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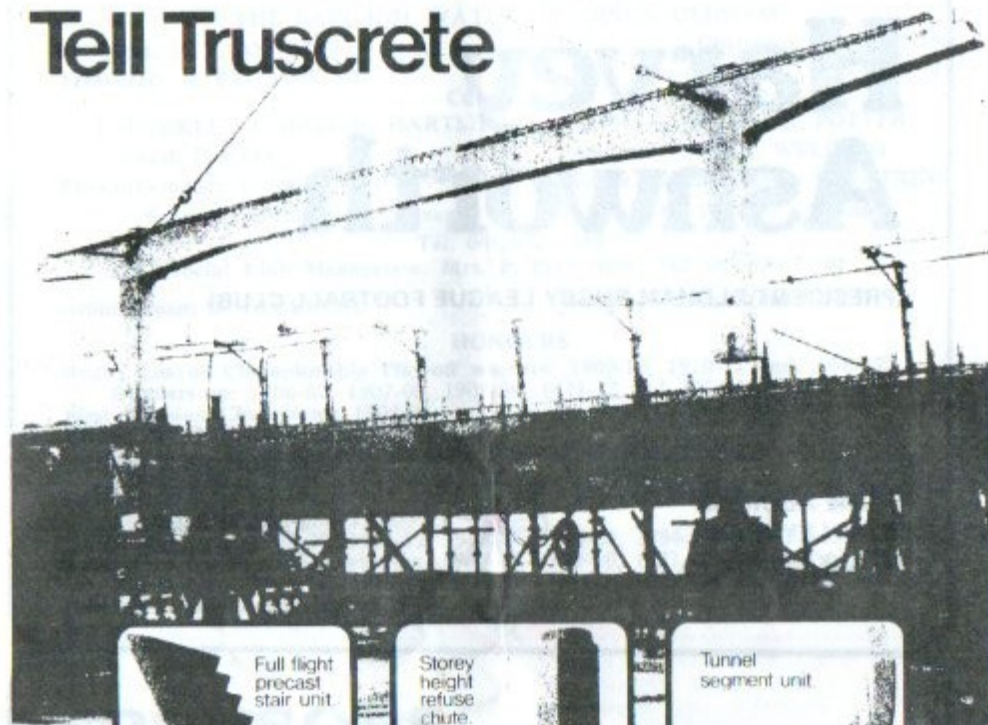
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OLDHAM OUTLOOK

We have a very tough task on our hands today when we entertain First Division leaders and 9-2 cup favourites, St. Helens, in the second round of the Challenge Cup.

However, there have been many many shocks in the Challenge Cup over the years and one thing is certain : the Saints will know they have been in a match when the final hooter sounds this afternoon.

As a matter of fact, we have done very well against the Saints in cup competitions over the years. Two years ago we went to Knowsley Road in a third-round tie and lost by only eight points. The score was 17-9 to Saints but we were very much in the game until early in the second half.

That same season, we won at Knowsley Road, 8-7 in a First Division match, John Blair landing the winning drop goal near the end, and who will ever forget our grandstand finish that same season in the first round of the Lancashire Cup?

We came strongly with several late tries and Saints were very grateful indeed when they heard the final whistle. They won 19-17.

At the end of 1972 the Saints won here 12-11 and 12 months before that they drew 12-12, also here at Watersheddings. Six years ago we also played them in the Challenge Cup, in round one and lost only 6-8.

While Saints have had the better of the spoils, Oldham have always given them a very good run for their money. Who knows? Perhaps it is our turn this time to earn a win which we most certainly deserve after all those near-things!

We welcome to Watersheddings the players, officials and supporters of St. Helens and trust that we can all enjoy a truly memorable tie, played in the best spirit of the code and with the skill that we know both sides can show on their day.

In matches of this nature vocal support counts for a lot and we appeal to all our Oldham fans to give the boys as much help as possible.

