

ROUGHYED REVIEW

We put the spotlight
on Max, 'Shez' and
Joe -- go to pages
six to 14 inclusive

2021 PROGRAMME NO.12
SUNDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER
KICK OFF
3:00PM



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Hello and welcome back to Bower Fold for the last time this season and the last time in the Championship, for now anyway. . .

A CHAT WITH THE CHAIRMAN

CHRIS HAMILTON

Championship and League One is perhaps no better evidenced than by our visitors today, Newcastle Thunder.

finances, it will be a very different team that is put together next season.

Last weekend at Widnes was very disappointing to say the least. For the first time under Big Mac we looked nervous and apprehensive and that was reflected in the way we started the game which effectively meant it was over within ten minutes.

After getting promoted via a paper exercise when Leigh were promoted to Super League on the same basis, Thunder went full time part way through the season after they had been struggling early on.

The fact that, even at this stage, we do not know for sure what will happen, particularly around central distributions for next year, is particularly worrying.

With so much at stake that hurt, and I hope it hurt all the players too because it should.

You can only do that, of course, if you have the money and they have a wealthy owner who bought into that idea (literally!).

I have been in this game for a long time now, too long some would say, but I have never known such a despondency around the professional game and its future.

We have worked so damn hard to get the club into the Championship again, but we have been unable to sustain it, like last time.

Doing something like that part way through a season is not easy and their results have not been brilliant since they took that decision some time ago now. They have, however, done enough to maintain their status in the division for next season so that is mission accomplished.

A lot of that is obviously linked to a vastly reduced broadcast deal. We have been here before, talking about how clubs are too reliant on that, but for there to be no certainty at this stage is not only worrying but also scary for a professional sport.

With two games to go I expect nothing less than 100 per cent effort from the players and two wins now would at least end the season on a bit of a better note.

From our perspective, it will inevitably require a major overhaul of the club as, with the proposed changes to structure and

Of course, there is nothing given in this division and the gulf between the

(cont. on page 21)

ON THE INSIDE . . .

with Brian McDermott

This is our final home game and it's time to reflect and look back on the last few weeks.

So . . .

Against the uncertainty of what will happen at the end of this year due to decisions and the expected changes to be made regarding league formats and structures, we must crack on.

Last week was the team's worst performance.

They looked timid and held back, both physically and metaphorically.

A few people maintained form, but most were way off.

That said, we must look to what we can do rather than what we did.

We have shown some incredible passages of play in recent weeks, but we will regret those moments when we could not keep those periods of form for long enough.

Applied pressure is an ingredient all teams must have. I have to say that, while I note just how well we've played in patches,

these are all the more impressive bearing in mind that, as a team, we've applied little pressure on the opposition with a rating of three out of ten.

Pressure comes from well-timed and well-placed kicks. It comes from the subsequent defensive set being without errors or giving penalties away. It comes from the subsequent offensive set, as we try to work our way up the field, being error free and offensively potent.

We have improved greatly in both these areas, but not enough with the time left.

I've previously talked about the players' commitment; their genuine, raw toughness; and their willingness to do whatever it takes to be as good as they can be. None of these sentiments change for me.

My time here has been an extremely rewarding period. I've enjoyed working with the players and staff tremendously. They're a charismatic group who know what real life is all about and I'd trust them implicitly as well their pledges of commitment.

To the club and to Chris Hamilton, I say thank you. I have found a new mate in the game (so that makes three of them !). My respect for Chris and for Championship Rugby League ownership has increased beyond measure.

To the staff, and in particular Brendan Sheridan, I say a huge thanks. Shez held this place together while I bedded in any got a feel for the joint.

Matt Diskin needs a mention too and I hope he's in good shape and healthy.

To the fans . . . you've been bloody awesome !

(cont. on page 21)



'Image SWPix'



YOUR CAPTAIN CALLING

Gareth Owen on the ball

We had a mountain to climb from there and it didn't get much better.

All I can do is apologise -- not just for that game but for the way the season as a whole has gone.

It wasn't good enough from start to finish, barring a handful of games. Please accept this apology,

Gareth

I'm struggling for words really this week.

The boys and I are absolutely gutted in what we dished up at Widnes last weekend. To start the game like we did and to go three tries down after ten minutes was not acceptable.

Captain Gaz calls it a day

Since penning his programme notes(above), Gareth Owen has announced his retirement at the end of the season. He has made 153 appearances for his home-town club, whom he joined in 2014 from Salford. He played 38 Super League games for the Red Devils.

