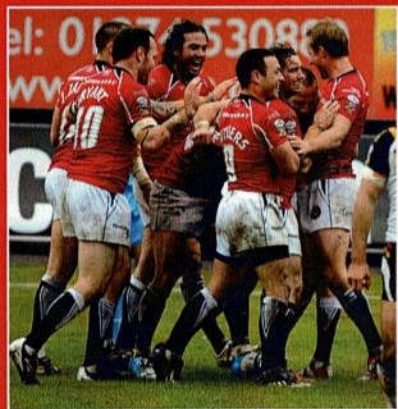


THE RECENT HISTORY OF RUGBY LEAGUE IN WALES

A Welsh Crusade

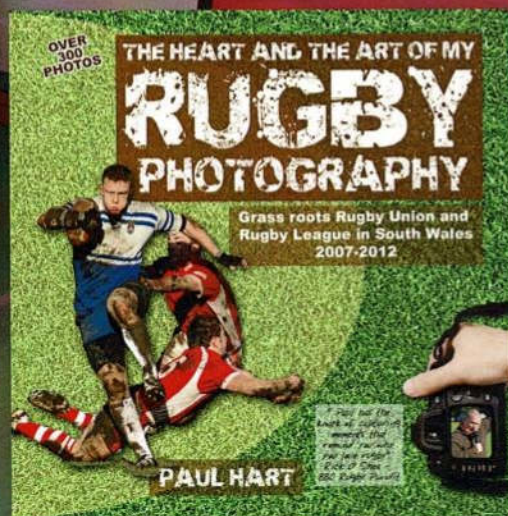
Building Rugby League in Wales
1990 to 2009



Ian Golden

Foreword by John Dixon
Introduction by David Watkins

IN WORDS...



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South Wales

RUGBY LEAGUE MAGAZINE

INCORPORATING THE SOUTH WALES SCORPIONS OFFICIAL MATCH PROGRAMME - VOLUME 1 - ISSUE 1 - MARCH 2014

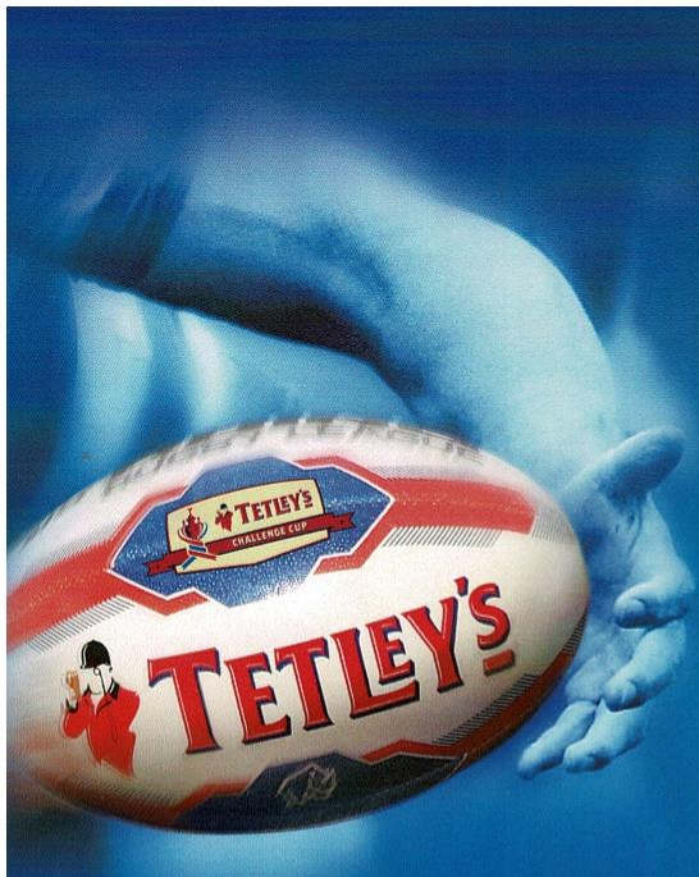
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INSIDE...

This month's big matches -
Scorpions v Oldham Roughyeds
Sunday 2nd March 2014 - 3pm
Scorpions v Hemel Stags
Sunday 16th March 2014 - 3pm
PLUS
WRL in Sierra Leone - Part 1
The South Wales Academy
Aber Valley Wolves
Torfaen Tigers
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WELCOME / CROESO

HELLO and welcome to the first ever issue of South Wales Rugby League Magazine. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

This publication is something that a few of us have been wanting to do for a few years. I've always thought that the good work that goes into RL in South Wales really needs highlighting. There's always so much to write about and talk about and sometimes a website isn't the place, as much as logging onto the WRL or Scorpions sites are a must!

While this magazine has taken its time coming to fruition, it's been a tough few months all round for everyone here in South Wales. The Scorpions were, like London Broncos, dead for a while late last year. In October and November there was no club, just myself feeding the odd thing to the website and trade press while helping WRL with the media at the World Cup.

At that same time we were getting questions from players and fans as to what was going on and the answer was at the time "nothing". Phil Davies, the founder and original owner of the Scorpions, after four years at the helm had decided to hand the club over to new investors. We did have one or two in the pipeline but eventually, when December came and we needed a side on the field in less than three months, WRL took charge and began to run the club themselves.

The rest isn't quite history. From January everyone at the club, from administrators to coaches had to fit four months' work into two. It's been tiring, for many it's been 12 hour days, but we're here now and the Scorpions have a side, and a virtually 100% Welsh side at that, on the field. Yes it's been tough, we've had setbacks and we've had negativity with one person on Twitter telling me to "admit defeat and watch the Bluebirds". Remarks like that just convince us to carry on (not that there's anything wrong with watching the Bluebirds of course).

But South Wales RL is more than just the Scorpions. We've Valley Cougars who are in the Conference South this year, we've South Wales Academy sides at under 19 and under 16 level, the South Wales Conference where at senior

level Torfaen Tigers are our current champions and have recently competed in the Challenge Cup. We've university sides, local junior sides and schools sides. Plus of course we have our AASE Academy side based at Maesteg School which is something we're very proud of.

Like I said, so much to read about and so much to write about. I've only scratched the surface here and you can read about a lot of these sides here and even more in future issues when the clubs' various seasons begin.

Right now we're reaching the end of the university and schools seasons. They've been rain affected, universities especially, but they've still competed with much enthusiasm.

Plus this month we've South Wales Scorpions starting out with Oldham on March 2nd then Hemel Stags come to Maesteg TWICE. First in the Challenge Cup on March 16th then back in league on the 30th. Exciting times indeed.

Enjoy your Rugby League. I have in Wales for over 22 years and I've been writing about it for over 10. I know I'll be doing so for many more.

**Ian Golden – Editor and WRL
Communications and Profile Manager**

Thanks to everyone who made this first issue possible. This magazine was published by Wales Rugby League and was edited and designed by Ian Golden. Contributors were Andy Birchall, Jeff Cole, Sally Davies, Sarah Denton, Harrison Elliot, Sian Golden, Jac Griffiths, Paul Hart, Karl Jones, Mark Jones, Lloyd Lewis, Ian Lovell, Rebecca Smith, Gareth Walker and Darren Williams with photos from Ian Golden, Tyler Handley, Paul Hart, Ian Lovell and SW Pix. Printed by Van Warren printers of Maesteg.



INTRODUCING THE SCORPIONS

South Wales Scorpions have made a number of changes to the side for 2014. **Ian Golden** reviews all of their new signings who are in contention for a place in the sides for this month's games...

SCORPIONS have gone truly local this year. With a Wigan link very unlikely and no imports from the north or Australia, the squad is (virtually) 100% Welsh. In fact, every squad member has played for one Welsh side or another.

Coach Mike Grady has raided the Wales Dragonhearts side that he coached last season with no less than six of nine potential Scorpions first team debutants having played for them.

Experienced dual code winger Ian Newbury (pictured fourth right) signs after a strong campaign with Valley Cougars and Wales Dragonhearts sides last year. The 27-year old started playing League with Cardiff Demons in 2007, going on to play for former Scorpions feeder side South Wales Hornets before ending up with the Cougars in 2013.

Forward Scott Britton (pictured far left) also joins the club from the Cougars. The 23-year old started playing League five years ago with Cardiff Demons and played for Wales under 18s that same year in the Home Nations Championship in Scotland.

Skilful young Colwyn Bay born full-back Jordan Sheridan (pictured fifth right) joins the club from Conwy Celts. The 19-year old was the lynchpin in Conwy's two North Wales Conference Grand Final wins in 2012 and 2013. He

won caps for Wales at under 18s, 20s and Dragonhearts last year.

New assistant coach Paul Emanuelli (pictured far right) will also play for the club for 2014. Playing in a pivotal half-back role, the 30-year old is known as a proven goal-kicker after a long career in both codes, turning out in the reserves for the old Celtic Crusaders as well as Blackwood Bulldogs, Valley Cougars, South Wales Hornets and a seven year playing spell with Wales Dragonhearts. Head coach at the Cougars for the last two years in addition to playing for them, he was last year appointed assistant coach of the Dragonhearts.

Winger Dafydd Hellard joins the club from Valley Cougars for whom he's been playing for since 2008, winning his first Wales Dragonhearts cap in 2010. However at the end of that season, he suffered knee ligament damage and was out for two years. After undergoing knee reconstruction surgery, the 29-year old returned to League in 2012 with South Wales Hornets and then back to Valley Cougars in 2013. He has been named captain of the Cougars for 2014 and will play for them when not involved in the Scorpions' first 17.

Centre Kyle Scrivens has only been in Rugby League for two years starting with Blackwood Bulldogs in 2012. Last year he played for Torfaen Tigers and helped them to a South Wales Conference Grand Final win. He also won caps for Wales Dragonhearts and played for Wales Select against the full



Wales side in a World Cup warm up game last year.

21-year old Alex Randall becomes the club's second only non-Welsh born player in the squad this season. Kings Lynn born, he has been playing rugby union all his life and has been at Folkstone RFC for the past eight seasons. He began playing Rugby League at the University of Glamorgan (now USW) and was vice captain of the team as they reached two successive BUCS Shield finals, winning in 2013. He is a Wales Student international.

Finally, Owain Davies, a 21-year old second row forward from Neath, and Daniel Parry, a 20-year old half-back from Treharris have become the latest players to come through the WRL's South Wales Academy system to sign a first team contract with the Scorpions.

Both played for the under 20s side last year as well as turning out for Wales Students in the 2013 Festival of World Cups. Both were also part of the University of Glamorgan (now known as University of South Wales) side that were runners up in the national BUSA Shield in 2012 before winning the competition the year after.

Davies, a rugby union player with Tonna RFC from youth, has also played club Rugby League for Neath Port Talbot Steelers before transferring to Bonymaen Broncos in 2012 and helping them to a South Wales Conference title win.

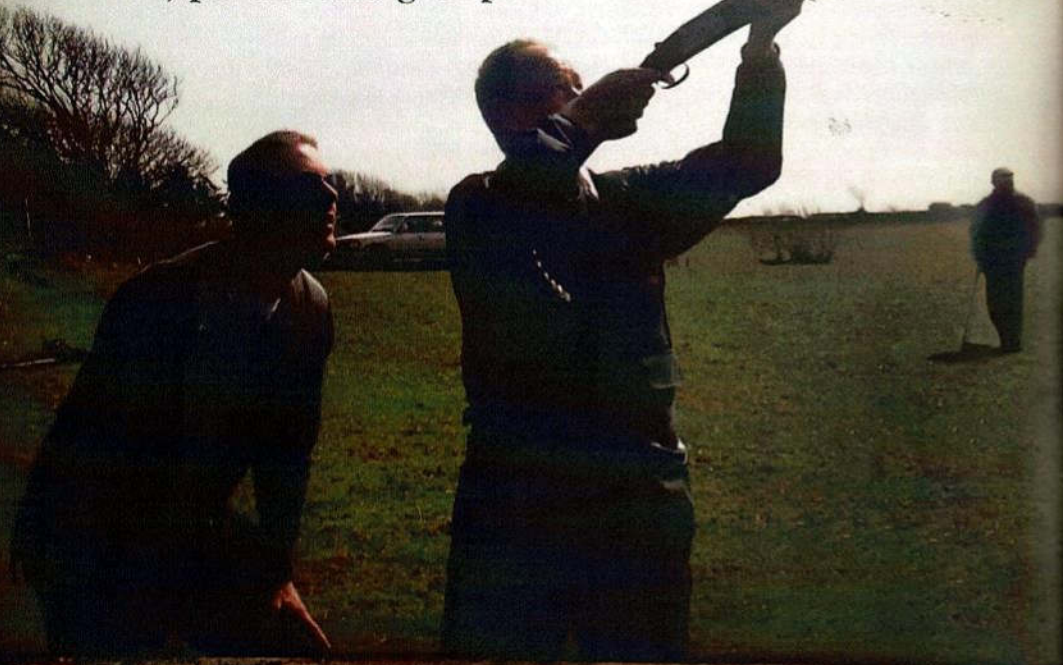
Parry, a rugby union player with Treharris RFC from youth, has also played club Rugby League for Treharris Phoenix and Valley Cougars.

