his solo try early in the second half that put us in front for the first time and he

then went on to set up the try that put us back on level pegging at 16-16 in the 70th minute.

Kris Smith also had reason to boast a few smiles after setting us on our way with a one-on-one ball steal early in the second half that led to Gareth Langley's first try, and then twice scoring himself late on.

So through we went to reach the last 16 and to emulate what we did in 1999, 2001 and 2004.

For the record, this is what we did in those earlier competitions:

In 1999 we beat Eccles 26-7 at Spotland and Dewsbury 18-10 at Spotland before losing 18-2 up at Whitehaven.

In 2001 we won 64-0 against Queensbury at Boundary Park, then beat Hull KR 17-6 at Boundary Park before going out to Wakefield, also here, 26-6.

In 2004 we beat amateurs in rounds three and four -- Castleford Panthers 16-8 and Sharlston 24-4, both at Boundary Park --- before Warrington knocked us out, 44-10, also here at Boundary Park.

Last weekend's fourth-round results were as follows: Keighley 16, OLDHAM 26; Dewsbury 28, Sheffield 46; Salford 64, Gateshead 14; Bradford 24, Castleford 16; St Helens 78, Batley 14; Leeds 72, Workington 10; Catalans 70, Featherstone 12; Warrington 38, Hull KR 10; Pia 8, Harlequins 64; London Skolars 4, Wakefield 52; Widnes 24, Wigan 34; Huddersfield 74, York 4; Hull 78, Hunslet 0; Rochdale 20, Celtic Crusaders 16; Whitehaven 36, Halifax 8; Swinton 14, Barrow 47;

SUPPORT GROUP NEWS

THE good win against Swinton was a tremendous boost for the morale of all who have been travelling the long road of despondency in the last 12 months. We so enjoyed that special feeling, being very aware of the importance of the win, in terms of regaining confidence and putting an end to the media emphasis on our recent history. We can now look forward and anticipate the future in a positive manner and with fresh enthusiasm. Good luck to Steve and all the lads as we commence the Co-operative National League Two campaign.

My special thanks go to the small band of people who continue to support and enjoy the quiz evenings. Perhaps you would consider joining us for the next one. I must warn you, however, that there is no prize money, just simple prizes of various goodies, and that the level of competition is just... FUN!

QUIZ NIGHT

Tuesday, 8th May, 8.30pm in the social club lounge

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REAL ROUGHYEDS

Do you see a glass that's half empty, or a glass that's still half full?

Do you see a soft and lovely day, when the weather is cloudy and dull?

Do you see a team of losers, or real guys giving their all, 'Do or Die'?

Well, you can do the choosing, and even if we're losing,

It's a real big deal just to know how you feel,

And to stand with your head held high,

And, whatever the score, it's never a bore,

IT'S ROUGHYEDS TILL I DIE!!!

Grant, March, 2007.

Rovers fancied for honours, but . . .

COACH HOBBS URGES CAUTION

by ROGER HALSTEAD

DAVID Hobbs, former Oldham player, ex-ally of one-time Roughyeds boss Gary Mercer and now head man at Featherstone, is urging Rovers fans not to get carried away by pre-season talk of promotion.

Experience has taught the Yorkshireman, who scored 265 points in 60 appearances for Oldham in the mid-1980s, that you can take nothing for granted in rugby league.

"People are making us favourites, but the Co-operative National League Two will be very competitive indeed," says the Rovers coach. "You only have to look at Celtic Crusaders, York, Swinton and Barrow -- a much improved side from last year -- to see that there are banana skins all over the place.

"We have to make sure we are professional and that we are prepared to tough it out in the games we are expected to win."

Hobbs joined Oldham late on in the 1984-85 season and left in 1987 to join Bradford where he became club captain and

Twenty one years on he has assembled a strong squad at Post Office Road (they can call it what they want but it will always be Post Office Road to this traditionalist) and has brought in quality signings like centre Jon Whittle, utility back Dean Colton, half-back Paul Handforth and prop Gareth Handford.

