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(see flashback, page 23)

(picture by Oldham Evening Chronicle)

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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 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 (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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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

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Oldham Evening Chronicle, League Publications
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boardroom **view**

with Chris Hamilton



Friday, May 4, will be a date that lasts long in the memory of every Oldham rugby fan. The result against Celtic Crusaders was absolutely fantastic, given that it looked like we had been sent as sacrificial lambs to a weekend of Super League.

All the talk at Bridgend was about that and how the Crusaders will soon be

amongst the big boys. How unfortunate that nobody had passed that message on to us!

We have long said that there is nothing better than going out, when odds are stacked against you and proving people wrong and that is certainly what the team did last Friday.

What made it particularly sweet was the fact that the victory was from a losing position of 26-6 and at that point it was merely a question of how many the Crusaders would win by!

To come back and win against a full-time team was truly fantastic and thoroughly deserved and a big pat on the back must go to everybody concerned.

To have played and won like that on the TV was even more special and as I said at the start of this piece, that date will stick in the minds of a lot more fans than were actually at the game.

We put Oldham rugby league back on the map and a lot of rugby league fans in general will have sat up and noticed that performance.

We are acutely aware, however, that it is only one match and one performance. Today is a totally different proposition as we find ourselves up against a Harlequins team who have already shown themselves to be a match for anyone in

Super League this season. They will be looking at this fixture and thinking that this tie gives them an ideal opportunity to progress in one of the game's prestige competitions.

It is typical of our luck that we are unable to play this game at Boundary Park but we hope that we will be able to put on another big performance in a game that will provide our toughest test yet this season.

The players have earned the right to play against Super League opposition and I am sure that they will be looking forward to testing themselves again today.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the support the team got at Bridgend as it is a hell of a journey (you want to try walking it!) and the people who made it there produced plenty of noise within a big crowd. The players appreciated your support and, after that performance, I am sure you will consider the trip to have been well worth it!

Today we can make a difference again if we get behind the team. Let's hope we can again talk about a great performance after 80 minutes.

Enjoy the game

Chris

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deeks's coach approach

with Steve Deakin



IT'S Carnegie Challenge Cup day today. Welcome to Boundary Park for this last-16 tie against Super League club Harlequins which gives our players a rare, but great, opportunity to showcase their abilities against some of the biggest names in the game.

We've all, at one time or another, from the stands or on the television, watched and admired the skills of Danny Orr, Scott Hill, Henry Paul, Mark McLinden, Lee Hopkins and the rest.

Today, the Roughyeds players will get the chance to see them and other top-quality Super League players at close quarters — and it isn't every day part-time professionals in the National Leagues share the same rugby field as full-timers from our elite competition. Oh, for the magic of the Challenge Cup.

From a personal point of view it is a very special occasion for me in that I will be coaching against one of my former Super League clubs and also coming up against one of Britain's leading coaches in Brian McDermott, with whom I worked at another Super League club, Huddersfield Giants.

This year the Quins have gone from strength to strength under the stewardship of Brian McDermott and Tony Rae, both of whom are doing an outstanding job — along with the players, the back-up staff and all the admin staff at The Stoop — in showcasing our great sport of rugby league in our capital city.

Had I been asked before the draw about Oldham's chances in a similar situation to that in which we find ourselves today my honest answer would have been on these lines — 95 times out of every 100 the Super League side will win. A realist has to conclude that to be the case.

But this is the cup, and what about the other five times?

Who can forget some famous upsets in recent times: Hull KR v Warrington, Leigh v Salford, Hunslet v Huddersfield or, further back in time, Featherstone's win at Wembley against mighty Hull, Oldham's defeat of Wigan in the Paddy Kirwan

final on that memorable night at Watersheddings or, one close to my heart, Sheffield's mighty Wembley victory against Wigan in 1998.

Not all those surprise results, of course, were part-timers versus full-timers, which is the situation we have today.

But one feature in all of them remained the same. The underdogs in each and every case not only prepared themselves for a win which would certainly be no shock to them but, more importantly, they really BELIEVED they could go out and do it.

Self-belief is an essential ingredient in the make-up of players and the mental attitude of teams. We will have prepared well for today's big challenge, believe me, and I hope we will have confidence in ourselves (self belief) to go out and give a good account of ourselves.

I hope local fans will back us in good numbers because, whatever the result of today's tie, we can look forward to a testing, yet enjoyable and potentially very rewarding season in Co-Operative National League Two.

We are currently in the middle of an extremely tough period of the season. I am writing these notes before our trip to South Wales on Friday night last week for the televised game against Celtic Crusaders at Bridgend, but whatever the outcome it was always going to be a demanding day involving a lot of travel followed by a very tough encounter against one of the more fancied teams in the division.

Today we take on a side that is more than capable of winning an end-of-season play-off spot in Super League and seven days later — next Sunday — we are back here at Boundary Park to entertain another side, Barrow, that has already made a lot of people sit up and take note, not only of their results but of the players they have signed.

Enjoy the game today — it is a special occasion for everyone associated with the Roughyeds — and please make every effort to come back again next Sunday and to give us as much vocal backing as you can generate in what promises to be one of the best NL2 games of the season against the revitalised and big-spending Barrow Raiders.

Enjoy ALL the games when you watch the Roughyeds,

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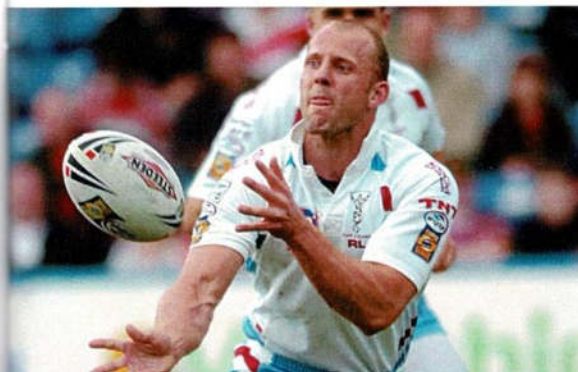
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'No longer can the London club be accused of over-reliance on Australian imports'



Scott Hill (Picture by Rugby League Photos.com)

last term.

Club captain Rob Purdham leads from the front. The current England captain, who led his country to victory in the Federation Shield last autumn, is a real worker who regularly tops the tackle count. He is also an accomplished goalkicker, who can play in the centre as well as the back row of the pack. Though settled in the capital, Rob makes no secret of the fact that he would still be a farmer in his native Cumbria if he wasn't a top-class sportsman.

In the back line Quins ooze star quality. Stand-off Scott Hill, with 11 caps for the Kangaroos and over ten years' experience in the NRL is the Quins' TOP GUN -- a fantastic ball player with an uncanny knack of creating space and then possessing the ability to put a team mate through the gap.

He is also a deceptive runner, who has scored a number of tries this year by running at the defence as they hold off while expecting the pass. This former Melbourne Storm stalwart is crucial to the Quins' attacking play and must be considered a huge threat to the Roughyeds.