SOUTH WALES SCORPIONS 2014

Date	KO/Score	Opponent		Squad
Sun, 23 Feb	W 58-16	Valley Cougars	H	1. Jordan Sheridan
Sun 02 Mar	15:00	Oldham Roughyeds	H	2. Ian Newbury
Sun, 09 Mar	15:00	Gloucestershire All Golds	A	3. Jack Pring
Sun, 16 Mar	15:00	Hemel Stags (Challenge Cup)	H	4. Kyle Scrivens
Sun, 23 Mar	15:00	York City Knights	A	5. Chris Leyshon
Sun, 30 Mar	15:00	Hemel Stags	H	6. Paul Emanuelli
Sun, 13 Apr	15:00	London Skolars	A	7. Shaun Owens
Sun, 04 May	13:00	Gateshead Thunder	H	8. Alan Pope
Sun, 11 May	14:00	Hunslet Hawks	H	9. Conor Farrar
Sun, 18 May	15:00	Oxford	A	10. Chris Vitalini
Sat, 31 May	15:00	Gloucestershire All Golds	H	11. Barrie Phillips
Sun, 08 Jun	15:00	London Skolars	A	12. Phil Carleton
Sun, 15 Jun	15:00	Oldham Roughyeds	A	13. Ashley Bateman
Sat, 21 Jun	15:00	York City Knights	H	14. Michael Connor
Sat, 05 Jul	15:00	Oxford	H	15. Owain Davies
Sun, 13 Jul	15:00	Hunslet Hawks	A	16. Osian Phillips
Sun, 20 Jul	14:30	Hemel Stags	A	17. Rhys Fitzgerald
Sat, 26 Jul	15:00	London Skolars	H	18. Harrison Elliot
Sat, 09 Aug	15:00	Gloucestershire All Golds	H	19. Alex Jones
Sun, 17 Aug	13:00	Gateshead Thunder	A	20. Scott Britton
Sun, 31 Aug	15:00	Oxford	A	21. Dan Parry
Sun, 07 Sep	15:00	Hunslet Hawks	H	22. Dafydd Hellard
				23. Alex Randall
				24. Matt Wilcox
				25. TJ Collin

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SCORPIONS COACH MIKE GRADY WRITES

It's an honour to write the introduction to this first ever issue of South Wales Rugby League Magazine and thank you for being a part of what we hope will be a successful 2014 season both on and off the pitch.

It's been a very short and different off season, mainly due to the ownership issues regarding the club, but behind the scenes there have been some fantastic people who have ensured the club continued, for me personally I have dealt with Chris Thair, Ian Golden and Stu Hogg who have supported myself, my staff and the players - they have played a massive part in the clubs survival.

It won't be easy on the field this season due to us only having a five week pre-season that commenced on January 29th. I don't want to mislead anyone of you by setting any targets of a top of the table finish, I don't think a play-off place is unachievable but to finish anywhere near the play-offs the lads know they have to be switched on for a full 80 minutes week in week out.

Our signings are not far off the 25 mark at time of writing, with a real mix in the squad. We have lads that have played here last season and been in the first team environment already, we have the young academy lads stepping up and getting their chance and we have the lads brought in from the local community scene with most of them playing for me with the Wales Dragonhearts during 2013. The latter make-up of the squad is a pleasing aspect for me, it shows that there is a pathway from the Welsh Conference, Wales Dragonhearts then through to the professional set up at Scorpions. I hope now that this is looked at by the domestic competition and lads know that if you playing well you will get the opportunity to step up. There are some real quality players within Wales, they just need that belief that they can play at this level.

Well it's Oldham first up and what a game to start with. For me Oldham will be up at the right end of the table come the end



of the season, packed with quality and probably unlucky not to be playing in the Championship. I've no doubt that it's going to be tough but if the lads give it 110% and believe in what they are doing, then with confidence as a team we will get the right performance at the end of the 80 minutes.

The month of March also see us play for me another team that will be up there at the business end, and that's York City Knights, but also includes another couple of tough fixtures against Gloucester and Hemel Stags. So it's a tough start but during that 80 minutes in each game it's up to us how hard or easy we make it for ourselves, do the little things right and I'm confident we won't be far off.

Finally I would just like to thank you all for your patience during the off season and sticking with it, it's been difficult for everyone including myself, Paul and the players but the squad myself and Paul have put together have got a great camaraderie and want to do well. But more important it's been difficult for yourselves the fans, you are the heartbeat of the club, and will certainly be needed over the course of the season to get behind the lads and give them that extra little boost.

See you all at the Oldham game, if you get chance come over and say hello, but if the weather continues the way it has been I'd prefer you bring me a nice hot coffee instead!

TOM Whitehead has big shoes to fill in Oldham Roughyeds' number one shirt in the new Kingstone Press Championship One season.

In recent years some of the Roughyeds' most exciting players have filled the full-back position with pride.

Names roll off the tongue - Paul O'Connor, Ben Heaton, Miles Greenwood and, last season, Richard Lepori.

Following Lepori's departure for Australia; Whitehead and Steven Nield will be competing for the full-back berth.

They had half a game apiece in the first of the two pre-season games at Barrow, but Nield had nobody breathing down his neck in the next run-out against Swinton because Whitehead was out with an Achilles problem.

Since then, 22 players have each been allocated squad numbers and relevant jerseys.

The Roughyeds are one of the Championship 1 title favourites and they'll come to Maesteg this month wanting to start their campaign on a high against us "upstarts" from South Wales.

However their coach Scott Naylor, meanwhile, has warned that now isn't the time for anyone to be filling players' heads with talk of play-offs and promotion. Oldham lost to Rochdale Hornets in last season's play-off final.

At this moment in time, Naylor is more interested in the here and now, as in the game against the Scorpions, than either the past or the future.

"The goal of every team in the division will be to compete in the play-offs," he said.

"Last year we were the best team going into them, but we didn't get the rewards we deserved for a season's work.

"That's all I'm going to say on that subject. I find it weird to be asked about such things when the season hasn't even started yet.

"There's a lot of rugby to come before then;

ups and downs no doubt; and things we can't envisage or predict.

"My focus right now is on hitting the ground running and getting the season off to a good start."

PIC: Oldham couldn't stop Rochdale in last year's Final - SW PIX



No	Nat	Player
1	+	Tom Whitehead
2	+	Mo Agoro
3	+	Ben Wood
4	+	Steven Nield
5	+	Dale Bloomfield
6	+	Lewis Palfrey (C)
7	+	Brett Robinson
8	+	Phil Joy
9	+	Sam Gee (VC)
10	+	Jason Boults
11	+	Josh Crowley
12	+	Danny Langtree
13	+	Mark Hobson
14	+	Adam Files
15	+	Paddy Mooney
16	+	Kenny Hughes
17	+	Danny Whitmore
18	+	Alex Davidson
19	+	Michael Ward
20	+	George Tyson
21	+	David Cookson
22	+	Liam Thompson
23	+	Jake Shoel

HEAD TO HEAD				
11 MATCHES - 1 DRAWN				
SCORPIONS		WON		OLDHAM
3				7
299		POINTS		371
LAST FIVE MEETINGS				
DATE	HOME	RESULT	AWAY	
14/07/2013	Oldham	52 - 22	Scorps	
16/06/2013	Scorps	32 - 36	Oldham	
24/03/2013	Scorps	12 - 24	Oldham	
22/07/2012	Scorps	12 - 44	Oldham	
26/05/2012	Oldham	30 - 35	Scorps	

Stats courtesy of Sportradar

CLASSIC GAME

NOT a lot of people know this but Oldham Roughyeds were the first ever visitors to Wales to play a game of Rugby League.

On September 7, 1907, Merthyr Tydfil hosted Oldham in a Northern Union match, the first professional rugby game ever played on Welsh soil, while at the same time, near neighbours Ebbw Vale travelled to Keighley in West Yorkshire.

The edition of the Merthyr Express dated September 7, 1907, advertised not only Merthyr's first-ever match against Oldham but also previewed Ebbw Vale's trip to Keighley.

There was even a paragraph talking about the 'All Black professional movement' that was 'being formed in Sydney by Mr Albert Baskiville, honorary secretary of the New Zealand Football Club'.

These events would also have great significance on professional rugby in Wales and the international game as a whole.

Neither Welsh club was given much of a chance of winning their first match. Ebbw Vale's Keighley adventure wasn't entirely glamorous as they had to make a 12-hour overnight journey on the 10pm Friday night train to Yorkshire in order to play on Saturday afternoon.

The following week's Express said the team had 'an enthusiastic send-off' and that 'the GWR station was packed with supporters and well-wishers of the little pioneer band'.

The local council was in full support of the venture, with Coun J Cameron giving

a speech at the station congratulating the system of open payment of players in preference to the veiled payment of the so-called amateurs.

Ebbw Vale couldn't defy the odds, though, and lost 3-26. Their solitary try-scorer that day was Williams Evans, the club secretary whose idea it was to switch 'in the face of bogus amateurism in the Monmouthshire League'.

Back in South Wales, Merthyr didn't fare much better in their tie against Oldham, losing 6-25 with the visitors, who were Lancashire Cup holders and League and Challenge Cup runners up the season before, running in seven tries. Dai 'Brecon Road' Davies, who later signed for Oldham, and Dai Bevan were the Merthyr scorers.

But the moral venture of professionalism was a complete success. The Express ran a match advertisement in its September 7 edition and a week later reported on the gate receipts, saying, 'the takings amounted to over £150, and after the match the Merthyr men were paid over the table'.

Professional rugby in Wales ran for only a few years at this point. Merthyr disbanded in January 1911 owing to constant financial losses and a reported lack of assistance from the Northern Union, while Ebbw Vale lasted until the end of the 1911-12 season before switching back to the amateur game.

Clubs from Aberdare, Barry, Treherbert and Mid-Rhondda all switched to Northern Union in 1908 but none lasted more than two seasons for the same reason as the initial two clubs and soon switched back, with the exception of Mid-Rhondda, who turned their efforts to the openly professional round ball game.

Now, over 100 years on and following clubs from Pontypridd (1926-7), Cardiff (1951-2 and 1981-5), South Wales (1996) and Celtic Crusaders (2006-11), the Scorpions are flying the flag for professional Rugby League here in South Wales.



PIC: The Merthyr squad from 1907

SOUTH WALES SCORPIONS V HEMEL STAGS

FOLLOWING the Tetley's Challenge Cup draw made in Cheltenham on February 24th, it was confirmed that Hemel Stags would be South Wales Scorpions' opponents in the third round **writes Sian Golden.**

The Challenge Cup is the oldest knockout rugby competition in the world, held annually since 1896, with the only exception being the years during the first world war and the 1939-40 season. It involves community, semi-professional and professional clubs and was recently expanded to include teams from France and Russia following years of being contested only by British teams. Current holders are Wigan Warriors who beat Hull FC 16-0 on their way to the double last year.

The Challenge Cup Final is one of the most prestigious in the world of sport, not just Rugby League, and it is traditionally held at Wembley Stadium. Indeed Wigan are the most successful club, tasting victory in the Final no less than 19 times during their history.

If the Scorpions win the third round tie against Hemel, it opens up the possibility of facing a Super League club, something that would indeed become an incentive to do well against their southern rivals.

