

A Little Gold Makes John Player Special.

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Health Departments' Chief Medical Officers

The Rugby Football League

John Player Special Trophy

1987-88 SEMI FINAL

OLDHAM
v
ST. HELENS

Central Park, Wigan
December 19th, 2.15pm



John Player Special
Sponsorship

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME

60p

Murphy



THE MOUTH!

OPENS UP EVERY WEEK

PLUS

★ **RICHARDS**
ON RUGBY



IN THE

DAILY Mirror

Front Cover: Photograph by Bolton Evening News



John Player Special Trophy

A very warm welcome to today's teams and their supporters
for the semi-final stage of the 1987-88
John Player Special Trophy competition.

This is the 17th season of the competition and it is now firmly
established as one of the major sporting occasions in televised
sport. This is also the 21st year that Imperial Tobacco has
supported the Rugby League and that makes it one of the
longest running major sponsorships in British sport.

To celebrate these landmarks, this season's competition is
worth a record £150,000 with £85,000 going in prize money —
including £16,000 to the eventual winner — and the
remaining £65,000 being allocated to the League's
Capital Development Fund.

The semi-final of any competition is always regarded as the
most difficult stage — so near and yet so far from the coveted
Trophy — but there is the consolation of £9,000 for today's
losing team, a 50 per cent increase in prize money at the same
stage last year.

The increased support this season is part of a new two-year
agreement worth a total of £320,000 and will take Imperial
Tobacco's sponsorship of the Rugby League since 1967 to well
over the £1 million mark.



John Player Special Trophy

John Player Forum

Eddie Hemmings is a Rugby League rarity. He speaks with a Liverpudlian accent. But, despite those obscure beginnings on Merseyside, his dulcet tones have become a part of Rugby League on the BBC Radio.

Now Eddie is moving into new fields, although he will not lose contact with the game as he is hosting a BBC 2 North West sports programme on television next year.

Rugby League is a now a key part of Eddie's lifestyle, as outlined in the latest Big Match face-to-face interview with the Sunday Mirror's **JOHN HUXLEY**.

Q: How did you become linked to Rugby League?

A: It starts with my old friend Harry Gratton. He had been covering the game for Radio Two Sport along with David Watkins and then he got his big chance to go into television.

I had been working alongside Harry as a producer for about two years and because he got his chance to work on the gogglebox there was a space... that provided me with a chance.

And so I started work with David in January 1985 and took it right through to Wembley when my first Rugby League Final was the memorable Wigan v Hull match. What a way to make my final debut!

Of course, I was brought up on Merseyside where and no dis-respect to Rugby League, Soccer is definitely king.

When I was connected with Radio Merseyside we actually started a brand new programme, along with Gerry Burrows, for Rugby League but my main-role was to cover Everton, Liverpool, Chester and Tranmere Rovers.

That's not to say that I wasn't interested in Rugby League. I always tried to catch the big events on television and never missed the Wembley final. But soccer was my main interest until I reached the BBC network

when I thought to myself I really ought to have a second sport to my bow.

It's remarkable that the second sport that I chose, Rugby League, has now taken my life over completely.

Now I'm not regarded in London as a football reporter but as the Rugby League commentator and reporter.

Q: What about your new role Eddie?

A: In the BBC we have a system of attachments which gives you the chance to try something new without the risk of losing your original job completely. That's just what I'm going to do.

Amazingly it's been because of my Rugby League connections that I've been given the chance to go on television which is something that I've always wanted to do.

Now I'm going to be working on a sports preview programme every Friday evening on BBC 2 in the North West starting next February. Originally we had hoped to start with the John Player Final in the New Year but various snags have delayed the start.

We're going to take in everything that happens in the North West including Soccer, Rugby League and Union, Cricket, Hockey, Snooker and the rest. We want to mirror what happens in the area.

But I think it's interesting that the editor of TV sport has told me that while soccer is important, and everybody must admit that it is, he wants Rugby League to have just as high a profile. And that's just got to be great news for the game.

Q: Has Rugby League changed since you started commentating on the game?

A: Well, I noticed that when I worked with Harry and David the game looked to be in the doldrums but that has certainly changed. Because of the foresight of such clubs as Wigan, together with the great work done by Maurice Bamford for Great Britain in the New Zealand and Australia Test series, the game has come out of its decline. We've now reached such a point that I believe we can give the Aussies a real go next summer. Of course, there are still cynics around who say we are going Down Under to get hammered, yet again, but I think that the game has a lot higher profile nationally now and that has changed things for the British game.

There are people outside Rugby League

in London who actually know who Ellery Hanley is and I've seen, even in my short time in the game, that it is actually spreading.

There's no doubt that played properly, as it is now being played at the top, that the game is as good if not better than ever.

Q: Do you think that Rugby League comes over well on television?

A: I think it does. Of course more could be done for the game and the BBC is trying very hard to redress that balance by introducing the new RL Focus spot on Grandstand, which can only be good for the game, and project the characters and people in the sport.

I think we could learn a lot from American football. The way that game has been promoted on TV means that they have millions of regular viewers nationwide and there's no reason why Rugby League shouldn't go the same way. In fact Rugby League should have been out there leading the race for those people.

Q: Do you enjoy the fact that Rugby League is essentially a part of Northern life?

A: Yes most certainly. I'm a northerner and proud of it. I have never really wanted or been given the opportunity to move to London but I love the people who play and administer the game of Rugby League as they are now part of my life.

At least being involved in a game like Rugby League you get the chance to know the people who have made it their life and get involved too. It's difficult to get into a soccer team's dressing room even on a training day, while you are actively encouraged to join a Rugby League team even after the worst defeat.