There are still a few old stagers around, though, and they don't come any better than CAPTAIN COURAGEOUS Stuart Dickens, an 80-minute prop, first-choice goalkicker, role model and hugely popular clubman.

At the age of 29 Stu is in his testimonial year and when it comes to pay-off time there will be no more popular recipient among supporters than the man who briefly tried his luck at Salford only to realise that there was no place like home.

Ian Tonks (31) and Dickens form the engine room of the Rovers pack, while one-club man Steve Dooler operates behind them in the second row, having had a testimonial last year.

Half-back Handforth, who has had Super League experience with Castleford and Wakefield, plays a key pivotal role and is our choice as TOP GUN.

For ONE TO WATCH you need look no further than 26-year-old prop Handford, whose no-nonsense style has quickly made him a cult figure at Rovers after previous experience at the Bulls, Wildcats and Lakers. His arrival takes a lot of the responsibility off the shoulders of Dickens and Tonks and gives Hobbs front-row options.

SHOOTING STAR? Full-back Nathan Larvin, at the age of 21, fits the bill admirably. He had a fine season in 2006 and looks to be building on it in 2007.

As for BEST OF THE REST you can go for unsung hero James Houston; former Cas, Harlequins and Wakefield forward Tommy Haughey; midfield maestro Chris Ross; new signing Jamie Field; threequarters Danny Kimmond, Wayne McHugh, Dale Cardoza and Jon Whittle, who should form a lethal partnership with Dean Colton.

Another key man is cultured ball handler Richard Blakeway, who can operate equally well at stand-off and loose-forward, while 22-year-old hooker Paul Hughes is coming along nicely after joining Rovers from the Wildcats.

All in all a nice mix of youth and experience, pace and skill -- and a squad that is sure to be there or thereabouts when the crucial games come along at the business end of the season.

(My thanks to Chris Westwood for his invaluable help in this run-down on Rovers -- RH)

STUART DICKENS . . . ROVERS' ROLE MODEL. PICTURE BY BOB NUNN.



eventually player-coach.

In Wembley and Featherstone folklore, of course, he will always be remembered for his magnificent Lance Todd performance in the 1983 Challenge Cup final when hot favourites Hull were made to eat humble pie.

And Oldham fans won't easily forget his match-winning try against Widnes in the Lancashire Cup semi-final of 1986 which secured the Watersheddings boys a place in the final for the first time in 18 years.

Oldham RLFC Appearances and Scorers, 2007

players

statistics

[up to and including March 25]

NAME	PLAYED	TRIES	GOALS	POINTS
P.Ashton	5		7	14
C.Baines	5	1		4
J.Boults	6			
G.Costin	3	1		4
A.Crabtree	6			
A.Gorey	4			
I.Hodson	1			
D.Houston	7			
S.Hoyle	7	1		4
G.Langley	7	2		8
C.Littler	6			
R.Mervill	3			
P.O'Connor	7	3		12
M.Ogden	4	1	10	24
S.Oldham	1			
N.Roden	6	3		12
W.Rogers	6			
L.Sanderson	1			
I.Sinfield	7	1		12
K.Smith	6	2		8
M.Stout	4	1		4
S.Tamghart	7	1		4
A.Wilkinson	6	6		24
L.Wingfield	4	1		1

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NATIONAL LEAGUE TALK

with GARETH WALKER of RUGBY LEAGUER & LEAGUE EXPRESS



READY FOR LIFT-OFF

THIS weekend provides what most people linked with the Co-operative National Leagues have been waiting for - the big kick-off for the league campaign.

The Northern Rail Cup is a credible competition that should play a big part in the Rugby League calendar.

But for many, the NL1 and NL2 league seasons are what captures the attention most - and after weeks of waiting, they now get underway. It's certainly a tough start for every team in both competitions.