Opponents Hemel Stags are experienced visitors to South Wales since they formed in April 1981, joining the Second Division of the South Amateur Rugby League. They are a relatively new side when it comes to Championship 1 having played in the National Conference over the last few seasons. Scorpions have the better record with two victories out of three encounters, and they hope to continue that trend in the fixture on Sunday March 16th (please log on to www.scorpionsrl.com for an update on admission prices to this game). Hemel have recently completed their

preparations in the pre-season by winning 26-6 against a London Broncos XIII.

"We've tested ourselves against quality opposition, now we can't wait for the season to start," said Hemel coach Troy Perkins. "We'll look forward to coming to Wales for the Cup and league games. I'm sure they'll be close and will hopefully draw large crowds to Maesteg RFC."



No	Nat	Player
1	+	Mitch Barbara
2	+	James Cameron
3	+	Aaron Small
4	+	Michael Brown
5	+	James Hill
6	+	Jymel Coleman
7	+	Ben Young
8	+	Aidan Pritchard
9	+	Ben Thorburn
10	+	Dan Ljizouli
11	+	Barry-John Swindells (C)
12	+	Ciaren Clement-Pascal
13	+	Alex Ingarfield
14	+	Evan Simons
15	+	Miles McLeod
16	+	Guy Aldam
17	+	Jimmy Morgan
18	+	Ashley Fyson
19	+	Malaichi Lloyd-Jones
20	+	Essad Al-Zubaidi
21	+	Ben Kavanagh
22	+	Ellis Gordon
23	+	Eddie M'baraga
24	+	Matt Haylock
25	+	James Howitt

PIC - Osian Phillips takes on the Stags last year - Ian Lovell

HEAD TO HEAD			
3 MATCHES - 0 DRAWN			
SCORPIONS	WON	HEMEL	
2	1		
62	POINTS	86	
ALL MEETINGS			
DATE	HOME	RESULT	AWAY
30/06/2013	Scorpi	16 - 14	Hemel
26/05/2013	Hemel	52 - 24	Scorps
17/03/2013	Hemel	20 - 22	Scorps

Stats courtesy of Sportradar

- SUNDAY 16TH MARCH - MAESTEG RFC, 3PM

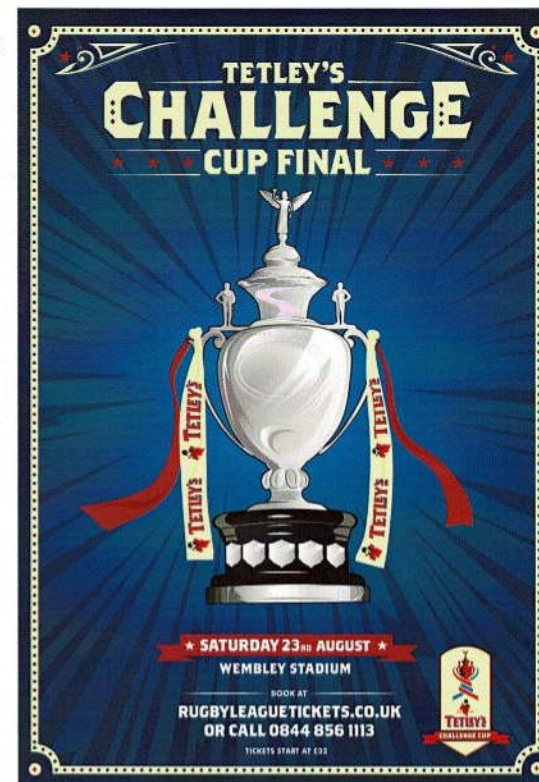
The draw for the third round of the 2014 Tetley's Challenge Cup took place at the University of Gloucestershire's Park Campus in Cheltenham this evening when the 23 Kingstone Press Championships clubs entered the competition for the first time. The Championships clubs joined the 11 winners from the second round ties in draw conducted by Maxine Melling, the Pro Vice Chancellor at the University of Gloucestershire, and Kevan Blackadder, the Editor of the Gloucestershire Echo.

The draw in full was as follows:

Milford Marlins v Barrow Raiders
 Rochdale Hornets v University of Gloucestershire All Golds
 Keighley Cougars v Wath Brow Hornets
 Dewsbury Rams v West Hull
 Sheffield Eagles v East Leeds
 British Army v Doncaster
 Hull Dockers v Halifax
 Batley Bulldogs v Kells
 South Wales Scorpions v Hemel Stags
 Normanton Knights v Workington Town
 York City Knights v Whitehaven
 Swinton Lions v Gateshead Thunder
 Egremont Rangers v Oldham
 Hunslet Hawks v Oxford
 North Wales Crusaders v Pilkington Recs
 Wigan St Patrick's v Leigh Centurions

The third round ties will be played over the weekend of March 15 and 16.

Two Championships clubs, Featherstone Rovers and London Skolars were given a bye into the fourth round in a random draw held earlier in the day. This is because the potential French entrants in the Cup decided at the last minute, to pull out and concentrate on their domestic league.



TWICE IN A MONTH

Don't forget that South Wales Scorpions take on Hemel Stags again on Sunday 30th March at Maesteg RFC (kick-off 3pm). Admission is just £8 for adults, £6 concessions, £2 for children aged 12-16 and £1 for children aged 11 and under. Issue 2 of South Wales Rugby League Magazine will be available at that match.

THE CHALLENGE CUP - WELSH ADVENTURES

With the Third Round of the Tetley's Challenge Cup coming later this month, **Paul Hart** looks back at the First Round, which saw a plucky loss for South Wales' domestic champions, Torfaen Tigers...

THE date is February 1st 2014 and one of the most famous rugby tournaments in the world is about to get underway.

The famous Rugby League Challenge Cup sits upon its freshly erected plinth as the teams file out of the changing rooms, but this isn't a club such as Leeds, Hull, or Wigan in Rugby League's northern "heartlands", this is Chiswick on the banks of the River Thames in London.

The hosts are South West London Chargers and the visitors Torfaen Tigers in a first round tie that pitches the best community side in London against their equivalents from South Wales. There is barely a northern accent to be heard during the warm-ups as shouts of "oh butt" and "yes Dai" from the Welsh camp intertwine with the more exotic Australian accents from many of the London Players.

Such is the importance of the tie to the RFL as they seek to expand "the greatest game on earth" to all parts of the UK, that as well as the famous old trophy they have also sent a media team to cover the match. The media guys are very friendly and open as I spend much of the build-up to the match chatting with them and Chargers' chairman Cameron Paul.

The cameraman's car is full of all kinds of goodies that catch the eye of Cameron and myself as we revel in the buzz of the big day, and while the expensive camera equipment is very impressive, it's the two official Tetley's Challenge Cup branded match balls that we are both instantly drawn to! I'm sure at a higher level of the game few people would bat an eyelid at something so basic and simple as a ball, but for us they are something special, they make us feel part of something bigger and symbolise that we



Tylan Mafi on a charge

have stepped up a level from our regular "any ball will do" matches. The media guys see our excitement and the their credit agree to look the other way at the end of the match so we could each keep one as a precious souvenir.

A buzz is in the air as the kick-off approaches, the fans have filed past the famous old trophy and their camera phones have been passed around as they each seek to be the envy of friends and family with a new Facebook profile picture.

Now it's down to business. I set myself up behind the posts that Torfaen are attacking and much like an Emperor at a Roman Coliseum, I sit back to observe and cast a critical eye over the battle played out before me, knowing full well I myself would be struck down in the opening moments of such a brutal conflict.

I see little of my 13 Champions in the first half as they bravely stage a backs-to-the-wall defensive effort on their own line for what feels like forever. I contemplate moving camp to the other end of the field, but the prospect of missing a possible length-of-the-field breakaway try by my favourite player Tylon Mafi causes me to stay put and hope for the best.

For all the London side's pressure in the first half, the one thing that shines though is that neither team has played for five months and rustiness is all too evident in basic handling errors from both sides. The Tigers' defensive effort meant they were just 4-0 down and could push on for the win if they could get some good play going in the second half.

Alas the second half went much the way of the first and it was safe to say that this my 213th match that I've photographed would not be a classic. The Chargers scored a converted try and penalty edging the score to 12-0 before the Tigers walked in a simple try in the final minute, by which time the result was decided and the Chargers

celebrated knowing the conversion would be the last kick of the game and they were safely in the hat for round two.

Ultimately this was a great occasion for the sport in non-heartland areas if not a great game. The Chargers progress to the next round with my best wishes, while the Tigers are left to reflect on what might have been.

The Tigers will be attempting to qualify for next year's competition by defending their Welsh Premier Title in a highly competitive league this summer starting with the annual Scott McRorie 9s on May 11th. Check in with www.WalesRugbyLeague.co.uk for all the latest information.

Paul Hart has been a Photographer and Media Officer at the grass roots of Welsh Rugby League for six years. Over 300 of his best photographs are featured in his excellent hardback book "The Heart and The Art of my Rugby Photography" which is available for just £10 at www.PaulHartPhotography.co.uk as well as via Amazon and eBay plus at Celtic Cameras in Bridgend Market.



The teams enter the fray - both photos by Paul Hart.

THE CHALLENGE CUP - A WELSH HISTORY

THE Tetley's Challenge Cup is Rugby League's most historic and prestigious competition and is the only knock-out tournament of its kind to include teams from all levels of the sport.

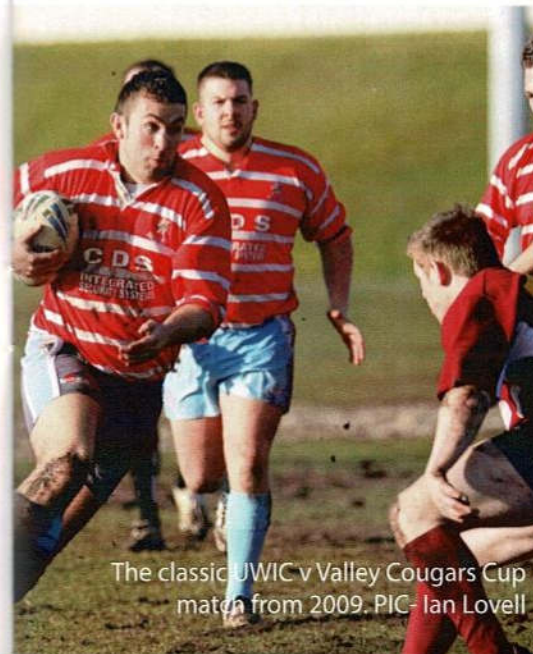
It is an eight month long competition that starts out featuring many grassroots clubs and climaxes with a spectacular final at Wembley Stadium, London which not only attracts fans from both competing finalists but the whole Rugby League community.

Since the first final in 1897, which saw Batley beat St Helens 10-3 in front of nearly 13,500 people in Leeds, the competition has grown from strength to strength. Welsh clubs first appeared in the competition in 1908 and Merthyr Tydfil sprung a shock by knocking out established club Whitehaven.

From 1998, there has always been at least one Welsh side in this famous competition.