There's a lot more openness and more co-operation.

Q: How do you think the players have changed in the last few years?

A: The players are much fitter, that's for certain. The Australian tourists of 1982 and 1986 proved how vital that particular quality can be. People said to me when I first covered Rugby League; oh that's the sport with the big, fat forwards! Well that is no longer true and I reckon that must be the most significant change.

Now the game is beginning to market itself on a much higher plane. Players have acquired agents, the media co-operation is

among the best in professional sport and, of course, we have the introduction of Old Trafford for big time games of Rugby League.

That was a tremendous step forward because that first Test against Australia provided Old Trafford with it's biggest crowd of the season at that time and the atmosphere was simply electric. You could reach out and touch it.

Q: What's your own particular favourite Rugby League memory?

A: I don't need to think too hard about this one. It just has to be that Wigan and Hull Final. It was, as everybody will remember, an all time classic.

But here I want to get a big plug in for the little feller himself David Watkins. I can just remember going into the commentary position before the match and wondering what I had let myself in for.

We never thought for a moment before the match that we were going to have 70 of the 80 minutes of the match actually going out over the air but David helped me through.

Player identification was a real problem for me but again David rescued me.

I still get butterflies at every Wembley final like every other red blooded British sports fan but that day had to be something special.

Q: Is there a difference between the way you cover matches for local and national radio?

A: David and I have to sell the game for the national audience because we are talking to people in areas like Hampshire, Kent and Cornwall who don't know anything about the game. That's why we tend to concentrate on the personalities involved.

The local radio lads have a ready made audience of people who know about the game and that must make a difference. But while I like to stress Rugby League is a serious sport it does have character and humour and we should never forget that because it is a major asset.

Conducted by **JOHN HUXLEY**, of the

Sunday Mirror



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John Player Special Trophy

ROLL OF HONOUR

Season	Winners	Runners-up	Venue	Attendance	Receipts
1971-72	Halifax	Wakefield T.	Bradford	7,975	£2,545
1972-73	Leeds	Salford	Huddersfield	10,102	£4,563
1973-74	Warrington	Rochdale H.	Wigan	9,347	£4,380
1974-75	Bradford N.	Widnes	Warrington	5,935	£3,305
1975-76	Widnes	Hull	Leeds	9,035	£6,275
1976-77	Castleford	Blackpool B.	Salford	4,512	£2,919
1977-78	Warrington	Widnes	St. Helens	10,258	£8,429
1978-79	Widnes	Warrington	St. Helens	10,743	£11,709
1979-80	Bradford N.	Widnes	Leeds	9,909	£11,560
1980-81	Warrington	Barrow	Wigan	12,820	£21,020
1981-82	Hull	Hull K.R.	Leeds	25,245	£42,987
1982-83	Wigan	Leeds	Elland Rd, Leeds	19,553	£49,027
1983-84	Leeds	Widnes	Wigan	9,510	£19,824
1984-85	Hull K.R.	Hull	Hull C.F.C.	25,326	£69,555
1985-86	Wigan	Hull K.R.	Elland Rd, Leeds	17,573	£66,714
1986-87	Wigan	Warrington	Bolton W.F.C.	21,144	£86,041

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The League's current top try-scoring forward Paul Round, a close season recruit by Oldham from St. Helens. Photo: Oldham Evening Chronicle.

John Player Semis

Rugby League historian ROBERT GATE reviews the previous 32 John Player Special Trophy semi-finals.

There have been 32 semi-final ties, plus one replay, in the John Player Special Trophy competition. These 33 matches have yielded a combined total of 819 points . . . an average of almost 25 points per match.

Of the 32 semi-finals, 21 have been inter-county affairs based on the traditional boundaries of Yorkshire and Lancashire/Cumberland. Lancashire sides have won 11 of the 21 clashes. There have been seven all Lancashire and just four all-Yorkshire semi-finals.

Semi-Final Appearances

Twenty clubs have reached the semi-finals:

- 9 Widnes
- 6 Hull K.R., Warrington
- 5 Hull, Leeds, St. Helens
- 4 Bradford N.
- 3 Castleford, Leigh, Salford, Wakefield T., Wigan
- 2 Halifax
- 1 Barrow, Blackpool B., Bramley, Oldham, Rochdale H., Swinton, Whitehaven

Most Semi-Final Victories

- 6 Widnes

Most Semi-Final Defeats

- 5 St. Helens

Most Consecutive Semi-Finals

- 6 Widnes, 1974-75 to 1979-80 inclusive

Most Semi-Final Appearances by a Player

- 8 Keith Elwell (Widnes)
- 7 Eric Hughes (Widnes)

Longest Playing Span between Semi-Finals

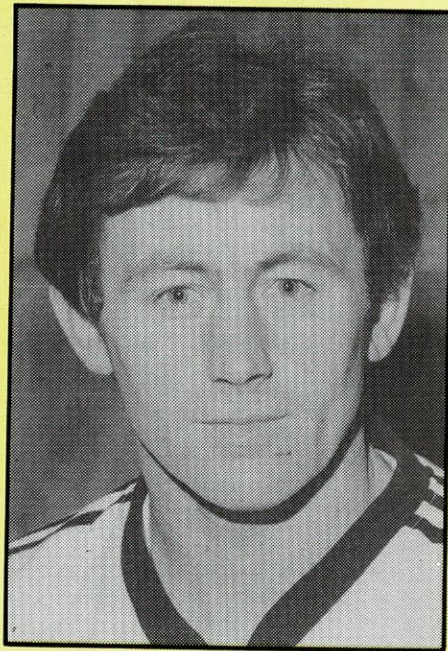
- 13 years by David Topliss, Wakefield Trinity 1971-72, Hull 1984-85
- 12 years by John Holmes and David Ward, Leeds 1971-72, Leeds 1983-84
- 12 years by Eric Prescott, St. Helens 1971-1972, Widnes 1983-84