Said Gareth: *"Captaining Roughyeds for five years was the biggest honour I could possibly have had. I leave with head held high."*

See Roughyeds website for full story - roughyeds.co.uk

Player Focus 1

Joe Hartley



Centre Joe Hartley, who maybe surprised fans with the quality of his performance against Featherstone Rovers a fortnight ago, was one of five Oldham lads in the 21-man squad named ahead of last week's game at Widnes Vikings.

Remember the names, Danny Bridge, Joe Hartley, Bradley Jinks, Phil Joy and Gareth Owen, all of whom know what it's like to enjoy fish and chips from Lever's in the Market Hall or to take a stroll over Oldham Edge on a balmy summer's evening. In truth Brad Jinks is from Tameside, but he played all his amateur rugby at Saddleworth and Waterhead - mainly Waterhead -- and can be reasonably classed as a 'local'.

Then we've got another Oldham lad in James Barran, currently on the injured list and formerly of Wigan Warriors, and we've had Fenton Rogers, who lives in Greenfield, on loan from Huddersfield Giants.

But back to Joe, on whom we are turning the focus here. His story is an unusual one in that he signed for us, aged 23, direct from St Anne's and that begs the question: How many more players are there in the amateur game who haven't been picked up by Super League clubs as kids, but possess the ambition, talent, self-belief and desire to have a crack at the part-time professional sport?

That's one way in. Another is the route that can be taken by younger chaps who have been on scholarship or in the academy ranks at elite clubs and then find, for whatever reason, they are no longer being retained or they themselves have decided they no longer wish to pursue a full-time career in rugby.

Each and every case is different, but Joe, who had been at St Anne's since he was nine, will tell you how much he has enjoyed his first season at Oldham and how pleased he is that he took the decision to train with his home-town pro club with a view to taking the next step up the ladder.

We caught up with him for the usual Q and A session and this is what he had to say

Q: Will you tell us about your day job, please?

A: I'm a plasterer by trade. I work with my dad, Jason. We have our own company, doing all aspects of plastering and rendering.

Q: What was the worst thing you did at school?

A: I was removed from a mock exam for singing in the exam hall with my best mate.

Q: If you won the lottery, what would you buy first?

A: I would probably buy myself a big house with an indoor swimming pool and a gym. I've been lucky enough to work in some mansions with that sort of facility in them and it's amazing. All in your own home! Once I'd done that, I would buy two dogs. I'm a massive dog lover and I can't wait to have my own.

GO JOE ! HARTLEY ON THE BREAK



ME, MY DAD AND MY GIRLFRIEND MAXIE.

DANGER . . . man at work



Q: What sports star do you most admire, and why?

A: Sam Burgess. I loved watching him play, not only because of his talent but also because of how he played the game -- always with aggression and a desire to win but in the right way.

Q: How would your team mates describe you?

A: I'm not the loudest in the group but I like to think they would say I'm a good lad to have around and I always give my all in everything I'm asked to do.

Q: What's your biggest achievement in rugby?

A: Defo signing for my home-town pro club and playing for Oldham in the Championship. Playing for England Colleges a few years ago was a close second. We beat both Wales and Scotland. I was a full-back then, but I later switched to centre and that's where I definitely feel most comfortable.

Q: And your biggest disappointment?

A: I wouldn't say a disappointment as such but I was very unlucky with injuries, and a

Me and my little brother who plays rugby at Rochdale Mayfield.



lot of them serious, when I was younger. I've broken my tibia and my cheekbone, plus a long list of other injuries, including fractures.

Q: Outside rugby and your day job, what do you do most ?

A: I mostly spend time with my girlfriend Maxie at the weekends. During the week, it's mainly work and training.

Q: What's the best thing about being in the Oldham squad?

A: The group of players at Oldham are all great lads, who made me feel welcome from the start. I didn't know anyone when I first started training with Roughyeds, but they made me feel one of the lads from day one.

Q: What would be your dream role in life?

A: To play in the NRL. I love rugby as much as I did when I was very young and just starting out. It's always been a dream to play at the highest level.

Player Focus 2

Max Roberts



Max Roberts, the young centre from Wigan, is closing in on a remarkable run of consistency which has earned him a starting slot in EVERY game Roughyeds have played this season.

Danny Langtree and Liam Bent are also ever-presents with only two games left, but what sets Roberts apart is the fact that he has started in all games in cup and league, whereas Langers was a sub forward in the first Championship home game of the season against Swinton Lions and Bent was on the bench in the recent home games against the big two, Olympique and Featherstone and then again at Widnes last Sunday.