Running off Hill will be Mark McLinden, the ex-Canberra Raiders half-back, who now operates mainly at full-back. Lightning pace, agility and athleticism are McLinden's key attributes as well as sound defence and bravery under the high ball.

The former Australian Schoolboys representative is definitely ONE TO WATCH, having carried off in 2006 the club's player of the year, players' player of the year and supporters' player of the year awards.

Other key men in the back line include:

Danny Orr, who has found a new lease of life this year after leaving the JJB at the end of last season and who links well with Hill in moving the side around the field.

Paul Sykes, the ex-Thornhill junior, who is a strong runner and a brutal defender in the centres.

Jon Wells, the reliable, long-serving winger who has also seen service with Castleford and Wakefield.

Chris Melling, a young full-back signed from Wigan who is proving there is life after leaving that hotbed of RL talent.

Tyrone Smith, deceptively strong and fast and a player who starred for Tonga in the Federation Shield.

Andy Smith, a strong-running winger who recently joined Quins from Bradford.

HARLEQUINS, formerly Crusaders and later Broncos, are in their second season as London's representatives in Super League. At the time of writing they were on the edge of the top six after an excellent Easter in which they enjoyed wins against Hull FC and Catalans Dragons, followed by a draw with Wakefield.

As one would expect of a side in the top half of the elite competition, the Quins side is packed with star players from both sides of the rugby league world, and they will be hoping that today sees them move into the quarter-finals of the Carnegie Challenge Cup at the expense of National League Two opposition.

No longer can Quins be accused of over-reliance on Australian imports. With a young English coach, some English players in key positions and a smattering of local youngsters coming through their academy system, the days when you wouldn't be understood around the club if you didn't speak with a southern hemisphere accent are long gone.

Brian McDermott is proving that he is one of the leading British coaches in the game, after being understudy to new GB boss Tony Smith at Headingley for three years prior to his first head-coach appointment in July, 2006. Brian's No 2 is former South London Storm boss Rob Powell, who hails from Sheffield.

Billy Peden, ex-London Broncos and Newcastle Knights star, is the club's conditioner and he has produced a fitter team who have, to date, suffered far fewer injuries than

(cont. on page 18)

with Geoff Cooke

cooke-ability!

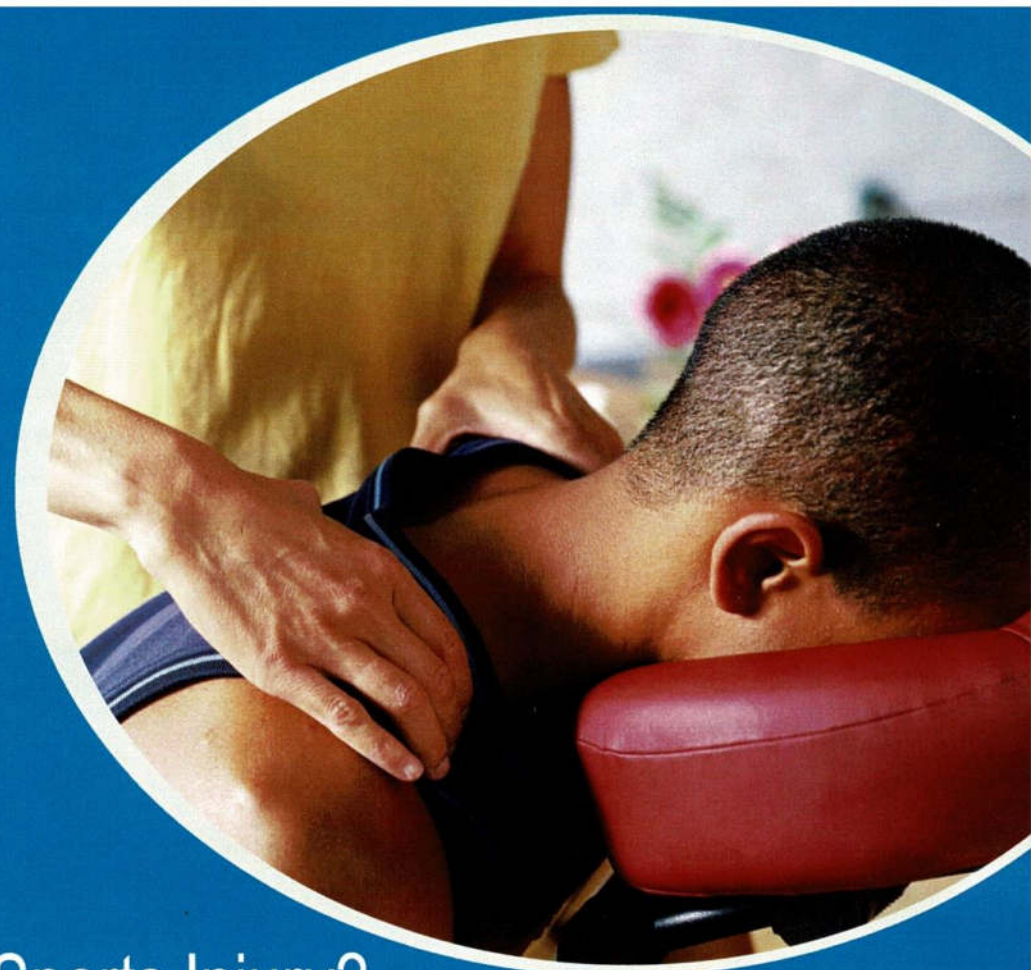
Millennium Magic weekend could hardly have got off to a better start than with Oldham's win at Celtic Crusaders.

The game was an absolute cracker, superbly refereed by Gareth Hower, and a wonderful advert for the quality of Co-Operative National League Two. Indeed, it put to shame the previous few weeks' Co-Operative National League One offerings which had nothing of the drama seen at Bridgend. As both coach and players observed after the match, Oldham started strongly, taking the game to their supposedly superior opponents and giving them serious problems. But then a mad 10 to 15 minute spell approaching half-time saw the Roughyeds go behind — to a supposedly irretrievable 26-6 deficit if you were to believe the Sky Sports commentary team. However, Oldham's second-half performance — perhaps the club's best since the 2002 semi-final recovery to beat Rochdale at Spotland — was magnificent. It all seemed to hinge on the sin-binning incident involving Jason Boults and Luke Young but, whatever the catalyst, Oldham simply blew away the highly-fancied Crusaders.

Every player did his bit, but it would be remiss of me not to remark on the planning, organisation and selection of coach Steve Deakin. Add to that some inspired use of the interchange bench which kept the Roughyeds fresh and you have all the ingredients for an outstanding success. After this performance I am sure the players will have gained in confidence, starting with today's game with Harlequins. It is a fixture we are not expected to win, but one which can go a long way to re-establishing the club's credibility with its missing 'fans' if the performance is up to scratch. Let's hope that Bridgend was the long-awaited watershed in turning around Oldham RL's fortunes.