Highest Attendances

- 13,214 Hull v. Leeds, at Boothferry Park, 1984-85
- 11,400 Hull v. Oldham, at Headingley, 1981-82
- 11,242 Hull v. Barrow, at Headingley, 1980-81
- 10,509 Leigh v. Wigan, at St. Helens, 1985-86

Lowest Attendance

- 1,611 Blackpool Borough v. Leigh, at Blackpool, 1976-77



Keith Elwell, most John Player semi-final appearances with eight.

All Four Semi-Finalists from one County

This has occurred only once. In 1984-85 four Yorkshire teams qualified — Halifax, Hull, Hull K.R. and Leeds.

Highest Points Aggregate

- 44 — Wigan 36 Leigh 8, 1985-86

Record Margin Win

- Warrington 35 Widnes 4, 1986-87

Lowest Points Aggregate

- 10 — Castleford 5 Warrington 5, 1980-81
- 10 — Leeds 8 Widnes 2, 1982-83

Nilled in a Semi-Final

Only St. Helens (0-19) in defeat by Leeds in 1972-73 have failed to score.

Most Tries in a Semi-Final

9 tries were scored in last season's Warrington-Widnes clash at Wigan. The eight scored by Warrington in that game beat the previous record of six held by Wigan in their defeat of Leigh in 1985-86.

No Tries in a Semi-Final

The only try-less semi-final occurred in 1982-83 when Leeds defeated Widnes 8-2 in a game decided by penalty goals.

Most Points by a Defeated Semi-Finalist

Four teams have scored 14 points and still lost — Hull K.R. (1974-75), Salford (1975-76), Swinton (1981-82) and Warrington (1982-83).

Most Tries by a Player

The only man to have scored three tries has been Wigan's prop-forward Greg Dowling who scored a hat-trick against Leigh in 1985-86.

Most Goals by a Player

- 6 Ray Dutton, Widnes v. Castleford, 1975-76
- 6 David Stephenson, Wigan v. Leigh, 1985-86

Most Points by a Player

- 14 George Fairbairn, Hull K.R. v. Swinton, 1981-82 (2 tries, 4 goals)

Second Division Semi-Finalists

- 1974-75 Hull K.R. and Whitehaven
- 1975-76 Hull
- 1976-77 Blackpool Borough
- 1981-82 Oldham and Swinton
- 1985-86 Leigh

Only Hull and Blackpool Borough have reached the final as Second Division clubs and both were defeated in the final.

Results

Until 1979-80 the semi-final matches were staged on the ground of one of the competing clubs. Of the 16 games under that system the home teams were victorious on 10 occasions. The results and attendances under this system were:

1971-72	Wakefield T.	14	St. Helens	9	3,694
	Leeds	7	Halifax	15	5,138
1972-73	Leeds	19	St. Helens	0	5,854
	Hull K.R.	13	Salford	15	2,946
1973-74	Rochdale H.	14	Bramley	2	2,835
	Warrington	20	St. Helens	9	5,352
1974-75	Widnes	16	Hull K.R.	14	4,000
	Whitehaven	6	Bradford N.	18	3,500
1975-76	Castleford	9	Widnes	17	3,416
	Salford	14	Hull	22	4,070
1976-77	Blackpool B.	15	Leigh	5	1,611
	Castleford	15	Widnes	10	5,700
1977-78	Wakefield T.	5	Warrington	15	8,919
	Widnes	14	Bradford N.	10	8,778
1978-79	Widnes	21	Bradford N.	3	7,911
	Warrington	9	Hull K.R.	5	9,047

From 1979-80 the semi-finals have been hosted by neutral grounds as follows:

1979-80	Salford	3	Widnes	19	at Warrington	6,567
	Bradford N.	16	Wakefield T.	3	at Headingley	7,847
1980-81	Hull	10	Barrow	13	at Headingley	11,242
	Castleford	5	Warrington	5	at Wigan	4,632
Replay	Castleford	10	Warrington	22	at Headingley	9,249
1981-82	Hull	22	Oldham	6	at Headingley	11,400
	Hull K.R.	23	Swinton	14	at Headingley	8,055
1982-83	Leeds	8	Widnes	2	at Fartown	7,247
	Wigan	15	Warrington	14	at St. Helens	9,011
1983-84	Leeds	18	Leigh	11	at Fartown	5,740
	Widnes	18	St. Helens	4	at Warrington	5,729
1984-85	Hull K.R.	14	Halifax	8	at Headingley	6,390
	Hull	18	Leeds	6	at Hull City AFC	13,214
1985-86	Wigan	36	Leigh	8	at St. Helens	10,509
	Hull K.R.	22	St. Helens	4	at Headingley	3,856
1986-87	Wigan	12	Hull	11	at Headingley	5,245
	Warrington	35	Widnes	4	at Wigan	6,409

Semi-Final Crowds

Old system	Aggregate	Average
	83,041	5,190
Neutral ground system (includes one replay)	132,342	7,785

All figures exclude this season's semi-finals.