- 1 Saturday 29th February 1908 - Round 1 - Beverley 3 Merthyr Tydfil 15
- 2 Saturday 14th March 1908 - Round 2 - Merthyr Tydfil 33 Whitehaven 5
- 3 Saturday 28th March 1908 - Round 3 - Leigh 8 Merthyr Tydfil 2
- 4 Saturday 12th December 1908 - Welsh Round 1 - Barry 9 Aberdare 5
- 5 Saturday 12th December 1908 - Welsh Round 1 - Mid Rhondda 8 Treherbert 7
- 6 Saturday 26th December 1908 - Welsh Round 2 - Mid Rhondda 2 Barry 0
- 7 Saturday 27th February 1909 - Round 1 - Hunslet 25 Mid Rhondda 5
- 8 Saturday 27th February 1909 - Round 1 - Beverley 7 Ebbw Vale 2
- 9 Saturday 26th February 1910 - Round 1 - Merthyr Tydfil 7 Ebbw Vale 12
- 10 Saturday 12th March 1910 - Round 2 - Huddersfield 3 Ebbw Vale 8
- 11 Saturday 19th March 1910 - Round 3 - Salford 8 Ebbw Vale 2
- 12 Saturday 31st December 1910 - Preliminary Round - Coventry 18 Merthyr Tydfil 3
- 13 Saturday 18th February 1911 - Round 1 - Batley 7 Ebbw Vale 2
- 14 Saturday 17th February 1912 - Round 1 - Halifax 10 Ebbw Vale 2
- 15 Saturday 12th February 1927 - Round 1 - Widnes 23 Pontypridd 2
- 16 Saturday 4th February 1950 - Round 1 First Leg - Cardiff 10 Salford 15
- 17 Saturday 11th February 1950 - Round 1 Second Leg - Salford 20 Cardiff 5
- 18 Saturday 10th February 1951 - Round 1 First Leg - Llanelli 9 Barrow 23
- 19 Saturday 17th February 1951 - Round 1 Second Leg - Barrow 39 Llanelli 5
- 20 Saturday 9th February 1952 - Round 1 First Leg - Cardiff 7 Dewsbury 7
- 21 Saturday 16th February 1952 - Round 1 Second Leg - Dewsbury 16 Cardiff 0
- 22 Sunday 14th February 1982 - Round 1 - Cardiff City Blue Dragons 8 Widnes 19
- 23 Sunday 30th January 1983 - Preliminary Round - Wigan 14 Cardiff City Blue Dragons 4
- 24 Sunday 12th February 1984 - Round 1 - Cardiff City Blue Dragons 6 Hull 34
- 25 Sunday 27th January 1985 - Preliminary Round - Leeds 68 Bridgend Blue Dragons 6
- 26 Sunday 5th December 1993 - Round 1 - Milford 18 Cardiff Institute 8
- 27 Sunday 4th December 1994 - Round 1 - Dudley Hill 54 Cardiff Institute 4
- 28 Sunday 5th December 1998 - Round 1 - Barrow Island 24 UWIC 4
- 29 Sunday 17th December 1999 - Round 1 - Durham 6 Cardiff Cougars 36
- 30 Sunday 16th January 2000 - Round 2 - Cardiff Cougars 18 Rochdale Mayfield 10
- 31 Sunday 30th January 2000 - Round 3 - Keighley Cougars 90 Cardiff Cougars 0
- 32 Sunday 3rd December 2000 - Round 1 - Wales Students 15 Askam 18
- 33 Wednesday 5th December 2001 - Round 1 - Royal Air Force 40 UWIC 13
- 34 Sunday 1st December 2002 - Round 1 - Shaw Cross Sharks 56 Cardiff Demons 12
- 35 Sunday 30th November 2003 - Round 1 - Aberavon Fighting Irish 6 Ince Rose Bridge 28

- 36 Sunday 16th January 2005 - Preliminary Round - Cardiff Demons 12 Walney Central 28
- 37 Sunday 12th March 2006 - Round 3 - Celtic Crusaders 64 Lokomotiv Moscow 4
- 38 Sunday 1st April 2006 - Round 4 - Rochdale Hornets 32 Celtic Crusaders 8
- 39 Saturday 10th March 2007 - Round 3 - Celtic Crusaders 50 Eastmoor Dragons 10
- 40 Sunday 1st April 2007 - Round 4 - Rochdale Hornets 20 Celtic Crusaders 16
- 41 Sunday 9th March 2008 - Round 3 - Celtic Crusaders 58 Lokomotiv Moscow 10
- 42 Friday 18th April 2008 - Round 4 - Leeds Rhinos 38 Celtic Crusaders 16
- 43 Sunday 18th January 2009 - Preliminary Round - UWIC 18 Valley Cougars 20
- 44 Sunday 25th January 2009 - Round 1 - Royal Navy 38 Valley Cougars 28
- 45 Friday 3rd April 2009 - Round 4 - Hull Kingston Rovers 32 Celtic Crusaders 6
- 46 Sunday 24th January 2010 - Round 1 - Blackwood Bulldogs 42 Edge Hill 16
- 47 Sunday 14th February 2010 - Round 2 - Edinburgh Eagles 16 Blackwood Bulldogs 28
- 48 Sunday 7th March 2010 - Round 3 - Oldham Roughyeds 80 Blackwood Bulldogs 6
- 49 Sunday 18th April 2010 - Round 4 - York City Knights 8 Crusaders 58
- 50 Sunday 9th May 2010 - Round 5 - Crusaders 34 Catalans Dragons 35
- 51 Sunday 23rd January 2011 - Round 1 - Valley Cougars 24 The Army 30
- 52 Sunday 6th March 2011 - Round 3 - South Wales Scorpions 6 Dewsbury Rams 62
- 53 Sunday 7th May 2011 - Round 4 - Leeds Rhinos 30 Crusaders 20
- 54 Saturday 24th March 2012 - Round 3 - Wath Brow Hornets 22 South Wales Scorpions 24
- 55 Saturday 24th March 2012 - Round 3 - North Wales Crusaders 28 Toulouse Olympique 10
- 56 Saturday 14th April 2012 - Round 4 - Halifax 84 South Wales Scorpions 28
- 57 Sunday 15th April 2012 - Round 4 - Wigan Warriors 98 North Wales Crusaders 4
- 58 Saturday 6th April 2013 - Round 3 - West Hull 6 North Wales Crusaders 82
- 59 Saturday 6th April 2013 - Round 3 - South Wales Scorpions 22 Doncaster 52
- 60 Sunday 21st April 2013 - Round 4 - Hull FC 62 North Wales Crusaders 6
- 61 Saturday 1st February 2014 - Round 1 - South West London Chargers 12 Torfaen Tigers 6



The classic UWIC v Valley Cougars Cup match from 2009. PIC- Ian Lovell

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FROM THE TERRACES

South Wales Scorpions Supporters Club chairman **Andy Birchall** gives his opinions of the month's happenings in Rugby League in South Wales...

WELL it's that time of year again when we all look forward to some flowers starting to bloom, lighter nights, warmer days and the main thing - RUGBY LEAGUE is back.

It's been a long cold and wet winter and like most fans I have been looking at the internet every week to see what news would come out regarding the Scorpions.

But now we have it - a new home, a new coach, new owners and a newish looking squad.

All is good and I can't wait to get back to standing on the Maesteg terraces watching them. I would love to see plenty of the locals there joining in the songs with the rest of us so let's hope a good few of them turn up for the first game.

This season is by no means going to be a stroll in the park. There are some good teams in our league and we start with possibly the best of them all in Oldham Roughyeds - a good hard working team that have been there and done it.

London Skolars have signed some good players one of them being our own Courtney Davies. I would like to wish him all the best but not when we play them.

Then we travel to Gloucestershire All Golds - our local rivals who will be looking to have bragging rights over us.

Not only do we have the Scorpions, but there we've the Conference to look forward to in the upcoming months, which again will be a hard fought season with last year only six points between the top four teams. Valley Cougars were top last

year and I look forward to watching them in their Conference South campaign but Torfaen Tigers won the Grand Final and it was a shame they went out of the Challenge Cup in the Third Round recently. I would hope that you can get to see a few of the games as this is the real grass roots of League in South Wales.

From grass roots to World Cup and I for one was thrilled at the way the games were covered on Premier Sports (note to Sky here who pretended it didn't exist).

As for the action on the pitch, well WOW some super games and some classic moments. The last gasp try from the Kiwis to defeat England, the total dominance of the Kangaroos, what SBW stands for (stop before white-line).

And Alfie scoring a try under the post in the opening ceremony.

But the one thing that did stand out for me during the World Cup was what kind of game plan did Iestyn Harris have because whatever it was, it didn't work?

Wales never got going, we all know that teams like Italy would be full of NRL players. Is it time for a change?

The future of the Welsh side are the young lads playing at under 16 and under 18 level and there are some very very good players but for the sport to grow, we as fans need to support them.

Gareth Thomas gets ready to run at the Millennium Stadium. PIC-SWPIX



Y GORNEL CYMRAEG

Dyma'r gornel y bydd **Sian Golden** o'r Cymro yn trafod ac yn lleisio barn ar ddigwyddiadau y mis yng nghymuned rygbi xiii De Cymru - o'r Scorpions a thu hwnt.

BYDD South Wales Scorpions yn codi eto wrth i gyfnod newydd ddechrau ym Maesteg ym mis Mawrth.

Roedd ansicrwydd ddiweddd tymor diwethaf wrth i berchennog y clwb benderfynu symud ymlaen at brosiectau eraill yn 2014. Fe aeth chwaraewyr i glybiau eraill ac roedd cyfnod o ddyfalu am yr hyn oedd i ddod.

I fod yn deg, efallai mai hynny fydd y peth gorau i'r Scorpions gan eu bod yn dechrau cyfnod newydd mewn lle newydd yn stadiwm The Old Parish ym Maesteg. Mae'r ardal wedi croesawu rygbi xiii i'w cymuned, gyda'r ysgol wedi bod yn ganolbwynt cadarn i'r adleoliad.

Mae eu cefnogaeth wedi bod yn hanfodol i sicrhau dyfodol y Scorpions, ac yn wir rygbi xiii yn Ne Cymru, gan nad oedd cefnogaeth wedi dod i'r fei bob tro yng Nghastell Nedd. Efallai ei bod yn werth aros am eiliad a meddwl faint o ddylanwad gafodd twrnament cwpan y byd rygbi xiii a gynhaliwyd yn ddiweddar ar blant a phobl ifanc ardaloedd Cymru. Mae'r plant yn yr ysgolion yn barod yn deall mwy o reolau'r gamp o gymharu a'r adeg hon y llynedd.

Bydd yn dymor diddorol i'r Scorpions eleni, gyda chymaint o ail-adeiladu wedi bod dros bedwar mis. Mae yna hyfforddwyr newydd, chwaraewyr newydd a gobeithio cefnogwyr newydd yn ymuno gyda'r clwb. Gobeithiai Mike Grady, prif hyfforddwr newydd y clwb, y bydd 2014 yn flwyddyn lewyrchus i bawb.

Bydd pawb hefyd yn gobeithio y bydd y bechgyn yn efelychu llwyddiant North Wales Crusaders, a gafodd eu dyrchafu i gynghrair y Bencampwriaeth ddiweddd tymor diwethaf. Maent wedi blasu llwyddiant ysgubol mewn byr o amser, ac wedi dringo allan o Bencampwriaeth 1 wedi dau dymor yn unig o dan Clive Griffiths, yn dilyn cyfnod cythryblus oddi ar y cae yng nghynghrair Super League; ac o ganlyniad i hynny, bu rhaid iddynt ail-ffurfio o'r newydd.

Dwi o'r farn fod yna agwedd bositif iawn yn y clwb y dyddiau yma gyda chymaint o newidiadau oddi fewn y clwb a teimlai pawb hynny. Mae'r clwb wedi dychwelyd i'w wreiddiau gan ganolbwyntio ar gael chwaraewyr sydd wedi eu geni yng Nghymru; ac o ganlyniad i hynny, fe ddylai'r system hon allu datblygu bechgyn ar gyfer gemau ryngwladol yn y misoedd sydd i ddod.

Mae yna adroddiadau eisoes wedi dod o'r clwb yn datgan fod Ashley Bateman wedi penderfynu dychwelyd i South Wales Scorpions yn dilyn cyfnod yn Gloucestershire All Golds yn ddiweddar. Mae hyn yn gam allweddol gan fod gymaint o adroddiadau positif wedi dod o'r clwb trwy ei ffrindiau yn y garfan.

Felly mae'r tymor newydd ar fin dechrau, ac am y tro cyntaf dwi'n teimlo'n eithaf cyffrous am yr hyn sydd i ddod. Mae'n gyfle gwych i gymuned Maesteg a'r cyffiniau i brofi South Wales Scorpions a'u derbynn yn ran annatod o weithgareddau'r ardal yn 2014. Bydd eu gem gyntaf yn Stadiwm The Old Parish yn erbyn Oldham Roughyeds ar yr 2il o Fawrth (cic gyntaf 3.00pm) yn un bwysig er mwyn arddangos talentau'r garfan i holl gymuned Maesteg.

