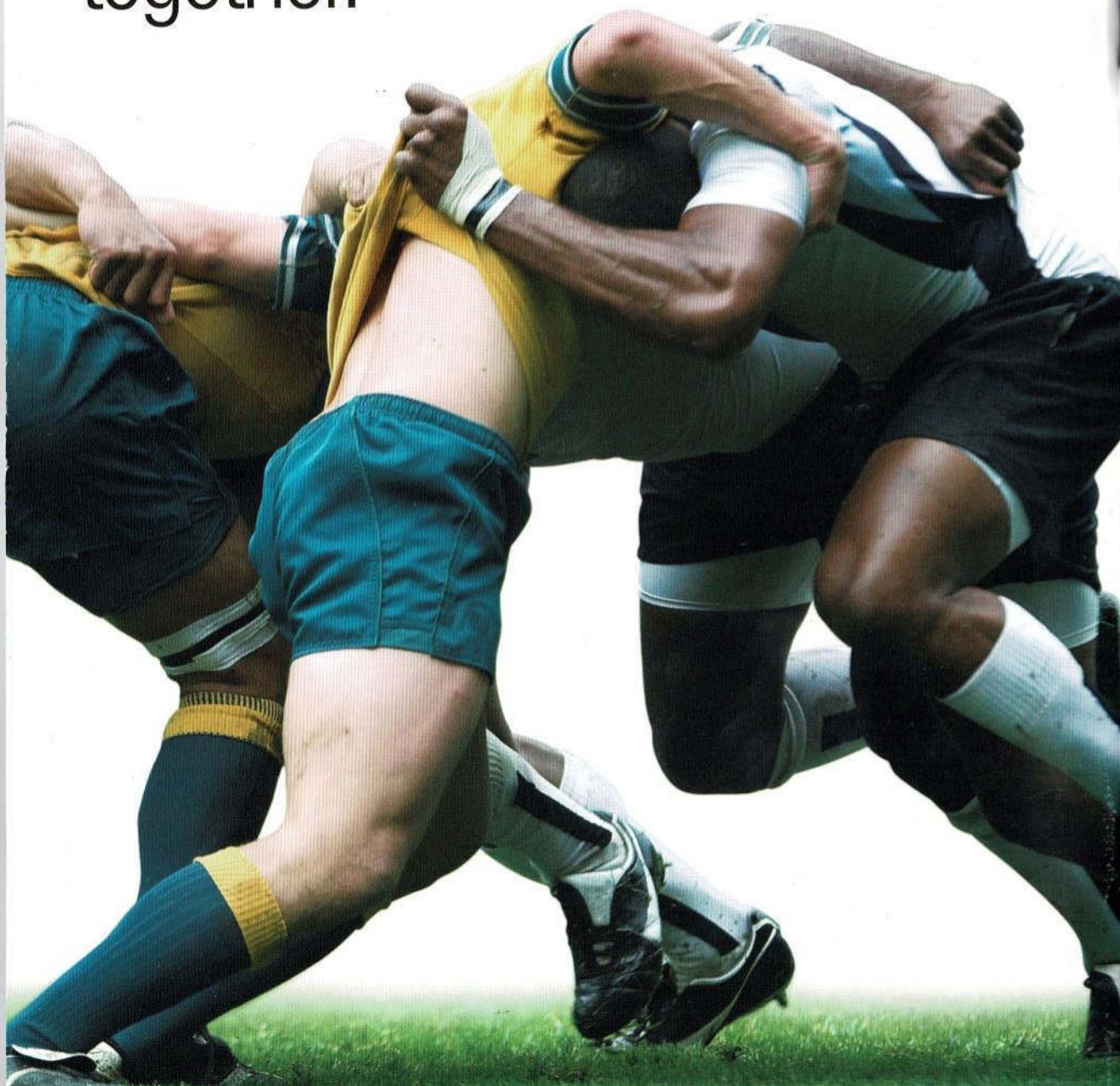


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CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE FINALS DAY 2007

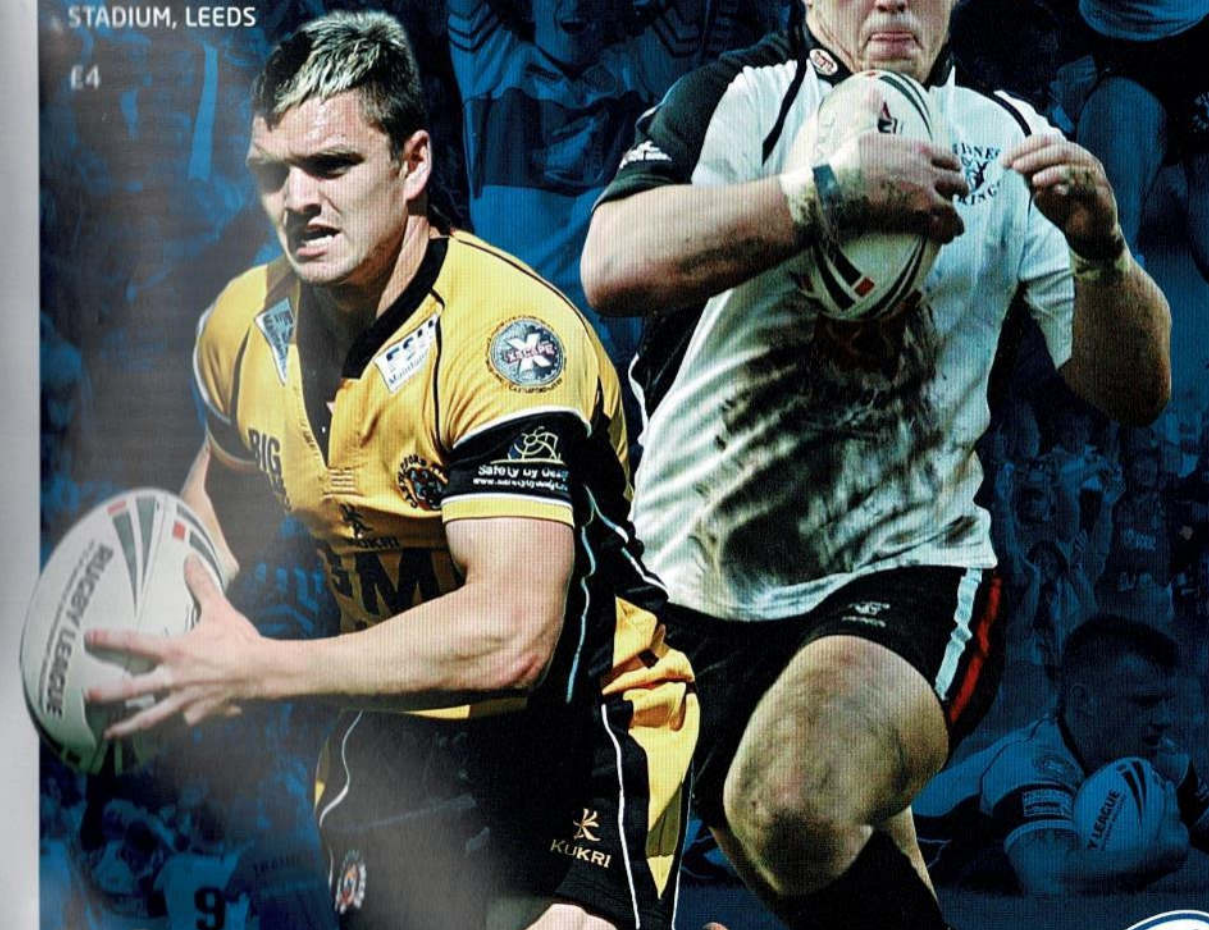
CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE ONE GRAND FINAL

CASTLEFORD TIGERS v WIDNES VIKINGS

KICK OFF 6.00PM

SUNDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2007
HEADINGLEY CARNEGIE
STADIUM, LEEDS

E4



CO-OPERATIVE RUGBY
LEAGUE CONFERENCE
(NATIONAL) GRAND FINAL

BRAMLEY BUFFALOES
v FEATHERSTONE LIONS

KICK OFF 1.00PM



CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL
LEAGUE TWO PLAY-OFF FINAL

FEATHERSTONE ROVERS
v OLDHAM RLFC

KICK OFF 3.30PM



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Welcome

CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE FINALS DAY 2007
HEADINGLEY CARNEGIE STADIUM, LEEDS
SUNDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2007

Contents

Foreword	5	Play-off reports	26
Message from our main sponsors, co-operative		The five co-operative NL2 play-off games	
Play-off reports	6	Season review	28
All the drama from the co-operative NL1 play-offs		The co-operative NL2 season - the full story	
Coach interview	9	Player profiles	30
Castleford's Terry Matterson tells us how his team is raring to go		The coaches identify their key men in the co-operative NL2 Final	
Player interview	11	Final analysis	33
Cas's Awen Guttenbeil on his engage Super League ambitions		The co-operative NL2 Final - a preview	
Coach interview	11	Season review	34
Widnes coach Steve McCormack on facing a familiar foe today		This year's co-operative RL Conference (National) season	
Player interview	15	Player profiles	37
Widnes' Scott Grix's eyes are on the prize		Conference coaches point out their key men	
Player profiles	16	Analysis	39
Castleford and Widnes captains profile their team-mates		co-operative RL Conference (National) Grand Final	
Road to the final	19	Fair Play Index	41
How the co-operative NL1 teams got to Headingley		Who's the fairest of them all?	
Season review	20	News	43
The ups and downs of the co-operative NL1 season		Community programmes	
Player awards	21	News	44
Who's got the gongs in co-operative NL1?		co-operative Festivals	
Survival	22	News	45
Can today's promoted side survive? Hull KR's Justin Morgan thinks so		Rugby League's continuing spread across the nation	
Final analysis	24	Squads	47
Barrie McDermott gives his low down on Widnes & Cas		co-operative NL1 teams	
		Squads	49
		co-operative NL2 and RLC National Finals team lists	
		Flashback	50
		To last year's finals	



On behalf of the RFL, I would like to welcome everybody to Headingley Carnegie Stadium for the 2007 co-operative National League Finals Day.

The event has rapidly become a key date in our calendar of major matches and we are set to see a feast of action unfold as three exciting games take place - all of which are extremely important in their own right.

Firstly, Bramley Buffaloes and Featherstone Lions meet in the co-operative Rugby League Conference (National) Grand Final. This match is the climax to the community game's summer season and it traditionally produces a full-blooded contest between two vibrant clubs.

Following this, Featherstone Rovers and Oldham RLFC take the field for the co-operative National League Two Play-off final. Both teams are bidding to secure the second promotion place from this division and with it, the opportunity to develop themselves in the next tier of Rugby League competition.

But of course, the day climaxes with the co-operative National League One Grand Final between Castleford Tigers and Widnes Vikings. As well as the undoubted prestige of securing the co-operative National League One championship, both clubs have met the standards required for promotion and so today's winning team will move into the engage Super League next season. This alone ensures that the game will be a truly fierce and hugely compelling contest.

Today's matches are of course the finale to what has been a terrific and successful season for the sport at this level. We have seen the introduction of weekly live television coverage which has attracted a new and highly successful partnership with the co-operative and record crowds in National League One and Two.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank both Sky Sports and the co-op for their tremendous support, and we also congratulate all the clubs who have worked so hard to develop their presence within the communities and grow their audiences.

It only remains for me to wish all six clubs the very best of luck for today's matches, and hope that all spectators enjoy what should be an action packed event.

Richard Lewis, Executive Chairman, RFL

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Official notices

Anti-racism policy

The RFL's 'Tackle It' policy states it will not tolerate racism of any kind and will take specific action against spectators who engage in racist chanting, abuse or intimidation. Rugby League is a great family sport and, with this in mind, action will also be taken against spectators who use foul and abusive language.

Please keep off the pitch

The RFL requests that spectators do not venture onto the pitch during or after the game. Such action is against ground safety regulations and the RFL reserves the right to take any action against any person infringing these regulations.

Man of the Match Awards

The Rugby League Writers' Association will select today's Man of the Match award for the co-operative National League One Grand Final, and the winner will be presented with the Tom Bergin Trophy. The co-operative National League Two Man of the Match will be awarded a commemorative trophy, while the co-operative National League Conference Man of the Match will be awarded the David Oxley Trophy.

In the event of a draw

If, at the end of 80 minutes in each game, the scores are tied, then extra time of 10 minutes each way will be played. Should the scores still be level at the end of that extra period of play, then the match will be decided on a 'Golden Point' basis with the winners being the first team to score. If that score is a try, no conversion kick will be necessary. In the case of the co-operative Rugby League Conference (National) Grand Final, if the scores are level at the end of 80 minutes, the match will go straight to a 'Golden Point' period.



The RFL gratefully acknowledges the support of Sport England for many of the programmes currently being used to develop the sport's potential, both within its existing heartland and in wider areas. Sport England's ambition is to get 2m people doing more sport by 2012. It does this by investing in, advising and developing community sport; and by working with organisations such as the RFL to encourage more people to take part in both formal and informal sport. For more info visit: www.sportengland.org

Foreword



I have been an enormous Rugby League fan all my life, so I cannot tell you what a pleasure it has been for me to attend so many games this season in my capacity as deputy chair of the co-operative Group – sponsors of the co-operative Leagues.

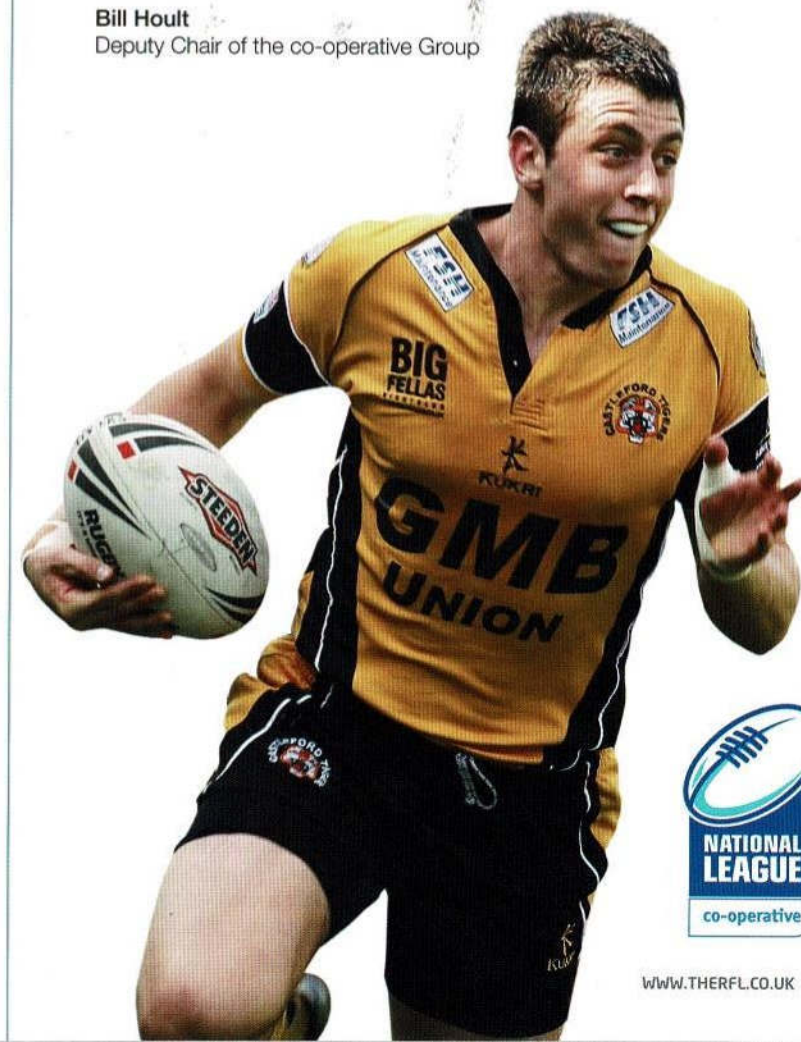
Whether it was the fantastic Batley Bulldogs versus Dewsbury Rams derby back in June, or the phenomenal crowd at the Oldham versus Celtic Crusaders game at the end of August, it has been a real rollercoaster of a season – and I have enjoyed every minute.