The Rugby Football League

John Player Special Trophy

*Best of Luck to
Today's Semi-finalists*

OLDHAM & ST. HELENS

1988 FINAL
9th JANUARY

Rugby League's
Longest Running Sponsorship

Warning: SMOKING CAN CAUSE FATAL DISEASES

Health Departments' Chief Medical Officers

John Player Special Trophy

LINE UP

8 OLDHAM

Red and White jersey

Coach: ERIC FITZSIMONS

MICK BURKE

Tom Nadiote ~~STEPHEN~~ ROBINSON

GARY WARNECKE

KEVIN MEADOWS

BRIAN MCCARTHY

PETER WALSH

STEVE PETERS

NEIL CLAWSON

IAN SANDERSON

HUGH WADDELL

PAUL ROUND

Terry Flanagan ~~MIKE~~ BARDSLEY

MAL GRAHAM, Capt.

CHRIS MYLER

Mick Bardsley TERRY FLANAGAN

Scrum
1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12
13 14 15 16
17 18 19 20

Penalties
1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12
13 14 15 16
17 18 19 20

ST. HELENS 18

Blue and White jersey

Coach: ALEX MURPHY

PHIL VEIVERS

2 KEVIN McCORMACK

3 PAUL LOUGHLIN

4 MARK ELIA

5 LES QUIRK

6 NEIL HOLDING

7 SHANE COOPER, Capt. *S*

8 TONY BURKE

9 PAUL GROVES

10 ~~PAUL FORBER~~ *Evans*

11 ~~ROY HAGGERTY~~ *Forber*

12 ~~ANDY PLATT~~ *Haggerty*

13 CHRIS ARKWRIGHT *Platt*

*Tanner
Dwyer*

Scrum
1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12
13 14 15 16
17 18 19 20

Penalties
1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12
13 14 15 16
17 18 19 20

JOHN PLAYER SPECIAL AWARD

Today's John Player Special Man of the Match,
judged by the Press, will receive £100 and an
inscribed memento.

Referee: JIM SMITH, Halifax

Touch Judges:

J. N. FISHWICK, Leigh (Yellow flag)

G. E. LIGHTFOOT, Bolton (Red flag)

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Rugby League**

**WE ARE TALKING
Australia**

**WE ARE TALKING
Summer 1988**

**WE ARE TALKING
The trip of a lifetime**

**WE ARE TALKING
Expenses paid**

**WE ARE TALKING
With the spouse (or a friend)**



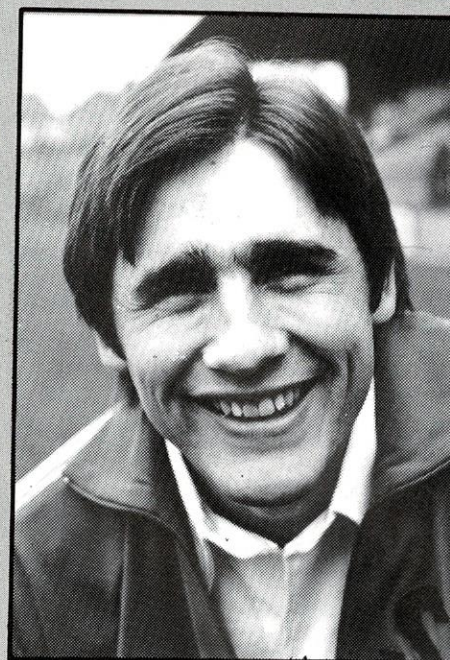
Look for the special competition entry forms in your local
Whitbread Trophy Bitter pubs and clubs next March.

WE ARE TALKING TROPHY.

John Player Info

1987-88 PRIZES

Round	Per Team	Total
Preliminary	8 x £ 1,100	£ 8,800
First	16 x £ 1,100	£ 17,600
Second	8 x £ 1,600	£ 12,800
Quarter Finals	4 x £ 2,825	£ 11,300
Semi-Finals	2 x £ 4,750	£ 9,500
Runners-up	1 x £ 9,000	£ 9,000
Winners	1 x £ 16,000	£ 16,000
Total Prizes		£ 85,000
Capital Development Fund		£ 65,000
Grand Total		£ 150,000



Double John Player record holder
Sammy Lloyd.

RECORDS: ALL ROUNDS TEAM

*Highest score:
Castleford 88 v. Millom 5.
Biggest attendance:
25,326 Hull v. Hull K.R.
(at Hull C. F.C.) Final 1984-85

INDIVIDUAL

*Most goals:
17 by Sammy Lloyd (Castleford)
Most tries:
6 by Vince Gribbin (Whitehaven) v.
Doncaster 1984-85
*Most points:
43 (17g, 3t) by Sammy Lloyd (Castleford)
*The above records were achieved in the
Castleford v. Millom first round tie in 1973-74.

IN THE FINAL

Most final appearances:
6 by Widnes
Most wins:
3 by Warrington and Wigan
Most tries:
No player has scored 3 or more
Most goals:
6 by Derek Whitehead (Warrington) v.
Rochdale H. 1973-74
Most points:
15 (6g, 1t) by Derek Whitehead (Warrington) v.
Rochdale H. 1973-74
Highest score:
Warrington 27 v. Rochdale H. 16 1973-74
Widest margin win:
Wigan 18 v. Warrington 4 1986-87
Biggest attendance:
25,326 Hull v. Hull K.R.
(at Hull C. F.C.) 1984-85
Biggest receipts:
£86,041 Wigan v. Warrington
(at Bolton W. F.C.) 1986-87



A vital third round touchdown for Terry Flanagan in Oldham's surprise victory at Warrington. Photo: Oldham Evening Chronicle.

John Player Gallery



St. Helens back row man Andy Platt, capped three times for Great Britain.