For those of us having to watch Oldham at home, the great bonus in the studio was the presence of David Watkins. Rugby league could hardly have a better ambassador for the game than a man who graced the highest levels of both codes. As one who was a regular spectator at Salford in the seventies when a threequarter line of Keith Fielding, Chris Hesketh, David Watkins and Maurice Richards was functioning (not to mention Kenny Gill and Steve Nash at halfback) it used to be a great pleasure to watch the record breaking Welshman in action. Having heard his comments around the Celtic Crusaders v Oldham fixture it would clearly be a good idea for the RFL to use such an articulate observer at every opportunity to help promote the game. And if you want a good read can I recommend 'David Watkins — an autobiography'? Published in 1980 it may be difficult to track down, but if you can it's well worth it.

As for the Millennium Magic weekend itself it seems to have been a great success with some good games and a terrific atmosphere. The only negative to me came with the video referee system, something I have always previously defended. However to see Hull K.R. denied a try for 'obstruction', a decision which flew in the face of all common sense, only to see a try awarded in virtually identical circumstances in the Saints - Wigan game brought the system into disrepute. And then there was the finish to Leeds v Bradford!



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by ROGER HALSTEAD

FROM 'LITTLE FAT LAD' TO BOY STAR --- THEN CRUEL LUCK SMASHES THOSE EARLY DREAMS

YOU could forgive Kris Smith for perhaps feeling sorry for himself when he thinks back at what might have been.

Precociously talented as a boy, he seemed to have the rugby league world at his feet only to suffer two of the worst injuries any sportsman can have before he was 21.

He was 17, a full-time pro at Leeds and already in the first-team squad, when he snapped the cruciate ligaments in his right knee during an Academy Cup semi-final against Wigan. Four years on, and on the verge of breaking into Salford's senior side, he went down in agony with exactly the same injury to his left knee.

A lot of rugby league players have a knee reconstructed. Few have both knees reconstructed by the age of 21. How unlucky can you be?

Bitter? Resentful? Envious of others? Not one little bit. At the age of 28, Kris looks back to the days when he and another Eccles-reared youngster with Leeds, Adrian Morley, were both being tipped for big things and speaks with nothing but admiration for everything the Leeds club did for him and for the backing and support he always received from his family, and especially from his parents, Eddie and Elsie.

The boy Smith did nothing by halves. He went to a soccer-mad school, Lowry High in Salford, and didn't take up rugby league seriously until he was 14. He signed for Leeds when he was 15.

Here was a young man who was going up in the world --- literally. Recalled Kris: "It might be hard to imagine now, but as a boy I used to be short and fat. Going into the fourth year at Lowry High I was 5ft 2in and really fat. But then I shot up to 6ft 2in within a year and suddenly I was tall and slim --- a complete transformation."

That transformation no doubt helped to convince Leeds scout Bob Pickles that the boy Smith was one for the future.

It was only a year earlier that Kris, encouraged by Mum and Dad, joined the Eccles amateur club where Dad already had connections. Dad coached his son's team for a time, but only a few months elapsed before Kris was invited to Headingley for a series of trials.

"I played three trial games -- two at stand-off and one at loose-forward," recalled Kris, "and I was still only 15 when I signed and joined the Leeds apprentice scheme."

Six months earlier Adrian Morley had taken a similar route from Eccles to Headingley, and the two young kids from Salford were initially in digs together in Leeds before they eventually moved out of the family environment to share a house with Neil Harmon and Harvey Howard.

By the time he was 17 Kris was full-time at Headingley and he was in a first-team squad that included the likes of Harmon, Howard, Richard Eyres and that icon of

speed, strength, grace and sporting perfection, Ellery Hanley.

Kris loved his five years at Leeds, during which time he played for Yorkshire Academy versus Lancashire (at that time you played for the county of your club) and then won a place in Mike Gregory's GB Academy squad to take on France at Elland Road.

Smith was fulfilling the promise that Pickles had spotted in him a couple of years earlier. Standing 6ft 4in by now and filling out accordingly, the youngster looked destined for big things until he wrecked his right knee in that Academy semi-final against Wigan and spent six months on the sidelines.

He was to have another three years in Yorkshire, but the then Salford boss Andy Gregory was keen to get the Eccles lad back on familiar territory at The Willows and the deal eventually went through, Smith having set his heart on making a fresh start nearer home.

He was desperate for a change of luck and he thought it was coming when, after five good games in the 'A' team, he was told he would play only half a game next time out and would then be taken off in readiness for his first-team call-up.

Lightning was to strike twice, however. Shortly before half-time, when he was due to be replaced, he again went down in agony with a knee injury and worst fears were confirmed when the injury was identified as cruciate ligament damage in the "other" knee, the left one.

It was enough to demoralise any ambitious young chap. Another seven months of inactivity followed, but Kris wasn't finished yet. He was made of sterner stuff than that. Next on the agenda of the luckless Smith was a season with French club Carpentras, followed by a return to his roots with Eccles and then another move to the south of France to spend a year with Pia.

Having proved to himself and to everyone else that his surgically rebuilt knees could stand the rigours of one of the most physically demanding sports on the planet, Kris returned to England to accept the offer of trials with Halifax, then in Super League.

He scored "six or seven" tries in three 'A' team outings and did enough to be picked in the first team to play Wigan at Central Park.

He was always convinced that it was the Halifax club's shortage of cash at that time that prevented a longer stay at The Shay.

Whatever the reason he was soon on the move again, this time south to London to answer a call from the Broncos' assistant boss Damian McGrath.

"That was an episode I'll never forget," recalled Kris. "I went down there on the Tuesday, I trained Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday; played in a match against Halifax on the Sunday --- and came home on the Monday."

"They offered me a contract, but I couldn't accept it. I was only there a few days, but I quickly realised life in the big city was not for me. There was too much hustle and bustle. The French way of life suited me better and appealed to me a lot more --- it's a lot more laid back."

Once back home in the North, and more specifically in the North-West, he signed for his 'local' club, Swinton Lions where he was to spend the next four years before signing for Oldham prior to the start of the current campaign.

Said Kris: "They were good years at Swinton. They had a fine set of lads and I had some top mates among them, including Chris Morley and Craig Farrimond. But Deaks was keen to sign me for the Roughyeds this year. My contract with the Lions had run out and they were dithering a bit over my deal for 2007."

"Deaks was very persistent and in the end I met him, did a bit of negotiating and that's how I came to sign for Oldham."

"I love it here. Training and coaching are good and I've found a bit of form. I've scored a few tries and it's always nice to get over the line, but I always thought my main role was more of a provider of tries than a scorer."

"Team wise, everything is starting to come together. If we could just fine-tune a few little things we would be hard to beat. We can defend well. Perhaps a little more direction would come in handy, but I still think we can improve sufficiently to become the team to beat."