The play-offs bring the season to a nail biting conclusion, and whilst I will be the first to congratulate the winners, I always feel a huge amount of sympathy for the teams that miss out. To get so close and then to miss out is heartbreaking, and like every fan I have experienced the highs and the lows that go with supporting this great game.

So good luck to all the teams playing today. With no allegiances to any of the clubs playing today, I am lucky in that I can look forward to watching a magnificent display of Rugby League without the heartbreak of defeat or the ecstasy of victory. But I will be riding the rollercoaster with you all the way.

Bill Hoult

Deputy Chair of the co-operative Group



Play-offs



THE ROAD TO HEADINGLEY

Six play-off sides were finally reduced to two for today's final. And some thrilling Rugby League was played along the way

QUALIFYING SEMI-FINAL

Castleford Tigers (4) 26

T: D Williams, M Wainwright, J Westerman 2. G: D Brough 5

Widnes Vikings (4) 8

T: M Nannyn. G: M Nannyn 2

The Jungle, Castleford, Thursday 20 September. Att: 6,179

A magnificent second-half display from the league leaders saw them storm past their main co-operative National League One rivals and book their place in today's Grand Final. Widnes twice took the lead, first through Mick Nannyn's two penalties, cancelled

out by two Danny Brough kicks for Cas, and then again with the big Scotland international's try early in the second half. Nannyn then blotted his copybook by having a pass intercepted to give Castleford a try, which proved to be the first of four the Yorkshire side would record in 15 minutes. Joe Westerman bagged two tries from kicks and Danny Williams crossed the line from a long pass. That last assist came from Wakefield-bound scrum-half Danny Brough, who was the main contender for man of the match, after pulling most of the playmaking strings for his side.



ELIMINATION PLAY-OFF 1

Halifax (18) 30

T: S Royston 2, S Penkywicz, P Smith, A Trinder.

G: G Holroyd 5

Sheffield Eagles (16) 26

T: J Ford 2, R Worrincy, D Brambani, R Newlove.

G: J Woodcock 3

The Shay, Halifax. Sunday 16 September. Att: 1,702

Sixth placed Sheffield kept up their fine late season form to battle third placed Halifax all the way at The Shay. It looked likely to go to form, however, when Shad Royston scored a converted try after just two minutes for Halifax. But a pacy Sheffield side hit back with three tries in 15 minutes from Ford, Brambani and Newlove. Halifax were soon back in front, though, with two six-pointers from Sean Penkywicz and Aaron Trinder. They pulled further in front early in the second half, but the Eagles levelled at 22-22 with 20 minutes left. Even when Royston's converted try and Holroyd's penalty made it 30-22 late on, Rob Worrincy's 77th minute try set up a tense final three minutes, but Sheffield fell just short.



ELIMINATION PLAY-OFF 2

Whitehaven (14) 19

T: C Calvert, D Seeds, C Rudd 2.

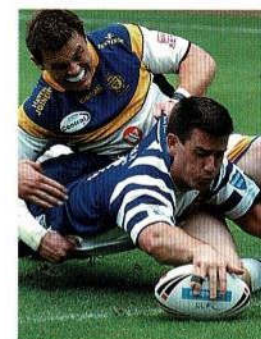
G: C Rudd. DG: C Rudd

Leigh Centurions (6) 6

T: C Hough. G: A Heremaia

Recreation Ground, Whitehaven. Thursday 13 September. Att: 1,761

Fervent home support, solid defence and confident passing helped see the 2004 and 2005 National League Grand finalists Whitehaven through to the Elimination Semi-final, along with a masterful display from their scrum-half Carl Rudd. Craig Calvert's early try for Whitehaven was cancelled out when Leigh's Chris Hough touched down after collecting Dave McConnell's high kick. Two tries from Rudd and David Seeds in his last home game for the club, opened up a 14-6 lead at the interval, and though Leigh were still within touching distance, they were put under too much pressure to make a comeback. Rudd's second try extended Whitehaven's lead and a drop goal sent the Cumbrians home happy.



ELIMINATION SEMI-FINAL

Halifax (18) 32

T: S Royston, R Varkulis, D Larder, D Ball, A Trinder.

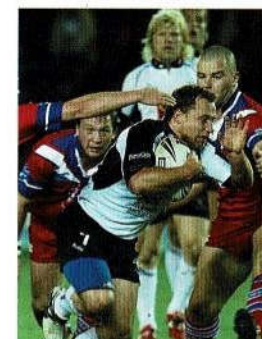
G: G Holroyd 6

Whitehaven (6) 24

T: C Calvert 2, C Rudd, D Fatialofa. G: C Rudd 4

The Shay, Halifax. Sunday 23 September. Att: 2,184

Graham Holroyd starred for Halifax as they overcame Whitehaven, who had been something of a bogey team for the Yorkshiremen this season. When the Cumbrians recorded the first score in a hard-fought first quarter it seemed that situation might continue. However, tries from Trinder, Larder and Royston gave the home side an 18-6 lead by half-time, and they looked comfortable. However, two tries in nine minutes from Carl Rudd and Craig Calvert levelled the scores before the 50 minute mark, and it looked like the momentum had shifted back to Whitehaven. But two tries from Varkulis and Ball and two Holroyd penalties made it 32-18, and despite a late try from David Fatialofa, tenacious defending earned Halifax a trip to Widnes.



FINAL ELIMINATOR

Widnes Vikings (12) 36

T: P Noone, M Smith 2, S Grix, B Beswick

G: M Nannyn 8

Halifax (4) 24

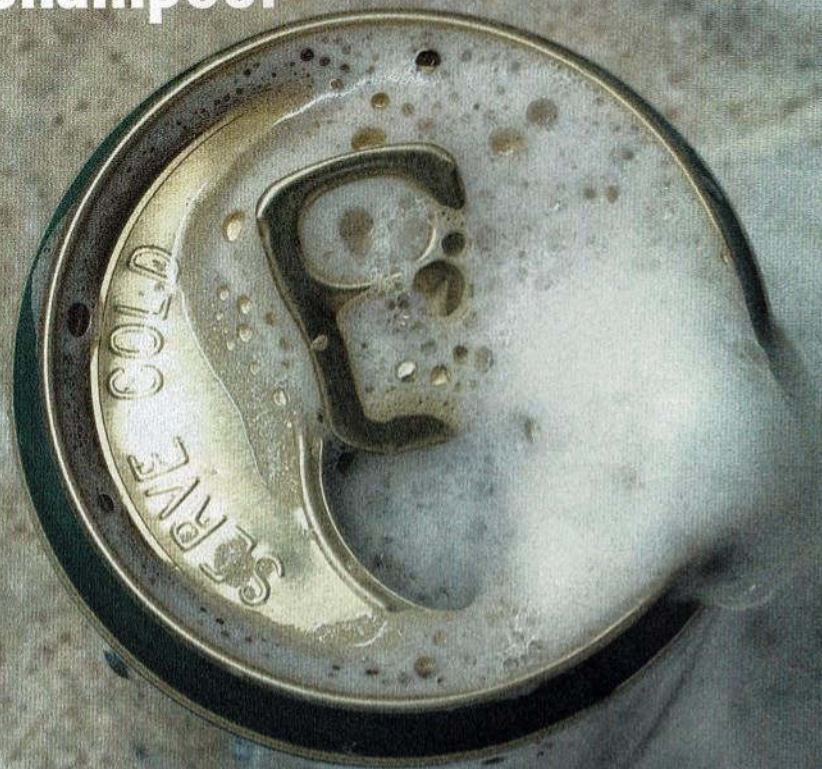
T: M Roberts, S Royston, F Watene, R Varkulis,

S Hoare. G: G Holroyd 2

Halton Stadium, Widnes. Thursday 27 September. Att: 3,347

A stubborn Halifax display couldn't stop Widnes earning their place in today's final. Mark Roberts' 14th minute try was equalled by two of Mick Nannyn's three first-half penalties, before slick passing put Noone over on 27 minutes. At 12-4 down, Halifax were pressing when Dennis Moran intercepted and released Mark Smith for the first of two six-pointers. A 20 point gap looked insurmountable, but Halifax kept defending fiercely, and after Royston and Grix exchanged scores, two Fox tries in two minutes reduced the deficit to 10 points with eight minutes left. More quick passing finally put through Bob Beswick to seal it, but the men from Cheshire certainly knew they'd been in a game.

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EVERY minute of
EVERY play-off match



NATIONAL LEAGUE GRAND FINALS

TO LIFT THE NATIONAL LEAGUE ONE TROPHY

4/9 Castleford

13/8 Widnes

TO LIFT THE NATIONAL LEAGUE TWO TROPHY

5/6 Featherstone

5/6 Oldham

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CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE FINALS DAY 2007



Co-operative National League One

WORK, REST AND PLAY

It's been 17 days since Castleford reached the final but, says coach **Terry Matterson**, his team is raring to go this afternoon

You've had 17 days since you beat Widnes to reach this final. How much has been rest and how much hard work?

The beauty of winning that game was that we were able to work really hard and then have a rest on alternate days. And we could work on a few things as a team and get over a couple of injuries as well. The first week wasn't too intense, but we certainly picked the pace up in the second week.

Is this a bigger game than the Wakefield relegation decider last year?

I don't think anything more could be riding on one game than there was then. But it really wasn't just one game that cost us last year. We ran out of juice and we just weren't good enough in the end. This year we've built up really strong, we're healthy and we're in the best possible position to get the result.

Today's opponents know you pretty well, are you tempted to surprise them?

I don't think there's going to be a lot of mystery. If you decide to change the way you do things just to wrong-foot your opponents, there's a risk factor with that as well. So, both teams will aim to concentrate on doing what they do well and playing to their strengths.

You timed your run of form pretty well. Was there a plan for the second half of the season?

We took a look at the run-in about 10 weeks ago and we knew we had to play Whitehaven and Widnes away, and so we trained accordingly. There was a lot of confidence around the place then, but if anything, I think we've got better. Especially with players like Anthony Thackeray settling in and doing well.

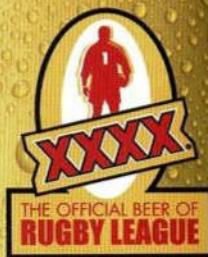
Is your main task today to settle the players' nerves?

Yeah, but if one of my players wasn't nervous before a game like this, then I'd think there was something seriously wrong with them. If you can channel those nerves into the right sort of energy on the pitch, then it's actually a positive thing.

Will today's side be the core of the team you'll be sticking with if you get into Super League?

If people do the job today, I'm pretty keen on taking the majority of the team up with us, but we'll also add some new faces. We're not in any hurry either, there's not going to be relegation next season, so we're not under so much pressure to plan for the short term. We can blood the kids and look to the future rather than having to look only 12 months ahead all the time.

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"I saw Castleford as a challenge. I've no regrets"

For Castleford's **Awen Guttenbeil**, a whole season boils down to this one game

How have you spent the past 17 days since you reached the final?

Winning the game against Widnes was a big priority and we've had the chance to have a rest, but we've also done work in the gym and in the pool before hitting the field and working on our game plan for today. We definitely feel as if we're ready.

You've played in big games such as NRL Grand Finals before. Will that help?

It helps knowing how to prepare. I knew it was important to take time away and not run the game over in your head too much. You have to do the preparation work but find a way of not thinking about it over and over.

You moved to Castleford last summer despite their relegation. Has your decision been vindicated?

I saw it as a challenge and as an opportunity to help them get out of this division. That's something that has always motivated me. I've no regrets on that one.

You said you wanted to 'dip your toe into coaching' when you came here. Have you managed to do that?

Yeah, a little. I've taken a few training sessions and enjoyed that. We have a little group I take on Wednesdays for a little extra stuff and I'd like to pursue that avenue in future.

What will it mean to Castleford fans to get back into the engage Super League?

It was great to have that support at home in the elimination semi-final. It's a proper Rugby League town and there's nothing better than being in the top competition in this country. They'll try and give us a big lift, and we want to give them something to cheer about.

And what would it mean to you personally?

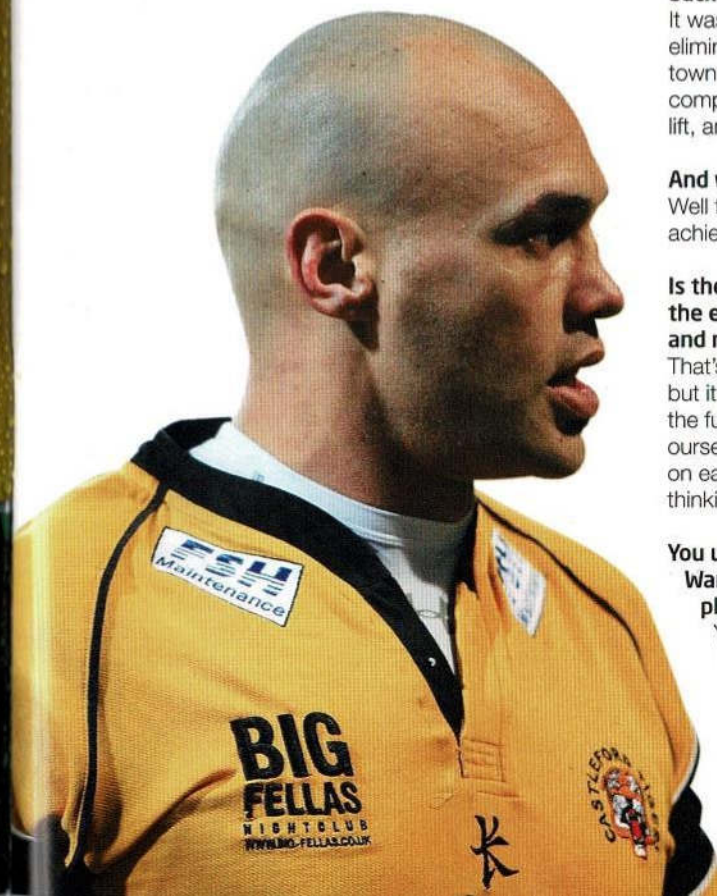
Well that's the reason I'm here. It'd be tremendous to achieve that goal, and so far it's gone to plan.

Is there more pressure on the club to get into the engage Super League in time for promotion and relegation being abolished next season?

That's not been spoken about. The rewards are huge but it would be counter-productive to think about the future. It's a Grand Final and we need to prepare ourselves to win this game – we've got to concentrate on each tackle, each ball, each move, so we can't be thinking about external factors.

You used to play with Stacey Jones at New Zealand Warriors. Have you seen him at all since he's been playing in the engage Super League?

Yeah, we've seen quite a lot of each other. It was awesome to see him run out at Wembley and I've been to Perpignan. He's had a tremendous career and it'll be good to see him have one last game for the All Golds in the Centenary international at Warrington. I'm hoping to be there even if I'm not playing. It should be a great occasion.



THAT WINNING FEELING

Widnes coach **Steve McCormack** believes being tested in the play-offs will only help his side today



This is your fourth Grand Final in a row. Do you think that'll help you prepare?

I've been in five finals in four years, if you include the Northern Rail Cup Final, and I feel privileged to have been part of teams that have been to those finals. Having said that, finals are a great place for winners, and I hope now we've experienced that feeling with the Northern Rail Cup we'll want to do it again.

The teams look well matched. What advantages do you feel Widnes have?

Cas have a number of outstanding individuals, but as a team I think we can do well against them. We've done that consistently throughout the season, and particularly in big games. I'm confident in our skill, our pace and ability to score tries, but there are small margins in a game as tight as this. Both teams have had a lot of chances in previous games and it's a question of who can take them.

Will there be any surprises in your tactics for this game?

You can't only have a 'Plan A'. Both teams know a lot about each other, but we'll have a few things up our sleeve, as I'm sure Terry Matterson will. As usual though, it'll be about who performs best on the day and maybe who wants it that little bit more.

Halifax didn't make it easy for you in the final eliminator. Was it good to be tested before the final?

It might give us an advantage because playing against Halifax there was lots of pressure for a week leading up to that game, and we had to calm ourselves down. I was delighted with the way they played under pressure. It's a case of keeping everyone together mentally and

physically and not playing the game too early in your head. If we can do that again we've got a great chance.

You fought Castleford right to the end to get the top spot. What do you see as their biggest threat?