With a record like that at the tender age of 20 and in his first season of senior rugby, Roberts can be excused for thinking he's done pretty well as a new boy fresh out of age-group rugby with the Warriors.

It helped him when first Cam Leeming and then Ben Heaton were damaged, but even so the young man from Atherton has made a lot of people sit up at the way he has coped with the intensity and the physicality match in and match out, no respite given.

Championship rugby is a tough competition for anybody to maintain high standards, let alone a young rookie stepping up to this level for the first time.

Interestingly, he and Ben Holcroft are good mates who have played together a lot at Wigan at three levels --- scholarship, academy and reserves.

Each of Holcroft's dozen or so Oldham games have all been played on the wing, most of them outside Roberts in a throwback to the 2019 Super League Academy Grand Final in which Wigan beat arch rivals St Helens 22-10, Roberts and Holcroft each scoring a try.

Well done Max on a hugely productive first season at Oldham. Listen to more about Mr Consistency in this Q and A feature:

Q: What about your day job ?

A: I'm currently going into my third year at university, studying sports coaching and development. Alongside that, I work part time as a health and fitness coach at Wellness Strength Training in Leigh.

Q: What was the worst thing you did at school ?

A: It was the decision I made to spend 24

hours on a coach to Spain when we were only going for three days.

Q: If you won the lottery what would you buy first ?

A: A nice holiday after the rugby season has finished, flying first-class and putting my feet up on a Caribbean beach.



PICTURE OF DETERMINATION -- THAT'S MAX

Relaxing after a game with Charley, my partner.



Q: What sports star do you most admire, and why?

A: Tom Brady. He was the 199th overall pick in the 2000 NFL draft. People said he was too skinny, lacked confidence and was too slow. But he never let it get to him. He went on to win seven Super Bowl rings and is widely regarded as the greatest of all time.

Q: How do you think you team mates would describe you?

A: I'd like to think they would describe me as a good bloke; someone who they can trust and would do anything for them. We've got a good group of lads and we all like to have a laugh.

Q: What would you consider to be your biggest achievement in rugby so far?

A: I'd have to say winning and scoring in the Academy Grand Final with Wigan Warriors against Saints in 2019.

Q: And your biggest disappointment?

A: That would have to be losing the National Cup final with my amateur club. We'd worked so hard all year and everything we did was designed to win that game.

ON top of the world . . . well, at the top of Helvellyn with my mates !



Q: Outside rugby, university, and the fitness job, what do you do most?

A: If we have a game on the weekend I like to binge a good Netflix series and go out for a nice meal with my partner Charley. If there's no game then I like going out and having a few drinks. I'm a sucker for a karaoke machine (hahaha). Or if the weather is nice I like going for a walk up a mountain for the day.

Q: What's the best thing about being in the Oldham squad?

A: Getting into my first senior squad environment and getting the experience to play at such a high and competitive level. The lads and coaches have helped me to improve so much and I'm grateful for everything they've done for me.

Q: What would be your dream role in life?

A: My dream role in life would be having my own business, in which I could work with young people -- sport or otherwise -- and be able to see the impact I was making in their development.

FOCUS ON A COACH

Brendan Sheridan

Brendan Sheridan, our assistant coach, is as well known in West Yorkshire as a voluntary mentor in the mental health sector as he is as a rugby league fanatic and a man who is very active in and around his native Dewsbury at all levels of the sport.

He has been steeped in the game since he first handled a ball at the age of five at the Dewsbury Moor club, following elder brother Ryan, the former Sheffield, Leeds Rhinos, Ireland and Great Britain star, who is now Darryl Powell's assistant boss at Castleford Tigers.

Aged 46, Ryan is about four years older than Brendan, who had been head coach of NCL club Dewsbury Celtic for two years or more before Matt Diskin brought him over to Oldham in the autumn of 2019.

Brendan, known to all and sundry in rugby league as 'Shez', talks in our Q and A (below) of his own playing days at Sheffield and Batley Bulldogs, which were followed by his natural progression into coaching and his success as head coach of Dewsbury Celtic.

He has had an eventful stay at Roughyeds, where his arrival as Matt Diskin's No 2 was soon followed by the outbreak of Covid-19 and his projection into the world's media headlines as one of the youngest and physically fittest men to find himself fighting for his life in a Wakefield hospital.