Yn ogystal ag Oldham Roughyeds, bydd mis Mawrth yn gweld ymweliadau Gloucestershire All Golds, York City Knights a Hemel Hempstead Stags i'r Old Parish. Hoffwn gymryd y cyfle o groesawu chwaraewyr, swyddogion a chefnogwyr y clybiau i'n plith yn ystod cyfnod dechreuol y tymor, a gobeithio y byddwch yn cael mwynhad o ymweld a ni yma.

Roedd yna falchder hefyd o ran y clwb gan weld Dalton Grant yn gwneud mor dda gyda Barrow Raiders yng nghynghrair y Bencampwriaeth. Sgoriodd ddwy gais yn ystod y gem yn erbyn North Wales Crusaders ar 16eg Chwefror. Fel y bydd rhai ohonoch yn ymwybodol, fe ymunodd Dalton Grant ynghyd a Joe Burke a charfan y Raiders ddiweddd y llynedd, a hoffai South Wales Scorpions ddymuno'n dda i'r ddau yn eu gyrfa ar y lefel hon. Da iawn chi bois!

Am fwy o wybodaeth ynglyn a'r Scorpions ewch i'w gwefan www.scorpionsrl.com.



SOME of South Wales' brightest young stars will be going for gold this summer after it was announced that the lead up to the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow will feature rugby league as an exhibition sport and **Ian Golden** talks to some of the Scorpions players who could feature in the tournament.

The mini competition will be an under 19s Championship involving five of the six Commonwealth Regions.

The Rugby League Commonwealth Championship 2014 will be contested by South Africa, Canada, Jamaica, England, Scotland, Wales, Australia and Papua New Guinea, with the teams split into two groups.

Wales have been drawn against Scotland, Australia and Jamaica in the group stages.

"It would be a great achievement to play at the Commonwealth Games at any age, level or sport," Rhys Fitzgerald said. "It would be a big tick in the box if I was selected as it's always a proud moment to represent Wales."

"I know it's 'only' an exhibition sport at the Games this time but I think it's really good for Rugby League. Also the NRL 9s in Auckland was a great success so I think it'll work. We need more publicity and media coverage at bigger stages like the Commonwealth Games."

Mike Connor also hopes to get selected to rekindle some old rivalries.

"I played last year for the students in the World Cup and we lost to Australia in the

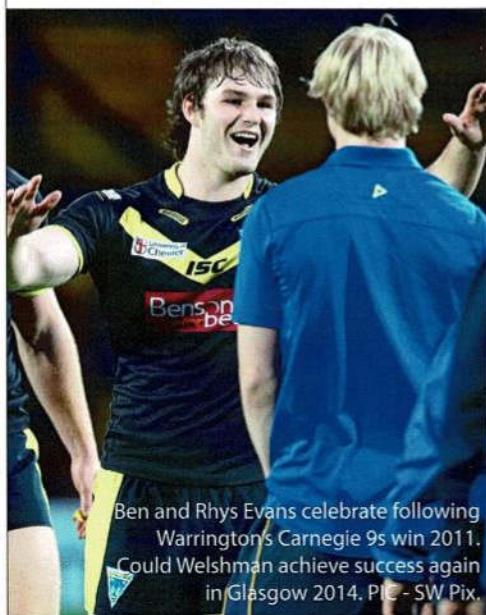
semis who were a brilliant outfit that went on to win the tournament," he said. "So a little payback at 19s in the Commonwealth Games would be ideal and a brilliant opportunity to play against one of the best rated league teams around."

"Being part of the Commonwealth Games is not something you associate with Wales RL at any level but it's a brilliant opportunity for players not only to represent their country but to do it in a major event."

"I think this will also help push on from the World Cup (even though it is 9s) and hopefully help inspire more to take up this growing sport in Wales."

Osian Phillips said: "Representing Wales at any level is an honour. However competing on their behalf in such an internationally recognised games would be an indescribable feeling."

"I've played against Australia many times over the years however the peak of that came in the semi-final of the Students World Cup last year where they went on to win the



Ben and Rhys Evans celebrate following Warrington's Carnegie 9s win 2011. Could Welshman achieve success again in Glasgow 2014. PIC - SW Pix.

Final. I also played against Australia at under 16s and 18s level. I've never come up against Scotland however facing them in their home games is certainly a big event. Having never seen Jamaica's rugby league side it would be great to play against them."

"I think it is huge for the sport and especially for teams where the sport isn't as well recognised like Jamaica for example and it will help with more funding in the sport when they see the potential in the teams."

Chris Leyshon is another Scorpions player who will hope to be selected for Glasgow.

"It's an exciting time," he said. "I've played against two of the teams that are in our group. It'd be a good opportunity to have another go at the Aussies after being on the defeated side twice at under 18 level. And I've also played against Scotland who I'm sure will be out for revenge after we beat them in the last international series at under 18 level. It'd also be a worthy experience to play against Jamaica and see what they have to offer in the game of rugby league. 9s is a quick game and I'm sure they'll be a tough opponent."

"At the end of the day, it's a huge opportunity for rugby league to prove it's entertainment factor and to gain a larger following population. Many people prefer watching rugby league for the quick game and the big hits, and I'm sure they won't miss out if they watch the league in the commonwealth games."

"With the World Cup just passed, it's a good opportunity for the nations involved to gain more experience at international level and progress further."

The matches will take place over the 27-28th June as the 9s format looks to continue to spread the sport on the international stage.

The Rugby League International Federation presented to the Commonwealth Games Sports Review Committee in Kuala Lumpur

in May 2011 and their decision to accept rugby league as a category three sport was ratified by the CG General Assembly in November that year.

The matches will take place at the Broadwood Stadium, North Lanarkshire and Mike Hooper, CGF Chief Executive Officer, commented: "The Commonwealth Games Federation wishes all participants every success, the advent of these Championships is a true demonstration of the RLIF's commitment to further developing the sport across the Commonwealth."

RLIF Chairman Scott Carter added: "Since becoming a member of the CGF in 2011, rugby league has remained true to the message that shaped our application, that it is truly a sport of the Commonwealth."

"We are committed to working to develop the sport in these regions. Our grassroots work continues at a steady pace in Africa, for example, and it was important for the RLIF to bring together teams from all corners of the Commonwealth in what promises to be a true celebration of rugby league."

The next Commonwealth Games in 2018 will be held on Australia's Gold Coast – a stronghold of the sport – where the plan is to again run a pre-Games exhibition, most likely at U23 level, with a view to 9s becoming a category two sport and eligible for full inclusion in the Commonwealth Games thereafter.

Rugby League Commonwealth Championship 2014 - Format

Pool A: Australia (ranked 1), Wales (6), Scotland (11), Jamaica (23)

Pool B: England (3), PNG (7), Canada (16), South Africa (25)

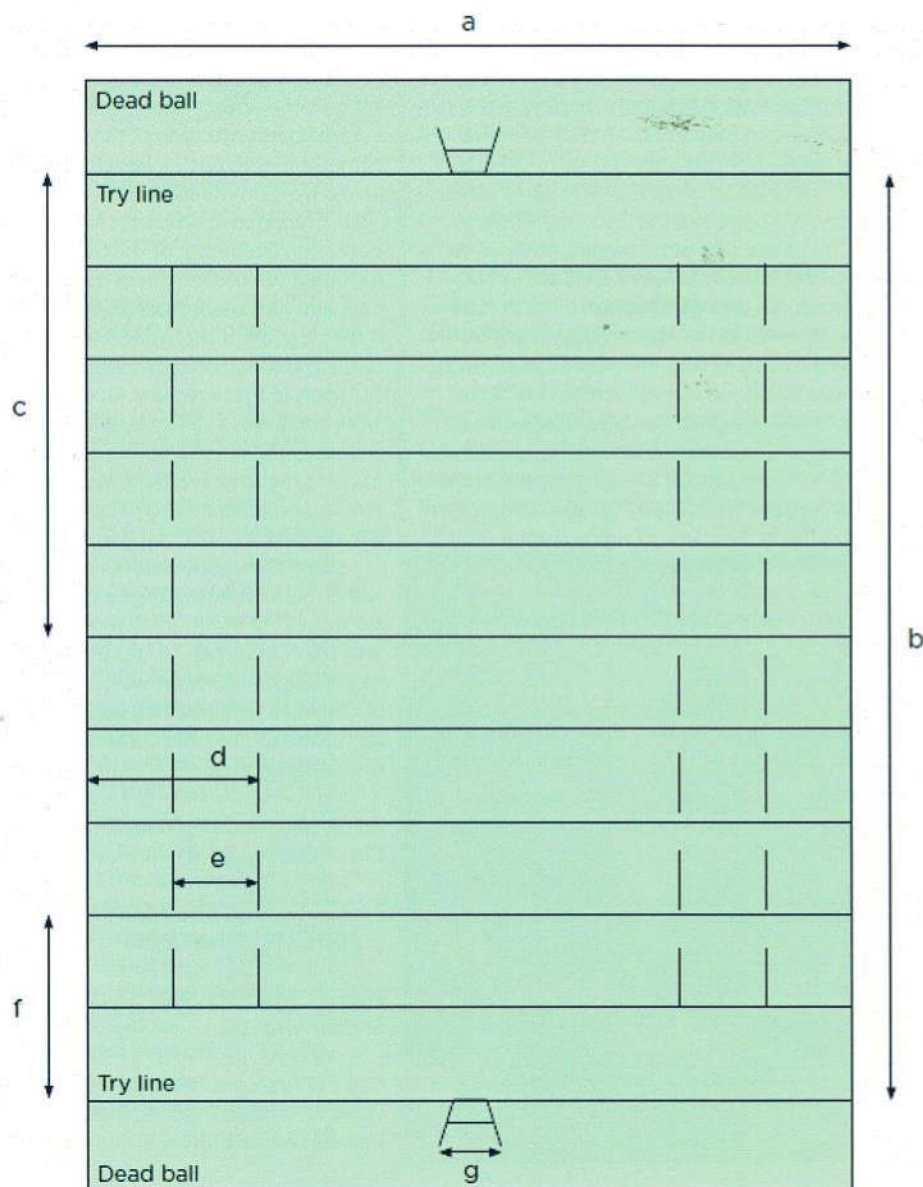
Day 1 (27th June) - Pool games

Day 2 (28th June) - Semis and Finals (5 matches per nation total)

MATCHDAY MATHS CHALLENGE - SPONSORED BY MAESTEG SCHOOL

WIN tickets to the Tetley's Challenge Cup Final at Wembley in August by entering this competition, sponsored by Maesteg Comprehensive School, the new base of the Wales Rugby League. **Jeff Cole** has prepared this. Are you smarter than a Comprehensive School student? Or are you in school and can do this. Complete your forms, photocopies are acceptable, and email them to JCole@maestegcs.bridgend.sch.uk by Friday 21st March for your chance to win.

A Rugby League Pitch



Which unit of measurement do you think rugby pitches are measured in?

- a) Millimetres
- b) Centimetres
- c) Metres
- d) Kilometres

Circle the answer
you think is right

A rugby pitch is 100m long from try line to try line and 68m from touchline to touchline. The pitch is marked every 10 metres with a horizontal line, and there are two vertical broken lines showing 10 metres in from the touchline and 20 metres in from the touchline. The dead ball line is 10m behind the goal posts.

How wide is line a?

How long is line c? ____ m

How long is line f? ____ m

How wide is line e? ____ m

Draw lines to show the right definitions:

Perimeter

Amount of surface

Area

Amount of turn

Angle

The distance round the edge

Perimeter of rectangle = $(2 \times \text{length}) + (2 \times \text{width})$

area of rectangle = $\text{length} \times \text{width}$

What is the perimeter of the whole pitch?

What is the area of the part of the pitch shown by line f and line a?

Show your working out below

Show your working out below

Last year, Rugby League's Commonwealth expansion initiative entered new territory following an exploratory visit to Sierra Leone by a joint Wales Rugby League-Rugby League European Federation delegation. **Mark Jones** represented WRL and last month he went back for phase two of the project. Writing for South Wales RL Magazine, here is the first part of his report...