In the middle they've got Guttenbeil and Leafa, who are quality players, and Andrew

Henderson playing off the back of that. Thackeray has been good for them and they've also got players who can return the ball well, like Stuart Donlan. But we're more interested in how we play ourselves.

If you do get promoted, will you be sticking with this squad or looking to recruit new faces?

We've made a commitment that if they're good enough to get up there, they're good enough to play a major part next year. We'll strengthen the team as well but the players we've got this year will have first crack.

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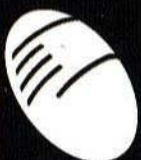
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"I'm good enough, and the team is good enough"

Widnes full-back **Scott Grix** is keen to prove his engage Super League credentials

What would getting Widnes into the engage Super League mean to you personally?

It'd be massive. People always say I might be good enough to be in Super League – I just hope I can do enough to get us there. This will actually be my 100th career appearance, so it'd be nice to mark it with a win!

Didn't you play in the engage Super League for Halifax?

No, I was with Halifax the year they got relegated but I didn't play because I went on loan to Doncaster. I'd like to prove to myself and other people that I can play at Super League level. I'm confident that I'm good enough and also the team is good enough, not only to go up but also survive in Super League.

Being from Halifax, did it feel good to play so well against your hometown club in the play-off game?

It was a bit weird because all my family and my girlfriend's family are Halifax supporters. It's special when you play against them. I've still got mates there and I still look out for their results but I certainly had no problems being on the winning side against them.

How do you relax yourself for a game like this?

It's easier with it being an afternoon game – I'm not so keen on evening games because it's

too long a day leading up to it. When we played Cas a couple of weeks ago I was up early, then I watched three DVDs during the day to take my mind off it. I was too pumped up in that game in the end – I think I dealt with it better before the Halifax game. Then I relaxed a lot more and I ended up playing a much better game.

Do you have any rituals just before kick-off?

The only thing I always do is tie my left boot first. I can put my right boot on first, but I have to tie the left lace first. Don't know why. But I don't have any special undies or anything like that...

Everyone's predicting a close final. What do you see as the difference between the teams?

We know each other well, but in a game like this there are so many little things that can go either way. Last time they scored off a couple of kicks, an interception, a couple of decisions went against us... the scoreline didn't really tell the story. If we take our chances and stay composed we can push things our way.

You won your first cap for Ireland recently. Are you hoping to go to the World Cup next year?

Definitely! I played last year against Lebanon in Dublin and I'd love to go to the World Cup. I don't know if I'll be in the squad – there's talk of a few players coming out of the woodwork – but to play in a World Cup would be something else.



Ones to watch: Castleford

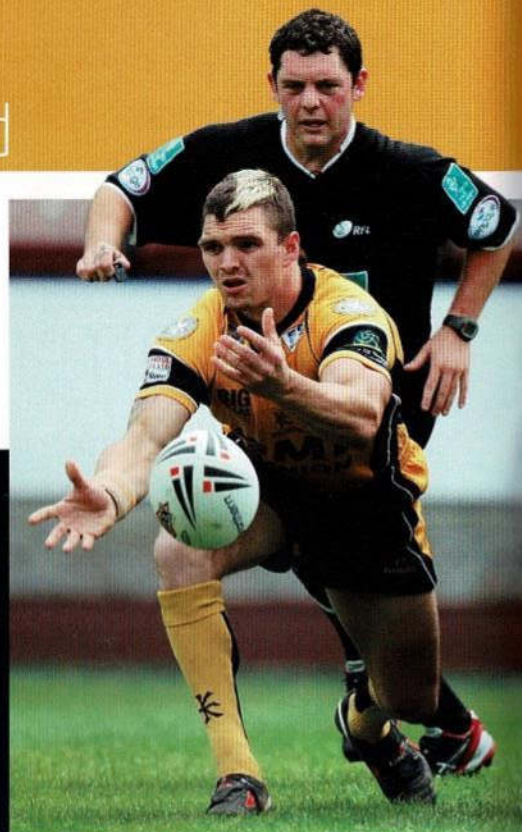


Castleford captain **ANDREW HENDERSON** names five of his players to watch out for in today's co-operative National League One Grand Final

DANNY BROUGH Scrum-half

"Danny has been a very important player for us this season. He's still only young, but he's got bags of Super League experience with Hull and Wakefield. His kicking game is phenomenal and he's got a good turn of pace too. He's also a good organiser, directing the

team's movements, which is what you look for in a half-back. He's paired up really well with Anthony Thackeray, who's a really exciting young player – they complement each other nicely. Danny's going back to Wakefield next season and we'll definitely miss him."



Ones to watch: Widnes

Co-operative National League One

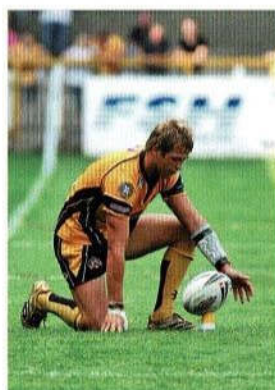
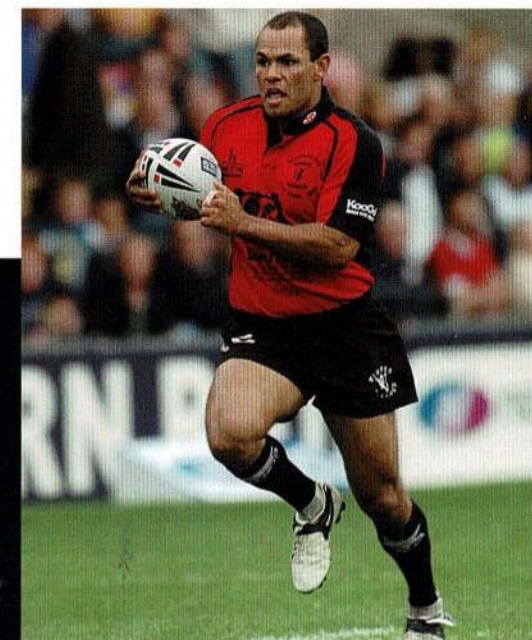


By Widnes captain **MARK SMITH**. "I can't speak highly enough of my team, and reaching this final is a tribute to every one of them."

DENNIS MORAN Scrum-half/Stand-off

"Dennis has been an indispensable part of our squad since he joined last year. His try scoring record speaks for itself. Even with all his experience he's still getting better, and I think the big improvement in Dennis this year has been his defence. He's not just

tackling people, he's really hurting people. He's a world class player – you don't play in Super League and get nominated for Man of Steel unless you've got something about you. Coming into big games like this you look to Dennis to take games by the scruff of the neck."



MARK LEAFA Second row

"Our Samoan international has been outstanding this year. He grew up playing Rugby League in Australia, so he's got NRL and Super League experience. He carries the ball strongly and aggressively and he's got a really skilful pair of hands. He's really good going forward but wins lots of tackles in defence."



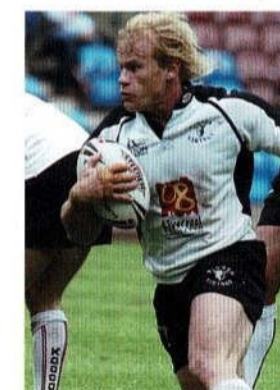
MICHAEL SHENTON Centre

"Only just turned 21 this year and he's been getting rave reviews. He's come into his own this season, and we're very fortunate to retain him after he had a great season last year. A very good runner with the ball, great footwork, turn of speed, defensively very good and really strong as well. So definitely one to watch for the future."



OLIVER WILKES Second row

"He's had a massive season, and was nominated for the National League One Player of the year award – which shows how well he's done for playing 40-50 minutes per game. He leads by example, he's an old school forward who runs hard and straight and when he hits people they know about it."

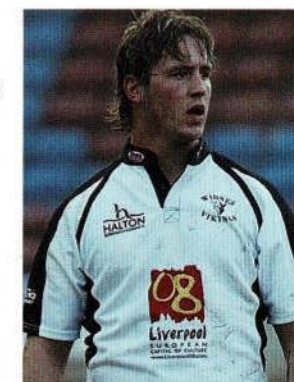


BOB BESWICK Loose forward

"Another massive player and hopefully he'll be a big part of the team if we get to Super League. The engine on the bloke is phenomenal and when others are tiring, Bob kicks on and finds another gear. He tackles hard, he's got all the skills, he thrives on the big games, and when Bob plays well we play well too."

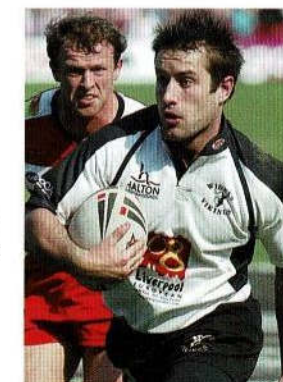
MICK NANYN Centre

"Mick doesn't always get the credit he deserves. He scores lots of tries, he's a lot quicker than people think, and he's often got us out of trouble. Against Cas in the first game he scored a try which I don't think anyone else could have done. As for his kicking, he's broken records wherever he's gone. He's so reliable."



DAMIEN BLANCH Winger

"Damien is our Vainikolo – a big strong lad and a powerful try scorer. His work rate from dummy half is fantastic. He's a model professional too, early in for training, first in the gym and last out. He's a typical Aussie – fun to be around, terrible dress sense – but, in fact, he plays for Ireland. Damien O'Blanch, if you like!"



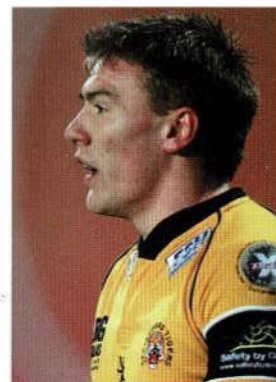
JOE WESTERMAN Loose forward/Stand-off

"He's only 17 but was recently voted our young player of the year. If there was a benefit in being relegated from Super League, it was being able to give opportunities to young players like Joe. The young ones doing well gives us older blokes a lot of confidence, because you can rely on them to do the job."



AWEN GUTTENBEIL Second row

"He was a legend at New Zealand Warriors, he's an international with bags of experience – it was surprising we were able to get a player of his calibre to play in National League One. He also does the assistant coach's role, and he's a true professional who has taught the players a few new techniques as well."



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Pictured is Sergeant Anthony Cowburn Royal Engineers & Captain of the Army Rugby League

CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE FINALS DAY 2007



Road to the final

Co-operative National League One

Castleford needed just one extra game to reach today's Grand Final, while Widnes needed two bites at the cherry. Here's how they got to Headingley



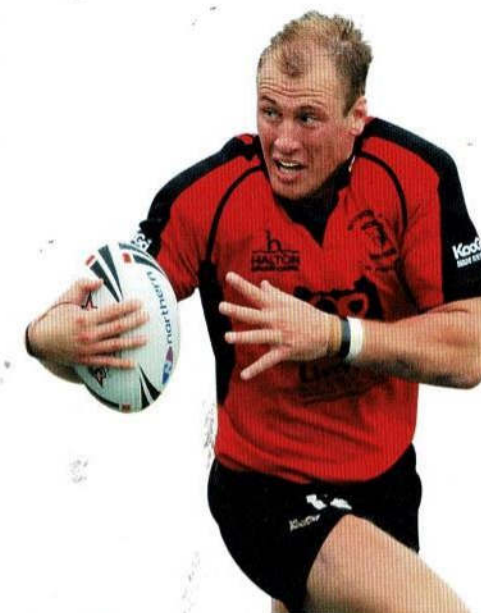
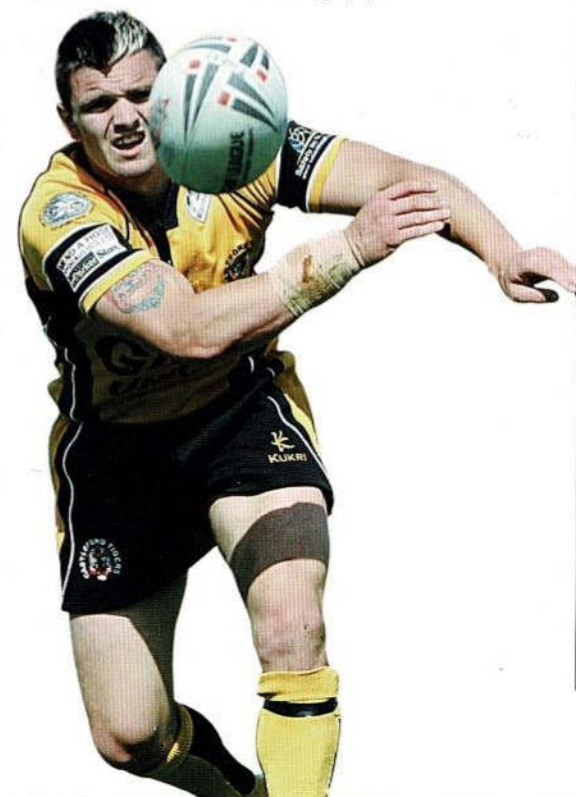
CASTLEFORD TIGERS

CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE ONE

6 APR	Halifax RLFC (H)	46-22
12 APR	Doncaster Lakers (A)	66-4
15 APR	Batley Bulldogs (H)	75-12
29 APR	Rochdale Hornets (H)	56-6
6 MAY	Leigh Centurions (A)	32-24
17 MAY	Widnes Vikings (H)	20-44
3 JUNE	Halifax RLFC (A)	30-14
10 JUNE	Dewsbury Rams (H)	56-8
15 JUNE	Sheffield Eagles (A)	27-15
1 JULY	Whitehaven (H)	44-12
8 JULY	Doncaster Lakers (H)	66-4
22 JULY	Batley Bulldogs (A)	42-6
29 JULY	Dewsbury Rams (A)	36-10
5 AUG	Sheffield Eagles (H)	52-26
9 AUG	Whitehaven (A)	20-12
16 AUG	Widnes Vikings (A)	24-18
2 SEPT	Leigh Centurions (H)	62-10
9 SEPT	Rochdale Hornets (A)	106-0

QUALIFYING SEMI-FINAL

20 SEPT	Widnes Vikings (H)	26-8
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WIDNES VIKINGS

CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE ONE

5 APR	Leigh Centurions (H)	46-12
9 APR	Rochdale Hornets (A)	40-18
13 APR	Sheffield Eagles (A)	46-4
26 APR	Halifax RLFC (H)	48-12
6 MAY	Batley Bulldogs (H)	66-14
17 MAY	Castleford Tigers (A)	44-20
3 JUNE	Sheffield Eagles (H)	56-10
10 JUNE	Doncaster Lakers (A)	90-4
14 JUNE	Halifax RLFC (A)	6-12
1 JULY	Rochdale Hornets (H)	32-0
5 JULY	Dewsbury Rams (A)	50-10
22 JULY	Whitehaven (H)	16-14
29 JULY	Doncaster Lakers (H)	40-18
2 AUG	Leigh Centurions (A)	38-0
12 AUG	Dewsbury Rams (H)	48-12
16 AUG	Castleford Tigers (H)	18-24
2 SEPT	Whitehaven (A)	22-18
9 SEPT	Batley Bulldogs (A)	18-34

QUALIFYING SEMI-FINAL

20 SEPT	Castleford Tigers (A)	8-26
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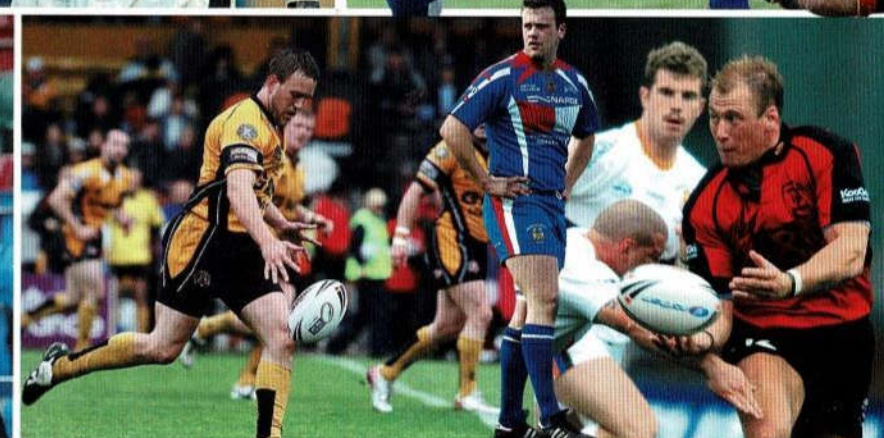
FINAL ELIMINATOR

27 SEPT	Halifax RLFC (H)	36-24
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Season review

CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE ONE

Widnes and Castleford led from the start, but there were twists and turns all the way



APRIL/MAY

Within the first four weeks of the season, it became clear that two teams were going to set the standard in co-operative National League One. During the month of April, neither Castleford nor Widnes notched up less than 40 points in any game.

