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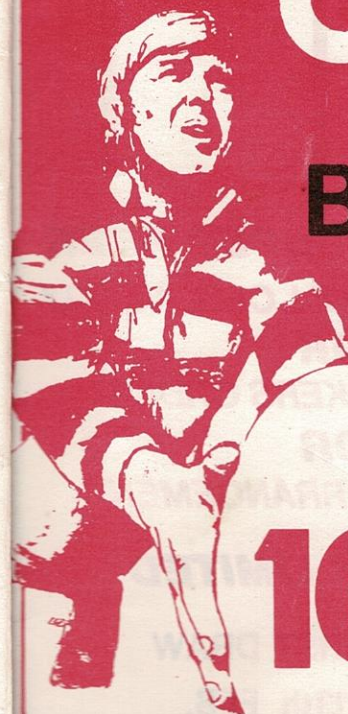
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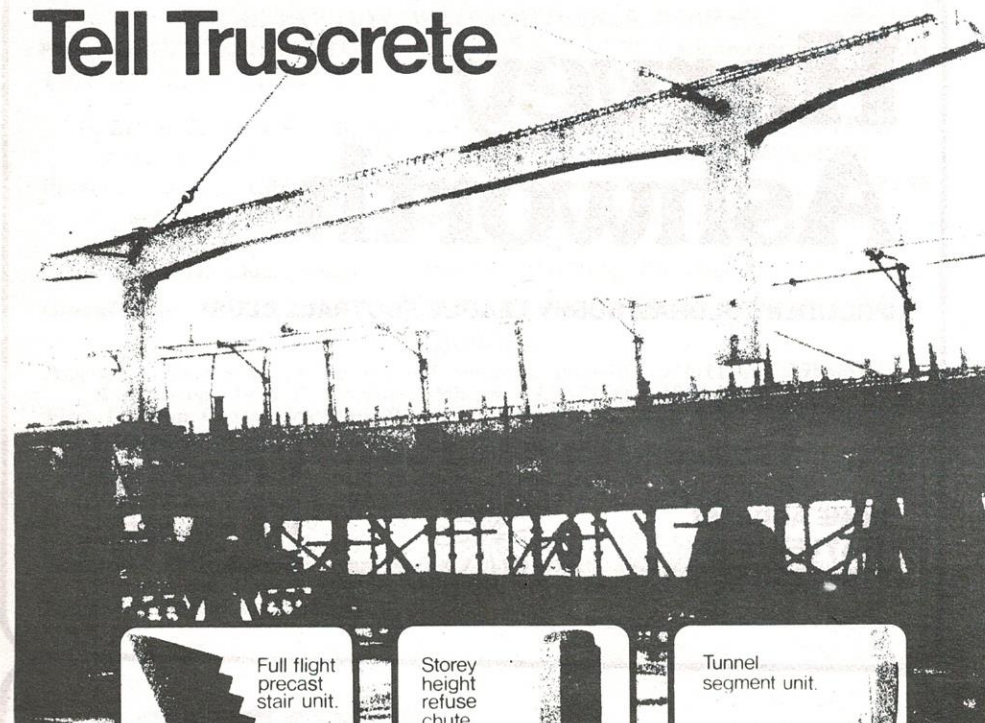
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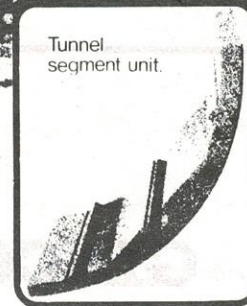
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OLDHAM OUTLOOK

So our interest in the Challenge Cup is over for another year. This is disappointing, of course, but we believe all our supporters must have been suitably impressed with the manner in which we took on the mighty challenge of the cup favourites in last Sunday's second-round tie.

St. Helens are not 11-4 favourites for nothing. They are top of the First Division and a side which will test all-comers.

To go ahead twice and give the Saints a big scare was an achievement in itself and particularly so considering the wretched luck we had with injuries.

Martin Murphy was forced to pull out with a hamstring injury; John Paterson was similarly sidelined with back trouble; Gareth Owen, who would have been the sub forward, missed the tie because of flu.

In addition to that there were long-standing injuries to players such as Peter Frodsham and Peter Jewitt, both regular members of the pack until a few weeks ago, and Chris Charles had to come off with a gash in his knee when the match was delicately poised at 11-10 in our favour.

We can fairly say that Lady Luck did not bestow her blessings upon us and we would like to thank all our friends and supporters who did all they could to help our cause against a side that could very well end up at Wembley.