Thankfully, all that is behind him now as he works alongside Brian McDermott, a Rhinos legend as a coach just as Matt Diskin was a Rhinos legend as a hooker.

Brendan's Q and A went like this:

Q: What do you do in your day job ?

A: I work for the local council as a gardener

Q: If you won the lottery what would you buy first ?

A: I would buy my kids a home and a car, then fly to New York on my own.

Q: What sports star do you most admire, and why ?

A: Mike Tyson.

Q: What would be your dream role in life?

A: A mentor in all aspects of life.

Q: What's your biggest achievement in rugby?

A: Becoming a professional coach at Oldham

Q: And your biggest disappointment?

A: Having a lot of bad injuries at a young age. They stopped any advancement I might have made in my professional playing career.

Q: Outside rugby and your day job, what do you do most ?

A: I do a lot of training on my own and run a non-profit organisation that helps people with mental health problems.



Q: Will you please trace your RL career for us, as player and coach?

A: Dewsbury Moor junior, signed for Sheffield Eagles at 15 and made my debut soon afterwards. I was injured on debut and spent four years out, then signed for Batley Bulldogs. Later on, I coached at Dewsbury Celtic before joining Roughyeds.

Q: What do you like most about coaching at Oldham?

A: The dedication and willingness of the players to work very hard at all times. Also, Oldham is a working-class club with great people. I really like that.

Q: Has coaching in the pro game come up to expectations?

A: Yes and no. My philosophies haven't changed. As a coach, it's all about adapting to the situations you are faced with. Things like honesty, character, work ethic and desire have to come from the players. Passion, I believe, has to come from the coach.



ON DUTY . . . with my daughters Elie and Alicia and son Iwan keeping an eye on me

Mum's pride. That's Denise with her boys, Ryan (left) and yours truly.



BALL BOY . . . that's me in my playing days with ball in hand.



SKY TO TELEVISION CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS

Sky Sports will televise all five matches from the Betfred Championship play-offs, including the Million Pound Game on Sunday, October 10, which will determine promotion to Super League in 2022.

The League 1 promotion play-off series will be streamed exclusively on the RFL's Our League platform, starting on the weekend of September 17/18.

The Championship play-offs have been expanded to six teams in 2021, following the format successfully reintroduced to Super League last year

They will kick off on Saturday, September 25 with a double header of elimination fixtures between the teams finishing third to sixth. The winners will then travel to the teams finishing first and second the following Saturday (October 2) in two sudden death semi-finals.

Then, on the evening of Sunday, October 10 – 24 hours after the Super League Grand Final at Old Trafford – Sky Sports will again capture all the drama and emotion as the remaining two contenders battle it out for the ultimate prize of promotion to join the elite in 2022.

Mark Foster, the RFL's Chief Commercial Officer, said: "The return of the Betfred Championship and League 1 campaigns was one of the sport's success stories of 2021 after the loss of the 2020 season because of Covid-19.

"Intensity levels are bound to rise as the leading English Championship clubs aim

to challenge current pacesetters Toulouse Olympique for a place in Super League in 2022 – and that should mean some great contests on Sky building up to the drama of the Million Pound Game.

"The Betfred League 1 promotion battle is also building to a fascinating climax with the league leaders to go up automatically to the Championship in 2022, leaving the next five clubs to contest the second promotion spot through the play-offs – and it's great that we can capture all the excitement and drama of that series on Our League."

Clubs are required to have played in 70 per cent of their scheduled fixtures to be eligible for the play-offs, although any Toulouse Olympique matches postponed as a result of current quarantine regulations do not count as cancelled for either Toulouse or their opponents.

BETFRED CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS 2021 – ALL GAMES LIVE ON SKY SPORTS*
Saturday, September 25 – The Elimina-tors

3rd v 6th (Kick-off 3.15pm or 5.30pm to be confirmed)

4th v 5th (Kick-off 3.15pm or 5.30pm to be confirmed)

Saturday, October 2 – Semi-finals

1st v lowest ranked play-off winner (Kick-off 3.15pm or 5.30pm to be confirmed)

2nd v highest ranked play-off winner (Kick-off 3.15pm or 5.30pm to be confirmed)

Sunday, October 10 – Million Pound Game (Kick-off 6pm)

*All kick-offs BST

NEWCASTLE THUNDER

Newcastle Thunder make their first visit to Bower Fold this afternoon safe in the knowledge that their Championship status is confirmed for another year. Roughyeds and Swinton Lions are already relegated meaning that pride and honour are all that's at stake today.