"Celtic Crusaders, York and Barrow are being tipped to do well in the competition. That takes a lot of the pressure off us and allows us to play in a more relaxed and enjoyable manner --- and it's usually when you are enjoying your rugby that you do well."

"On a personal note I've had more serious injuries than most players, but I've also been very lucky. Leeds, for example, were fantastic in everything they did for me. I think they must be the best in terms of looking after their young players."

"Then I was lucky to have my sort of parents. They supported me in everything I did, but they were never pushy and they always respected my decisions. My Mum regularly used to drive me over to Leeds, and then go back to work. The family between them would run me all over the place in pursuit of my ambitions and that's something you never forget when you get a bit older."

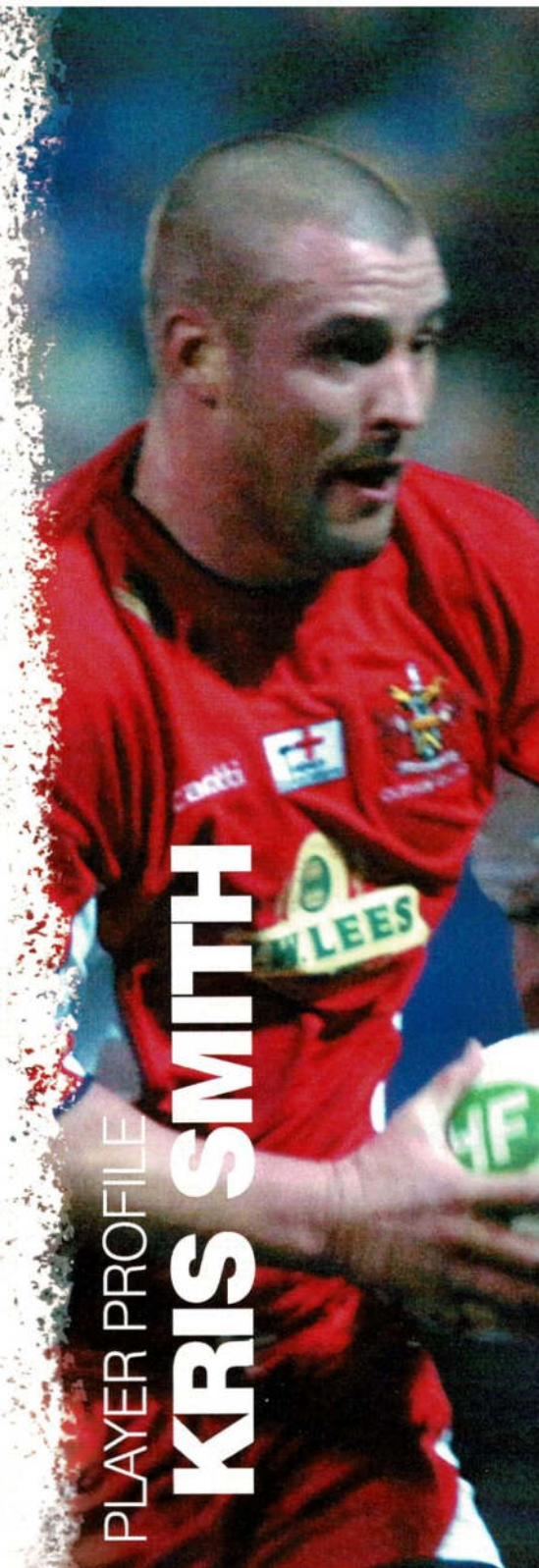
"I'm not so sure whether young kids of 15 should be put under the pressure of being watched by scouts and all that entails, but I have no regrets and I would urge any young kid who gets the chance to turn pro to go for it, always remembering that enjoyment is the thing that matters most."

"Two days after my 16th birthday I moved up to Leeds. That meant a move away from home, a new lifestyle, a lot of travelling and a life outside the family. At that age and in those circumstances you can easily become homesick, but the Leeds club was tremendous and I can't speak too highly of all my parents did for me through those years."

There were tears, and there was laughter; there were good times and bad. But Kris, a single man who works as a sports development officer for Salford Council, would opt to go through it all again if he could turn back the clock.

PLAYER PROFILE

KRIS SMITH



AROUND & ABOUT

with The Heritage Trust



based in Cardiff and then again in the same city 30 years later. A Bridgend club was formed in 1981 and a South Wales outfit played in the RFL's Division Two in 1996, the year of the introduction of Super League. None of them lasted for more than a season or two.

Since then clubs from Paris to Padstow and Gillingham to Gateshead have popped up with regularity, but with the exception of today's visitors none from outside the game's hinterland have survived. Of course, the jury is still out on Celtic Crusaders and Catalan Dragons but we wish them well.

Last weekend the Roughyeds travelled down to Bridgend to record a truly magnificent victory over promotion favourites Celtic Crusaders. Coincidentally, it was 100 years — almost to the day — since they once headed in the same direction to play Merthyr Tydfil in what was the club's inaugural home fixture and then, two weeks later, hosted a match at Watersheddings against Ebbw Vale who themselves were making a first ever journey north.

Some 12 years earlier, 22 powerful rugby union clubs from Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cheshire — Oldham among them — broke away from the vice-like grip of the authorities at a time when many of those sides would have enjoyed fixtures against teams from across the length and breadth of the UK.

By the start of the following season four more clubs, Barry, Mid-Rhonda, Treherbert and Aberdare had joined Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale, but alas, less than five years later, all had folded. Further attempts to gain a foothold in the Principality were made in 1926 with the formation of the Pontypool club, in 1951 with the first introduction of a club

It is hats off, then, to a club which has consistently bucked the trend since those early days of 1980. Back then, coach Reg Bowden took a busload of rugby league journeymen south and knocked them into sufficient shape to turn over Wigan in that first-ever match at Craven Cottage. Fulham, London Crusaders, London Broncos, Harlequins — call them what you will — they have kept a rugby league flag flying over the capital ever since.

Fulham wasn't the first attempt that the RFL had made to establish the game in London either. Three clubs, Streatham & Mitcham, Acton & Willesden and London Highfield, were formed in the 1930s but again all three only lasted a few seasons. Incidentally, Oldham provided Streatham & Mitcham with their first home opposition with the visitors running out 10-5 winners. But, once again, another expansionist venture ended in tears.

So, what's my point? Despite having taken on board the hype claiming Super League to be the finest contact sport in the world, having read that fans are flocking back to the games in their thousands and that Sky are recording ever

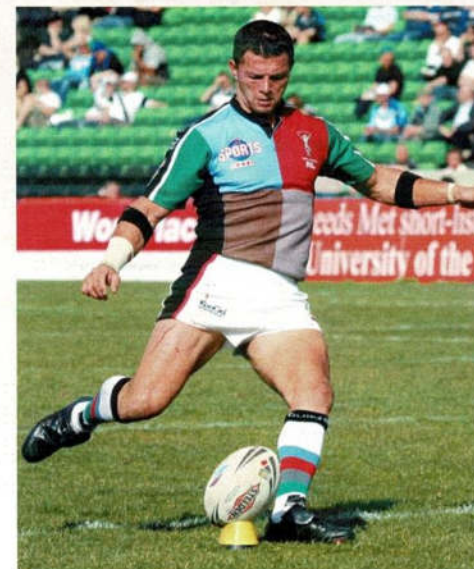
increasing viewing figures, I find it somewhat monotonous. So, before matron returns let me clarify. It's not the action — it's the repetitiveness created because Super League has a structure of just 12 clubs. Compared to the Barclays Premiership, which supports 20. How super is that?