It really does make a big difference to the players' performances and one of the big advantages of playing at home is that the side can usually expect the biggest volume of support.

LET US ALL MAKE SURE THAT WE DO NOT FAIL TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WHAT THE DRAW HAS GIVEN US.

St. Helens can be expected to have a lot of supporters in the ground but we are sure that the Oldham people will get right behind their side on this occasion and ensure that our team have the greatest vocal support.

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OUR VISITORS BY DON YATES

The glitter of the Rugby League Challenge Cup once again surrounds Watersheddings this afternoon as Oldham meet the might of First Division pacemakers St. Helens in the second round of Rugby League's most glamorous knock-out competition.

These two clubs have met several times previously in this tournament the last time being at the quarter-final stage just two years ago when Saints won a memorable game 17-9 and then went on to lift the trophy for the fifth time since the war. But the last occasion upon which these clubs met at Watersheddings in a second-round tie was in February 1969 when a crowd of 14,200 was attracted to a match which was eventually played on a Tuesday evening after a 10 day postponement because of snow. It proved a match well worth waiting for as underdogs Oldham gave a tremendous display to lead 6-5 at the interval thanks to three goals from full-back Derek Whitehead. Unfortunately, Oldham were unable to add to their score in the second half and Saints were able to run out eventual winners by 15 points to six with tries from Bill Benyon, Les Jones (who was later sent off) and John Mantle while Kel Coslett obliged with three goals. The only Oldham players who appeared that evening and who are still in the first team squad are three-quarters Phil Larder and Mike Elliott while the sole Saints survivor from that match is Les Jones although Eric Chisnall was a non-playing substitute nine years ago and would certainly have been included in the Saints' line-up today but for a broken arm which will keep him out for the rest of the season.

Nevertheless, the Saints team which opposes Oldham this afternoon looks extremely formidable and contains five players who this season have been involved in the International Championship matches against France. Last Sunday George Nicholls was in Toulouse with England while earlier this year St. Helens provided Mel James, Eddie Cunningham, Roy Mathias and Bill Francis for the Welsh team which also defeated France. The skipper and inspiration of that Welsh victory was stand-off Bill Francis, a product of Featherstone junior rugby who turned professional with Wigan in 1964 and who has developed into an outstanding middle back of tremendous vision and experience. The distinguished career of Francis covers World Championship visits to Australasia in 1975 with Wales and then again last summer with Great Britain and, in all, he has played 11 times for Yorkshire, 13 times for Wales, once for the Great Britain under-24 side and in four full internationals for the senior Great Britain team. Despite these impressive representative honours Francis has yet to win the two major domestic prizes of First Division Championship and Challenge Cup but following his £7,750 transfer to Knowsley Road last October I feel that these two major honours will be his before the end of May, especially if Saints can repeat the form they displayed last week when they defeated Bramley 71-7 to record the biggest ever win in the club's history. Full-back Geoff Pimblett equalled the club record of 13 goals in that match which emphasized just what a mammoth task Oldham face this afternoon as they set out to beat the club who promise to sweep all before them in their quest for Rugby League's spring double.

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- 6 FRANCIS, W.
- 7 GWILLIAM, K.
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Brian Batty

There is no truth in the rumour that referees are to be equipped with a lead, a muzzle and a copy of One Man and his Dog with whistling instructions.

Refereeing has long been regarded as a difficult enough job without the antics of a rugby-minded canine getting into the act.

Warrington official Ken Spencer unfortunately found himself exposed to enormous publicity and television coverage recently.

After 12 years as a referee - four in the senior grade - Ken Spencer's first televised game will not be forgotten in a hurry.

He was unfortunately upstaged by a dog in the Leeds-Halifax first round Cup-tie despite his efforts.

He made three attempts to have the dog removed from the Headingley pitch and ground with the help of police in the first half of the tie.

It was all in vain for the canine returned each time and spent the second half attracting more attention from the television cameras than the players.