Bryan McCarthy touches down in the 44-0 runaway second round success at Batley. Photo: Oldham Evening Chronicle.



St. Helens and ex-Bramley and Leeds prop forward Tony Burke.

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QUALITY COMES FIRST

John Player Comment

From **PAUL WILSON** of
The Independent

Here's a teaser for you. What was worth £8,000 ten years ago and £86,000 last year? No, not Maurice Lindsay's clothing allowance, but the John Player Special Trophy final, one of the success stories of the 80's.

The competition ticked along during the 70's on average final crowds of about 8,000. Then the 1981 final between Warrington and Barrow produced a record attendance of 12,820 and receipts of £21,000, twice as high as anything before.

Then came the all-Humberside final of 1982 and in one year the totals doubled up again, over 25,000 people paying almost £43,000. The John Player final had finally arrived and the following year's meeting of Wigan and Leeds at Elland Road produced a slightly smaller crowd but record receipts of £49,027.

Since then we have had another Humberside final, which boosted takings to the £70,000 mark, and the two Wigan dominated finals, the last one at Bolton raking in the figure of £86,041.

All this is good for the game and good for John Player, who had little hesitation in renewing their sponsorship for a 21st year. "Rugby League's longest running sponsorship" is the company's proud boast, and long may it be so.

There is little doubt that JPS get value for their money in terms of plugs in the media, for having invented the competition and named it after their product, journalists can't help but

mention the John Player Special Trophy every time it is played for. There are no awkward prefixes which can be crossed out by sub-editors, you don't have to remember to sprinkle the sponsor's name throughout the copy. The competition is the product. Simple but effective.

Many people are iffy about sponsorship. Witness the current horror in soccer circles about a brand name being attached to the FA Cup. But it seems to me that a company prepared to come along and start a new competition, name it after itself, and stick around for 20 or so years to ensure it becomes part of the game's tradition, deserves all the success it can get.

I happen to like the John Player format as well. It might not be as grandiose a competition as the Challenge Cup, and wherever we stage the final it won't compare with Wembley, but it stays in the North and ranks with the Premiership final as the major showpiece of our game in its traditional area.

For all that, the John Player final has become a moveable feast. During the 80's, the final has been played on as many soccer as rugby grounds, causing no end of concern to the purists, but delighting everyone else.

Some people, and I am naming no names here, seem to think that a neutral venue implies the nearest Rugby League ground to a point on a map equidistant from the two clubs involved, regardless of whether this ground is fit for the purpose. Some people, in other words, would rather stick to venues like Swinton or Fartown — sorry, Arena '84 — than take in swish, well-appointed grounds like Elland Road, Old Trafford, or even Burnden Park.

The John Player Final has boldly gone to where few finals have gone before however, and the crowd statistics tell their own story. Wonder where we'll end up this time?

John Player Profile

IAN PROCTOR meets MAL GRAHAM

When the international transfer ban was lifted after six years, in the autumn of 1983, the influence of ultra-professional Australians was immediately apparent and the big honours all went to clubs containing the best of Antipodean talent.

Wigan went to Wembley, after a 14-year absence, with three Aussies and two Kiwis in their ranks; Leeds lifted the John Player Trophy with a side which included Terry Webb, Dean Bell and Man of the Match Mark Laurie; Hull Kingston were inspired to the first Championship — Premiership double by the silky skills of John Dorahy; and Widnes's Cup-winning pack boasted the fearless New Zealander Kevin Tamati.

The effect was predictable. While the Lions toured Australia in the summer of 1984, Sydney and Brisbane was invaded by English officials seeking the players who bring the answer to the eternal demand . . . instant success.

While big clubs sought the biggest names, others operated more shrewdly and when newly-promoted Hunslet, under the astute guidance of Paul Daley, took a chance on an unknown from the Newcastle area of New South Wales, they were introducing the bargain buy of 1984-85 to the First Division.

Mal Graham was a sensation in a struggling team at Elland Road, scoring 18 tries in just 28 appearances in a team doomed to relegation almost from day one. It was an astonishing return from the man who came to England to try his luck, and several First Division clubs started the bidding to keep his all round ability in the top flight.

Oldham won his services, not cheaply however, for although he played for the South Leeds club for "peanuts", he had proved his ability and knew exactly what his talents were worth. The men from Watersheddings had no cause to regret adding Graham's authority to a pack which had just lost Andy Goodway to Wigan, and his try return surpassed his Elland Road feats — 21 tries bringing him the Oldham record for a forward.

In David Topliss's absence he skipped the side to within 15 minutes of their first-ever trip to Wembley, the bounce of a ball proved their undoing, and the people of the Greater Manchester area took him to their hearts.

He played every game as though his life depended upon the outcome; he never took a backward step and was a natural leader. His resigning for Oldham seemed a formality. Graham loved the club and it's supporters as much as they loved his hard-running style of back-row play.

But, Graham waited and waited for an offer which never came. Bradford Northern could not believe their luck, stepped in with an offer of a one year contract and Graham was on his way to Odsal Stadium . . . Oldham were on their way back to the Second Division.

Twelve months later, the damage done, Mal was delighted to be offered the player-coach job at Oldham in succession to Frank Myler, and, in conjunction with Eric Fitzsimons — a former colleague at Hunslet — and Iain MacCorquodale, has succeeded in breathing life into a club simply aching for success. Graham believes that he can be the man to fulfill those broken dreams for the Oldham faithful, nothing would please him more than to bring the good times back to Watersheddings.

This afternoon's semi-final against St. Helens offers the Roughyeds an opportunity to qualify for their first John Player Special Final. This could be only the start. With a limited company having replaced the old board, and men of vision at the helm. Oldham's ambitions now match those of their outstanding Australian, arguably the most consistent import to play in England over the past four years.