Most sides' schedule sees them play two games in the space of four days - how many other sporting competitions kick off with such a demanding challenge?

But there are also several positives to starting over the Easter weekend, including derby matches being played on traditionally well supported dates.

And with two games being shown live on Sky television - Widnes versus Leigh and Doncaster against Castleford - the National Leagues have never had a better opportunity to push forward their product.

So how have each team been shaping up so far ahead of the big kick-off?

In NL1, Castleford Tigers and Widnes Vikings appear to be the strongest two sides, an opinion backed up by their Carnegie Challenge Cup performances against Bradford and Wigan respectively.

But there will be a pack of clubs chasing them, and it's difficult to pick out which ones will be strongest.

Whitehaven look well placed to compete well again, and their comprehensive win over Halifax - themselves looking good early on - supports that.

Leigh Centurions have been up and down to date but still have a very capable squad, Rochdale Hornets have consistently done well in NL1 in recent years, and Batley Bulldogs will be seeking to build on last season's achievements.

Dewsbury Rams and Sheffield Eagles have put in some hugely encouraging performances already this year after their promotion campaigns in 2006, while Doncaster Lakers will be keen to put a difficult few weeks behind them as quickly as possible.

In NL2, three teams stood out during the NRC - Celtic Crusaders, Barrow Raiders and Featherstone Rovers. They will start the season as the favourites for the title, along with York City Knights, fresh from their year in NL1.

But again, the scramble behind them is likely to involve a host of other clubs.

Pretty much everyone will believe they can make the play-offs - a feat achieved last season by Swinton Lions and Gateshead Thunder.

Oldham, the other side relegated from NL1, have picked up significantly in recent weeks after a troubled 12 months, and although Hunslet Hawks have gone the other way after eye catching early wins over Dewsbury and Batley, they cannot be discounted.

The remaining four teams, Workington Town, Blackpool Panthers, Keighley Cougars and London Skolars, will all have belief that they can at least improve on last season's finishes.

It all adds up to a fascinating campaign.

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John Kettleton

Michael 'Braddy' Bradshaw, dinner circuit MC, mascot for
several sporting clubs and the man behind the Oldham-
based sporting memorabilia business, Sporting Image, is the
fifth £500 winner in the Roughyeds' monthly Five Alive draw.

His number, FA052, came up when the March draw was
made on Friday -- and it couldn't have come at a better time.

"I'm 35 on April 12," he said, "and on that day I'm going to
launch a Sporting Image website. It will cost me a lot to do it,
so the £500 will come in handy -- that's always assuming I
can convince my better half we don't necessarily have to
make a trip to the Trafford Centre!"

'Braddy', who joined Five Alive because he wanted to back
his hometown rugby league club, intends to recruit more
members, and given his track record in anything he turns his
hand to, Roughyeds are sure Five Alive membership will go
up from its current 84 once 'Braddy' starts to use his powers
of persuasion.

"I'm chuffed to win first prize," he added, "and I'm delighted to
hear membership is up to 84. I'll do my best to sign up a few
more."

A Waterhead man, 'Braddy' has connections with scores of
sports stars and he is currently working on testimonials for
top-line cricketers David Nash (Middlesex), Owais Shah
(Middlesex) and Paul Collingwood (Durham and England).