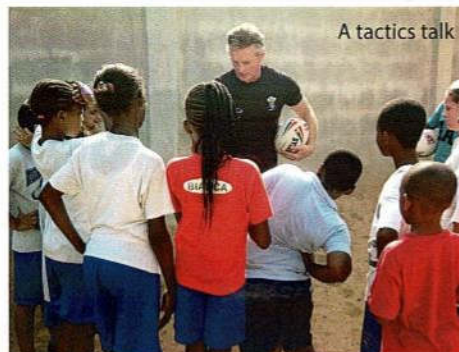
FINALLY we had the go ahead for the grant for phase two of the Sierra Leone project, and I was fortunate to be asked to revisit Freetown for 10 days to impart as much knowledge as possible to Magnus Campbell, the Freetown RL Community Coach, and other leaders such as school sports teachers.

Magnus will be the community coach for Sierra Leone RL and will build grass roots rugby in the Freetown area. During my visit, Magnus was to observe me coaching in schools, colleges and clubs and then be assessed running the coaching sessions.

During our first visit (phase one), we met with the Olympic committee and the education minister and set up the Sierra Leone RL Governing body. We were also interviewed on National TV and radio programmes, visited local School and Colleges and did a taster coaching session with Lions Warriors rugby team on the beach.

My flight was filled with business people, mostly middle aged white men, but also a few families with younger children. I wondered who they were working for, and why they were here. Our plane was scheduled to head over to Monrovia after touching down briefly at Freetown. The few Sierra Leoneans or Liberians aboard were outnumbered by their Western counterparts.

As I stepped off the flight, I was greeted by a blast of humid, hot air and the



organized chaos of Freetown Airport. After collecting my luggage, I began the process of attempting to get into Freetown, not a simple task because there is no road or bridge directly to the city – Lungi International Airport is separated from the rest of the city by a large expanse of water, the mouth of the Sierra Leone River. You have several options of getting into the city – a helicopter (which can be prone to crashing), an expensive water taxi, or the cheapest and probably safest, a ferry that comes at some point – you just never know exactly when. I opted for the water taxi.

As I left the airport I was immediately ambushed by a dozen local people trying to help with my luggage chasing a quick dollar or leon. There are 6,800 leones to the pound and Sierra Leone largest note is a 10,000 so when you change a £100 you have so many notes you are unable to close your wallet.

So, my journey involved quite a bit of sweaty nighttime waiting. Crammed like sardines, we were squeezed onto a minibus and headed over to the water taxi, where we were met with more waiting. Eventually, we boarded and were handed lifejackets, nervously I strapped up the jacket a thought passed through my head, if we capsized, how could the staff find us in pitch darkness, as they only have torch light to guide the speedboat across the river. The 25 minute journey was smooth and relaxing and I

was excited by what was to come, I eagerly awaited my arrival into the city. Bright, colorful buildings dotted the landscape. Freetown looked beautiful from afar.

Sierra Leone was founded in the aftermath of the slave trade's abolition. Thousands of freed slaves were deposited in what is now Sierra Leone by British abolitionists, and established themselves with support from the British military. Somehow, this diverse group of freed slaves came together to create Sierra Leone.

Today, Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world, often at the bottom of the list on human development and maternal mortality indicators. Even the capital, Freetown, has its share of breathtaking ocean views and beaches, but little in the way of modern shopping malls or high-rise buildings. Freetown has a few restaurants and shops powered by generators, a network of paved roads interspersed with dirt ones heading off the main road. Hip hop music blasts from roadside shacks and Nigerian films played at night attract large crowds of people trying to catch a glimpse. There is a state-owned electric grid, but electricity is touch-and-go, and running water is usually a distant dream.

Life in Freetown, is hectic, tiring, and frustrating, people are everywhere. Sierra Leone's population is 7 million and Freetown is the most crowded city in Sierra Leone with a population of 1.5million. Hawkers, traders,

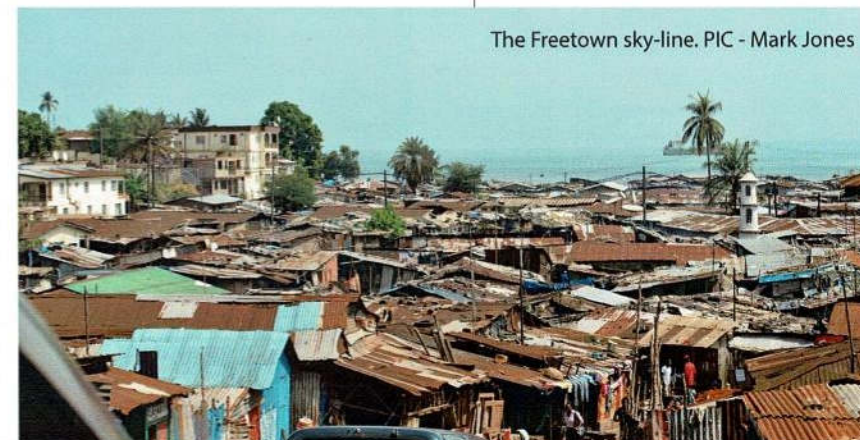
and sellers are everywhere, and the roads are filled with cars, motorcycles, bicycles, and minibuses. As we drive to the hotel, I pass boys playing football and large landfills where trash is being burned. In the slums of Kroo Bay, people live squashed together in dwellings they have painfully erected.

Ryszard Kapuscinski hailed slums as 'the highest achievement of human imagination, ingenuity, and fantasy.' Using nothing but tyres, corrugated iron, old car doors and bits of wire and wood, the Kroo Bay residents have constructed a small miracle spilling down the hill from the Cotton Tree to the sea. The walls of their tiny houses, fittingly known as pan-bodis, are made of patched together sheets of rusted zinc or iron...Fewer than six hundred of its eleven thousand residents have running water in their homes. None have a toilet."

This is Freetown – a bustling, crowded city, a constant assault on the senses, full of young men trying to find work, cut off from the stronger sense of community provided by their villages. But the city speaks of opportunity – and so people come. They always will.

After what seemed like days of travelling I eventually arrived at my hotel, The Family Kingdom. This was an old colonial building, zoo and park, and instantly gives you the feeling of travelling back in time.

To be continued..



BUILDING THE CONFERENCE

South Wales Conference media manager and official WRL photographer Ian Lovell talks about the set-up of the new management committee and what it means for our community league...

The first meeting of a new South Wales Conference Committee took place in early February in Cardiff.

This organisation was an idea that we came up with over a year ago by Ian Golden, Clive Batchelor and myself and has now been set up to govern the South Wales Conference competition at open age and junior levels as an independent organisation, but still registered and answerable to Wales Rugby League.

With assistance from WRL, we will deal with all matters of Rugby League on and off the field such as club and player registration and insurance, website and PR management, branding, finance, fixture formats, match official management, coach education, misconduct, penalties and sanctions, and safe-guarding.

Wales Rugby League's National Development Manager Mark Jones will sit on the committee as Discipline and Welfare Manager as well as an administrator. The other roles have been announced as...

Chair Person – Idris Evans

Registration Manager – Sarah Denton

Website and Media Manager – Ian Lovell

Treasurer – Ian Curzon

Fixture Manager – Richard Nuth

South Wales Match Officials Manager – Ian Curzon

Wales' community clubs have a big role to play in the future of the game in Wales and are a vital part of the player pathway. Players such as Wigan's Ben Flower and Gil Dudson, Widnes's Lloyd White and Bradford Bulls' Elliot Kear all began their careers in the Welsh Conference before becoming full time professional athletes and full Welsh internationals.

Youngsters can join a number of local clubs from age 13 and have a good chance of being spotted by WRL coaches, moving onto South Wales Academy training scholarships at the age of 16. It would be hoped the best of these would then feed into the South Wales Scorpions under 19 and ultimately first team with the possibility of being spotted by a Super League Club scout.

One of the aims of the new committee will be to try and engender a professional approach from the member clubs. It is hoped the member clubs will use the expertise and knowledge of the committee to develop a viable competition with participation open to all. There is a wide range of experience in the group from those who have played, refereed and acted as administrated in the game and all are keen to see the game develop.

The committee will in due course distribute contact details to the member clubs and will be the first port of call for all matters relating to the conference and junior clubs. It will aim to offer impartial advice on any aspects of the game in a transparent manner for the good of the game.

It is anticipated a registration evening will be held at Sport Wales, Sophia Gardens, Cardiff on Monday 03 March 2014 at 7.30pm – still to be confirmed at time of writing. It is hoped that there will be at least six clubs competing in the South Wales Conference League from the Gwendraeth Valley in the west to Newport in the east. Any clubs wishing to join the conference should in the first instance contact Mark Jones by emailing mark.jones@walesrugbyleague.co.uk to discuss your plans and ideas.

The 2014 South Wales Conference League will start on May 11th with the annual Scott McRorie Nines competition with the season proper starting a week later.

The 12th South Wales Grand Final, as well as Grand Finals at all junior levels, will take place on August 17th at Taff's Well RFC.

EMBRACING THE WORLD CUP

CARDIFF Spartans, who were under 13 South Wales Conference Grand Final runners up last year, were delighted to be part of a once in a life time opportunity assisting in the 2013 Rugby League World Cup when the opening ceremony was held in Cardiff last year.

Junior players from various age groups enjoyed assisting the RFL for the opening ceremony at the Millennium Stadium as ball boys for the entire day. Before they took their duties as ball boys the under 13s played a Match against Brighouse Rangers from Yorkshire who travelled to Cardiff for the World Cup.

And in what many may perceive as a shock, the Spartans, beat Brighouse 24-22.

The Spartans really threw themselves into the World Cup, arguably more than any other South Wales Conference side. They were at the opening press conference at the Stadium, they, as mentioned, provided the ball-boys, hosted the World Cup trophy at their ground in the build-up, and even took out corporate hospitality meeting stars like former Wigan, England and Lions legend Shaun Edwards in the process.

Now the club are expanding and want to have a senior side for the first time in their history. Potential players are asked to

email Sarah Denton on spartansrlfc@ovi.com or phone 07910846608. The club are holding an open evening on Sunday 6th April at Whitchurch RFC 2pm - 5pm and their coaches are holding taster sessions at their home ground of Llandaff North RFC at a date and time TBC.



CLUB OF THE MONTH - ABER VALLEY WOLVES

In the first of our Club of the Month features, **Sally Davies** look at current domestic senior champions Torfaen Tigers on the opposite page, while below, we focus on a new success story, Aber Valley Wolves. Just two years old and a few trophies already in the cabinet, chairman **Darren Williams**, one of the most enthusiastic volunteers we have in South Wales, tells the story...

FOLLOWING a request by one of my rugby union players who asked if we could setup a rugby league team, I approached a few local rugby union clubs including Senghenydd RFC, Caerphilly RFC and Bedwas RFC to see if any of their under 14 players would consider joining our new venture.

There was interest amongst the players at these teams however as the majority of players played union at Senghenydd, which is a long standing rugby union club based in the Aber Valley near to Caerphilly, it seemed sensible to base the name on the team on this and Aber Valley Wolves were born.

I asked my son to draw our club badge which is a wolf head, and this badge promotes the teams that represent Aber Valley Wolves.

I recruited two coaches - Gareth Short and Bobby Andrews - who gained level 2 and level 1 rugby league coaching badges. I also recruited a physio in Phil Oates who has been keeping our players fit ever since. I then contacted Mark Jones from WRL who was brilliant in helping me setup this great little club. Mark provided advice on funding plus he arranged for Lee Cullen from Wales Rugby League to undertake coaching sessions with our coaches.

I canvassed local businesses for sponsorships or small donations and was lucky to have gained sponsorship from Davies Construction and Abertridwr fish and chip shop, plus we had a few small donations to help us on our way.

In the first season we had several players who played for East Wales at The Gnoll in Neath while Gareth and I helped to coach the side

PIC - 2013's under 15 champions



which was an awesome experience.

That same year, we had seven players picked for the South Wales under 16 academy, four of whom went to France on tour to play Catalan Dragons. Whilst there, one of our players, Lewys Willacott, was selected to the Wales under 16 squad to play England but unfortunately didn't make the match day squad. I'm sure he will this season.

We also got to the WRL under 14s Grand Final, losing to Pontyclun Panthers in a hard fought match.