"It was a bitter disappointment to have to leave Oldham in the first place", said Graham. "My heart was here. I love the club and the people who follow Oldham and my dearest wish is to bring the success which they all crave. The club is crying out for a successful team.

Our attendances have been magnificent following the disappointment of relegation, and the aim is to reward their loyalty. Victory at Warrington in the quarter-final of the John Player competition certainly lifted those who had seen Oldham flatter to deceive so many times before in the past. We've still to hit top form, but we've been winning, saving our finest form for the John Player competition, having played four ties to get this far.

"We fully expected to defeat Fulham, of course, in the preliminary, but it was a fine

achievement to overcome Bradford in the first round because there was a lot at stake that day. Their side included ex-Oldham star David Hobbs, who felt he had a point to prove, and I'd played for Northern last year. They had just won the Yorkshire Cup, and were on a high, but few teams fancy coming to Watersheddings in cup football, and the vastly improved defence did it's job as it did to provide the basis for victory at Wilderspool.

"We've introduced a discipline at the club which just didn't exist before, and I think a lot of players have become fitter than at any stage of their careers.

Graham's first guide and mentor when he arrived in England, in the winter of 1984, was current Batley coach Paul Daley, who advised the ex-Newtown player to keep his skills in the First Division. He told him that he would be wasting his abilities if he ever settled for Second Division football. Those words immediately came to mind when Oldham turned to him in the summer. It is a measure of his commitment to the re-born club that he swallowed his pride and accepted their offer, determined that he would play in a lower grade for just one season. His side seems certain to gain promotion.

"It was a tragedy that Oldham ever suffered the ignominy of relegation," said the articulate, deep-thinking schoolteacher. "While some of the players must have been dejected at the thought of Second Division football at the outset, they've knuckled down to hard work, to the task of re-establishing the club. Obviously we must be strong enough to compete when we go back in the top flight, but I think Oldham now have men of real ambition in charge again.

"As a coaching trio, Eric, Iain and myself complement each other well. Eric is the man who's in charge of administration, finance, signings — although I have my say, and rules the players with an iron fist. Iain looks after the Alliance team, and, with Eric forms part of the club's strategy to liaise closely with the schools and amateur movement in the area. I look after training and affairs on the park.

"I'm delighted at the way we've tightened the defence in the first half of the season and we'll be looking to add polish to the side as the season progresses.

"We've made a tremendous signing in Paul Round (set to break Graham's tries-in-a-season record for a forward at the club), and our Australians, Brian McCarthy and Peter Walsh, have served us magnificently, along with Gary Warnecke. Peter's experience and tactical

know-how has proved invaluable, while his accurate goalkicking has been a bonus. His marksmanship was crucial in the defeat of Warrington, and he's taken the role from Mick Burke with assurance.

"Brian's form has been superb — eight tries in as many appearances — and he's been one out of the blue, because he only arrived in England as a mate of Leeds' Peter Tunks, planning on touring around Europe. Now he could be opposing Tunksy in the John Player Final.

Graham, the Australian nomad, will be hoping for a change of fortune as he attempts to reach the first major final of a wide and varied but always distinguished, playing career. He signed for the Newtown Jets in Sydney in 1982, the year after they contested the Grand Final with Parramatta. After starring as a winger-centre under Warran Ryan, Brian Moore converted him into a highly promising back-rower.

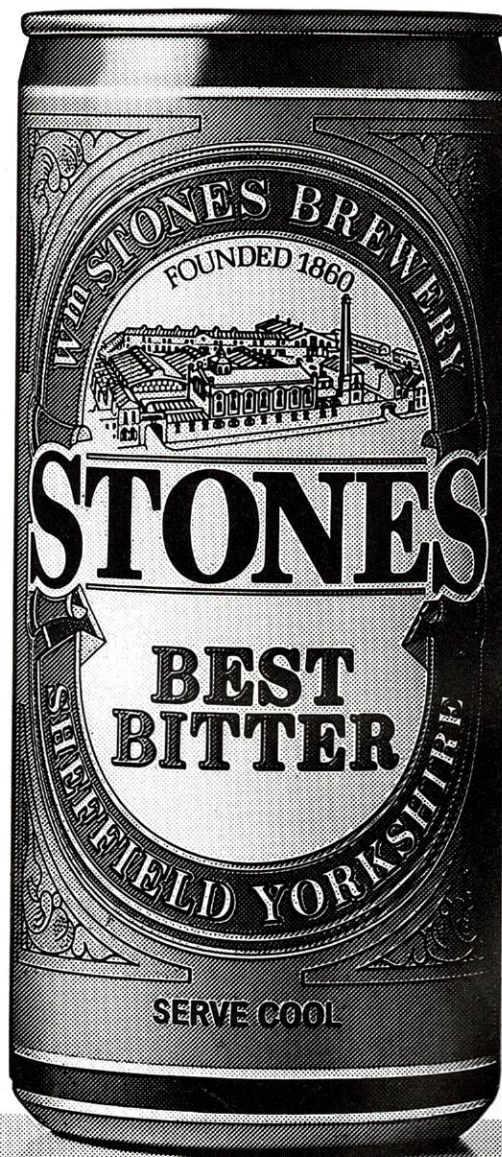
Unfortunately Newtown's days as a glamour side were numbered. By 1983 they were defunct and Graham was heading back to the Newcastle league to finish at teacher training college, playing for Western Suburbs. In bush football, the blond-haired forward did all that a country player could.