Also showing promising early form were Whitehaven, with only one defeat in the first two months of the campaign. Their sole loss was to Doncaster Lakers, who would only win twice

more all season, after encountering financial difficulties. Though they were eventually reformed as Doncaster RLFC, a six-point deduction hampered their on-pitch fortunes.

The Dons' South Yorkshire neighbours Sheffield were faring even worse. Their 2006 National League Two play-off win had triggered dreams of the engage Super League, but they could not record a win in the first two months of the season, and relegation looked more likely.

The top two teams met for the first time on 17 May at The Jungle in Castleford, but it was Widnes who came away with the spoils, running in eight tries during a comprehensive 44-20 win. Castleford coach Terry Matterson called the defeat 'a massive reality check'. Was this a sign that Widnes were going to run away with the league? Nothing in sport is ever quite that simple...

JUNE/JULY

By mid-June, the Vikings had accrued an average score of over 55 points in the eight games played. Meanwhile, Halifax had lost five of their first seven matches. However, when the two sides met at a rain-sodden Shay in June, Ian Watson's kicking game saw them grind out a 12-6 win over the leaders. It would prove to be the turning point of their season.

Widnes struck another psychological blow against Castleford, winning their Northern Rail Cup semi-final to set up a meeting with Whitehaven.

The 54-6 scoreline in the final in Blackpool was harsh on the Cumbrians, but it showed not only the gulf in quality between Widnes and the rest of the division (barring Cas), but also reflected Haven's apparent inability to record a win over the big two.

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

Despite winning last year's Northern Rail Cup, Leigh Centurions' season never really got going this year. By the start of August they had lost as many games as they had won, they shipped 60-odd points to both Castleford and Halifax, and they failed to score against Widnes.

After that morale-boosting win over Whitehaven, Widnes, Halifax went on to win eight of their next nine games, eventually pipping the early season pacesetters Whitehaven to bag fourth place.

Another team to turn their season around was Sheffield, who took the final play-off place after winning every other game they played from the start of June to the end of the season. They pipped Dewsbury, who despite gaining six bonus points for narrow defeats, ultimately won no more games than Doncaster, or eighth placed Batley, who did the double over their West Yorkshire rivals but struggled to find any consistent form.

Widnes bounced back from that shock defeat at

The Shay to win six on the trot, but when they came to play Castleford in a crunch game at the Halton Stadium in mid-August, their form deserted them, and the Yorkshiremen prevailed 24-18 to regain top spot in the league.

Spare a thought for Rochdale, though. Languishing at second from bottom, a miserable season was complete when they were crushed 106-0 by Castleford at Spotland, shortly after former Sheffield boss Gary Wilkinson turned down the chance to coach the club.

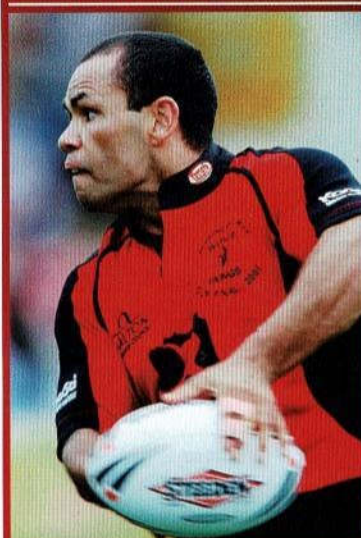
Season review

NATIONAL LEAGUE ONE AWARDS

Rugby League World magazine's pick of the best of co-operative National League One this season

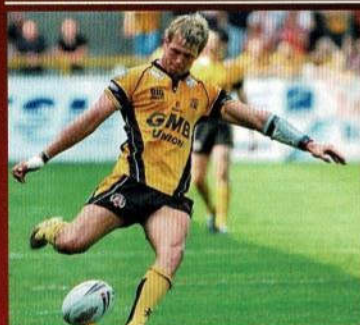
In association with **Rugby League**

PLAYER OF THE YEAR



Winner: **DENNIS MORAN** (Widnes)
Nominees: Sean Penkywicz (Halifax), Oliver Wilkes (Widnes)

YOUNG PLAYER OF THE YEAR



Winner: **JOE WESTERMAN** (Castleford)
Nominees: Michael Shenton (Castleford), Ian Preece (Dewsbury)

RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD MAGAZINE PLAYERS OF THE MONTH

APRIL: Danny Brough (Castleford)
MAY: Bob Beswick (Widnes)
JUNE: Paul Noone (Widnes)
JULY: Dennis Moran (Widnes)
AUGUST: Graham Holroyd (Halifax)

COACH OF THE YEAR



Winner: **MARK ASTON** (Sheffield)
Nominees: Terry Matterson (Castleford), Steve McCormack (Widnes)

The Rugby League World Magazine CO-OPERATIVE NL1 TEAM OF THE YEAR

1. Scott Grix (Widnes)
2. Damien Blanch (Widnes)
3. Michael Shenton (Castleford)
4. Mick Nannyn (Widnes)
5. Danny Mills (Sheffield)
6. Dennis Moran (Widnes)
7. Danny Brough (Castleford)
8. Oliver Wilkes (Widnes)
9. Sean Penkywicz (Halifax)
10. Mark Leafa (Castleford)
11. Richard Fletcher (Whitehaven)
12. Ryan Clayton (Castleford)
13. Bob Beswick (Widnes)

VIEW OF THE SEASON: COACHES' QUOTES

"It's been traumatic at times, but I've enjoyed my time at the club so far. It was a tough challenge for us to stay in the division, but we gave it a really good shot. Outstanding player? Oliver Wilkes has been consistently good. Eight weeks ago I wouldn't have backed against Widnes for the final, but Castleford have hit some form."
John Stankevitch, Doncaster

"We're disappointed not to make the top six. We made it last year and that's what we hoped for but in the end we just managed to survive. Best players? Sean

Penkywicz at Halifax was really good this year, while Dennis Moran and Danny Brough have also been excellent. It's tough to pick a Grand Final winner. I'd like to see Steve McCormack and Widnes go up, but Cas seem to be in better form. As for League Two, Oldham seem to be in the ascendancy."

Gary Thornton, Batley

"Considering that no promoted side had ever stayed up, survival was the most important thing for us. We flirted with the play-offs all year and we view it as nothing other than successful. Dennis

Moran is my player of the year in NL1, and I think Widnes might have the edge over Castleford."

Andy Kelly, Dewsbury

"It was a rollercoaster ride. We were inconsistent and it was a tough year, but a lot of kids got their chance in the first team and that will stand us in good stead. Richard Fletcher was really consistent for Whitehaven. I'll tip Castleford for the Grand Final. Featherstone Rovers are strong in NL2, but Oldham will fancy their chances."

Darren Shaw, Leigh

FIVE STEPS TO HEAVEN

Justin Morgan, coach of 2006 National League Grand Final winners Hull KR, has some tips on Super League survival next season

ONE: ESTABLISH A SUPER LEAGUE MINDSET

As a coach it's important to establish a mentality for your team that will carry on into Super League. There are other pressures in Super League – external pressures, the media pressure, more people at games, and more expected of you. You need to make sure that the non-tangible things in the game – team spirit and harmony and positive thinking – are not affected by the pressure.

TWO: PICK YOUR PLAYERS EARLY

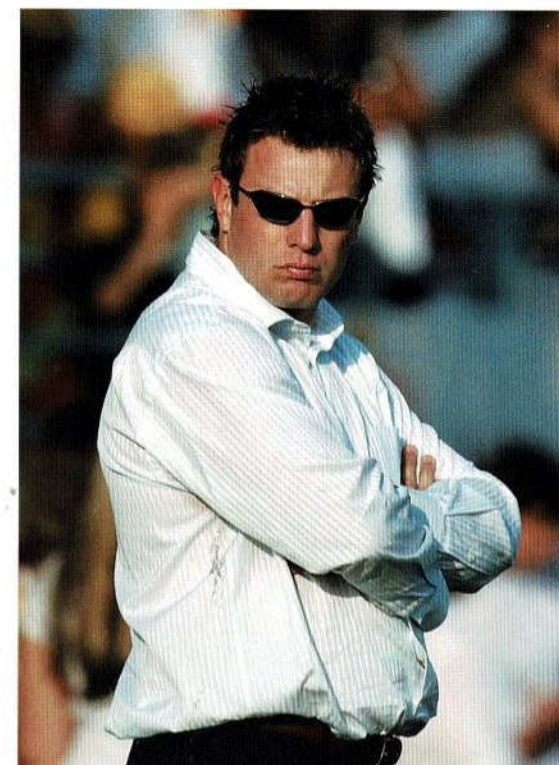
Some players will be reluctant to join a newly promoted club, and that's why you need to be careful with your recruitment. We began recruiting for this year's Super League season in 2005. Hence why we took a lot of the players through, like Ben Fisher, Ben Cockayne, Scott Murrell, James Webster – we recruited them because we felt they could do well in Super League in 18 months time. And they did.

Super League players are faster, fitter, and stronger, and more skilful. My players could produce the same skills as Super League players when they were promoted, but the difference is doing that when under pressure, week in week out. It's what the top teams do.

THREE: FOCUS ON A GOOD START

We geared our pre-season training up to starting the season well, and it worked for us. We wanted to take the confidence we'd created in the National League and ride that into the Super League. We knew we wouldn't be able to do that for long – maybe a month or six weeks at the most, but that was the reason why we took players through from the National Leagues and geared up to start well.

We had a bit of a flat period in the middle of the season, but our good start meant we knew we were good enough to start winning games again.



FOUR: LEARN TO DEAL WITH DEFEAT

There is always pressure as a top team in the National League, but you're also confident because you're winning. In Super League you lose more than you win and that can put you on a downward spiral. Promoted teams tend to win by a close score or lose by 30 or 40, which suggests when they go behind they find it hard to get back into the game. It's a mental toughness that Super League teams have developed over time.

"National League One players can often produce the same skills as Super League ones – the difference is doing that week in week out"

FIVE: PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

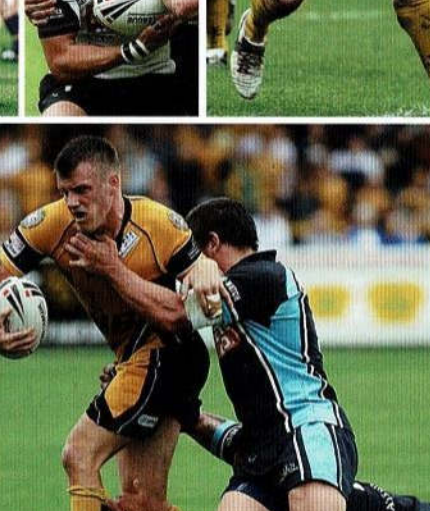
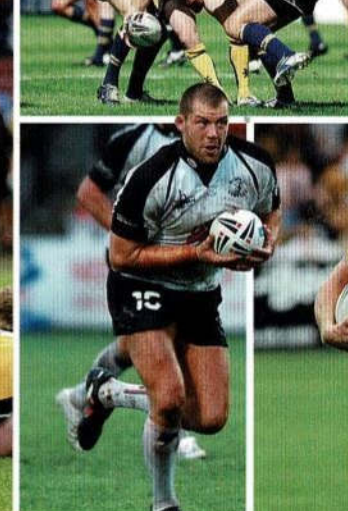
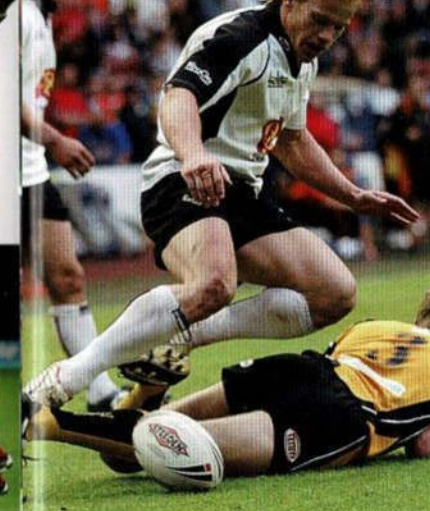
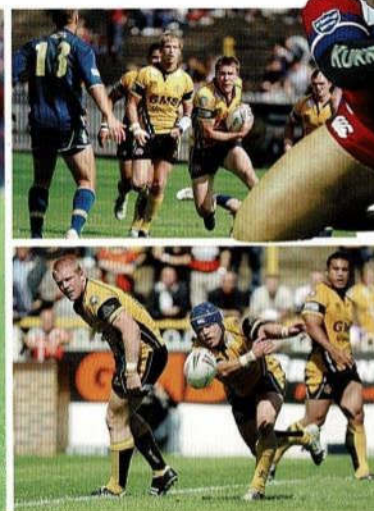
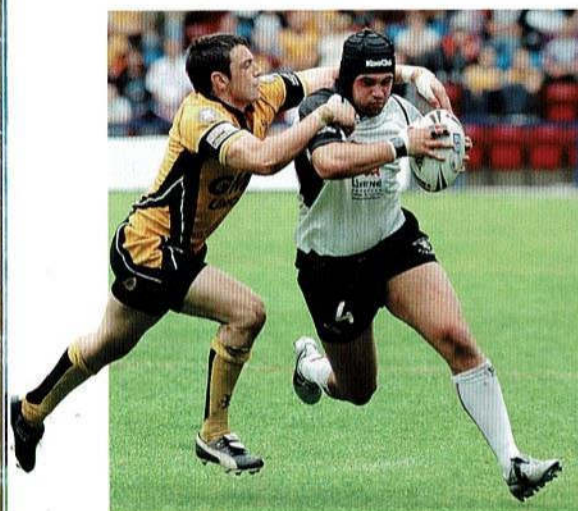
We had a long term plan to build a team that could not only win the National League Grand Final, but go forward and hold its own in Super League. But the planning doesn't end there. You need to keep progressing. We'll be a different side in our second year in Super League, because we have to make sure that we move forward next season. We'll have 10 or 12 new faces, that was always the intention when I came here.

Key battles

ANALYSIS



Sky Sports pundit **Barrie McDermott** highlights the key areas where today's Grand Final could be won or lost



FORWARDS

If you look at the make up of the two teams, in the packs you've got a battle of agility and athleticism versus size and power. Cas are very strong and powerful, they've got the likes of **Mark Leafa**, **Craig Huby**, **Ryan Boyle** and **Awen Guttenbeil** – all big, strong aggressive players – and defensively they're going to be very tough to break down. Widnes's pack includes **Bob Beswick**, a very fine player, and **Mick Cassidy** who is 34 years old but works very unselfishly. He begins their roll forward and gets the quick Play The Ball.

But for me, **Oliver Wilkes** has been the best front row forward in National League One. He's a very skilful and agile player, and he's had a very consistent season. He'll be looking to be a bit more creative to link up with **Mark Smith** and their other creative players to let their team use their speed and athleticism, which is when they're at their best.

Both hookers like to pick up the ball and run. **Andrew Henderson** for Castleford is very inventive, very industrious, he gives good service to his forwards and makes long accurate

passes from dummy half. **Mark Smith** for Widnes, meanwhile, is very quick in the way he reads the game. If ever there's a lapse in concentration in the opposition marker, then he's gone – he's like lightning.

PLAYMAKERS

Both Smith and full-back **Scott Grix** marshal that middle channel and back up the forwards – they've both got plenty of Rugby League in them and they will play you off the park if they're given half a chance. That's why, if it's dry conditions that will suit Widnes, because Leeds

Headingley Carnegie stadium has a bigger pitch than Castleford's ground, and there's likely to be more wide open spaces there. Added to the atmosphere that the stadium and the big crowd creates, Widnes will be encouraged to play and create second phase opportunities. I think that will be to their advantage. Castleford, on the other hand, like to play tighter, and **Danny Brough** will look to pin Widnes down behind their own line with his kicks. But I think the back three for Widnes – **Scott Grix**, **Gavin Dodd** and **Damien Blanch** – are

very good at starting the ball rolling and if they can do that then they may find this is a great place for Widnes to be at their best.