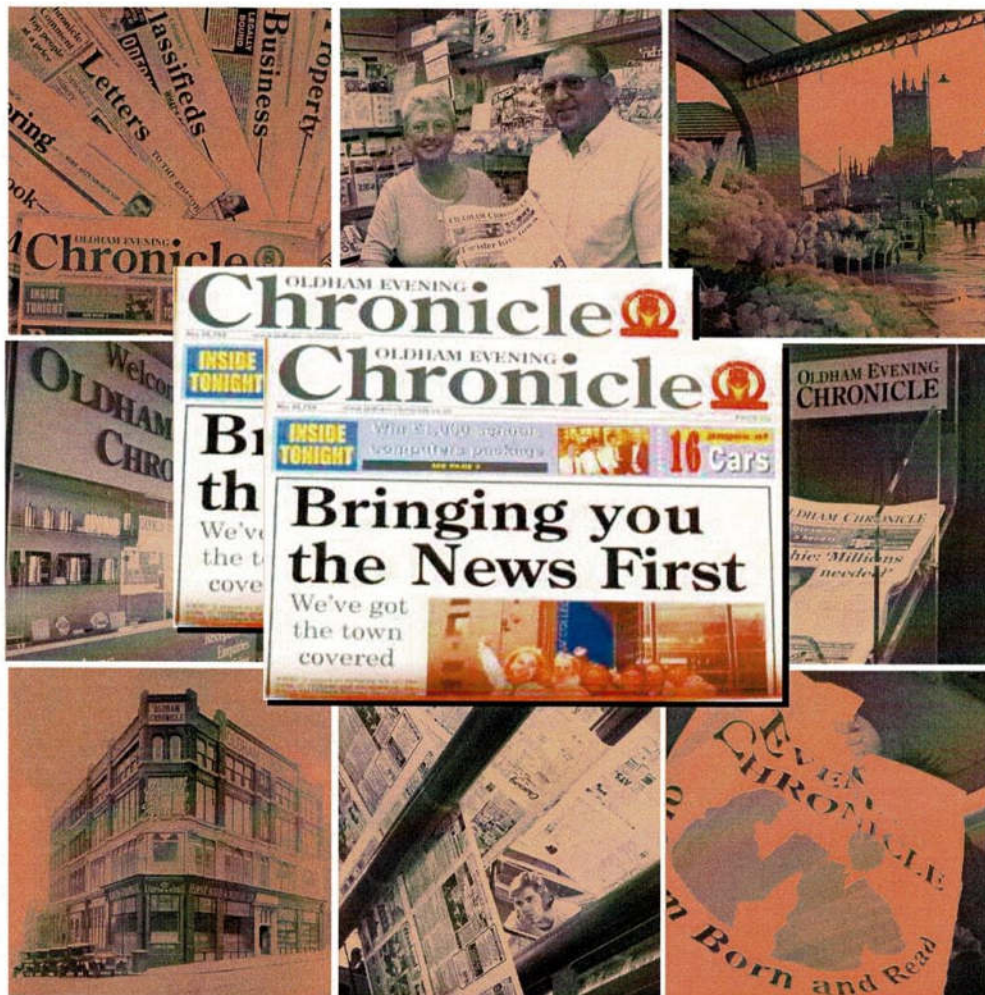
As a mascot he is second to none. He currently works for
Bradford Bulls and Great Britain in rugby league, Burnley in
football and Yorkshire county in cricket. He will also be 'Flex
the Dragon' at Wrexham FC's last four games of the season
and 'Sid the Pig' for financial giants, engage, at the Super
League's Millennium Magic weekend in Cardiff in May.

Second prize in the latest Five Alive draw -- two places in the
match-day hospitality suite with pre-match meal etc -- went
to John Smith (FA006), of JFS Mortgage Services Ltd, while
third prize (a £25 voucher for the club shop) was won by
Shirley Mullaney of H Mullaney and Son (Skip Hire) Ltd of
Mossley (FA053).

In the most recent Club Cash draw, A Waterhouse of Heyside
won £300; M Y Wrigley of Delph won the £100; and jackpot
prizes went to A McFarlane of Greenacres (European mini-
break courtesy of Travelcare) and to Pat Perrin of Mossley
(meal for two at Clayton Green).

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journalistic license

by Matthew Chambers

At this point in the year, it is customary to speculate that this Co-operative National League Two season promises to be a 'cracker'.

While that may usually be regarded as an empty platitude, on this occasion it is definitely true.