Out will come the old chestnuts that there isn't enough News Corporation cash or sufficient quality players to go around and so on. If Super League really is the finest contact sport and interest really is mushrooming it shouldn't be too difficult to sell should it? It's got - repeat got - to smash its way big time out of its northern confines. Last weekend's Super League fest down at the Millennium Stadium must have been a massive fillip for the Crusaders who marketed this to their advantage — resulting in attracting a record second division turnout for the Oldham game.

Past efforts to gain a toehold in rugby-mad Wales have failed miserably, but surely with the barriers between the two codes of rugby now torn down there's never been a better opportunity to establish a couple of Super League sides down there, which, in turn, would be a massive boost for the expansionists. Why not take a leaf out of Harlequins book and do a franchise deal (beggars the word) with two established union clubs?

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I was miffed that work stopped me getting down to Bridgend last Friday. Not because I thought we'd knock them over — I admit I didn't. It was because it was excitingly different and Crusaders sold that difference.



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QUINS PROVIDE by Wayne Halstead CAPITAL CHALLENGE

(cont. from page 9)



Mark McLinden (Picture by Rugby League Photos.com)

In the pack the SHOOTING STAR has to be Louis McCarthy-Scarsbrook. Just 21, and hailing from Lewisham, he has worked his way up through the SE London Service Area and the Broncos academy system. A tough runner and hard-hitting defender, he has cemented his place in the first team this season and is being tipped by many good judges to be pushing for GB honours before too long.

Locking the scrum is Henry Paul, who returned to League last year after a stint in rugby union. The veteran has lost none of his skill, despite losing a yard of pace since he was in his prime, and his experience and know-how are vital in the middle of the field. He is also a metronomic goalkicker and a great exponent of the drop goal.

Doing the hard work up front will be Karl Temata, the ex-New Zealand Warrior; Daniel Heckenberg, signed from Manly Sea Eagles; Jon Grayshon, the former Huddersfield forward; and David Mills, son of the Welsh legend, Big Jim Mills.

Hooker Chad Randall, a lively dummy-half and distributor, is the son of former Aussie Test star Terry Randall. He will be "spelled" throughout the tie with French international Julien Rinaldi.

Interestingly, any pack which featured the three fathers of these current Quins players — namely Jim Mills, Jeff Grayshon and Terry Randall — would be one to be feared!

Running out wide with Purdham will be Lee Hopkins, the quiet star of the Quins pack. In his first year with the then London Broncos he topped the stats for most tackles, most offloads, most metres gained and most tackle busts. He is the type of player who often goes unnoticed until he is out injured, whereupon it quickly becomes obvious how much work he gets through. Also fighting for a spot in the back row will be local product Mike Worrinecy.

It will be a huge task for the Roughyeds to compete for 80 minutes and, man for man, the Super League outfit should be miles ahead. In a two-horse race, however, anything can happen and one thing is for sure: the city slickers from the capital won't have it all their own way this afternoon.



Henry Paul (Picture by Rugby League Photos.com)

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 Bloem 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.

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!

Views on the "Millennium Magic" weekend varied considerably before the event, with some very negative views being expressed - for example by St. Helens, and by the apparently increasingly miserable Paul Sculthorpe. What about the post-event review?

Let us first deal with the numbers issue. The official attendance over the two days was 58,831. This compares with an average Super League weekly attendance of 59,786 over the first 12 rounds of 2007. So I think that can be regarded as entirely acceptable.

More importantly, though, the atmosphere surrounding the occasion in Cardiff, both inside the stadium and around the town over the weekend, was superb, so that, assuming the experiment is to be repeated, I cannot imagine that the numbers attending will not increase, once those who experienced this year feed back to their fellow supporters back home. The opportunities for the RFL to market the weekend next year, on the back of this year's actual event, will be that much more convincing, too.

To me, the whole weekend reinforced what we are missing by replacing Cardiff by Wembley for the Challenge Cup Final, and I am convinced that the concept has the potential to grow to have a long-term place in the game's annual calendar. As Kevin Sinfield said just before the weekend's games began, the attendance at the first Old Trafford Grand Final was only around 40,000, and look at that now; so I for one give a huge pat on the back to the RFL for the decision to give the idea a go.

What of the actual rugby? Apart from the unbelievable treat for a RL fanatic to be able to watch six games in such surroundings over two six-hour sessions, it was fascinating to be able

to make comparisons, between sides and between individuals, so directly. A number of impressions stand out - the amazing quality of Stacey Jones; the courage of Hull KR's defensive effort to hang on for their win; Paul Wellens' unstoppable strikes; the sheer entertainment and rugby skills of Huddersfield's playmakers; Lee Briers' cheeky traditional half-back's contributions; and, finally, of course, the amazing end to the final Leeds-Bradford top-of-the-table contest.

There were a few other highlights, too, which for me said everything about what is best about our game. One was that, in eight hours of rugby league, there was hardly a violent incident, and the relations between the players after each game demonstrated nothing but the utmost mutual respect.

At a time when I have just been reading about a young RU star being banned for six months for eye-gouging, it was a marvellous advert for the players who play the game at the top level. So too was the general acceptance of referees' decisions; although inevitably there were particular decisions which one could argue about, overall the general standard of the refs was good, as was the apparent rapport on the field between players and refs.

Finally, the relationships between fans of different sides was as good as it is always claimed to be. Eamonn Holmes had expressed incredulity that such a weekend could be contemplated in Rugby League, given that if it was tried in football, the result would be nothing but crowd - rioting disasters; but once again the police and stewards in attendance had probably their easiest and most enjoyable weekend of the sporting year, as spectators mingled with the cheerful good humour and tolerance for which they are famed.