There's a real contrast between the half-backs – **Dennis Moran** plays either half-back or stand-off but he is very individual, a fantastic poacher of tries, master of the intercept and a very strong defender. People target him and look to take some petrol out of his tank, but invariably he's too good for them. **Anthony Thackeray** for Castleford, on the other hand, is more of a traditional organising half-back, the pivot and

link between forwards to backs. He lets **Danny Brough** concentrate on what he needs to do which means he can make things happen as well.

TRY SCORERS

Mick Nanyn at centre for Widnes is a very under-rated player. He scores tries as regular as clockwork, he's kicking the ball from all angles and he's very reliable. He'll make a chance into a try and that's invaluable.

But in the same position for Cas, **Michael Shenton** is a real threat with the ball in his hand.

He's got great skills, great footwork, a lovely kicking game, and he makes plenty of opportunities for his winger. **Damien Blanch** for Widnes is also a very fine athlete, probably the best player outside Super League. **Scott Grix** has great footwork, he's also got a nice short passing game and regularly gets over to score. **Gavin Dodd** also gets a few, and he could be a surprise package in this final.

BARRIE'S VERDICT

In a big game it's about taking your chances and putting the pressure on. If you're doing more defending than your opponents then you're more liable to crumble and let tries and points in.

People think Castleford should walk it because they're the form team. But Widnes have got great strike power and can hurt any team at any moment. So it's just too close to call.

Play-offs



IN WITH A SHOUT
Six co-operative NL2 teams battled for a place at Headingley Carnegie - and produced five play-off matches full of action

QUALIFYING SEMI-FINAL

Featherstone Rovers (20) 36

T: D Kirmond 2, W McHugh, A Adebisi, G Handford, J Field. G: S Dickens 6

Barrow Raiders (6) 20

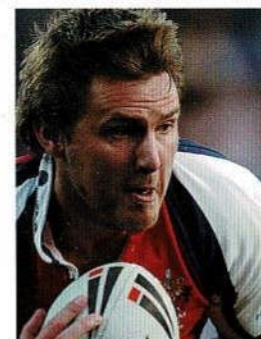
T: M Basan, L Harrison, A Ellis, L Dutton. G: D Holt 2

Chris Moyles Stadium, Featherstone.
Sunday 23 September. Att: 1,791

A blistering start saw Featherstone book their place in the Grand Final. Danny Kirmond put Rovers ahead in the seventh minute before tries from Ade Adebisi and Gareth Handford gave them a commanding 16-0 lead with just 18 minutes gone. Barrow eventually got on the scoresheet with Liam Harrison's try, but Wayne McHugh's score just before half-time extended Rovers' lead. Barrow stayed in contention with second half tries from Andy Ellis, Lee Dutton and Mike Basan, but Stuart Dickens replied for Rovers and when Jamie Field went over with five minutes left, they booked their place at Carnegie Headingley.

CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE TWO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Bpts	PTS
1 Celtic Crusaders	22	19	0	3	918	345	3	60
2 Featherstone Rovers	22	18	0	4	819	366	2	56
3 Barrow Raiders	22	17	0	5	769	387	4	55
4 Oldham RLFC	22	16	0	6	661	420	5	53
5 Workington Town	22	12	0	10	655	515	7	43
6 York City Knights	22	10	0	12	488	470	6	36
7 Swinton Lions	22	11	0	11	605	649	6	33
8 Hunslet Hawks	22	8	0	14	368	591	7	31
9 London Skolars	22	8	1	13	448	610	4	30
10 Keighley Cougars	22	6	1	15	407	692	4	24
11 Gateshead Thunder	22	6	0	16	381	822	3	21
12 Blackpool Panthers	22	0	0	22	332	984	6	6



ELIMINATION PLAY-OFF

Oldham RLFC (26) 36

T: B Ford, A Hughes, L Onyango 2, R Roberts 2, G Costin. G: G Morton 4

Swinton Lions (0) 6

T: C Ashall. G: L Marsh

Boundary Park, Oldham.
Sunday 16 September.
Attendance: 1,120

Oldham ran in five first-half tries against Swinton Lions to ease into the Elimination Semi-final. Oldham made the perfect start when Adam Hughes and Lucas Onyango combined to send Hughes over inside the first minute. Oldham extended their lead in the seventh minute when Byron Ford took advantage of a loose ball by his own goal-line to race almost 100 metres and score in the corner. Onyango then crossed five minutes later before Geno Costin gave Oldham a comfortable half-time lead. Onyango made it 30-0 before Swinton finally got on the scoresheet when Craig Ashall went over with 12 minutes remaining. However, Rob Roberts' try from the restart completed the scoring in a one-sided match.



ELIMINATION PLAY-OFF

Workington T (10) 42

T: M Wilson, S Dawes 3, D Miller 2.

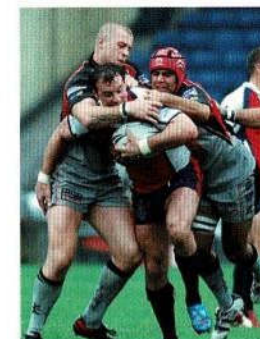
G: C Forber 9

York City Knights (4) 4

G: R Esders 2

Derwent Park, Workington.
Sunday 16 September.
Attendance: 669

Workington cruised through to the Elimination Semi-final with a crushing win over York City Knights, despite being reduced to 11 men at one stage. On a day of blustery winds, York went ahead from Ryan Esders' 40-yard penalty kick, but when Dexter Miller's try put Workington ahead in the 13th minute, York never recovered. Town hooker Shaun Lunt was then red-carded in the 28th minute for alleged biting in the tackle. With the half-time score at 10-6, the game was wide open, but Workington simply blew York away in the second half. Taani Lavulavu was sin-binned and York briefly held a two-man advantage, but Workington extended their lead, running in a further four tries from Miller, Stephen Dawes and Martyn Wilson.



ELIMINATION SEMI-FINAL

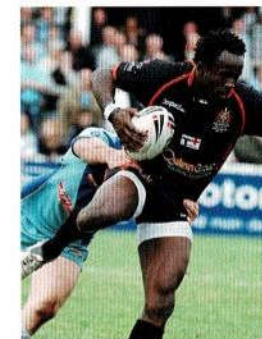
Oldham RLFC (18) 48

T: G Langley 3, A Hughes 2, L Onyango, J Coyle, G Costin, I Hodson, M Brooks. G: G Langley, A Hughes 3

Workington T (0) 0

Boundary Park, Oldham.
Sunday 23 September.
Attendance: 1,128

Oldham earned their place in the Final Eliminator in style with a 10-try whitewash of the Cumbrians. Adam Hughes opened the scoring in the fourth minute, and just six minutes later, they had extended the lead, Lucas Onyango hacking a split ball upfield and chasing after it himself to touch down. Ian Hodson and Gareth Langley then went over and Oldham were 18-0 up at the break. Workington were still hopeful of turning the game around, but when Franco Kmet was sent to the sin bin shortly after half-time, the floodgates opened for Oldham. Two tries from James Coyle and another from Hughes made it 32-0 and three more tries in the final 16 minutes of the game completed the rout.



FINAL ELIMINATOR

Barrow Raiders (0) 6

T: M Basan 1, G: D Holt 1

Oldham RLFC (16) 28

T: A Hughes 3, J Coyle 2, G: G Langley 6

New Craven Park, Barrow.
Sunday 30 September.
Attendance: 2,771

Proving beyond doubt that they are the form team of co-operative National League Two, Oldham recorded their 10th win in 11 games at New Craven Park to set up a fascinating play-off final with Featherstone Rovers. Oldham stamped their dominance on the game in the first half hour, as converted tries from Adam Hughes and two from James Coyle gave them a 16-0 lead at the break. Michael Basan's try for Barrow after 52 minutes triggered something of a fightback from the home side, but Oldham, who conceded an average of just four points during their three play-off games, held out. Finally, Hughes added two more tries in the last 10 minutes of the game to complete his hat trick and send his team to Headingley Carnegie brimming with confidence.

Season review

CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE TWO

The Welshmen were on song as Celtic Crusaders took the League Two honours



APRIL/MAY

The contrast between the opening two months of the season could hardly have been more pronounced for the only full-time side in co-operative National League Two, Celtic Crusaders.

After clocking up 254 points and conceding only 34 in their opening four games, they looked a class apart, especially in an 82-4 win over Swinton. But they only managed to get over the 30 point mark once in the next seven games, losing to Oldham and Workington, then Hunslet in June. Meanwhile, Featherstone, Oldham, Workington and Barrow won seven of their first eight to set the pace.

But for every winner, there's a loser, and last year's play-off finalists Swinton were enduring a frustrating start to the season, particularly after

incurring a mandatory six-point penalty for going into administration. If that was frustrating, Blackpool's start was a nightmare. At the end of May, they still awaited their first win of the season, three bonus points for narrow defeats their only consolation. London Skolars also managed only a solitary draw, ending May with only four points. Gateshead's opening day victory over York was their only win until they beat Keighley at the end of May. The Cougars fared worse still, with only one win in two months.

JUNE/JULY

The summer began in earnest with wins for the Crusaders over table-topping rivals Featherstone and Barrow. Nevertheless, the Yorkshiremen won another seven on the trot to extend their lead at the top, until they once more fell to the

Welsh at the end of July. Those two defeats would prove crucial in the final reckoning, as Crusaders would not drop another point all season.

Workington, meanwhile, fell off the pace with five defeats in eight games, as did Oldham with four losses in five. However, Hunslet briefly offered hope to their fans, pulling off an unlikely victory over Celtic Crusaders in June to make it four wins from seven games. However, they threw away a half-time lead to lose at Gateshead, and their season went downhill from there. Things didn't get much better for Gateshead either, as they struggled alongside Keighley. London Skolars pulled clear, with five wins in seven, and York surged towards the play-off places with three wins on the bounce in July. Swinton's win-one, lose-one form continued to pin them in mid-

table, but Blackpool would gladly have swapped places with them. Still without a win, three bonus points were the last of a miserable season.

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

Celtic Crusaders continued their winning streak into September, but the top spot was still up for grabs when they went to Boundary Park on 30 August to play before the TV cameras. They came back from 12-6 down at half time to win 32-18 and all but seal the title.

Featherstone ran them close until the final day, when defeat at Craven Park meant they had to settle for second spot, with Barrow third. Oldham, meanwhile, secured a play-off place, having surged back into the top four, winning eight of their last nine games. Hunslet's hopes, however, were dashed by a

disastrous run of only two wins in the final 10 weeks of the season. Swinton and Workington made the other two play-off spots, the former maintaining their perfectly consistent inconsistency, ending up with a record of won 11, lost 11.

London Skolars continued their good form into August, but a disastrous 34-0 home defeat to York proved decisive in handing the latter a play-off place at their expense. The bottom teams were playing for pride by now, and Gateshead drew level on points with basement rivals Keighley with a last gasp drop goal to beat them 19-18. However, a 13-0 midweek defeat at Hunslet deprived them of the bonus point they needed to edge ahead. As it happened, the Cougars beat Hunslet in their final game to avoid a bottom two finish anyway.

Co-operative National League Two

NATIONAL LEAGUE TWO AWARDS

In association with **Rugby League**

PLAYER OF THE YEAR



Winner: **TONY DUGGAN** (Celtic)
Nominees: Jace van Dijk (Celtic), Neil Budworth (Celtic)

YOUNG PLAYER OF THE YEAR



Winner: **SHAUN LUNT** (Workington)
Nominees: Richard Knight (Keighley); Lee Mapals (York); and Danny Kirmond (Featherstone)

COACH OF THE YEAR



Winner: **LATHAM TAWHAI** (Skolars)
Nominees: John Dixon (Celtic); Paul Crarey (Barrow).

NL2 TEAM OF THE YEAR

1. Tony Duggan (Celtic)
2. Danny Kirmond (Featherstone)
3. Mark Dalle Court (Celtic)
4. Liam Harrison (Barrow)
5. Austin Aggrey (Skolars)
6. Neil Roden (Oldham)
7. Jace van Dijk (Celtic)
8. Stuart Dickens (Featherstone)
9. Neil Budworth (Celtic)
10. Adam Sullivan (York)
11. Neale Wyatt (Celtic)
12. Tommy Haughey (Featherstone)
13. Damien Quinn (Celtic)

Ones to watch: Featherstone Rovers



David Hobbs (coach):

"We set out at the beginning of the year to get into National League One and we've given ourselves a good chance of doing that. We feel confident in our abilities, we've just got to put it together on the day."

STUART DICKENS

Prop

DH: "He's our captain, who regularly plays 80 minutes, which is rare for a front row forward. He did that in a bruising encounter against Barrow to get us into the final, and I'm sure he'll be ready to

do the same again today, if required. He is also a leader – in the two seasons I've been in charge, he's done a great job on and off the field. Despite being over 30, he's showing no signs of tiring."



PAUL HANDFORTH

Scrum-half

"He got the man of the match award against Barrow in the qualifier, and he's key to a lot of what we do. He and Andy Kain have been my preferred half-back combination all year and they're certainly where we expect the creativity to come from after the forwards have done the hard work."



ADE ADEBISI

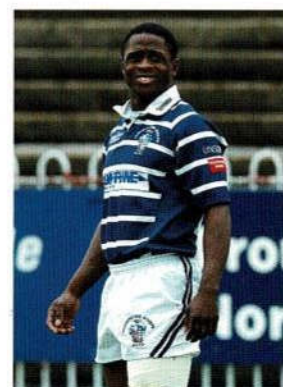
Winger

"He came through the Harlequins youth system and we signed him from Doncaster. He's not the biggest kid in the world but he's quick and strong and a really good try scorer. He got a hat-trick in only his second game with us and he's hitting form at just the right time of the season."

RICHARD BLAKEWAY

Loose forward

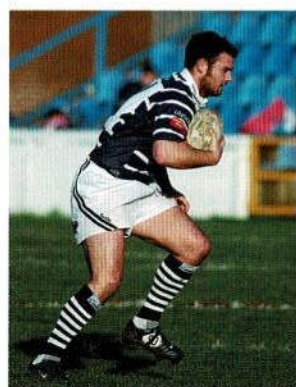
"People see our pack as our big strength and Richard has got a really good all round game, with a lot of it based on a strong defence. He does a tremendous amount of work alongside Jamie Field and Tommy Haughey, and like Tommy, he often pops up with a try or two."



DANNY KIRMOND

Winger

"He's been nominated for National League One young player of the year. He's scored over 30 tries on the wing and I'm sure a lot of eyes are on him, because he's only 21. Many saw him as a potential back row forward but he's got plenty of pace so I opted to use him on the wing and it's paying dividends."



Oldham



Steve Deakin (coach):

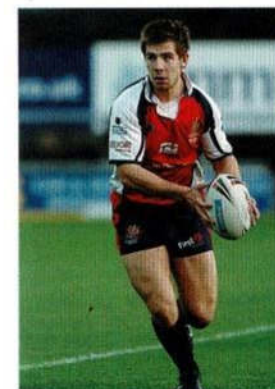
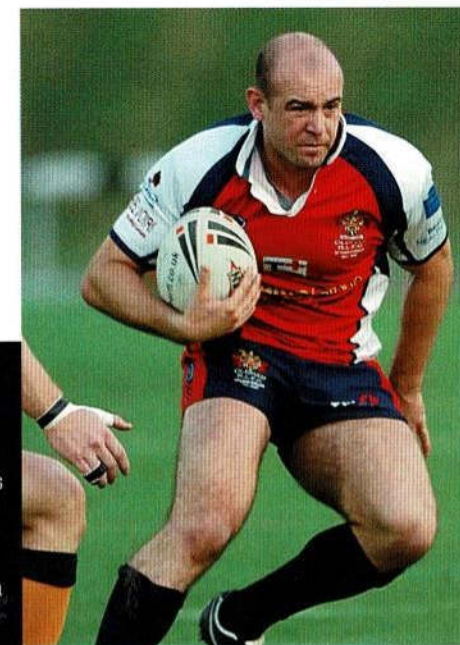
"We've had a real resurgence this season, led by our skipper Rob 'Two Bobs' Roberts who we signed from Leigh. But I'll also mention a few of the other players who have helped us get to this final..."