The teams involved in the competition may arguably lack the glamour of, say, the Widneses and the Castlefords of this world. But up in National League One, the combination of full-time and semi-professional clubs creates an imbalance that stifles real competition. With all the good will in the world, the likes of Batley and Sheffield won't be challenging for a Super League place come September as they simply can't compete resource-wise; instead, they will compete in a 'league within a league' to try and secure a place in the play-offs.

A tier below, things are a little different. Though today's visitors Featherstone and Celtic Crusaders are in a position to offer big money to entice players — Barrow, as illustrated by the big-money signing of Kiwi forward Michael Smith, fall in to this category too — the playing field appears to be more level.

Most pundits agree that there are six major players, those three aforementioned sides plus Oldham, Swinton and York.

But few are brave (or foolhardy?) enough to predict how exactly the cards will fall come the season's end. Having stuck my neck on the line and conservatively plumped for Oldham

finishing in fifth place behind Fev, Celtic, York and Barrow in the Chronicle's pre-season supplement, the Roughyeds' recent performances and new signings are causing a few doubts as to the wisdom of that prediction.

In general terms there's no doubt that peaks and troughs in form, injuries and movement in the player market from now on in will have a major impact in the final placings.

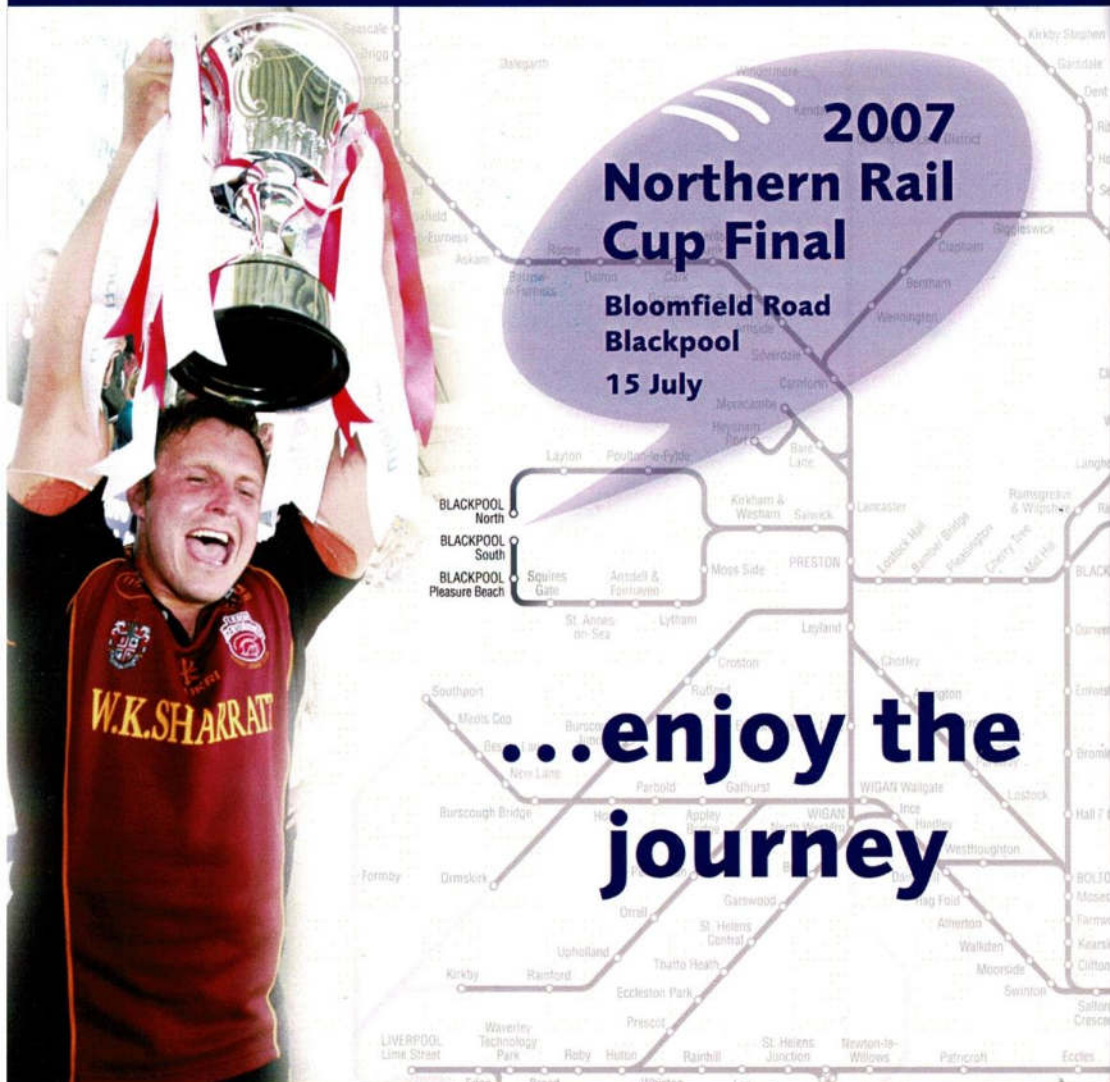
In turn, the unpredictability and ferocity of competition for places should breed some very exciting action this year. Which, given the extra coverage now given to the lower leagues by Sky Sports — albeit mainly concentrating on National League One — bodes well for all clubs below Super League.