Oldham last staged a home game against Thunder at the conclusion of the 2019 season when Scott Naylor's Oldham faced Simon Finnigan's Thunder at Whitebank Stadium.

A prize in the 2020 Championship was at stake as both clubs had battled through to the promotion play-off final.

Oldham were victorious with a Jimmy Beckett try sealing the win in the fourth quarter of the game. Celebrations went on long into the night for Oldham as Thunder faced a long journey home empty-handed.

The covid-curtailed 2020 season saw Tornado Wolfpack drop out of the Super League which meant that a reshuffle was required for 2021. Leigh Centurions would ultimately take the place of Toronto whereas

Thunder were promoted to the Championship.

Newcastle began the 2021 Championship season with a 30-30 draw against Widnes Vikings at Kingston Park. Round 2 saw an away defeat against Whitehaven but Thunder were able to record their first win of the year in round 3 against Sheffield Eagles.

Four defeats were to follow until Thunder faced both Swinton and Oldham on consecutive weekends.

A six-point margin against Swinton at Heywood Road brought a second win of the season but Thunder went on to thump Oldham 40-6 seven days later. Tries from Jack Johnson x2, Ukuma Ta'ai, Sam Halsall, Bob Beswick, Jake Shorrocks and Josh Woods overpowered the Roughyeds who could only respond with a converted Liam Kirk try.

After beating Oldham, Thunder have only won three more games. A double against Dewsbury and a narrow home win against York City Knights. They are currently positioned in tenth place with six wins from eighteen games but points in the bag means a lot at the business end of the season.

Newcastle are due to move to full-time status in November this year which demonstrates the ambition of Chairman Mick Hogan.

Speaking to Sky Sports he said:

"We want to be here for the long-term. We've got a stated aim to win Super League by 2030, which is a bit bold and ambitious, but we believe we've got the right processes and conditions in place. And the right plans going forward."

"We've got a great stadium (Kingston Park), which is used for Premiership rugby union. We've got good administration around it, some great staff here, the academy, junior development, good training facilities."

"We're going to go full-time in November, with a full-time squad and a great coaching team with Dennis Betts and Eamon O'Carroll."

"Today's encounter will enable Oldham to finish on a high with a much needed win but Thunder will want to press home their superiority and won't take their feet off the gas."

Three To Watch



JACK JOHNSON

An exciting talent with a wealth of experience, Jack Johnson is a Super League standard winger who arrived on Tyneside from Widnes Vikings via Ottawa Aces.

A product of the youth setup at Warrington Wolves, Johnson made his Super League debut aged just 19 in a 46-16 win over Hull FC and went on to make 18 appearances for the Wire.

An additional three top-flight games were played on loan at Widnes Vikings, where Johnson first came into contact with Thunder director of rugby Denis Betts.

He brings further experience of Championship level rugby league, having played a key role for Featherstone in their run to the promotion play-off in 2019 and for Widnes in their strong start to the 2020 season.



BOB BESWICK

Ireland international Bob Beswick first joined the Thunder ranks from Toronto Wolfpack at the end of 2019, as the vastly experienced hooker made a transatlantic switch to the ambitious north east club.

Heading into his 17th professional season, Beswick featured in all four of Thunder's competitive games pre Covid-19 and became one of the most experienced players to ever pull on a Thunder shirt, with more than 400 games played in his career to date.

Making his Super League debut in 2004 with Wigan, Beswick played in the top-flight for two years before establishing himself as one of the most competitive and creative hookers at Championship level across a superb ten-year stint.



ALEX CLEGG

The 21-year-old winger made himself an almost indispensable feature for Thunder in 2019 as he made 25 appearances out of a possible 28 and placed himself as the second-top try scorer of the season with an impressive 19 four pointers to his name.

He continued where he left off in the truncated 2020 season, making five competitive starts and scoring three tries.

Able to play at fullback, centre or wing, Clegg is a versatile option who first came to the club back in 2018, joining the academy after moving to the region to study at Northumbria University.

NEW WORLD CUP DATES IN 2022 -- OCTOBER 15 TO NOVEMBER 19



Main points:

- + Opening match and double-header men's and women's finals remain at St James' Park, Newcastle and Old Trafford, Manchester respectively.
- + Tournament will fall between 2022 Commonwealth Games and 2022 FIFA World Cup (football).
- + All 61 fixtures remain on BBC channels.
- + A 'Foundation Fan Squad' has been launched to reward fans.