NEIL RODEN

Stand-off

SD: "He's the club's leading try scorer of all time during two different periods, and he's had an outstanding season. He's in the NL2 team of the year, he's been player of the month and player of the round in the

Northern Rail Cup. He's crucial to our attacking game, he gives us the cutting edge, and he makes the tries for the others. Good distribution allied to a good kicking game make him a big threat to any team."



ADAM HUGHES

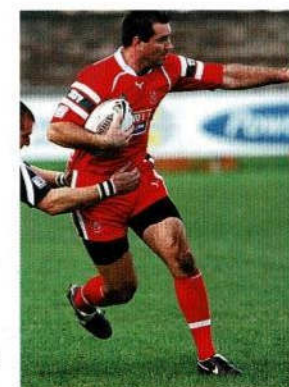
Centre

"A Welsh international centre with 18 tries this season so far. A big go-to player on our left hand side. He's linked up really well with our left side winger Lucas Onyango, our top scorer this season. Between them, they've scored 37 tries so far this season. So we're very strong down the left."

JAMES COYLE

Half-back

"A former Great Britain youth international who we signed from Wigan in June. He helped transform us from a top six team to a team that has got to the Grand Final. He's still only 21 but he's already a great organiser on the field, helping guide the team around the park. He's also our main yardage kicker."



RICHARD MERVILL

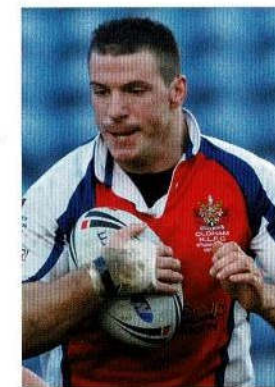
Prop

"He and Neil Roden have been ever-present this season, and Richard has averaged 55 to 60 minutes in games, doing the hard yards and providing the basis for our forward thrusts. He's also a good offloader and very strong defensively. One of those reliable performers that every team needs."

BYRON FORD

Winger

"A Cook Islands International who we signed from Hull KR, he's an extremely good finisher on our right hand side. He scored 11 tries in his first six appearances for us and is one of the go-to players for our team. His ability to jump is equal to anybody in the game, so he's a great target for our attacking kicks."



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JJB Stadium, Wigan

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CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE FINALS DAY 2007



Key battles

Co-operative National League Two

ANALYSIS

Today's play-off final is between two sides who have enjoyed better times, and an intriguing battle for promotion lies ahead, says **Gareth Walker**



Two of Rugby League's most traditional names meet in today's co-operative National League Play-off final, hoping to take a significant step on a road back to the top. Featherstone Rovers and Oldham, having competed at the highest level in the recent past, have both found themselves on the bottom rung of the professional ladder this season, but now stand just 80 minutes away from promotion.

Both sides have made major strides this year, with Rovers only narrowly missing out on top spot to Celtic Crusaders, and the Roughyeds making a late charge for Headingley Carnegie with an outstanding play-off run that culminated in last Sunday's impressive 28-6 win at Barrow.

The two teams are packed with experience, and there will be a host of fascinating battles, starting at half-back. Oldham coach **Steve Deakin** recently labelled his number seven **James Coyle** as 'the best half-back outside Super League', and the ex-Wigan youngster scored a crucial try against Barrow. But

Deakin would find debate among the Featherstone faithful, whose own chief creator **Paul Handforth** was still playing in the engage Super League last year. The two stand-offs will also have key roles to play, with Rovers' **Andy Kain** being a former co-operative NL1 Young Player of the Year, and Oldham's **Neil Roden** named in the co-operative NL2 All Star Team last week.

There will be no lack of try scoring ability out wide, where Oldham can boast the prolific pair of **Adam Hughes** and **Byron Ford**, among others. The much-travelled Hughes bagged a hat-trick last weekend, while Ford has been little short of a revelation since his mid-season loan move from Hull Kingston Rovers. On the opposing side, wingers **Danny Kirmond** and **Ade Adebisi** can trouble defences from anywhere on the field for Rovers and provide a fine mixture of power and pace.

Then there is the battle up front. Featherstone's **Stuart Dickens** was another All Star Team member after an outstanding year at prop, and

his tussles with the likes of **Richard Mervill** and **Tony Tonks** will be fascinating. And in the back row, two more vastly experienced players, Oldham's **Rob Roberts** and Rovers' **Tommy Haughey**, are both capable of breaking their opponents' line.

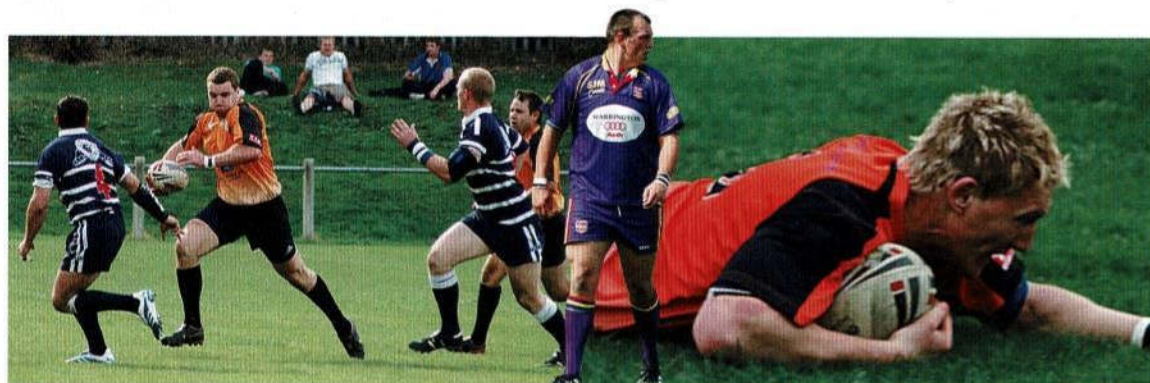
Plotting this afternoon's tactics will be two highly respected coaches. Featherstone's **David Hobbs** is a former Oldham player who won the Challenge Cup with Featherstone in 1983. His opposite number Deakin has just been handed a new contract with the Roughyeds, having overseen their revival since the dark days of last year when, amid financial difficulties, Oldham lost every league match in National League One.

Both men will probably tell you that previous meetings count for little today, but Rovers did win both encounters this season. They will start as favourites today, but will be more than wary of the threat provided by an Oldham side that has won its last five matches. It promises to be an absorbing battle filled with tension and excitement.

Season review

CO-OPERATIVE RUGBY LEAGUE CONFERENCE (NATIONAL)

It was a season of highly contrasting fortunes for teams in the Conference National this season, but Bramley Buffaloes set the pace again, with Featherstone Lions and Warrington Wizards in hot pursuit



APRIL/MAY

Bramley Buffaloes got off to a flying start with a crushing 74-0 win away to Cottingham Phoenix. Even at this early stage, the result reflected the way the season would pan out. The following week, Bramley went even better with a 100-0 victory over East Lancashire Lions as the Yorkshiremen set a frantic early pace at the top of the table.

But by the end of May, Warrington Wizards led the way, mainly thanks to their 124-0 humiliation of struggling Cottingham. The Wizards ran in 23 tries without reply to keep themselves ahead of Bramley and Featherstone Lions, whose 30-10 win over Huddersfield Underbank Rangers saw them keep up with the league leaders.

JUNE/JULY

In early June, Bramley Buffaloes defeated Warrington Wizards 34-16 to return to the top of the table, but after seven consecutive defeats and three consecutive fixtures

cancelled, Cottingham Phoenix were expelled from the league and the games played against them removed from the other teams' records. At the end of the month, Featherstone Lions inflicted another crucial defeat on Warrington Wizards in the race for second place. The week after, Bramley lost their 100 per cent record as they went down to a surprise 22-20 home defeat to Huddersfield Underbank Rangers.

With Featherstone Lions beating Gateshead Storm 44-28 and Warrington Wizards also defeating Dewsbury Celtic, the title race looked set to be a tight three-way fight. However, round 13 saw a twist as Warrington lost to Hemel Stags, while Bramley beat Featherstone to put some breathing space between themselves and the chasing pack.

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

Though the battle for the title was heating up, there were also some key matches at the bottom of the table. Leeds Akkies earned

a decisive 60-8 win over fellow strugglers Gateshead Storm, while East Lancashire Lions kept their heads above the battle with a 30-12 win over Hemel Stags. At the top, Warrington Wizards inflicted only the second defeat of the season on the Buffaloes in the penultimate round of games, but the narrow 26-22 loss meant that Bramley had secured the bonus point which all but guaranteed them the title.

The Buffaloes duly completed the task in the final week of the season, with a 104-2 win at Gateshead Storm. There was more misery for Gateshead as Leeds Akkies' narrow 19-18 win over Huddersfield Underbank Rangers saw them leapfrog the Storm, leaving the Tynesiders in bottom spot. Featherstone Lions confirmed second place with a 48-12 win over Dewsbury Celtic, which meant that Warrington Wizards had to settle for third place. Dewsbury, Huddersfield Underbank and Hemel Stags also clinched their play-off spots.

Play-off reports

Co-operative Rugby League
Conference (National)

The two main challengers for Bramley's crown were taking no prisoners on the way to the final, before the second-placed team finally prevailed

ELIMINATION PLAY-OFF 1

Warrington Wizards 52
Hemel Stags 22

Although the score suggests one way traffic, this result was in the balance for most of the game. Warrington were pegged back to 30-22 after 46 minutes, and it was only after a sin-binning disadvantaged the visitors that the Wizards really began to weave their spell, ending up with 10 tries on the board.

ELIMINATION PLAY-OFF 2

Dewsbury Celtic 24
Huddersfield Underbank 34

For half of this game Dewsbury held the balance, but the turning point came when their teenage forward Scott Green was sent off just before half-time with the score at 18-14 in their favour. Slowly but surely, Huddersfield made their numerical advantage pay, and 20 unanswered points were scored before Celtic got a final consolation on a disappointing day for them.

ELIMINATION SEMI-FINAL

Warrington Wizards 54
Huddersfield Underbank 14

Full of confidence from beating Hemel, Warrington recorded their second half-century of points, going in 30-4 up at the break. It was plain sailing from thereon as four more tries completed the rout, winger Ian Stephenson bagging a hat-trick before the end.

QUALIFYING SEMI-FINAL

Bramley Buffaloes 36
Featherstone Lions 12

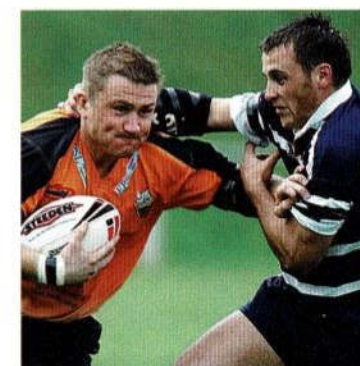
The first Grand Final place was booked as Bramley justified their position at the top of the co-operative Rugby League Conference

co-operative Rugby League Conference (National)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	BPts	PTS
1 Bramley Buffaloes	16	14	0	2	714	192	2	44
2 Featherstone Lions	16	13	0	3	636	326	2	41
3 Warrington Wizards	16	12	0	4	512	327	3	39
4 Dewsbury Celtic	16	9	0	7	516	410	3	30
5 Huddersfield Underbank	16	7	0	9	359	433	4	25
6 Hemel Stags	16	6	0	10	431	461	6	24
7 Leeds Akkies	16	4	0	12	293	558	4	16
8 East Lancashire Lions	16	4	0	12	340	624	3	15
9 Gateshead Storm	16	3	0	13	292	760	2	11
10 Cottingham Phoenix	7	0	0	7	86	437	2	2

Play-off results

15 Sept	Warrington Wizards 52-22 Hemel Stags (Wilderspool)
15 Sept	Dewsbury Celtic 24-34 Huddersfield Underbank Rangers (Crow Nest Park)
22 Sept	Warrington Wizards 54-14 Huddersfield Underbank Rangers (Wilderspool)
23 Sept	Bramley Buffaloes 36-12 Featherstone Lions (Stanningley)
30 Sept	Featherstone Lions 40-14 Warrington Wizards (Millpond)



(National) by overcoming fierce Lions resistance in an absorbing game. It was even Stevens pretty much the whole way through the first half until just before the break when Bramley's Matt Mulholland scored a converted try to make it 12-6. With that psychological blow struck, the Leeds side doubled their lead shortly after through Scott Pendlebury, and despite pulling back to 20-12 just after the hour, the Lions then conceded again. Two sin-binnings helped Bramley coast home with two late tries.

FINAL ELIMINATOR

Featherstone Lions 40
Warrington Wizards 14

Featherstone Lions succeeded in making it a second appearance for the town's representatives in today's finals day, with an assured second-half performance to end the Cheshire side's dogged resistance. The Lions fought back from an early Warrington try to go in 14-8 at the break. The teams then exchanged tries early in the second half but after Steve Frogatt scored the first of his two Featherstone tries on the hour it was one way traffic, and the Lions ended up crossing the Wizards' line six times in all, while Martin Pearson's reliable kicking landed him eight goals, and helped put pressure on the Wizards defence with some excellent positional kicking. Meanwhile, another fine performance from the Lions' 17-year-old hooker Dean Gamble, will surely have a few scouts from bigger clubs turning up early today to have a closer look.

Key players

Co-operative Rugby League
Conference (National)

BRAMLEY BUFFALOES

Chosen by coach Paul Cook



"We're quietly confident, because we finished top of the league, and we've won in the final before. We're a fast side, and we break teams down well, and then in the second phase of play we've got the people to make it count. It's cup football so anything can happen, but if we are successful, here's the ones who will make it happen..."

PAUL DRAKE

Centre

"Captain. He's very skilful, very strong, and he's one of the best goal kickers I've seen for a long time. He's very passionate about the game and his side's performance. A leader in training and on the park. He knows what it is to win, and he's a very good all-rounder."

MARK GIBSON

Scrum-half (below)

"He's the playmaker who's been up and down this year, but he's an old head who has been in the game a long time and he can lead the team and direct our play really well. He can be a game breaker at any time. If we're successful he'll be part of it."

NICKY FONTAINE

Winger

"He's had a great season, Nicky, he's come on in leaps and bounds for

us this year. He knows where the try line is and having pace like he has will always make a big difference at any level of Rugby League."

BRADLEY ASQUITH

Hooker

"He wears his heart on his sleeve. He's the smallest man in the team but he's the best defender in the team. His line speed is exceptional, his ball skills are fantastic, his kicking game is great, and he's one of our leaders on the park."

MARK BUTTERILL

Prop

"He's my assistant coach, and he's a born leader. He was coaching Milford before he came to us and he's got a lot of experience which is always useful in big games like this. He's great going forward, he can work hard for 80 minutes, and he's definitely the unsung hero in our pack."



FEATHERSTONE LIONS

Chosen by team coach Simon Tuffs



"If we can get over our walking wounded we've a good chance. We were in the previous game against Bramley up until the hour, but then we got a few injuries. If we can play our natural game we've got a good chance. We were bottom of the table last season, so to come through to the final this time round feels like a major achievement."

MARTIN PEARSON

Stand-off

"Formerly with Featherstone Rovers, Halifax and Sheffield, he's been a big boost with his experience. He's a good goalkicker as well, and we missed his kicking game when we played Bramley in the qualifier. He's a great link man between the forwards and backs."

JAMIE NICHOLSON

Scrum-half

"We look to him and Martin to direct operations. He's tough, really good on defence, he's like an extra forward with his tackling. He's talking all the time, and always plays really hard and strong."

JIMMY CARLTON

Prop (below, front)

"Jimmy has played for Featherstone Rovers and for Huddersfield in the Super League. He's been outstanding all year, and has been picked for the Conference dream team. He often plays the whole 80 minutes and works really hard for us."