* Tony Smith's appointment as the new Great Britain coach has caused a stir in some quarters, mainly due to the fact he isn't English.

Rugby league has little to learn from soccer in terms of player and fan behaviour and administrative blundering. But if there is one lesson to be taken from the England football team's recent exploits, it is this: accident of birth is not sufficient qualification for a successful coach.

Matthew

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down memory lane

with Murph

'MURPH' LAUNCHES A STROLL DOWN MEMORY LANE FOR FORMER PLAYERS

MARTIN Murphy, who played more post-war games for Oldham than any other player, is "proud and privileged" to become the first member of a new Oldham RL ex-players' association to be launched soon.

Now aged 58, and living in Moorside, the lion-heart full-back spent 15 years at Watersheddings and clocked up 462 first-team appearances to boast the third highest number of games for the club in more than 100 years of pro rugby league in Oldham.

Only Joe Ferguson (627 between 1899 and 1922) and Jack Read (463 between 1925 and 1939) played in more games than 'Murph', who was No 1 in the post-war record books; who wore No 1 on his full-back's shirt during his long service to Oldham; and who now becomes member No 1 in the club's new association for former players.

It is being set up in conjunction with Roughyeds and is open to anyone who has played professionally for either the current club or the previous Oldham club, which was liquidated in 1997.

"An active ex-players association in Oldham is long overdue and I am honoured to give it a kick-start," said Martin, who had the distinction of captaining the former club in its centenary season of 1976-77.

Still a window cleaner in the town after nearly 30 years in the job, he added: "I have wonderful memories of my rugby days and I would love to share them with the blokes who played for Oldham at the same time.

"In those days we spent years at one club and built up friendships which shouldn't be allowed to

fade as we get older. I still see some of my old team mates around town, but I would love to meet up again with out-of-towners like Tommy Davies, Tommy Warburton, Tommy Canning and Wilf Briggs, just to name four.

"An organised association will enable former players from various decades to renew old friendships. The years are rolling on. If we are going to do it there is no better time than now."

On behalf of the Roughyeds, former Oldham Chronicle reporter Roger Halstead, who covered

Oldham RL for the paper for more than 40 years, will work alongside Murphy in getting the new body up and running.

The plan is to hold an initial meeting in the Roughyeds social club on May 29 to be attended by Roughyeds, interested ex-players and particularly those who might wish to become involved in the setting up and administering of the association.

From that meeting, it is planned to launch the association publicly at the Oldham v Hunslet game at Boundary Park on Sunday, July 22.