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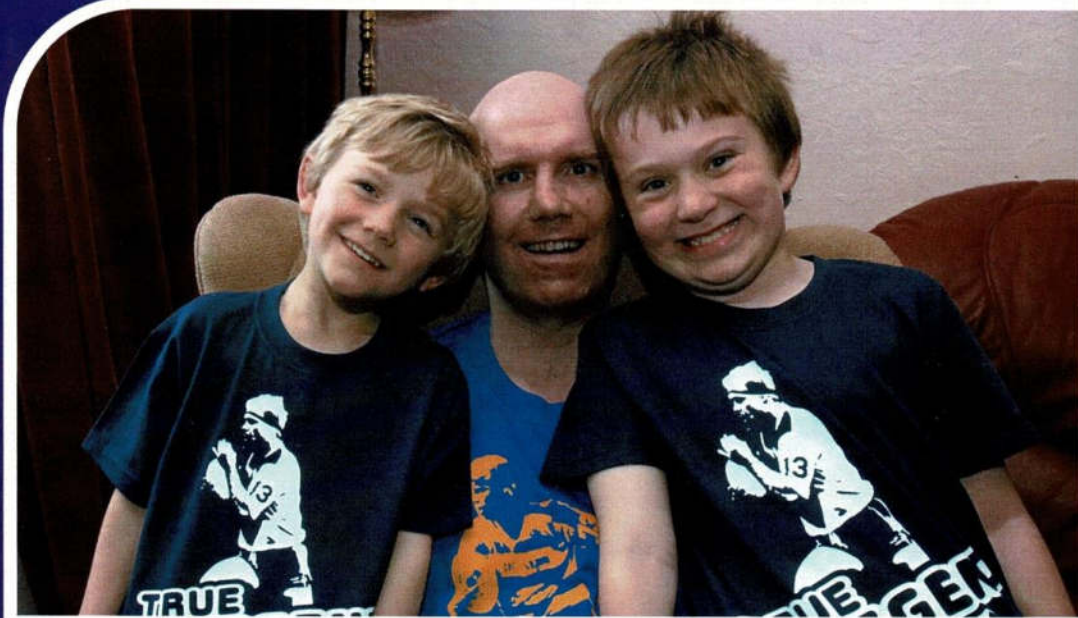
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BE PART OF IT - RUB SHOULDERS WITH CHAMPIONS - SUPPORT A GOOD CAUSE

carnegie challenge cup

by ROGER HALSTEAD

The last time today's two clubs met in the Challenge Cup was on February 9, 2003 at Griffin Park, Brentford when the Broncos, as they were then called, ran out 42-12 winners. The next night, the Oldham Chronicle carried the following match report by Roger Halstead, under the headline: "Early blitz puts paid to cup bid".

OLDHAM hopes of causing an upset at Griffin Park were smashed in the first 20 minutes when the bucking Broncos scored three tries as Roughyeds looked on in awe.

If the Super League club planned to extract Oldham's resolve before it had chance to develop it was a plan that worked a treat.

Even London, however, must have been surprised at the amount of possession and territorial advantage they enjoyed in the first quarter of the game as the nervous Roughyeds shook in their boots.

The introduction of ex-Bronco Darren Shaw 18 minutes into the tie put some steel and self-belief into the Roughyeds' pack but by that time Broncos were already thinking of this evening's fifth-round draw, and so were their fans.

Chris Morley, on after 23 minutes, also put some much-needed bite into Oldham's forwards.

There was never any way the visitors were going to subdue a Broncos pack in which loose-forward Jim Dymock reigned supreme, but at least they had a go at it when Shaw and Morley got stuck in.

Perhaps there is no real substitute at this level for strength and physical maturity... and it certainly looked that way as Dymock and two more of the Broncos' old hands, Steele Retchless and substitute Russell Bowden took command of the tie.

But as Oldham fumbled and floundered their way through the first 20 minutes, looking edgy, nervy and lacking in self-belief, it was all too easy for Dymock to orchestrate the Broncos attack with a display of cultured creativity that put him a class apart.

Two-try centre Rob Jackson picked up the man-of-the-match award, but how anyone could see beyond Dymock for the individual prize beats me.

Three of London's five first-half tries were scored out wide down Oldham's right side, courtesy of Dymock's use of the long pass to

stretch an outflanked defence.

He continued to produce his magic in the second half, too, and he made it look like men against boys when he used his upper body strength to stand in the tackle, throw off three defenders and offload to eager support.

That once incident encapsulated, for me, the gulf between's Super League full-timers and the rest.

Broncos were already 14-0 up when the visitors opened their account. Two penalties in quick succession gave them a foothold in London territory, and movement of the ball from right to left enabled Gareth Barber and Lee Doran to put Gavin Dodd in for a try which Barber improved.

Clearly lifted, the Roughyeds stormed back again. A Neil Roden kick put Dom Peters under pressure. Barber and Doran threw him into touch, only to be penalised for having a second stab after the tackle was complete — a poor decision which took the pressure off the home side as Oldham looked like applying it seriously for the first and only time.

Thus reprieved, London picked up the tempo. Oldham slipped back into error making and two more tries by Steve Hall and Chris Thorman gave the home side a 24-6 interval lead.

To their credit, Oldham regrouped and, for the first 25 minutes of the new half, mixed it tackle for tackle with a London side that, by now, didn't look as vastly superior as it had earlier.

With quarter of an hour left it was still 24-6 and Oldham were giving as good as they got. It was all to change, alas, with the sin-binning of Roden for interfering with a London restart kick.

A man short, Oldham couldn't hang on any more and Broncos made use of the extra space to score late tries by Nigel Roy, Jackson and centre Tony Martin.

It was no more than Roughyeds deserved, however, when Ryan Stazicker, one of the best of Oldham's younger players, took a flat Simon Svabic pass to crash through two defenders for a try which Svabic goaled.

SUPPORT GROUP NEWS

THE life of a coach operating under the difficult circumstances that we have had in the last 18 months must be very stressful, to say the least.

In the wake of last season the patience of desperate fans was always going to be short as we started the Northern Rail Cup qualifying rounds.

Steve Deakin soon came under attack following a run of poor results in that competition. Now, we seem to have turned a corner and the players are receiving the plaudits for their recent form as they continue to gel as a team.

What about the coach? Steve deserves acknowledgement for the way he has put together a rapidly improving squad and we wish him well as the season progresses.

SUPPORT THE ROUGHYEDS.

Sheila.

REUNION DINNER

DAVID Fairclough, better known as the former Liverpool FC super-sub, will be guest speaker at the Roughyeds' ten-year Law Cup reunion dinner in the social club on Friday, June 22. Bobby Bender will be the comedian and tickets, priced at £25 a head or £250 plus vat for a corporate table of ten, are available from Janet at the Roughyeds' office on 0161 628 3677.

The 18 players and two coaches who were on duty when the Roughyeds won the Law Cup at Rochdale on January 1, 1998 in the 'new' club's first-ever game have been invited to the dinner, one of several events to be held this summer to recognise ten seasons of operation by Oldham Rugby League Club (1997) Ltd.

Another is the proposed formation of an ex-players association. Martin Murphy is fronting this project and all ex-players, going back to Watersheddings days, are invited to a meeting in the social club on May 29, further details to follow. From that meeting it is planned to launch the association publicly at the Oldham v Hunslet game at Boundary Park on Sunday, July 22.