CLIFTON RICHARDSON

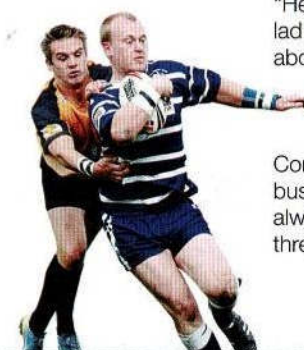
Winger

"He started out in the forwards but he's moved out onto the wing and been an revelation this season. We had injuries but Clifton's come in and done incredibly well."

DEAN GAMBLE

Hooker

"He's only 17, and a small lad but he plays well above his weight and he was nominated for the young player of the year in the Conference. He's a really busy hooker who is always in the top two or three tackle makers."



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CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE FINALS DAY 2007



Key battles

Co-operative Rugby League
Conference (National)

ANALYSIS

Today's co-operative Rugby League Conference (National) Grand Final sees last year's champions up against a resurgent local rival, writes **Phil Caplan**



Although barely 20 miles separate this afternoon's gladiators in the co-operative Rugby League Conference (National) Grand Final, the contrast between them could not be more intriguing.

Defending champions and league leaders Bramley are in their third consecutive Grand Final, having picked up the second-ever trophy in their distinguished history last season. Featherstone Lions, on the other hand, have undergone a metamorphosis. Twelve months ago, in their first season at this level, they stood bottom of the table with only one win to their credit.

Their transformation has been built principally around a fearsome pack which offers another distinction between today's sides. Three of the Lions forwards have made the 2007 RLCN All Star team; second rowers **Mark Tepper** and **Jimmy Carlton** and outstanding prop **Bart Thomson**, who was crowned the competition's 'Player of the Year' last Tuesday, and is hoping to shake off an injury to make some of his trademark power-packed runs.

Bramley's recognised trio of seasonal star performers were in the backs of the All Star team, with winger **Nicky Fontaine** – who scored the game breaking try in their Grand Final success last year – gaining his second successive Team of the Year selection. His two club mates picking up commemorative citations have both shown their versatility in 2007, **Paul Coates** has switched between centre and full-back, while **Bradley Asquith** is equally at home at scrum-half or at hooker.

The sides have met three times so far this season with Bramley just coming out on top in them all and restricting the Lions to 12 points in each contest. An interception turned the 'first versus second' contest two weeks ago as the Buffaloes secured the direct route to Headingley Carnegie, Fontaine's awareness and speed securing Bramley's passage.

With little between the teams, the outcome could come down to goal kicking, and two fine exponents of the art will be on the field today. Buffaloes' **Paul Drake** has set a world record for successful

consecutive shots at goal and their opponents have the former Sheffield, Halifax and Wakefield sharp shooter **Martin Pearson** in their ranks.

Among the favourites for the David Oxley Medal for man of the match will be the current holder, Buffaloes' inventive scrum half **Marc Gibson** who was at the club when they were last in the professional ranks. For Featherstone, England Lionhearts centre **Steve Froggatt** is a proven finisher who was back to his best with a brace last Saturday and dynamic 17-year-old hooker **Dean Gamble** has been a revelation.

Another 'X-Factor' in this derby clash could be the crowd, with each side expecting to be backed by vociferous support. Bramley have averaged around 500 fans at Stanningley and they travel to the ground where they last performed as a professional club. Lions will be boosted by Featherstone Rovers supporters arriving early for their play-off decider. It promises to be a highly charged, passionate occasion that could come down to one act of individual enterprise.

News

Co-operative National League One

THE FRONTLINE FAIR PLAY INDEX

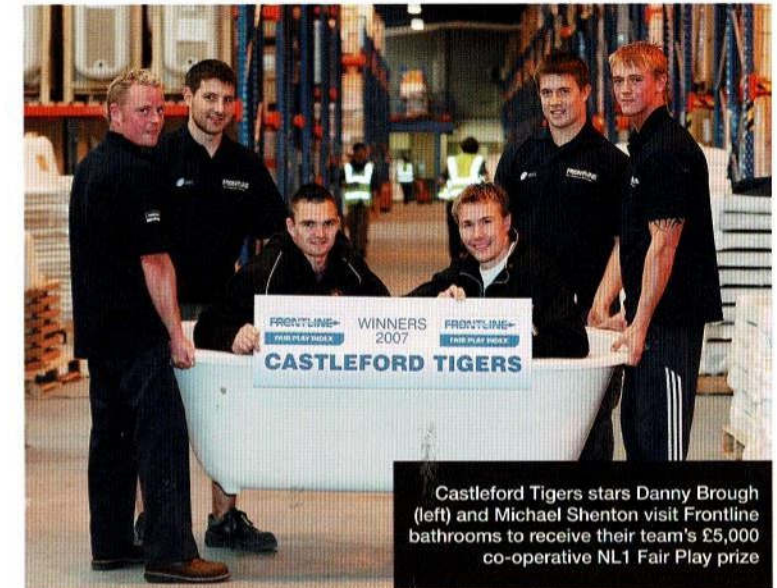
Castleford not only topped the co-operative National League One table, they were also top dogs for fair play

Castleford Tigers are seeking a cup double this afternoon, having already lifted the first NL1 Frontline Fair Play Index Trophy – and the £5,000 prize that goes with it.

The Tigers led the Frontline Fair Play Index throughout the season, and finished on 107 points, a whole 26 points ahead of their nearest rivals Batley Bulldogs.

The Frontline Fair Play Index for both co-operative National League One and the engage Super League was launched this year by the RFL and its latest official partner, Frontline Bathrooms. The competition is for league matches only, with clubs receiving points for the number and type of penalties conceded, sin bins, sendings off and match bans.

The Index is published every Wednesday to take into account the previous night's Disciplinary Committee hearing, and the winners in each division are the club with the lowest number of points.



Castleford Tigers stars Danny Brough (left) and Michael Shenton visit Frontline bathrooms to receive their team's £5,000 co-operative NL1 Fair Play prize

The scoring system for co-operative NL1 is:

- 1 pt Penalty
- 3 pts Sin bin
- 4 pts Sending off sufficient
- 5 pts Each match ban (eg five matches is 25 points)

The Tigers conceded an impressively low total of just 94 penalties in the 18 rounds for both technical and foul play offences – an average of only five per game.

Their only other concessions were one sin bin and two match bans, bringing their Frontline Fair Play Index points total to 107. The bottom club, Doncaster, amassed more than 180.

"We used the Frontline Fair Play Index to prove to the players that discipline on the field is the backbone to success," says Castleford head coach Terry Matterson.

"As a club, we are very proud to be the inaugural winners of the Frontline trophy and, of course, the £5,000 prize. To concede fewer than 100 penalties in a full league campaign sets a formidable yardstick for the future."

The Frontline Fair Play Index has made a big impact on the 13-a-side code in its debut season, as the main feature of its new two-year official partners agreement, worth an annual six-figure investment, between the RFL and Frontline Bathrooms, one of the UK's leading suppliers to the bathroom industry.

The winners of the engage Super League Frontline Fair Play Index are Harlequins, who pipped Catalans Dragons to the £5,000 prize.

Today's showpiece event has double significance for Frontline Bathrooms. Headingley Carnegie was the venue for their debut as sponsors of the Frontline Test between Great Britain and France last June. And the Featherstone-based company are main sponsors of today's co-operative NL2 Grand Finalists, Featherstone Rovers.

NATIONAL LEAGUE co-operative		FRONTLINE FAIR PLAY INDEX		Stats are correct after round 18 of Co-operative National League One on 9/9/2007		
Team	Pens Conceded (x1pt)	Sin Bins (x3pts)	Sending off sufficient (x4pts)	Match Bans (x5pts)	Fair Play Total	
1 Castleford	94	1	0	2	107	
2 Batley	130	1	0	0	133	
3 Whitehaven	137	1	0	0	140	
4 Rochdale	139	2	0	0	145	
5 Leigh	134	5	0	0	149	
6 Widnes	123	1	0	5	151	
7 Halifax	136	6	0	0	154	
8 Dewsbury	134	4	2	4	174	
9 Sheffield	165	5	0	0	180	
10 Doncaster	155	6	1	1	182	

The Frontline Fair Play Index is calculated from league games only using a weighted formula powered by statistical data collected by PA Sport

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Sat 15 Nov	Semi-Final	Brisbane
Sun 16 Nov	Semi-Final	Sydney
Sat 22 Nov	Final	Brisbane

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News

THE COMMUNITY SPIRIT

As elite Rugby League continues to thrive, the sport at grassroots level is also in an excellent state of health



As the engage Super League and the co-operative National Leagues continue to enjoy constant growth, the sport's role as a valuable and integral part of the community is also stronger than ever, with thousands of volunteers giving countless hours to support this.

Among the latest community success story is the co-operative National League Community Programme. The programme is supported by the National Sports Foundation and has sought to provide all 22 clubs in each division with full-time community officers.

"Rugby League has always had very strong ties with the communities that surround it," says the RFL's community marketing manager, Adam Jude. "We want to increase this important contribution they make to community life."

Over the past five years, the RFL's activity in this area has gone from strength to strength, helping to keep Rugby League at the hub of local communities. There

has been growth throughout the country with areas such as London, Wales and the South-west all experiencing positive developments.

Clubs such as London Skolars and Celtic Crusaders have devoted a great deal of time, energy and resources to reaching out to people in their regions, often with impressive results.

And while Rugby League's community officers are obviously keen to get people participating in the sport, from primary school level through to adults in the amateur game, their work also extends far beyond the Rugby League pitch.

"We are not only working towards improving coaching techniques and introducing new people to the game, but we also help to deliver and support important lifestyle and social campaigns such as promoting healthy eating and preventing truancy in schools," says Adam. "To coin a phrase, it's more than just a bag of balls."

News

A FESTIVAL OF RUGBY LEAGUE

The co-operative 'Cubs to Lions Festival' claims to be the biggest in the world

Think of the word 'festival' and most people imagine rain-drenched crowds listening to loud music in a field somewhere in rural Britain. And while we can't guarantee that no-one will get muddy at co-operative Rugby League Festivals, it's much more a case of good clean family fun. That's especially true because they're very much geared around kids, aiming to encourage youngsters across the country to get involved in the game and improve their skills in a safe, enjoyable and competitive environment.

Last month's co-operative Cubs To Lions Festival saw over 50 venues playing host to 160 teams. The festival can now boast of being 'The World's Biggest Rugby League Festival', and it will take place every September and May.

The round robin format ensures that everyone gets to enjoy a few games, and while the atmosphere is competitive, the festivals are based on the philosophy that enjoyment, fair play, team interaction and skill development are more important than who ends up on the winning side.

"The festivals are obviously designed to encourage more children to participate in the sport," said Michael Fairclough, community development manager at the co-operative, "but improving their health and fitness is of equal importance in terms of outcomes."

"The enjoyment in the faces of the children and their families is wonderful to see," says Philip Jones, secretary united region, the co-operative. "There is no doubt that this initiative contributes to the health and well-being of all its participants. If it also produces a few Rugby League stars of the future, then that's an added bonus."

Some lucky players were presented with a certificate signed by Great Britain star Jamie Peacock, with teams also receiving equipment such as water bottles and match balls.

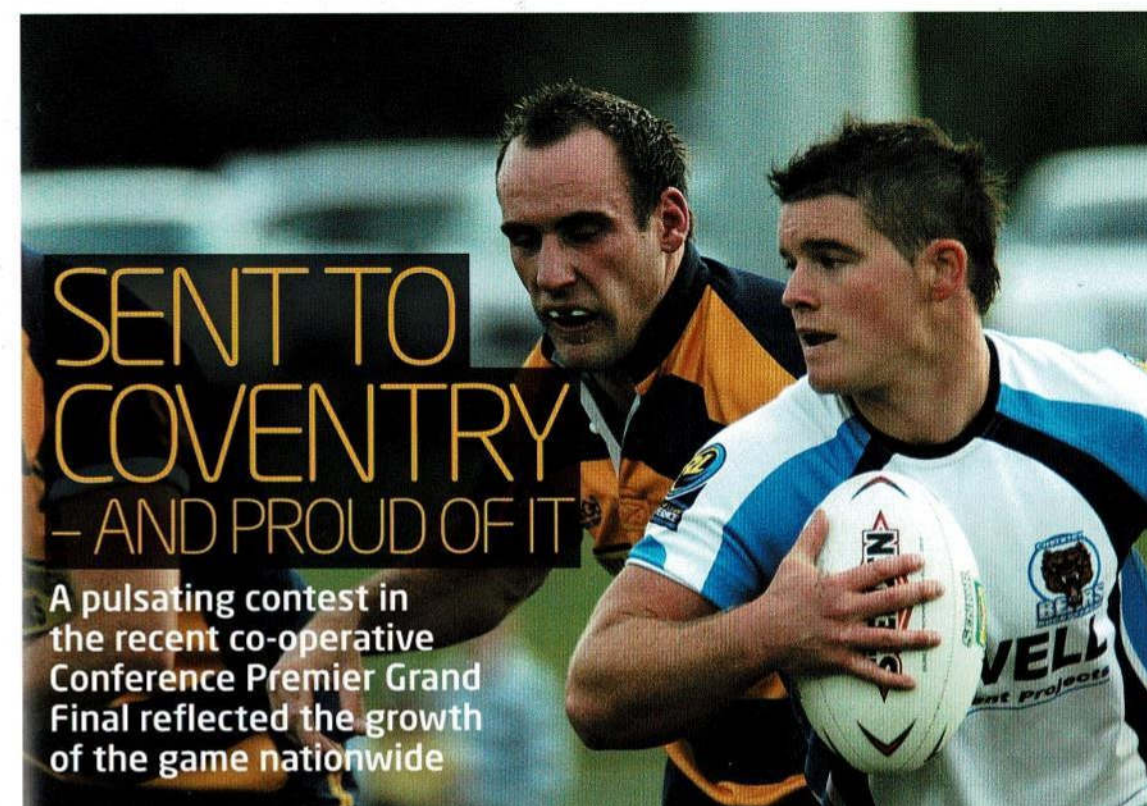
Peacock himself was highly impressed by the event. "The Cubs to Lions Festivals are a great way for kids to start out on the pathway to becoming potential stars of the future," he said.



News

SENT TO COVENTRY - AND PROUD OF IT

A pulsating contest in the recent co-operative Conference Premier Grand Final reflected the growth of the game nationwide



They say successful sides don't spring up overnight, but soon after Coventry Bears were formed in 1998 by Alan Robinson, Great Britain's student Rugby League captain and Irish international, they became regular contenders for silverware.

The Bears were Conference Grand Finalists in 2001 and 2002 and won the National League Division Three Grand Final in 2004. Despite opting to go back into the Conference Premier Division in 2005 for organisational reasons, Coventry Bears were back to their old winning ways this season, reaching the 10th co-operative Rugby League Conference Premier Grand Final last month.

But although they were playing at home and unbeaten throughout the season, the Bears met their match in the shape of St Albans Centurions at the Broadstreet Stadium, in front of a crowd of over 1,000.

The Hertfordshire club lifted the Harry Jepson Trophy, their first ever silverware, by defeating Coventry 28-20 in a superb contest that showcased plenty of individual skill as well as the kind of full-blooded competition we're used to seeing in the engage Super League.

The co-operative Rugby League Conference Premier is not to be confused with the co-operative Rugby League Conference National, whose Grand Final is being played today. The former is part of the sport's nationwide summer competition, encompassing 88 teams across the UK.

St Albans is another example of a thriving grassroots club in an area not traditionally regarded as Rugby League heartland. Yet as Hemel Stags demonstrated when reaching last year's National League Three play-off final in Warrington, the game in the south continues to grow.

At grassroots level, the game's prospects have never looked rosier. Its strength in London is reflected not only by Harlequins RL's presence in the engage Super League, but by London Skolars' success in co-operative National League Two and the good work of South London Storm, West London Sharks, Kingston Warriors and London Griffins in making the capital the UK's fifth biggest Rugby League centre.

The success of Celtic Crusaders in Wales will be well known to co-operative National League Two fans, but equally significant is the game's growing popularity in the South-west. The recent inaugural Devon Cup Final, featured on Sky Sports' Boots 'n' All programme, was the showpiece of the newly formed co-operative Rugby League Conference South West. It just shows that wherever you are, Rugby League is a game without frontiers.