Our second season saw us starting another under 14 team who are coached by Viv and Lloyd Treherne while of course 2012's 14s went up to under 15 level.

The u14 and u15 teams won the Welsh League plus both teams are Welsh Cup champions. We have seven players represented in the under 16 South Wales academy in Connor Weigold, Dylan Reed, Ryan Davies, Lewys Willacott, Macauley Harris, Jordan Gilbert and Connor Kawulock - good luck lads!

This season we are starting another under 14 team along with our existing 15 and 16 teams and we'll be based at Caerphilly RFC, plus we are starting an open age senior team based at Senghenydd RFC.

Within three seasons we have gone from one team to four so the future is looking bright. We are currently looking to recruit players for all age groups so if anyone is interested in playing rugby league at 14s, 15s, 16s or senior level for a great now firmly established club, please contact me on 07527302424.

CLUB OF THE MONTH - TORFAEN TIGERS

TORFAEN Tigers were one of the founding members of the Welsh Conference after they were formed in March 2003 and as a result are the third oldest club in Wales (behind Cardiff Demons and Valley Cougars).

The club enjoyed a nomadic first few years playing at a number of grounds throughout the borough including Emlyn Park in Talywain, The Memorial Ground, Pontypool and The Polo Grounds in Panteg. Despite this the club enjoyed some success including a Welsh Premier Grand Final and RLC National Plate Final appearances in 2005 and a 1st place finish in the WRL Championship League in 2010.

At the end of the 2011 season the club was forced to undergo a massive restructure (which saw them sit out the 2012 season) as it was decided its current infrastructure was unsustainable, as a result of this restructure Head Coach Rob Davies was promoted to chairman where he was joined by avid Tigers fans James Price and Sally Davies in a new look committee. They move quickly to establish a new home venue at the Kings Head Ground in Cwmbran.

The club appointed a new coaching team of veteran player Jamie Williams and local RU coach Chris Bailey. Many people questioned the wisdom in appointing such an inexperienced team but Chairman Davies has this to say.

"From the moment I took over the running of the club I knew I wanted Jamie to taking over as head coach, his lack of coaching experience didn't bother me as he's a natural leader and when he said he wanted Chris, who I knew from Rugby Union, to coach alongside him I knew they'd complement each other's styles perfectly."

The duo justified the decision when in 2013, at the first time of asking, they guided the club to their maiden WRL Premiership title when they

defeated Valley Cougars 24-18 in the Grand Final in August at Taff Wells RFC.

As a result of this, the Tigers were invited by the RFL to compete in the 2014 Tetley's Challenge Cup, where they were drawn away to 2013 Harry Jenson Trophy champions South West London Chargers, where they were narrowly defeated 12-6. Despite the result there were many positives to come from the game, the players showed they could compete at a higher level and the club has seen a rise in support amongst the local community partly due to the massive increase in exposure in the local and national media.

Looking forward the club has big plans for 2014 and beyond, this season they hope to increase their average home attendance to 200, pass 1,000 combined social media followers as well as retaining the Welsh Premier Title and to become the first Welsh side since Bridgend Blue Bulls in 2005 to be crowned Harry Jenson Trophy champions. Further in the future the club hopes to capitalise on the strength of the school game in the county and re-establish a junior set-up, that previously produced several Welsh and GB Age Grade Internationals and gave current Wigan Warriors and Wales Forward Gil Dudson his first taste of the greatest game.

In order to achieve their goals they have added ex-Dragonheart Rhys Miller and ex-Scorpions Academy Team Manager Wayne Ponting to their backroom staff. They have strengthened on the field too with the signings of Jarad Hinnem from Newport Titans, Andrew Barlow from The Army under 23s, ex Wales age grade international stand-off Matthew Cummings and former Tiger Jon Daniels from Rugby Union.

In order to fund their plans for the future the club are currently looking for sponsors with packages starting from £125, anyone interested is encouraged to contact the club on 07553437355 or TorfaenTigersRL@hotmail.co.uk

All the latest Tigers news and information can be found at facebook.com/TorfaenTigersRLFC or on twitter by following @TorfaenTigersRL and a new official club website coming soon.



PIC - 2013's senior champions

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Gareth Walker's



CHAMPIONSHIP TALK

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KINGSTONE Press Championship One gets underway this month with the nine clubs involved vying for the golden ticket of a place in the second tier for 2015.

The winners of the Championship One Grand Final will take the final place in the Championship from next season, when the RFL's sweeping restructuring comes in.

That is a major carrot for each of the clubs involved, and raises a host of possibilities.

Relegated clubs Hunslet and York could be competing for Yorkshire derbies with the likes of Wakefield or Bradford, if they fall into the Super League drop zone.

Oldham's long attempt to claw their way out of the bottom tier of the professional game could see them taking on the Bulls in the league for the first time since their solitary Super League season in 1996.

And London Skolars could earn their first ever league derbies against top flight neighbours the Broncos.

Those four clubs look the most likely to be bidding for promotion, but if 2013 taught anyone in Championship One anything, then it's that little can be taken for granted against the clubs in more outlying areas.

Hemel Stags, Oxford, the University of Gloucestershire All Golds, South Wales Scorpions and Gateshead Thunder each have their own reasons to be positive about the new campaign.

And each showed at various points last year that they are capable of upsetting the more established clubs on their day.

Still, it would be a major surprise if last year's two Championship clubs Hunslet and York are not among

the top sides, with both possessing plenty of experience from the higher level.

It's arguable that the Hawks look stronger this year than they did for the Championship in 2013, which is a credit to the recruitment that has been done in South Leeds during the winter.

The Knights will be strong as well, and having seen their close pre-season friendly with Sheffield, have a host of talented young players ready to make an impact at this level.

Oldham should be there or thereabouts again under respected coach Scott Naylor, and although the Skolars have undoubtedly lost some crucial players – most notably Dylan Skee and James Anthony – they look like having a huge pack in 2014.

All of which should add to a terrific campaign, and a Grand Final with more at stake than in recent memory.

Promotion this year brings with it a key to further progression up the new-look league ladders – and that should be enough incentive to ensure Championship One shines brightly this season.



The Championship 1 captains pose at a recent media launch. PIC - SW Pix

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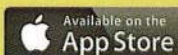
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AHEAD OF THE GAME

WITH REBECCA SMITH OF LEAGUE WEEKLY

A HYBRID League-Union game is being mooted.

There is a proposal for the Australian Rugby Union team to meet England's Rugby League team at Wembley in December and play a mash-up of the two codes' rules.

The RFL are said to be against it and lots of League pundits have poo-pooed the idea including our own columnist Andrew Voss.

But I reckon it would be a great idea. I think some people are just scared. They seem to fear it would be the first step to there being just one code.

The reality is the two codes will never merge. There is too much political history for that to ever happen, let alone the differences in the styles of play.

The hybrid game is a mere curiosity. A bit of fun. But it has the potential to make a lot of money and attract a mass of publicity.

And if there are two things our beloved code is lacking - it is income and exposure.

There are few things I envy about the 15-man game. To me it is a slower, duller product on the pitch but they can certainly show us a thing or two about events.

Saracens have taken a couple of their league games to Wembley in recent season and attracted crowds of around 70,000. We struggle to get that for a two-day Magic Weekend of seven fixtures.

As successful as we in League thought our recent World Cup was, it barely registered on the national sporting consciousness. But we all know next year's Union equivalent will get near blanket coverage from television, radio and newspapers.

So why not make the most of this opportu-

nity? Tap into Union's huge support base and track record of big events.

A hybrid game at Wembley between the Wallabies and England RL or Great Britain would be superb.

Would England rugby union fans cheers the English, or rugby union? They surely couldn't themselves to cheer the Aussies over the Brits just for code loyalty. Seeing Twickers regulars cheering on the likes of Ben Westwood and Ryan Hall without betraying their class roots would be excellent.

Sure, it is a bit of nonsense. It would prove nothing about which code is superior. Even if it did, people don't chose their code on the basis of quality or entertainment value. For 99.9 per cent of us we are born League or Union.

Even if a League side slaughtered the Wallabies with the best rugby Twickenham regulars had ever witnessed they aren't going to ditch their Hunter wellies and Labradors for flat caps and Whippets.

It is a bit of fun that could deliver heaps of press and line our pockets so I say, let's do it.

For more from League Weekly including our columnists Andrew Voss, Ray French, Jon Wilkin, Stuart Cummings and our outspoken publisher, Danny Lockwood, why not subscribe? For details call Amy on 01924 666 433.

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UNIVERSITY CHALLENGES

In South Wales, we have three university sides all going for glory. The University of South Wales side are in the BUSC Western 1A Division while Swansea and Aberystwyth are in Western 2A, obviously a league lower. We spoke to Scorpions first team player **Harrison Elliot** who is also Strength and Conditioning Coach for the ASEE Academy and South Wales under 16 sides and a player for USW, about the season so far.

"I could probably start by saying that the weather has practically destroyed our season," he said. "We've played just four regular season games this year and suddenly we had to start the play-offs.

"I'm pleased that we won our first play-off match (against Exeter University on February 19th) but we didn't find it easy. There were a few patches where we slipped off a bit. We were a bit rusty at first as we'd not played for three months but we scored some good tries to get the win.

"It's been a bit of an up and down year, we've had lots of personal success with players from our uni being signed for Scorpions and the Wales student squads and we only lost one game in 2013, but we have been limited with squad size this year and unfortunately we had to drop our second team which is disappointing as we had around 50 players in 2012-13.

"Winning the BUCS Shield last year in Sheffield was the biggest success in our history, beating many teams higher ranked

than us convincingly along the way and we are still in with a shout of winning another trophy this year. It's also very pleasing to see that we have the largest contingency from any university in the Wales Students squad this year which is a great achievement."

Log on to www.walesrugbyleague.co.uk for all fixture updates.

SOUTH WALES STUDENT SCORES 2013-14 FEBRUARY '14

- 26th Aberystwyth v Swansea
- 26th South Wales v Bath
- 19th South Wales 30-12 Exeter

JANUARY '14

- 29th Bristol 6-36 Swansea

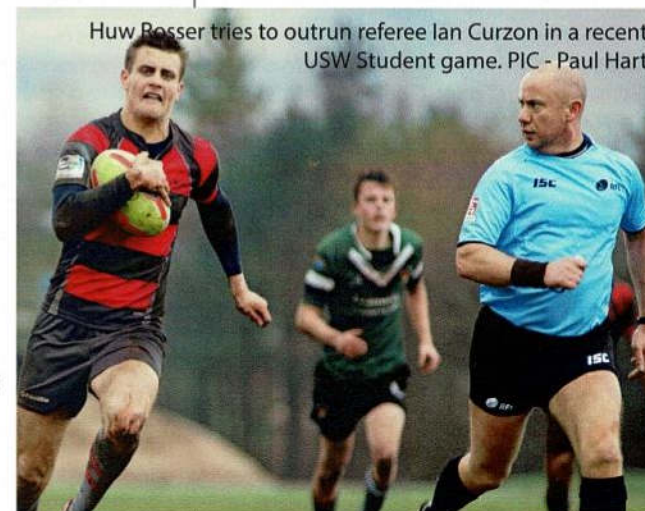
NOVEMBER '13

- 27th Bristol 34-10 Aberystwyth
- 20th Swansea 52-6 Exeter University A
- 13th Aberystwyth 10-40 Swansea
- 13th South Wales 24-20 Bath
- 6th Gloucestershire 16-80 South Wales

OCTOBER '13

- 30th Exeter A 32-10 Aberystwyth
- 30th South Wales 24-38 Exeter
- 30th Swansea 36-12 Bristol
- 16th Aberystwyth 32-10 Bristol
- 16th South Wales 76-16 UWE

Huw Bosser tries to outrun referee Ian Curzon in a recent USW Student game. PIC - Paul Hart



LEARNING THE BUSINESS

Last September, Wales Rugby League, Wigan Warriors, Coleg y Cymoedd and Maesteg School officially launched a new Rugby League Academy at Maesteg School. Here, Maesteg Sixth Form media student **Lloyd Lewis** talks to two of the players, Dan Maiden and Gethyn Rees on how they've gone in the first half year of the programme.