FROM SHEDDINGS TO THE STOOP

by Wayne Halstead

Wayne Halstead, son of the former Oldham Chronicle RL writer Roger Halstead, tells what it's like on this Carnegie Challenge Cup Sunday to have a soft spot for both the Roughyeds and the Harlequins.

IT'S a long way from Watersheddings to the Twickenham Stoop, not only in terms of miles but also culturally. The journey took me from one of the oldest and most traditional of rugby league venues to the bastion of old-school-tie rugby union --- and I now know how Adrian Alexander must have been feeling when he made the journey in the opposite direction 25 years ago.

For a young fella brought up on everything Oldham Rugby, the weekly trip to watch the Roughyeds was one of the main

it couldn't match watching Oldham. Then the RL world turned upside down with the advent of Super League.

Suddenly Oldham and the newly-named London Broncos were in the same division. I was, by now, watching the Broncos more often, although I still supported the Bears in their two seasons in Super League.

I was at the Stoop when the Broncos beat Canberra Raiders in the World Club Challenge in 1997 on a night as equally unforgettable as any I had enjoyed while standing behind the sticks at 'Sheddings. I was there also a week later when they almost beat the mighty Brisbane Broncos. I was slowly becoming a London RL fan!

The biggest success in the London club's history came two years later when a late Steele Retchless try sealed victory against Castleford in the Challenge Cup semi-final. I finally managed to do what nobody had ever done watching Oldham -- 'we' went to Wembley. Despite being well beaten by Leeds, it was a magnificent occasion and it further strengthened my affinity with the Broncos. Incidentally, can the Quins be one of the first two teams to grace the new Wembley, as the Broncos were one of the last two at the old Wembley?

For almost ten years now I have watched them at most home games and my passion for, and support of, London rugby league has grown. Of course, the biggest change of all came in July, 2005 when the Broncos joined forces with Harlequins RFC and Quins RL was born.

The old club was taken over by new chairman Ian Lenagan (shades of Bill Quinn here!) and a new future dawned. From 2006 I was suddenly shouting, "Come on Quins" --- and if, 20

constants in my childhood. Every week, home or away, we would all pile in the car and go and watch Oldham. The performances of the Oldham players -- from Murphy in the late 70s, through Goodway and Flanagan in the 80s, to Lindner in the early 90s -- would shape my mood for the coming week.

I was the club's team mascot for the whole of the 1978-79 season, and running out in front of Murphy, Munro, Elliott, Larder and the rest remains clear in my memory.

All the highs of the 1980s and early 1990s are still vivid in my mind's eye -- the Challenge Cup semi-finals, the Old Trafford Premiership finals, knocking Wigan out of the cup, almost beating the Aussies on that great night at Sheddings -- I was there to see them all. And then things changed.

In 1992 I moved south and I have lived in Kent ever since. For a few years I travelled up to Oldham whenever possible to watch the Roughyeds, but it became more and more difficult to fit it in. I started watching the occasional London Crusaders game to get my fix of rugby league, but of course



Memories are made of this... my heroes of the day

years ago, anyone had suggested I would one day be doing that, I would have questioned their sanity.

My son Jack was born in 1998 and he has known nothing else but watching the league every other week, initially at Griffin Park and at the Stoop. His bedroom is a shrine to the Broncos and the Quins (along with the odd Chelsea FC poster, but we'll try and forgive him for that).

He is in his second season playing for the Kent Ravens under-9s, which involves a 90-mile round trip for training and to play games (no luxury here of having several junior clubs within a ten-minute radius). Even watching the Quins at home requires a round trip of 160 miles.

Jack played at the Stoop twice last season in curtain-raisers

prior to Quins games. The Ravens play such clubs as Croydon Hurricanes, Brixton Bulls, Addington Lightning and Thornton Heath Tornados, all feeder teams for South London Storm ARLFC and Greenwich Admirals.

The junior game in the South East, and in SE London and Kent in particular, is going from strength to strength and is massively stronger than when I first moved south 15 years ago. This can only bode well for the future development of Quins first-team players and, who knows, even internationals perhaps. The progress of Louis McCarthy-Scarsbrook, Mike Worrincy and Tony Clubb at the Quins, who all hail from that area, shows what can be done.

Incidentally, will Louis be the first London-born Great Britain international since Martin Offiah? Watch this space.

My boyhood support of Goodway et al has now been replaced by Jack's idolisation of McLinden, Hill, Hopkins and Orr. The names change, the location is somewhat different, but one thing remains -- love and support for The Greatest Game.

Back home in the sport's heartland, I shall be sitting on the proverbial fence with mixed feelings today, hoping for no more than a good, close game and a big crowd. But the little bloke next to me will have no divided loyalties. He'll be singing, "We're Quins RL" ... and there will be a few more doing the same. Enjoy the game.



Those were the days -- that's me as mascot with Murphy, Elliott, Starkey and Co. Flashback pictures by OLDHAM EVENING CHRONICLE.



Mike Elliott takes centre stage at his farewell appearance



ALL set for the 280-mile trip from Ashford to Boundary Park. That's Wayne, Trudi and children Alice, Lauren and Jack.

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with GARETH WALKER of RUGBY LEAGUER & LEAGUE EXPRESS



THANKS to the almost unbelievable final few seconds of the Leeds versus Bradford game on Sunday night, there have been plenty of column inches written about the Millennium Magic weekend this week. But for many that went down to Wales, one of the most memorable events occurred on Friday night.

Celtic Crusaders' home match with Oldham attracted a Co-operative NL2 record crowd of 3,441, which included a healthy gathering of fans from across the Rugby League family. The number of different shirts present at the match gave it an almost cup final feel, with supporters mixing freely with one another, and the locals.

The Crusaders' home ground at Brewery Field is ideally suited to warm summer evenings, allowing supporters to walk around the terraces and purchase food and drink while still watching the match.

And what a match it was! The Roughyeds were actually 16/1 to win the game, and were handed a 30 points start by one bookmaker.

Those predictions looked accurate - and maybe even a little short - when the home side led 26-6 just after half-time.

But Oldham then staged a remarkable fight back to win 32-26, temporarily silencing the vocal home support and laying down a marker for the remainder of the season.

The Welsh side had been most people's hot favourites for the title - but the Roughyeds' win has now blown that race wide open.

And on that evidence alone, you would have to say that Oldham themselves will be heavily involved in the promotion shake-up.

Defeat, though, shouldn't ruin what was an excellent night for Celtic Crusaders. There's no doubt that a few sceptical people that visited their ground for the first time will have seen the potential that the club has.

Whether they will be ready for a Super League franchise in 2009 remains to be seen. But the fact that they have started at the bottom in NL2 will surely stand them in good stead for any future progression.

This weekend, much of the attention switches to the Carnegie Challenge Cup, and those National League clubs that remain in the competition.

Perhaps the best chance of an upset is at the Recreation Ground, where Whitehaven entertain Catalans Dragons and will be looking to cause a shock.