In the meantime, all ex-players interested in joining Murphy on his trip down Memory Lane are

asked to ring Janet at the Roughyeds office on 0161 628 3677 or email to chris@oldhamrugbyleague.fsnet.co.uk providing name and contact details.

For the record, only eight players have recorded more than 400 senior games for Oldham, going back to 1876, and two of them played for years in the same team as Murphy — winger Mike Elliott (446 games) and hooker Kevin Taylor (429 games).

All three are included in the club's Hall of Fame



2007 fixtures

DATE	OPPONENTS	CUP	VENUE	K. O.	RESULT	W/L	ATT
31/01/07	Warrington Wolves	Friendly	Home	7.45pm	42-6	W	789
11/02/07	Rochdale Hornets	NRC	Home	3.00pm	8-24	L	1,145
18/02/07	Swinton Lions	NRC	Home	3.00pm	18-28	L	1,017
25/02/07	Dewsbury Rams	NRC	Away	3.00pm	22-32	L	819
04/03/07	Rochdale Hornets	NRC	Away	3.00pm	6-16	L	816
10/03/07	East Hull	CCC 3	Away	2.00pm	26-10	W	214
18/03/07	Dewsbury Rams	NRC	Home	3.00pm	8-32	L	622
25/03/07	Swinton Lions	NRC	Away	3.00pm	42-18	W	555
01/04/07	Keighley Cougars	CCC4	Away	3.00pm	26-16	W	1039
04/04/07	Featherstone Rovers	NL2	Home	7.45pm			
09/04/07	Hunslet Hawks	NL2	Away	3.30pm	NEW DATE BELOW		
15/04/07	Blackpool Panthers	NL2	Away	3.00pm			
22/04/07	NRC quarter finals						
29/04/07	Keighley Cougars	NL2	Home	3.00pm			
04/05/07	Celtic Crusaders	NL2	Away	7.35pm			
13/05/07	Swinton Lions	NL2	Home	3.00pm			
20/05/07	Barrow Raiders	NL2	Home	3.00pm			
26/05/07	London Skolars	NL2	Away	3.00pm			
03/06/07	Workington Town	NL2	Away	3.00pm			
10/06/07	York City Knights	NL2	Home*	3.00pm			
17/06/07	Featherstone Rovers	NL2	Away	3.00pm			
24/06/07	Keighley Cougars	NL2	Away	3.00pm			
01/07/07	Gateshead Thunder	NL2	Home*	3.00pm			
08/07/07	Swinton Lions	NL2	Away	3.00pm			
15/07/07	Barrow Raiders	NL2	Away	3.00pm			
22/07/07	Hunslet Hawks	NL2	Home	3.00pm			
29/07/07	York City Knights	NL2	Away	3.00pm			
05/08/07	Blackpool Panthers	NL2	Home	3.00pm			
12/08/07	Workington Town	NL2	Home	3.00pm			
19/08/07	Gateshead Thunder	NL2	Away	3.00pm			
22/08/07	Hunslet Hawks	NL2	Away	7.30pm			
02/09/07	Celtic Crusaders	NL2	Home	3.00pm			
09/09/07	London Skolars	NL2	Home	3.00pm			

Play offs will take place on Sundays, September 16, 23 and 30 with the Grand Final on Sunday 7th October.
Home* venue to be arranged.

Key

NRC - Northern Rail Cup
NL2 - National League Division 2
CCC - Carnegie Challenge Cup

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Oldham RLFC fully support the Let's tackle Racism in Rugby League campaign and welcomes all players and spectators irrespective of their ethnic or racial origins. Racism has no place in our game and racist chants are totally unacceptable.

Allow everyone to enjoy the game.

Impact

RUGBY APPAREL

**SPECIALISTS IN THE
DESIGN AND
MANUFACTURE OF
PERFORMANCE
RUGBY
EQUIPMENT.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

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