We now turn our attention once more to the Second Division programme and that means the visit today of our friends from Blackpool.

There have been many changes at Borough Park in the last few months, not least the death of that stalwart of League in the Fylde for more than 20 years, Mr. Gordon Emery.

His two sons, Ron and Mike, are now playing a leading role in steering the club to a brighter future, alongside other long-serving men such as our old friends George Lunn and Reg Parker.

On the playing side Borough have recruited the irrepresible Albert Fearnley as general manager and Albert is already spreading the League gospel in the Fylde in much the same manner as he did in Bradford.

Albert's enthusiasm is certainly infectious and there are now big plans in the pipeline to make Borough a force to be reckoned with in a few years' time.

Our programme next week-end is particularly vital to the promotion tussle. We go to Rochdale on Good Friday and then take on Huddersfield, our rivals for fourth place, here at Watersheddings on Easter Monday.

In both games vocal support will count for a lot and if we can beat Blackpool today and take four points over Easter we must be in with a promotion chance.

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OUR VISITORS BY DON YATES

After last weekend's Challenge Cup knock out at the hands of St. Helens, Oldham can now concentrate fully on their demanding league task which could, given a little luck, result in promotion especially if the recent slips by Keighley and Huddersfield are repeated in the remaining Second Division fixtures.

The opposition this afternoon is provided by Blackpool Borough whose only remaining aim this spring is to improve on their lowly league placing. They at present lie third from the foot of the table with just four wins and a draw to show from their 20 league outings. The drawn game was at Huyton 3-3, with the victories coming in home games against Whitehaven 16-6, Batley 20-3 and Halifax 12-11 while Blackpool's solitary away win was also against Halifax who Boro' beat 13-11 at Thrum Hall. Amongst the 15 defeats suffered by Blackpool was Oldham's 28-2 success at Borough Park last September, their sixth successive league victory over the Seasiders whose last league win against Oldham came here at Watersheddings in October 1971 when they pulled off a sensational 24-19 victory. Oldham followers, however, will recall that last season Boro' knocked Oldham out of the Lancashire Cup with a 17-10 victory on the Fylde coast and the memory of that result should ensure that the current improved Blackpool line-up is not under estimated.

National coach Albert Fearnley is the current team manager at Borough Park and he has taken great strides recently in building up a team around the undisputed talents of player coach Bak Diabira, the 29 years old French born scrum-half who was introduced to the game in Humberside junior circles. Diabira, began his professional career under Fearnley at Bradford Northern where his skills did not go unnoticed by the national selectors and three seasons ago he appeared on the Other Nationalities side in their three County Championship matches. The following summer he was transferred to New Hunslet and then, last November, he joined Blackpool for £1,000 where he became an instant success, scoring three dropped goals on his debut when Boro' beat Whitehaven. Fearnley continued his team building last month when he paid a further £1,000 for stand-off Alan Fairhurst, the 21 years old former Leigh Colt who joined the senior Leigh club in January 1974. Fairhurst is a useful goal-kicker as well as a brainy attacker and he displayed these goal-kicking talents on his debut for Leigh when he landed five goals in a 13-13 draw against New Hunslet. Other prominent members of the Boro' line-up are Norman Turley, the former Warrington back, Jimmy Hamilton, a powerful prop signed from Workington Town and two players who should be familiar to local rugby enthusiasts, hooker Peter Clarke and utility player Paul Machen. Clarke had a spell on loan at Watersheddings during November 1976 while Machen, who like Clarke moved to Blackpool from Rochdale Hornets, is a product of the Saddleworth Rangers amateur club.

Although Oldham go into today's game as firm favourites to win they can expect stiff opposition from the experienced players just mentioned and so they will have to be on their toes if they are to win and so keep alive their faint hopes of a top four spot and with it promotion into Division One.

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Hull, containing seven internationals and unbeaten so far this season, came to Oldham expecting an easy passage into the Final. They were well aware that Oldham only in Division 2 were a very young team. The fact also that the game was not being played at Watersheddings suited their down the middle tactics.

The Oldham squad had been training very hard for this game and they were all confident and determined to cause a major upset. The game started at a fast pace and the tackling throughout was ferocious. Oldham won the first three scrums, and exerted tremendous pressure, attacking first down the middle and then on both flanks. Left winger Peter Rankin was well tackled by the Hull full-back, Damien Chadwick realised that the fullback was now acting half-back, kicked through and followed up to score under the posts. Chris Deakin converted. (5-0).