"I WASN'T sure about how this would turn out. It's been tough, a lot tougher than I think any of us thought it would be. But we love it."

Dan Maiden, Wales U18 representative, WRL Academy player and now players mentor to the current WRL U16 Academy squad didn't have far to move his education, just a small matter of seven miles, but he's glad he did.

Alongside his fellow Academy colleagues, Dan has flourished as part of the full time set up at Maesteg School, under the watchful eye of WRL Performance Coach Jon Ellis and Strength and Conditioning Coach Harrison Elliot.

"It gives you a real insight into what it takes to be a proper professional player and the added bonus of getting an education alongside it doing the Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (AASE) qualification makes it even more worthwhile," Maiden continued.

Whilst Maiden merely moved schools in the Bridgend County Borough, several of the squad travel in every day from around South Wales, from Port Talbot, Cardiff and Pontypridd, whilst two players, Jordan Thomas and Zak Williams have moved from Monmouth to stay with other players to make the most of this opportunity.

For the other players at the Academy, Maesteg was already their school prior to winning places on the programme. Gethyn Rees, a Bridgend Blue Bulls junior has stepped up into the full time environment after impressing former Scorpions coach Dave Clark last summer and now finds himself both training and coaching.

"A few of us go to one of the local primaries in Caerau at the very top of the valley," he said. "We help deliver skills-based coaching to reception age children and their parents

as part of an initiative involving Communities First.

"I live in the area and it's a fantastic way of helping out and putting something

back into the community. It also means I miss about ten minutes of one of Harrison's S and C sessions too so there's another positive there," he laughs.

The recent bad weather has prevented the Academy squad from completing any fixtures this side of Christmas, but they are due to play the Gloucester Academy on March 2nd as the curtain raiser to the Scorpions season opener against Oldham Roughyeds. Both Dan and Gethyn are looking forward to the game.

"It was a real mud bath last time we played and we didn't show up with our best game that day," says Maiden. "We want to put that right and it's a perfect opportunity to do that on the 2nd."

Gethyn agrees: "We've worked so hard and with the new performance gym in place we should be able to match the physical presence of some of their older, bigger players better than two months ago. I'm itching to get it on out there on the pitch and show the big crowd how far we have come."

ACADEMY FACTS

This new academy has provided WRL a new permanent base in facilities that includes office space, a state of the art gymnasium, all-weather training and grass pitches.

The players receive daily training at Maesteg Sixth Form as part of the AASE pilot, with the funding obtained for this representing the biggest ever investment to WRL from a Welsh body.

The improvement to our pathway further supports our vision of being a top four nation by the end of the 2017 World Cup and it is another sign the sport is taking significant strides in Wales.



A battle in the mud last time out.
PIC - Tyler Handley

On Sunday 2nd March, before South Wales Scorpions v Oldham Roughyeds, the AASE Academy will look to get revenge on their South Gloucestershire and Stroud rivals having been lost to them 12-10 in December.

The Academy started life by thrashing Swansea University earlier in the season but in a more competitive match just before Christmas, they lost by a mere conversion.

The AASE side consisted of ten players that have worked their way through the Scorpions academy and scholarship system over the last two years, along with seven newcomers to Rugby League who have always been attending Maesteg School and were only playing their second match in the 13-man code.

Together, coached by Jon Ellis from Wales Rugby League, they are bright prospects for the future and, while going down to a defeat on this occasion, matched their slightly more experienced opponents all the way.

Talking about last December's game, Ellis said: "It was a battle but the lads applied themselves really well in their defence. Conditions weren't conducive to playing rugby and there was a lot of dropped ball and a lot of misunderstanding in our attacking phases and we tried to be too expansive at times. Defensively though I couldn't fault them. They're coming along well especially as they've only been training as a side for three months and for a number of them it was only their second ever game of Rugby League."

Tom James, the Gloucestershire and Stroud coach adds: "Some of our lads have been playing Rugby League for a couple of years but for others it was just their sixth game coming to us as rugby union players. The thing that really pleased me was that both teams looked like Rugby League sides and not union players attempting to play."

In March, a wider group of players will join the Maesteg lads and will form a Scorpions under 19s squad who will play in a new Southern based competition against sides from Gloucestershire All Golds, Oxford, Hemel Stags, Coventry Bears and London Skolars, as double headers with Championship One games.

HOW THEY LINED UP IN DECEMBER...

SOUTH WALES AASE ACADEMY

- 1 Ben Jones
- 2 Regan Grace
- 3 Brandon Goldsworthy
- 4 Daniel Maiden
- 5 Gethyn Lloyd
- 6 Shane Lee
- 7 Tadhg McGuckin
- 8 Rhys Brownsell
- 9 Zak Williams
- 10 Harry Boots
- 11 Morgan Jefferies
- 12 Liam Maule
- 13 Jordan Thomas

SUBSTITUTES

- 14 Ethan Evans
 - 15 Rhys Dawe
 - 16 Jack Williams
 - 17 Josh Gillet
- TRIES Boots (8), Maiden (32)
- GOALS Ben Jones 1/2

GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND STROUD

- 1 Gregor Hamilton
- 2 Brandon Lamb
- 3 Joe Foulkes
- 4 Archie Gibbs
- 5 Jack Farler
- 6 Callum Smith
- 7 Wes Long
- 8 Anthony Coates
- 9 Dan King
- 10 Liam Curnow
- 11 Dan Moody
- 12 Matt Jones
- 13 James Mason

SUBSTITUTES

- 14 Keiran Webb
 - 16 Pete Hayes
 - 18 George Fear
 - 20 Conan Roberts
- TRIES Mason (24, 29)
- GOALS Mason 2/2
- SINBIN Gibbs (48, fighting)

Referee: James Jones
Half-time: 4-12

THE SOUTH WALES UNDER 16 ACADEMY

Last year, the South Wales under 16 academy shocked the UK by beating Widnes, Salford and London's Super League academy sides. This year, with many newcomers in the side, it's going to be tough as **Jac Griffiths** reports.

Wakefield Trinity Wildcats' size, strength and experience were too much for our youngsters as they were beaten 58-6 on their first outing of the season.

However it has to be said that the score did not reflect the effort by the Welsh youngsters, over half of whom were playing their first ever Rugby League game, and after only three weeks of training together.

The first 10 minutes were tightly fought between the two sides, but Wakefield showed their experience in the game and ran in three quick tries in that period. Wakefield ended the half 32-0 up, the try scorers being Rhys Accatt (2), Kyle Ratchford, Liam Paisley, Jordan Kershaw and Jack Scater.

The second half started with two tries directly from kick off for Wakefield with Scott Beattie and Shaun Wooffitt going over.

However South Wales dominated the next 20 minutes and showed their natural rugby ability. They were rewarded for their efforts with a try from Jordan Gilbert. This produced the biggest

cheer of the day with the large travelling support from Wakefield rising to cheer along with the home fans. Will Holley converted.

But Wakefield again showed that they had been together as a squad longer than South Wales as they ran in two more tries, from Liam Senior and Luke Harrison.

South Wales head coach Jon Ellis said: "Last month we saw the under16's academy play a Super League academy side Wakefield Wild Cats in their first game after only three weeks together as a team - as opposed to Wakefield playing since September last year.

"The game was never expected to be won on their first game in a new sport and therefore was seen more as a lesson in playing the game at the elite level rather than putting in place a winning format. The players all applied themselves to the task and for periods of the game matched Wakefield, especially down the middle of the park and in the pivot roles.

"We put together some really fluent moves during the game and the execution became more precise as the game went on.



Jordan Gilbert scores the only try for South Wales under 16s Academy versus Wakefield last month. PIC - Paul Hart

Under 16 Academy - Fixtures and Results 2014

Sat, 22 Feb	6-58	Wakefield Trinity Wildcats	Old Parish Ground, Maesteg
Sat, 22 Mar	12:00	Sheffield Eagles	Sheffield Hallam Universities
Sat, 19 Apr	12:00	North East Academy	Taffs Well RFC
Sat, 03 May	12:00	Midlands Hurricanes	TBC
Sat, 14 Jun	12:00	Widnes Vikings	Taffs Well RFC
Sun, 06 Jul	12:00	Wigan Warriors	Orrell

"In defence we lacked League alertness in the technical areas of the tackle but at the same time there was some aggression and control along with some bone crunches in our D cycle.

"Notable performances were given by Sion Jones, Ryan Davis and Connor Kowoluk in the forwards, pivots Joe Condy and Jordan Gilbert showed maturity and defiance in both attack and defence, Rhys Lloyd never stopped going forward and surprise package Dale Price showed his versatility at full back.

"All the team deserve a pat on the back for putting their hands up to play what is the toughest team sport on the planet, the team now go back to the drawing board with a plan to apply and with some reinforcements coming back from holidays the strength will only increase.

"As their coach I'm going to give the

players 100% and improve their game and I am in no doubt that we will be taking some scalps this season."

South Wales named a shared man of the match performance between full back Dale Price and Rhys Lloyd. with a stern captain's performance from Sion Jones.



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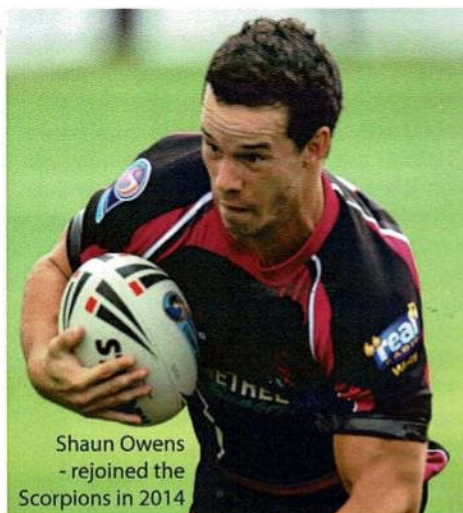
ITV Wales and WRL media officer **Karl Jones** writes his first monthly column for South Wales Rugby League Magazine candidly talking about the latest events in the region...

A club relocating, a team striving for an identity; as someone with a vested interest in rugby league in South Wales this off-season hasn't been plain sailing. There is no disputing the fact that South Wales Scorpions' search for a sustainable future became prolonged – or that such due diligence was necessary – but new head coach Mike Grady's approach has, on the face of it, been swift and measured.

Ahead of the move to Maesteg's Old Parish ground and the new Kingstone Press Championship One season, a few familiar faces have returned, but more importantly they are home-grown – easy to identify and relate to. In the second Welsh derby last season, the club fielded a squad of 17 of which 12 have progressed through the pathway within Wales Rugby League. Not since the inaugural season under Anthony Seibold had so many local players represented South Wales, and did so admirably against a North Wales Crusaders needing to win to claim the title.

Where Grady has been particularly astute is that large parts of the squad he is assembling are not only experienced, but are experienced together. In theory, he could pick the back row and half-back partnership that frequently represented Valley Cougars in the old National Conference in 2011, but Scorpions' record appearance holder Ashley Bateman would only enhance that.

A number of new additions have been promoted from the Welsh Conference having worked with the new head coach during his spell as Wales Dragonhearts coach last season – largely the source of talent in the Scorpions' first season. Even the younger elements of the squad are familiar with each other having developed through the age-grade setup together, a stark contrast from dual-registrars and the late-season signings of last year rocking up at short notice and found



Shaun Owens
- rejoined the
Scorpions in 2014

themselves in key positions.

With a more modest budget has come a refreshing honesty. The coaching staff are aware they are pressed for time – but keen to make up for that rather than use it as an excuse – and new recruits are eager to prove they belong at a higher level. As I have reminded him in brief conversations since he was appointed, Grady is aware of how strong the element of surprise can be. The aforementioned Cougars team beat his then-champion Warrington Wizards on the opening day of that season, when even those in Wales were sceptical of how they would fare having been promoted from the Welsh Conference. His new charges are of far more local pedigree than the Scorpions squad of previous years, which could be to his advantage once versed in his tactical structures.

Having a squad that, so far, is purely home-grown and committed to the club despite its off-season uncertainty is encouraging. It promotes a unifying presence that has not always been associated to the club. Whether it is fans coming to see one of their own, or players from other Welsh Conference clubs going to watch former team-mates who have progressed, this season offers something to buy into. Long may it last.

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