Organisers have confirmed dates for the next World Cup, which will now take place here in the UK next year between Saturday, October 15 and Saturday, November 19.

They also announce that it will all kick-off at St James' Park in Newcastle and finish with the men's and women's double-header final at Old Trafford, as originally planned.

Officials are delighted these two iconic venues remain in place to open and close the best and biggest Rugby League World Cup there has ever been.

These new start-and-finish dates have been confirmed after detailed conversations with several partners. In particular,

RLWC2021 would like to thank Super League Europe and member clubs, who have been extremely accommodating.

The tournament will take place a week earlier than it was scheduled this year in order to maximise both match attendance and television viewing figures. Work now continues to release a full match schedule by no later than the end of the year.

The earlier start means we'll follow the Commonwealth Games and finish before the start of the FIFA World Cup, thus enabling broadcast partners to air all 61 games, as they would have done this year.

Fans who wish to keep their original ticket(s) for next year have nothing further to do as tickets will be automatically transferred to the corresponding fixture next year.

As a thank-you for continuing fan support, RLWC2021 has created a 'Foundation Fan Squad', an exclusive group who will receive a thank-you pack, which will include an updated wall planner, a chance to win exclusive prizes and other benefits.

Fans with tickets for this year who can't attend next year will no doubt already know that the first general admission ticket-refund window opened last month for a three-week period.

Fans who purchased a ticket via official platforms should please visit www.rlwc2021.com/tickets for further refund information.

RLWC2021 would like to take this opportunity to thanks all those involved in the process of confirming dates for 2022 and we look forward to working closely with all nations, sponsors, partners, venues, and host towns and cities as we finalise the revised

tournament schedule.

Jon Dutton, RLWC2021 chief executive, said: *"The continuing conversations with hosts and venues have been hugely positive. We are confident we can deliver a similar tournament schedule, which will be communicated as soon as possible."*

"We are disappointed the tournament will not be happening as originally planned, but we are determined to make next year a celebration of sport, unity, people, places and civic pride."

Troy Grant, chairman of the IRL, said: *"The Rugby League World Cup is the international pinnacle of our sport and I am delighted the new dates have been agreed, meaning we can now push forward towards Autumn, 2020."*

"Jon Dutton and the entire RLWC2021 team have worked tirelessly following the postponement and I have total confidence that the 2022 incarnation of the tournament will be the best we have ever seen, both on and off the field of play."

Rochdale Hornets have confirmed that the game between England and Fiji, scheduled for October 15 this year at the Crown Oil Arena, has been postponed until next year.

Following the announcement that the World Cup will be rearranged for 2022, Hornets have worked tirelessly with partners to ensure that there will be international rugby league at the Crown Oil Arena in the run-up to next year's World Cup.

An agreement in principle is now in place between Hornets, the RFL and Fiji RL for a game to be played next year.

A plea for RL unity in these difficult times

Steve McCormack, son of a former Oldham player, has issued an impassioned plea for the sport to rally together as it emerges from the most difficult 18-month period in its history.

The impact of Covid has been keenly felt in rugby league communities and players, officials and administrators across all levels are working hard to deliver a sport that means so much to so many.

Most people are patient, appreciative and maintaining faith in the game, but in recent months there has been an under-current of misguided and often harmful negativity from some quarters, especially on social media.

Steve McCormack said: "As Head of Welfare at Rugby League Cares, I see how hard everyone in our sport is working.

"I see the sacrifices players and coaches make; how our administrators fight hard to ensure our sport is thriving in trying times; how hard match officials are working; the work our club CEOs are doing to ensure we have clubs to support; and the sterling efforts of our community clubs to enhance people's lives on a daily basis.



"I also see the selfless work the medical staff and Covid officers do at clubs, under immense pressure, to ensure the health and wellbeing of everyone takes precedence.

"It is important to understand that, while we look forward to watching our clubs in action, the most important thing is the health of players, staff, and their families. Nothing should compromise this. [We know that better than most, given Brendan Sheridan's fight for his life in Pinderfield Hospital early on in the pandemic – editor];

"I also see the impact of the unjust negativity people in our

sport receive. Being involved in professional sport comes with pressure and public scrutiny and – in most cases – rightly so.

"However, the tone of some comments on social media, especially hate-filled and ill-informed criticism, is unnecessary and unacceptable.

"No-one in our great game, be they player, administrator, match official or fan deserve personal abuse.