Jon Nicholls has packed more than most into his time at Leeds Met. While studying for a BA (Hons) in Physical Education, Jon has led the university's rugby league team to three consecutive national titles and into the second round of the 2007 Carnegie Challenge Cup, as well as captaining the GB Academic Lions in

their first ever victory over Australia earlier this year. Jon graduated in July but has returned to the university to take up a place on the secondary education teaching course. "I've made the most of lots of opportunities at Leeds Met, and had an awesome time; I don't want to leave just yet!"



the university of rugby league



The Squads

CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE ONE



Castleford Tigers

Dwayne BARKER	Second row
Ryan BOYLE	Prop forward
Danny BROUGH	Half-back
Chris CHARLES	Loose forward
Ryan CLAYTON	Second row
Kirk DIXON	Three-quarter
Stuart DONLAN	Winger/Full-back
Tere GLASSIE	Second row
Awen GUTTENBEIL	Second row
Andrew HENDERSON	Hooker
Liam HIGGINS	Prop forward
Craig HUBY	Prop forward
Mark LEAFA	Second row
Peter LUPTON	Half-back/Loose forward
Ryan MCGOLDRICK	Half-back/Centre
Richard OWEN	Full-back
Michael SHENTON	Centre
Anthony THACKERAY	Half-back
Michael WAINWRIGHT	Winger
Joe WESTERMAN	Stand-off/Loose forward
Danny WILLIAMS	Winger
Terry MATTERSON	Head coach



Widnes Vikings

Bob BESWICK	Loose forward
Damien BLANCH	Winger
Adam BOWMAN	Centre
Daryl CARDISS	Centre/Full-back
Mick CASSIDY	Second row
Gavin DODD	Full-back
Dayne DONOGHUE	Loose forward
Lee DORAN	Second row
Robert DRAPER	Loose forward
Dean GASKELL	Winger
Scott GRIX	Full-back
Jordan JAMES	Scrum-half
Andy KAIN	Prop
Martin KEAVNEY	Scrum-half
Andy KIRK	Centre
Toa KOHE-LOVE	Centre
Dennis MORAN	Scrum-half
Mike MORRISON	Prop
Mick NANYN	Centre
Paul NOONE	Second row
Joel PENNY	Scrum-half
Gareth PRICE	Prop
Adam SIDLOW	Second row
Mark SMITH	Hooker
Matthew STRONG	Centre
Aaron SUMMERS	Prop
Ian WEBSTER	Hooker
Oliver WILKES	Second row
Scott YATES	Full-back

Steve MCCORMACK Head coach

TODAY'S OFFICIALS:

Phil BENTHAM	Referee
Richard SILVERWOOD	Reserve referee
Ian SMITH	Video referee
Steve WRIGHT	Touch judge
Robert HICKS	Touch judge
Paul GRUNDHILL	Reserve touch judge
Ian MCGREGOR	Match commissioner



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The RFL would like to thank all sponsors and partners for their support of the game throughout the year

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CO-OPERATIVE NATIONAL LEAGUE 2



Featherstone Rovers

Ade ADEBISI Winger/Full-back
Nathan BATTY Full-back
Jamie BENN Half-back
James BINKS Centre/forward
Richard BLAKEWAY Loose fwd
Craig BOWER Full-back
Dale CARDOZA Centre
Dean COLTON Winger
Stuart DICKENS Prop
Steve DOOLER Loose forward
Kevin EADIE Hooker
Garry ELLERY Prop
Jamie FIELD Second row
John FOWLER Prop
Scott GLASSELL Stand-off
Gareth HANDFORD Prop
Paul HANDFORTH Half-back
Tommy HAUGHEY Second row
James HOUSTON Prop
Carl HUGHES Hooker
Paul HUGHES Hooker
Andy KAIN Stand-off
Danny KIRMOND Centre
Nathan LARVIN Full-back
Wayne McHUGH Centre
Chris ROSS Winger
Andy SPEAKE Half-back
Gavin SWINSON Hooker
Ian TONKS Prop
James WARD Second row
John WHITTLE Centre
Los WILDBORE Full-back
Scott WILSON Full-back
Dale WYNNE Winger

David HOBBS
Head coach



Oldham RLFC

Chris BAINES Second row
Jason BOULTS Prop forward
Matty BROOKS Half-back
Geno COSTIN Second row
James COYLE Half-back
Andy CRABTREE Hooker
Byron FORD Winger
Andy GOREY Winger
Alan HADCROFT Centre
Ian HODSON Second row
John HOUGH Hooker
Drew HOUSTON Second row
Simeon HOYLE Hooker
Adam HUGHES Centre
Gareth LANGLEY Winger
Craig LITTLER Centre
Richard MERVILL Prop
Gareth MARTON Centre
Paul O'CONNOR Full-back
Stuart OLDHAM Winger
Lucas ONYANGO Winger
Rob ROBERTS Forward
Adam ROBINSON Second row
Neil RODEN Half-back
Wes ROGERS Prop forward
Lee SANDERSON Half-back
Ian SINFIELD Second row
Kris SMITH Second row
Warren STEVENS Prop
Said TAMGHART Utility
Tony TONKS Prop
Alex WILKINSON Centre
Lee WINGFIELD Second row

Steve DEAKIN
Head coach

TODAY'S OFFICIALS:
Gareth HEWER Referee
Ben THALER Video referee
Martin HAWKES Touch judge
Bob STOKES Touch judge
Dave CAMPBELL Match commissioner

CO-OPERATIVE RUGBY LEAGUE CONFERENCE (NATIONAL)



Bramley Buffaloes

Bradley ASQUITH Scrum-half
David BRAY Second row
Steve BURNS Prop
Mark BUTTERILL Prop
Paul COATES Centre/Full-back
Paul DRAKE Centre
Jamie FIELDHOUSE Second row
Shaun FLYNN Full-back/Centre
Nicky FONTAINE Winger
Chris GARDNER Prop
James GIBLIN Hooker
Marc GIBSON Scrum-half
Shaun GILMOUR Second row
Tom GREY Prop
Graham HARRISON Utility
Matt HAYES Centre/Winger
Neil HESKETH Prop/Second row
Danny JOHNSON Second row
Richard LEESE Prop
Daniel MITCHELL Prop
Matt MULHOLLAND Centre
Jon NICHOLLS Loose forward
Danny O'CONNOR Second row
Kevin O'HARE Hooker
Scott PENDLEBURY Stand-off
John RICHARDSON Winger
Benoit ROGERS Second row
Simon SPEIGHT Second row
Gareth THIRSK Second row
Thomas TSANG Full-back
Nick WALKER Centre
Thomas WEBB Hooker
Kyle WEBSTER Centre
Eddie WILSON Second row

Paul COOK
Head coach



Featherstone Lions

Craig BARKER Second row
James CARLTON Second row
Simon CHILD Prop
Byron COOPER Winger
Stuart EARLEY Loose forward
Dominic EDWARDS Prop
Richard FRANKLAND Winger
Steve FROGGATT Winger
Dean GAMBLE Hooker
Matty GODBER Hooker
Ben HALL Winger
Justin HUDSON Prop
Chris HULME Winger
Ross JOHNSON Full-back
Kyle LITTLEWOOD Prop
Craig MACHEN Prop
Neil MEARS Prop
Jamie NICHOLSON Scrum-half
Martin PEARSON Stand-off
Clifton RICHARDSON Winger
Sam SMEATON Centre
Kris SMITH Prop/Second row
Mark TEPPER Second row
Bart THOMSON Prop
Paul WATSON Stand-off

Simon TUFFS
Head coach

TODAY'S OFFICIALS:
Michael DAWBER Referee
Paul GRUNDHILL Touch judge
Peter WHARTON Touch judge
Louise GREENHALGH In goal judge
Craig RODGERS In goal judge
Ian MCGREGOR Match commissioner

Flashback

LAST YEAR'S NATIONAL LEAGUE GRAND FINALS

Want to know what kind of joy and pain will be witnessed today? Look no further than this time last year at the Halliwell Jones stadium, Warrington

NATIONAL LEAGUE ONE GRAND FINAL

Justin Morgan has called the co-operative National League One Grand Final "The biggest game in British Rugby League." He's referring to the financial impact and the galvanising effect a victory in this game can have on a club and the surrounding community. He should know, because he took Hull Kingston Rovers into the engage Super League for the first time last year with a 29-16 victory over Widnes Vikings, preventing the Cheshire side from an immediate return to the top flight after their relegation in 2005.

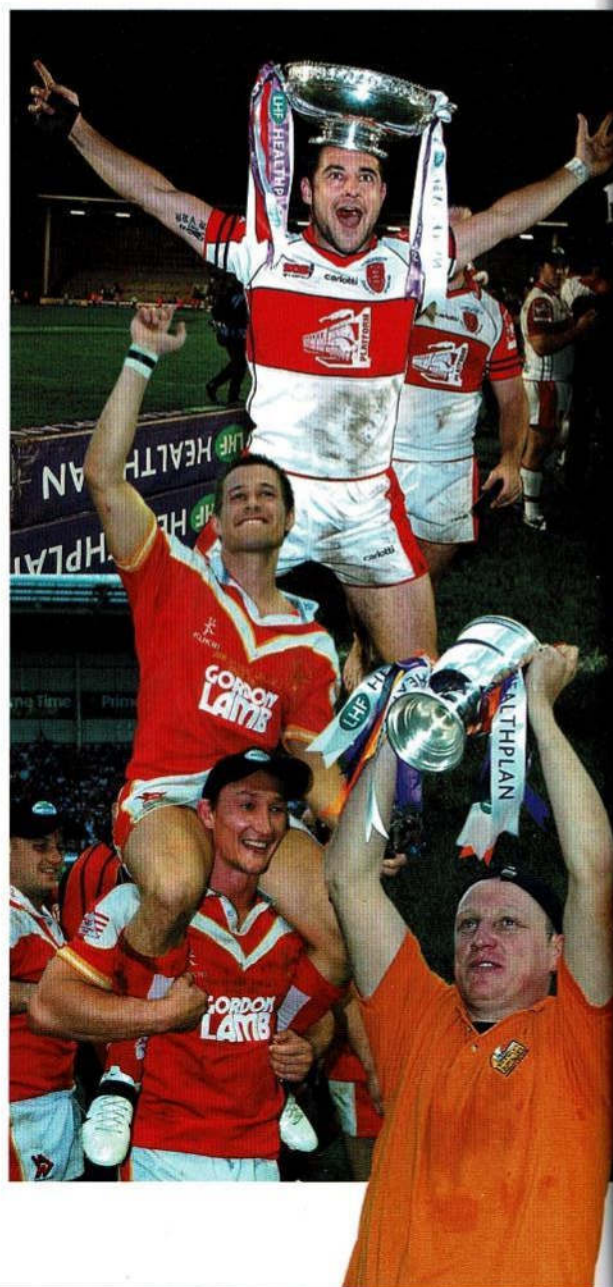
Rovers roared into a 22-4 lead at the break thanks to good work from Ben Fisher, James Webster and Ben Cockayne, showing the form they would later display in the engage Super League. And although Widnes weren't about to go down without a fight, drawing to within 10 points of Rovers at one point, the favourites secured the victory with a last minute penalty to spark wild celebrations throughout the red half of Humberside.

NATIONAL LEAGUE TWO GRAND FINAL

Earlier that day, Sheffield Eagles went one better than in 2003 (when they narrowly lost to Keighley) and beat Swinton 35-10 to take the second automatic promotion spot in co-operative National League Two, and win their first final since the famous 17-8 win over Wigan in the 1998 Challenge Cup Final. It was a club record-extending 13th straight win, reflecting just how important form can be coming into the play-offs. Despite a slow start to this season, they rallied to reach this year's co-operative National League One play-offs, narrowly losing out to Halifax in the Elimination Play-off game.

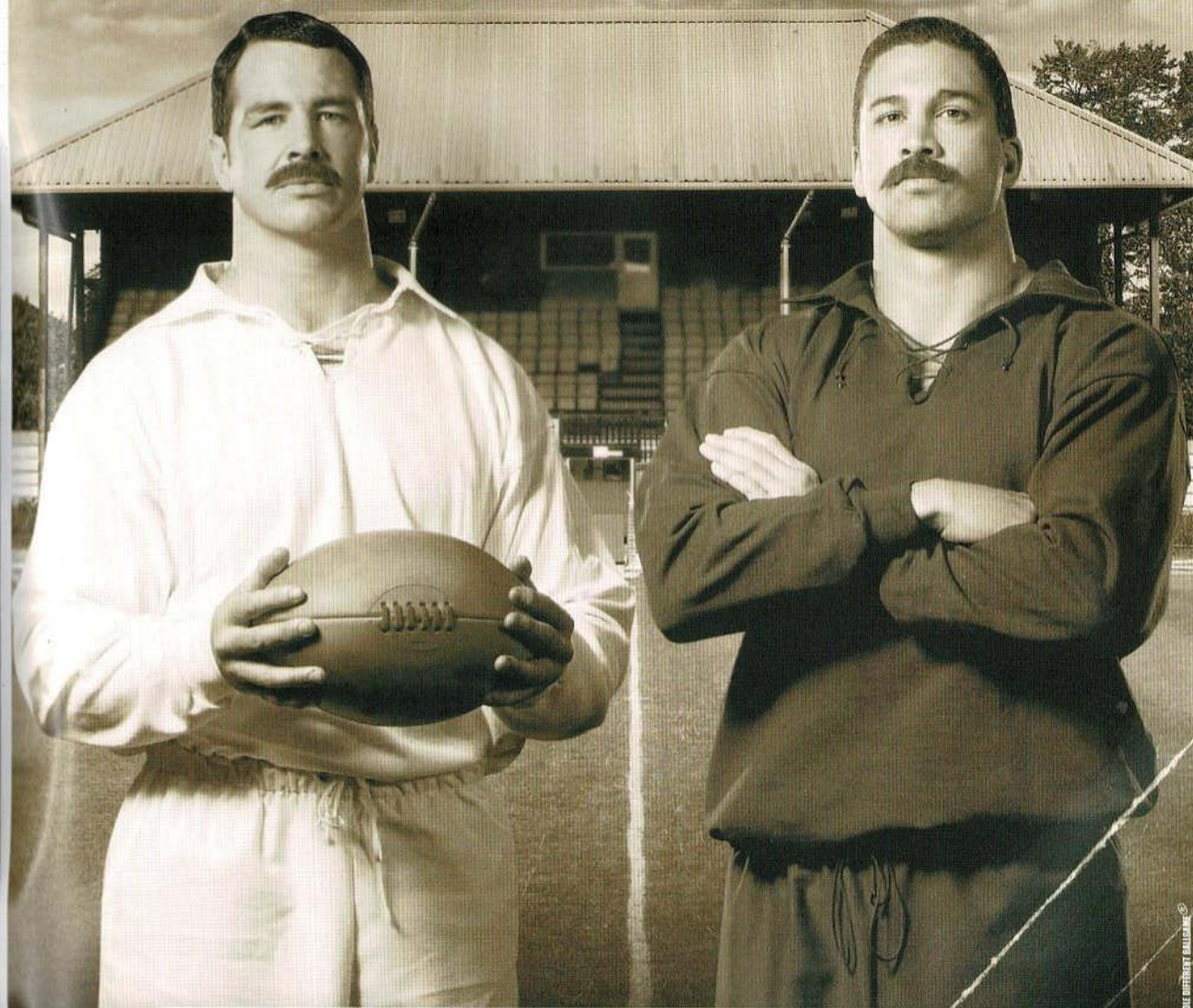
NATIONAL LEAGUE THREE GRAND FINAL

The opening game of the day was a clash of old versus new. In the co-operative National League Three play-off final, Bramley Buffaloes, descended from the original Northern Union club, faced a team formed in 1981, Hemel Stags. The southerners, cheered on by an impressive travelling support, took an 8-6 interval lead, but Bramley scored 24 points after the break to win 30-8 and go one better than their 2005 runners-up spot. It sealed Bramley's rise from the ashes, after going bust in 2000 and being reincarnated as the Buffaloes in 2002.



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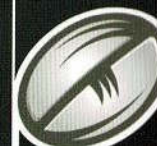
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