Elsewhere, Rochdale Hornets have the formidable task of travelling to holders St Helens on Friday night, Oldham host Harlequins on Sunday, Sheffield travel to Hull FC, and Barrow Raiders take on Warrington Wolves at the Halliwell Jones Stadium.

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JANET Yewdale, latest £500 winner in the Roughyeds' Five Alive lottery, has been a staunch supporter of the club for the past five and a half years and has spent the last 18 months working full-time in the club's office.

It's a job she loves. "There's never a dull moment," she said, "and I can honestly say coming to work isn't a hardship. It's not a job - it's a vocation."

"It's been a hard slog these past 18 months, but Chris and Sean have been absolutely heroic in their determination not to let the club go under, and only those close to the situation have any real idea what they have been through and the number of man hours Chris has put in to keep the club alive."

"Now Bill Quinn is here, the team is coming along nicely and Steve Deakin is starting to reap some reward for tackling what must have seemed like an impossible task when he first took it on."

"Deaks has been just as dogged and determined on the playing side as Chris and Sean have been on

the administrative side.

"And I do honestly believe that, both on and off the field, the club is set fair for moving onwards and upwards."

Janet has been known to perform just about every duty there is to perform at the club, including washing the kit, and her mum, Doreen, and son George are almost part of the fixtures and fittings, as anyone who frequents the social club and attends the Roughyeds functions there will readily testify.

She was one of the first fans to sign up for Five Alive. "It's fund-raisers like these that can help to take the club forward," she added, "and I think Five Alive offers good value for money. We've got 84 supporters in the lottery now, but if there is anyone out there who might be thinking about it we would like to hit the 100 before the season is much older."

Want to join? Give Janet a ring on 0161 628 3677.

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journalistic license

by Matthew Chambers

MILLENNIUM Magic, or May Madness?

In this day and age, with "carbon neutrality" all the rage in just about every walk of life, it seems more than a little strange to have hordes of rugby league fans making the huge journey down to South Wales — to play derby matches that would normally take place on their own doorsteps.

Perhaps some of them reached Cardiff by bicycle. Unlikely, given the shapes and sizes on display on the streets around the ground, but possible. But despite the logistics, not to mention the inappropriateness of playing in such a huge venue and the bizarre refereeing both on the pitch and in front of the television screens, the weekend worked for me. Sort of.

The atmosphere around the stadium, helpfully sited slap bang in the city centre, was first-class. Banter was exchanged, beer was drunk in the sun (at least, on Saturday) and all was well with the world.

True to say, there are precious few other high-octane sports in which rival supporters consume massive amounts of alcohol and still manage to control themselves admirably. Rugby league can certainly be proud of itself on that score.

The action was also exciting, for the most part. The Hull derby was a close-run if sloppy encounter, while you couldn't script a more dramatic finish than that which occurred in the Leeds-Bradford match — whatever the wrongs of the refereeing.

It was a pity to see games taking place in front of a half-empty stadium, though. Especially so, when the majority of supporters inside have no real emotional stake in the outcome and don't get involved in making the sort of noise needed to lift up a stodgy

Huddersfield-versus-Wakefield derby.

But overall, it deserves marking up as a qualified success. Hopefully next year a few more will decide to make the trip to Wales, though by then the wearing-off of the novelty value could have some impact on ticket sales.

WHILE the RFL's marketing of tickets will have to improve if the event is to grow, the Celtic Crusaders certainly did well on that score. They won't have made much money from the thousands of school-aged children who descended on the Brewery Field for the Oldham game last Friday evening. Free tickets were as common as coffee. But as a PR exercise it was a masterstroke. Less slick was the Crusaders' performance on the pitch. It was wonderful to see the Roughyeds performing such gusto and with so few flaws — illustrated perfectly by the amazing fact that Steve Deakin's men didn't concede a single penalty all game. The stands, so full of high-pitched song for the first hour of the game, went very quiet as the game drew to a conclusion — save for the hardy band of travelling fans, of course.

A similarly flawless performance and a large slice of luck courtesy of Lady Luck will certainly be required if the Roughyeds are to fell Harlequins today.

The Challenge Cup is all about dreams. But the reality of the situation is that Oldham have shown the viewing public that promotion to Co-operative National League One is possible this year.

Matthew

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players statistics

[up to and including May 4th]

NAME	PLAYED	TRIES	GOALS	POINTS
P.Ashton	9	2	23	54
C.Baines	9	1		4
J.Boults	9			
G.Costin	6	1		4
A.Crabtree	10	1		4
A.Gorey	4			
I.Hodson	5	1		4
J.Hough	1			
D.Houston	12			
S.Hoyle	11	1		4
G.Langley	12	7	2	32
C.Littler	11	2		8
R.Mervill	8	1		4
PO'Connor	12	4		16
M.Ogden	5	1	10	24
S.Oldham	1			
L.Onyango	3	2		8
N.Roden	11	4		16
W.Rogers	9			
L.Sanderson	3		4	8
I.Sinfield	9	1		4
K.Smith	10	5		20
M.Stout	4	1		4
S.Tamghart	12	2		8
T.Tonks	3	1		4
A.Wilkinson	11	10		40
L.Wingfield	4	1		4

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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	12-23	L	1,162
09/04/07	Hunslet Hawks	NL2	Away	3.30pm	NEW DATE BELOW		
15/04/07	Blackpool Panthers	NL2	Away	3.00pm	40-20	W	501
29/04/07	Keighley Cougars	NL2	Home	3.00pm	32-20	W	847
04/05/07	Celtic Crusaders	NL2	Away	7.35pm	34-26	W	3441
13/05/07	Swinton Lions	NL2	Home	3.00pm	TO BE REARRANGED		
13/05/07	Harlequins	CCC5	Home	12.30pm			
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
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NL2 – National League Division 2
CCC – Carnegie Challenge Cup

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game line-up

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JASON BOULTS		PAUL SYKES
GENO COSTIN		MATT GAFA
ANDY CRABTREE		ANDY SMITH
ANDY GOREY		MARK MCLINDEN
IAN HODSON		DANNY ORR
JOHN HOUGH		DANIEL HECKENBERG
DREW HOUSTON		CHAD RANDALL
SIMEON HOYLE		LOUIS MCCARTHY-SCARSBROOK
GARETH LANGLEY		ROB PURDHAM
CRAIG LITTLER		HENRY PAUL
RICHARD MERVILL		SCOTT HILL
PAUL O'CONNOR		LEE HOPKINS
STUART OLDHAM		JULIEN RINALDI
LUCAS ONYANGO		KARL TEMATA
NEIL RODEN		DAVID MILLS
WES ROGERS		TYRONE SMITH
LEE SANDERSON		MICHAEL WORRINCY
IAN SINFIELD		JON GRAYSHON
KRIS SMITH		ZEBASTIEN LUISI
MICHAEL STOUT		JOE WALSH
SAID TAMGHART		
TONY TONKS		
ALEX WILKINSON		
LEE WINGFIELD		

match officials

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