"We are rightfully proud of our sport's ability to rally round and do the right thing when times are tough; we
(cont. on next page)

recognise the importance of community, of the wider Rugby League family and of the need to be decent, empathetic and honest.

"Now, more than ever, we need to embrace those values and recognise the impact our actions can have on the wellbeing of others.

"Like all sports, Rugby League is facing considerable challenges, but we have much to look forward to. Rugby League is the best sport in the world, with the best supporters and communities.

"Let's pull together, look after each other and make sure our game and all the

people involved are able to flourish like we know they can.

"Rugby League Cares is proud of the role it plays in supporting our communities and we will continue to put Rugby League people at the heart of everything we do."

Chris Hamilton (cont. from page 3)

Back to today and I hope the support the team gets is at the same level it has been since you were allowed back into grounds. Even at Widnes last week, you never stopped singing and getting behind the team and that is greatly appreciated.

I also want to say a massive thank you to all our sponsors, season- ticket holders, other fans, support staff and everybody else who makes this team function for all their help and support over the last 12 months.

Without you we wouldn't be here and everything you do, in whatever way, is very much appreciated by me and everybody at the club. Thank you.

**Enjoy the game
Christopher Hamilton
Chairman**

Brian McDermott (cont. from page 4)

Last week's reception of the players after the game was a true demonstration of what supporters should be like. It made me proud to be associated with you all

And finally . . . Maybe, when decisions are made, the club endures the ultimate setback. If so, it would be a shame. I really do hope decisions are made to keep the 'good' clubs.

But I must say this. These last 18 months of real life

have been, for some, awful and testing. My gut tells me the real challenges are ahead of us with kids' education, companies coming off furlough, the overall health and fitness of society.

It's not going to be easy. My gut tells me the most important things in life are what we've already got... health, family, the ability to smile and be polite to those we don't know.

Without doubt, these can create a better environment to live in than the one we

had before COVID hit. It was too fast with too much emphasis on 'I want it now' and too much finding faults with others.

COVID has brought everyone back to earth with a slam.

I wish you all the best for the future and hopefully we can all bounce back into a better society

The most sincere of regards,

Brian





TIME TO PRESENT A UNITED FRONT AS TOUGH TIMES LIE AHEAD FOR CLUBS IN LEAGUE 1.

By IAN WILSON

Ian reports on our home games for League Express and he is secretary of Rugby Oldham, the Supporters Trust. He is keen to make it clear, however, that his comments here are purely personal and nothing more than his own thoughts.

Sadly, it didn't take more than the first quarter of the game at Widnes last Sunday to confirm the inevitable - that we are relegated to the third tier of the rugby league for 2022. It was a pretty familiar story. We were simply unable to cope with our opponents' greater power, pace and craft, and although, as always, we tried hard, and never gave up, we were just not good enough. At least, we now know our fate.

Looking at the season as a whole, it was evident from the outset that the Championship represented a major increase in quality over League One. In a way, the writing had been on the wall even during the truncated 2020 season, when our losses to Bradford and Dewsbury at home in particular demonstrated clearly that we were in need of serious strengthening, and of course, to be fair to our owner and to the then coach Matt Diskin, we did indeed strengthen.

In their recruitment, there was a clear emphasis in beefing up our pack in recognition of the fact that, unless we were able at least to live with the physical challenges presented by the teams likely to be in the lower half of the table in 2022, our prospects of Championship survival would be minimal.

And things began reasonably well. The early loss to Swinton in the Cup was disappointing, but more than compensated by the league victories over them and - quite a surprise, this, and the reward for a superbly-organised and committed effort, with no little skill thrown in - Halifax too. The loss at London had very encouraging aspects as well, though the early thrashing at Batley definitely had me worried; we should have been at least competitive against teams in the middle reaches of the table away from home, but we never really were for the whole of the season.

But then came what to me was the crucial turning point - Whitehaven at home. We were in a position to win the game, but catastrophic errors resulted in a 4-36 scoreline. And we never really recovered. There were other games we could or should, have won, both before and after the amazing arrival of Brian MacDermott - Sheffield home and away, Dewsbury and London at home, Whitehaven and Swinton away. But we kept making crucial errors, and when this is compounded with our lack of creativity in positions where it really counts, and of course our share of injuries, Championship rugby in 2022 was never really a likely outcome, being brutally honest.