He repped against touring teams from Great Britain and Papua New Guinea, played in the annual City-Country clashes, but yearned for a higher grade of football. That opportunity came when he took a chance on coming to England, succeeding beyond his wildest dreams.

On the field he found success, fame and riches, if not a fortune, and off it he met his wife in the shape of Leeds girl Michelle Daley. Frank Myler, who obviously recalled Graham's deeds for Newcastle against his Lions tourists, and Bradford's Barry Seabourne have all been unstinting in their praise of the likeable, confident 27-year-old.

At Oldham, first time around, he was denied a Wembley trip in heartbreaking manner. When Oldham competed in last season's Lancashire Cup Final, Graham was contributing to the Bradford revival, and when that revival reached fruition with a well-deserved Yorkshire Cup win in October, Graham had returned across the Pennines.

This time he hopes that he is in the right place at the right time in the quest for honours. No player deserves success more than the cultured Graham, a player who would not know how to shirk a challenge. Every successful team needs a Mal Graham-type, his hope is that this year the successful team is Oldham.



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John Player Profile

IAN PROCTOR meets PHIL VEIVERS

When Saints' immaculate full back Phil Veivers arrived in the North of England three years ago, his plan was to stay just a year, "for the experience".

A Lancashire Cup — Premiership double, incredible scenes at Knowsley Road, and the opportunity to make his name in his own right persuaded the former Brisbane Souths utility back to build a career at Knowsley Road.

His consistency at the rear of the St. Helens side during three-and-a-half seasons has been remarkable, appreciated by fans who have seen some of the very best — Glyn Moses, Austin Rhodes, Frankie Barrow, Geoff Pimblett — and admired by colleagues and opponents throughout the game.

The man who arrived in Mal Meninga's shadow has certainly created his own reputation as a safe, utterly dependable, full back, with an ever-improving attacking game, which is hardly surprising for a former winger. His decision to remain with Saints has been vindicated — his Wembley ambition was fulfilled last season, even if the result did not go as planned — but he acknowledges that he is rapidly reaching the crossroads of his career at the end of the current English season.

His options are simple . . . either to stay and play out his career with the St. Helens club he has grown to love, or return home to prove to himself that he could be equally successful in the harsher playing climate of Sydney. Already he has deferred a couple of lucrative offers to return home, preferring to stay at Knowsley Road on a yearly contract, but the summer of '88 will, he candidly admits, be make or break time.

"It's a dilemma," he confessed. "I wish I could have the best of both worlds because I love playing in England, yet have this burning desire to prove myself in Sydney. Former Souths colleagues Mal Meninga and Gary

Belcher went to Sydney to make it with Canberra and toured with the Kangaroos last year.

"The nagging question is 'would I make it, too?' The move to St. Helens was the best of my career and I'm delighted at the way events have turned out. I've won medals in the Lancashire Cup and Premiership, following an unforgettable debut season in 1984-85 and achieved my ambition of playing at Wembley last May. The occasion, the atmosphere and the stadium fully lived up to all my expectations. The result, sadly, did not, and I'd like to return there to rectify that this season.

"Firstly, though, we've got to do the business in the John Player Special Trophy — a competition all Saints players are keen to win. The club has won every other trophy but this one and it's an omission we want to correct this time. With all due respect to an Oldham side which have proved their mettle in getting this far, I think that if we get the ball out wide we can do the damage to win through to our first-ever John Player Special Final, at least.

I'm full of respect for the way Oldham have progressed to the last four. They have some tremendous players, too, with Paul Round having found his finest form immediately, but this new look Saints side is beginning to knit together and look a very capable side. The additions of Les Quirk, Paul Groves and Shane Cooper have transformed things, and all have played key roles in our reaching the semi-finals.

"Shane, a vastly experienced player, who has skippered all the sides he has played for, is a natural leader. He took a couple of games to settle, but has since proved a great organiser. Les and Paul were both a bit quiet when they first arrived, but they're getting used to the other lads and are producing the goods where it matters — on the park".

From a big family of Rugby League celebrities, Veivers made the decision to find his own identity 12,000 miles from home when his friend Meninga was offered big money to join Saints. But he soon proved to be a quality player in his own right, his fielding of the high balls being near-flawless and his bravery and coolness under pressure helping Saints to defeat Wigan (Lancashire Cup) and Hull K.R. (Premiership) in big matches.

Like many of his fellow countrymen, he loves the crowds and the atmosphere created at the big occasions in English football. His brother



Mal Meninga, the big name travelling partner for fellow Australian Phil Veivers.

Greg, a former Australian captain, and uncle Mick both played in Britain, and they influenced his decision to have a season with Saints.

The former Queensland schoolboys Rugby Union star, a bit-part player with Souths, immediately settled into St. Helens' problem role. His father, Jack, also played State football for Queensland, while his brother-in-law is new Brisbane Broncos and Queensland coach, Wayne Bennett.

Veivers, therefore, is steeped in Rugby League and, while proud of his family achievements in the game, is more than pleased to have done it his way.

"When I made my debut for Souths I was referred to as Greg Veivers' brother and that got to me a bit. Then it was a case of the media asking if I, too, would go on to represent Australia. Naturally I'd love to, it's the ambition of every bloke, and playing four seasons in England has made me a better player. I think I've improved every year, and last year I was delighted to get 14 tries. It underlined my belief that I've come on in leaps and bounds during my time with Saints."