Such a situation hardly improved the game's image but it seems hard on a referee to expect him to carry the responsibility when he has his hands full controlling 26 players.

Surely if a club are employing members of the police force to keep members of the public off the pitch then they can be expected to take the same measures with a playful dog.

There have been enough claims in recent years that referees have more than enough laws to enforce to cope with on top of general play and any trouble it might produce.

As referee Spencer reflected after his experience: 'I was on a hiding to nothing whatever I did in this tie after three attempts to remove the dog had failed.

The whole position of a referee in this situation needs clarifying.

Certainly if he had delayed the game too long there would have been an outcry from the BBC that their entire schedule had been thrown out and a serious comeback.

MAN IN THE MIDDLE

Refereeing today's game is Grade One official Ron Moore of Calder Grove Wakefield, a 44 years old representative who has been refereeing since 1963 and who reached Grade One status in 1975. Mr. Moore's sole sporting interest is Rugby League and he is a former amateur player who also holds a Grade Two Coaching Certificate. His biggest honour so far was to referee the 1976 Challenge Cup Final between St. Helens and Widnes. Mr. Moore is a married man with two children.

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With the Amateurs ALAN BURKE

Tomorrow night at Watersheddings Saint Anne's will be taking on Saddleworth "A" in the second semi-final of this season's Oldham Standard Cup competition, with the match kicking-off at 7.30 pm. The winners of the tie will take on Saddleworth Rangers in the Final, which as usual will be played at Watersheddings on Good Friday morning, kick-off 11.0 am. Saddleworth qualified for the Final by defeating Langworthy Juniors by 30 points to 2 in the other semi-final, which was also played at Watersheddings, last Monday night.

The Oldham Amateur Rugby League are very grateful to the senior club for allowing them the use of their pitch and facilities in order that these outstanding matches could be played, and in fact the Oldham R.L. Club are held in very high esteem by officials of the British Amateur Rugby League Association for all their co-operation in helping to promote Amateur Rugby League.

It is perhaps significant of the help given by the local senior club to the amateur game that many of the top Amateur matches are now being played at Watersheddings, thus boosting the finances of the professional side as well as the Oldham Amateur League. Last season saw the Lancashire-Yorkshire Amateur County Championship matches taking place at Watersheddings as well as the BARLA National 7-a-side Finals, and this season even more top amateur Fixtures have been scheduled for the Oldham ground.

The BARLA Lancashire-Cumbria Youth Cup Final, in which Saddleworth defeated Blackbrook has already been staged here, and both the Pennine Cup Final and the BARLA Sevens have been put into the Watersheddings Diary for later this year. As well as the Standard Cup Final, the Oldham Amateur Rugby League will also be staging their Championship Final and the Albert Edwards Memorial Sevens on the Watersheddings ground, with the Championship decider taking place on May 5th, and the seven-a-side tournament being played on April 16th.

Another local Amateur Rugby League occasion will also be taking place at Watersheddings next month, but this time the event will be on the stage of the social club, and not on the playing area. This will be the first showing in Oldham of the film of the BARLA Youth Tour to Australasia, which contains highlights of the final match of the tour, which was played on the Sydney Cricket Ground prior to the 1977 Rugby League World Championship Final. The film is to be shown on Wednesday, April 26th, and tickets for the event priced 20p. can be obtained from any of the local amateur rugby league clubs.

Once again the excellent relationships between the Oldham Amateur Rugby League and the town's senior club was shown by the local league choosing the Oldham R.L. Social Club as the venue for the film so that the professional side would also be benefiting from the extra bar-takings.

Yesterday, Yorkshire were due to entertain Lancashire at the Heworth Amateur Club's ground in York, in the deciding matches of this season's BARLA County Championships, after Lancashire had defeated Cumbria at both Youth and Open-age levels last Sunday. The Lancashire Under-18s side beat the Cumbrians by 22 points to 5, with Oldham's Peter Grimbley scoring a try, whilst the Open-age side triumphed by 18 points to 3.

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