What of individual players? No fewer than 34 have represented the club this season, which tells a tale in itself. It is no business of mine to criticise any of them, and nor would I wish to, given the efforts put in. But I would pick out just three. Danny Langtree - he, tackling machine Liam Bent and the extremely brave Max Roberts have played in all games so far - remains the genuine heart of the side and has consistently produced performances of Championship standard. So too has Danny Bridge, even though he has not been able to stick solely to his best role as a ball-playing wide-running forward. And Tyler Dupree has been an absolute revelation - what a player! It is my devout Christmas wish that we are able to retain all three for 2022!

So what about the future? The Ex-Players Association's lively involvement with the club, as explained in the last match programme, is most encouraging. Ray Hicks from the Association sits on the board of Rugby Oldham, too, so that the two organisations are constantly kept in touch with what each is doing and indeed planning for the future. Members of the supporters trust board plan to take a table at the annual Ex-Players Association's October dinner - Iestyn Harris main speaker - for example, and there is early planning going on for a major joint dinner, also involving the Oldham RL Heritage Trust,

hopefully during the coming twelve months, once - hopefully - the covid-induced restrictions on our lives are largely behind us.

Talking about Rugby Oldham, it has been great at recent home matches to see the trust's banner draped in front of the Stand at Bower Fold. The message it displays - about supporting RL at all levels in the town - is very much the trust's objective, and indeed the focus of everything Rugby Oldham attempts to do. One suspects that the near future will be exceptionally challenging for rugby league everywhere, at all levels, and inevitably this includes in Oldham. There are all sorts of stories currently circulating about the likely levels of central funding available for both Championship and League One clubs in 2022, for example - maybe even zero in the latter case?! - as well as the structure of the whole competition from 2023 onwards.

The amateur and youth games too face major issues of their own. One wonders whether the huge challenges such changes will present to a club and a town in Oldham's situation might be best tackled via a concerted effort to bring all relevant parties together in some way, so as to think more strategically about the long-term future health, or indeed survival, of the game.



Langers -- 'the genuine heart of the side'



Liam Bent



OLDHAM RLFC



NEWCASTLE THUNDER

NEWCASTLE
THUNDER

01	Dan Abram	Rugby Oldham
02	Tommy Brierley	David and Val Webster
03	Ben Heaton	Stephen Butterfield
05	Ryan Ince	Oldham RL Heritage Trust
06	Lewis Charnock	Anne Kearns
07	Dave Hewitt	Gordon Sedgwick
08	Phil Joy	Past Players Association
09	Gareth Owen	CDX Security
10	Jack Spencer	Graeme Lee
11	Danny Langtree	David and Val Webster
12	Liam Bent	Pam Taylor/ LTS
13	Martyn Reilly	Dynasty Denture Solutions
14	Matty Wilkinson	John & Lynda McAndrew
15	Luke Nelmes	Gareth Hughes
16	Tyler Dupree	Gerry Jones & Caroline Hughes
17	Liam Kirk	Fab-tek Installations Limited
20	Jode Sheriffe	The Property Buying Co
21	Shaun Pick	Available - Ring 07904 898177
24	Max Roberts	Available - Ring 07904 898177
25	Danny Bridge	Gerald Brierley
26	James Barran	Available - Ring 07904 898177
27	Ben Holcroft	Available - Ring 07904 898177
28	Joe Hartley	Available - Ring 07904 898177
30	Dec Gregory	John and Lynda McAndrew
31	John Hutchings	Available - Ring 07904 898177
33	Jamie Abram	Available - Ring 07904 898177
	Brian McDermott	Property Buying Company
	Brendan Sheridan	Property Buying Company
	Jode Sheriffe	Property Buying Company

01	Lewis Young
02	Jack Johnson
03	Matty Wright
04	Kieran Gill
05	Calum Turner
06	Jake Shorrocks
07	Josh Woods
08	Nathan Wilde
09	Bob Beswick
10	Mikey Wood
11	Ukuma Ta'ai
12	Sam Wilde
13	Liam McEvoy
14	Evan Simons
15	Ted Chapelhow
16	Jake Chapelhow
17	Connor Bailey
18	Alex Clegg
20	Cole Oakley
21	Reece Dean
22	Sam Kibula
23	Joe Brown
24	Rhys Clarke
25	Oliver Gowing
26	Kieran Hudson
27	Alex Donaghy
28	Cian Tyrer
33	Connor Aspey
Head Coach: Eamon O'Carroll	



Referee: J. Smith

Touch Judge 2: S. Ellis

Reserve Referee: N. Hart

Time Keeper: P. Smith

Touch Judge 1: C. Sharrad