Hull hit back strongly to score a controversial try. Their captain, Sanderson, was tackled strongly five yards from the Oldham line. He lost the ball in a forward direction an Oldham player under severe pressure attempted to gather. Instead he played the ball, Hull kicked through and scored under the posts (5-5).

Surely a rule which allows advantage to a team defending their own line under severe pressure is an anomaly.

For the rest of the half Oldham attacked, but Hull defended stoutly and Oldham had to be content with a sole penalty by Deakin (7-5).

On half time the Hull officials complained that hooker Deakin was wearing shoulder pads. Despite producing a doctors note explaining that the shoulder pads were a necessary protection for a damaged joint Chris had to remove them.

Partially because of this Oldham lost the second half scrums 6-2 and had to defend for long periods. All the players tackled and covered well and Hull were contained until the last ten minutes. By this time the heavy pitch had visibly tired the home team, and Hull were able to score a very fine try in the right corner (7-8).

Oldham, behind for the first time in the game and with only minutes remaining threw everything into attack. In the dying seconds Paul Stott was tackled inches short, he immediately played the ball to himself and dived over. The Oldham jubilation was short lived for the referee decreed that the ball had not been played correctly and promptly blew for time (7-8).

The entire team played above themselves and to signal any individual out would be unfair. It is safe to say however that the players leaving school this year will have numerous offers to turn professional and I sincerely hope that they will elect to join Oldham. Surely the future of the Club lies here!!

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With the Amateurs ALAN BURKE

On Good Friday morning, kick-off 11 am, Saddleworth Rangers will be facing Saint Anne's in what should be one of the most exciting Oldham Standard Cup Finals since the trophy's inauguration in season 1903-04. Saddleworth are at present at the top of the Pennine League's First Division with a 100% record, whilst St. Anne's lie in second position with just one league defeat - at Saddleworth by 7 pts. to 3. Therefore, the Saints will be hoping to avenge that early season defeat and will also be striving to retain the Cup which they won last year by beating Higginshaw in the Final.

The two finalists are without doubt currently the top two teams in the Oldham area and have thoroughly deserved their places in the Final of this season's competition which in fact began in October last year when the draw for the 1st Round was made live on B.B.C. Radio Manchester's "BARLA Midweek" programme.

In that opening round Saddleworth had a comfortable 29-2 home Victory over Waterhead "A", but faced sterner opposition in Round 2 with a visit to Ferranti. However, Rangers progressed through to the semi-finals with a 13 pts to 0 win and then reached the Final by defeating Langworthy Juniors 30-2. Saint Anne's were one of the clubs to receive a bye in Round 1 but were then involved in a very tough 2nd Round tie at Mayfield where they triumphed by 7 pts. to 5. The Saddleworth "A" team surprised everyone by reaching the semi-finals, but Saint Anne's ended their giant-killing run to gain a place in the Final.

History is being made with the 1978 Standard Cup Final as for the first time the event is being sponsored. The match itself is being sponsored by Frank Knowles & Co., textile engineers from Oldham, whilst Lansdowne Metals of Chadderton are sponsoring the programme and Joshua Greaves and Sons engineering firm of Ramsbottom have agreed to sponsor the match-ball.

Because of the programme sponsorship the Oldham League are hoping to produce one of the best ever Amateur League programmes, which will include photographs of both teams, a list of all the past winners of the Standard Cup, pen pictures of the players and match officials, and a review of the 1977-78 season as it has affected our local clubs. It is hoped that the programme will be on sale in the Oldham area several days before the Final is played, and in fact by the time you are reading this article copies of the programme may already be available.

With the top two sides in the Pennine League competing, this season's Oldham Standard Cup Final should prove to be very worthy of its stature as the major local-league event anywhere in the country, and, given a fine morning on Good Friday, there is no reason why the attendance at the match should not reach 5,000 spectators. In fact, the appeal of the Standard Cup is shown by Radio Manchester agreeing to record after-match interviews with the personalities of the Final, these to be broadcast on their Easter Sunday "Rugby League Special" programme, and with the Standard Cup Final being the only amateur game to receive such treatment from any radio station throughout the season.

Finally, we must offer our congratulations to Saddleworth's Terry Flanagan on his selection as substitute forward for the BARLA Great Britain Youth team to play in France later this season. Terry, younger brother of Oldham forward Kevin Flanagan, is without doubt the most talented Youth player in the Oldham area at the present time and we wish him well on his BARLA International debut.

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