Recommended to Saints officials by members of the Australian party at the French anniversary match in Paris in April, 1984, Veivers' delight at proving a success has been matched by a loyalty to the Saints club. He works at the ground, his whole life revolves around success on the field and satisfying those supporters who have taken him to their hearts. With over 100 first-team appearances to his credit, and some 36 tries, Phil Veivers has carved his own niche in St. Helens' history. That reputation would be embellished if he was in their first John Player Special Trophy-winning team, and he is more than confident that 1988 will be the year of the Saints.

"As I said, Wembley was great except for the result, and that's made us all the more determined to get amongst the trophies this time" The new lads are fine footballers, seeking their first honours in the game. There's a hunger within the team to win things, perhaps more so than last season.

"The flair is still there — I think Saints will always be an attractive team to watch — but there is a discipline about the side. Defensively we must do a good job against Oldham, otherwise they will exploit any weakness. Being odds-on favourites puts the pressure on us, but they're a First Division side. "There will be no under-estimating Mal Graham's men by us, every team deserves respect, particularly one that knocked over Warrington at Wilderspool and accounted for Bradford Northern, too. But ultimately it's down to how well we perform. If we hit the form we are capable of there should be no worries, Saints should finally over-come their semi-final hoodoo in the John Player Special Trophy."

Time will tell whether this is Veivers' last hurrah in English football. The Stones Bitter Championship has seen the arrival of a number of outstanding Australian full backs over the past few years in the shape of Graham Eadie at Halifax, Warrington's Brian Johnson, Andrew Ettingshausen at Headingley, Dale Shearer, currently with high-flying Widnes, David Liddiard, formerly with Oldham, former Halifax star Joe Kilroy, and the world number one, Garry Jack in the famous red of Salford.

It is a tribute to the qualities of Phil Veivers that he is as highly regarded as such world-class figures in England. Had he stayed in Australia it is possible that that would not be the case, and he may reflect on that as he ponders his next move during the summer.

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John Player Special Trophy

PROGRESS CHART

Key: W—Winners. F—Beaten finalists. SF—Semi-final. P—Preliminary round.

	1986-87	1985-86	1984-85	1983-84	1982-83	1981-82	1980-81	1979-80	1978-79	1977-78	1976-77	1975-76	1974-75	1973-74	1972-73	1971-72
BARROW	3	2	1	2	3	3	F	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	3
BATLEY	P	1	1	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1
BLACKPOOL B.	2	1	1	1	2	P	2	2	1	1	F	1	1	1	1	3
BRADFORD N.	3	2	2	1	3	2	1	W	SF	SF	2	1	W	1	3	1
BRAMLEY	1	1	3	—	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	SF	2	2
CARLISLE	2	P	P	2	2	2										
CASTLEFORD	2	1	2	1	1	2	SF	3	3	2	W	SF	1	2	1	2
DEWSBURY	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	3	2	1
DONCASTER	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
FEATHERSTONE R.	2	P	2	3	1	2	2	2	2	3	2	1	1	1	2	1
FULHAM	1	1	1	1	1	1	2									
HALIFAX	2	1	SF	1	1	1	3	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	W
HUDDERSFIELD B.	P	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	3	1	3	1	1	2	2
HULL	SF	3	F	2	2	W	SF	1	2	1	3	F	1	1	3	3
HULL K.R.	1	F	W	2	3	F	2	1	SF	1	1	3	SF	1	SF	2
HUNSLET	1	2	P	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1
KEIGHLEY	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	3	2	1	1	2	3	1	2
LEEDS	1	1	SF	W	F	3	1	2	1	1	3	2	3	3	W	SF
LEIGH	3	SF	1	SF	2	1	3	3	3	3	SF	2	1	2	2	1
MANSFIELD M.	1	1	1													
OLDHAM	1	2	2	1	1	SF	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	1
ROCHDALE H.	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	F	1	2
RUNCORN H.	1	1	2	2	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
ST. HELENS	3	SF	3	SF	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	1	SF	SF	SF
SALFORD	1	2	1	2	3	3	2	SF	2	2	2	SF	3	2	F	1
SHEFFIELD E.	2	1	1													
SWINTON	2	1	1	3	1	SF	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	1
WAKEFIELD T.	1	2	P	1	1	1	1	SF	3	SF	1	2	2	3	2	F
WARRINGTON	F	3	1	2	SF	2	W	3	F	W	1	1	3	W	1	1
WHITEHAVEN	1	1	2	P	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	SF	2	1	2
WIDNES	SF	3	3	F	SF	3	3	F	W	F	SF	W	F	1	3	1
WIGAN	W	W	2	3	W	1	1	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	3
WORKINGTON T.	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	2	2	3	3	1	2	1	1
YORK	P	3	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	3	1	2	2	2	2

—Bramley withdrew from the Trophy while in liquidation, opponents Hull K.R. receiving a bye.

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John Player Special Trophy

1987-88 DATA

PRELIMINARY ROUND

Featherstone R.	34	Thatto Heath
Heworth	5	Swinton
Oldham	36	Fulham
York	38	Bramley

FIRST ROUND

Batley	18	Hunslet
Carlisle	16	Warrington
Dewsbury	14	Doncaster
Featherstone R.	12	Castleford
Halifax	32	Keighley
Hull	42	Workington T.
Hull K.R.	30	Rochdale H.
Leigh	28	Huddersfield B.
Oldham	22	Bradford N.
Runcorn H.	2	Mansfield M.
Springfield B.	14	Barrow
St. Helens	12	Widnes
Swinton	12	Salford
Wakefield T.	22	York
Whitehaven	14	Leeds
Wigan	34	Sheffield E.

FIRST ROUND REPLAY

York	6	Wakefield T.	30	Mark Conway (Wakefield T.)
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SECOND ROUND

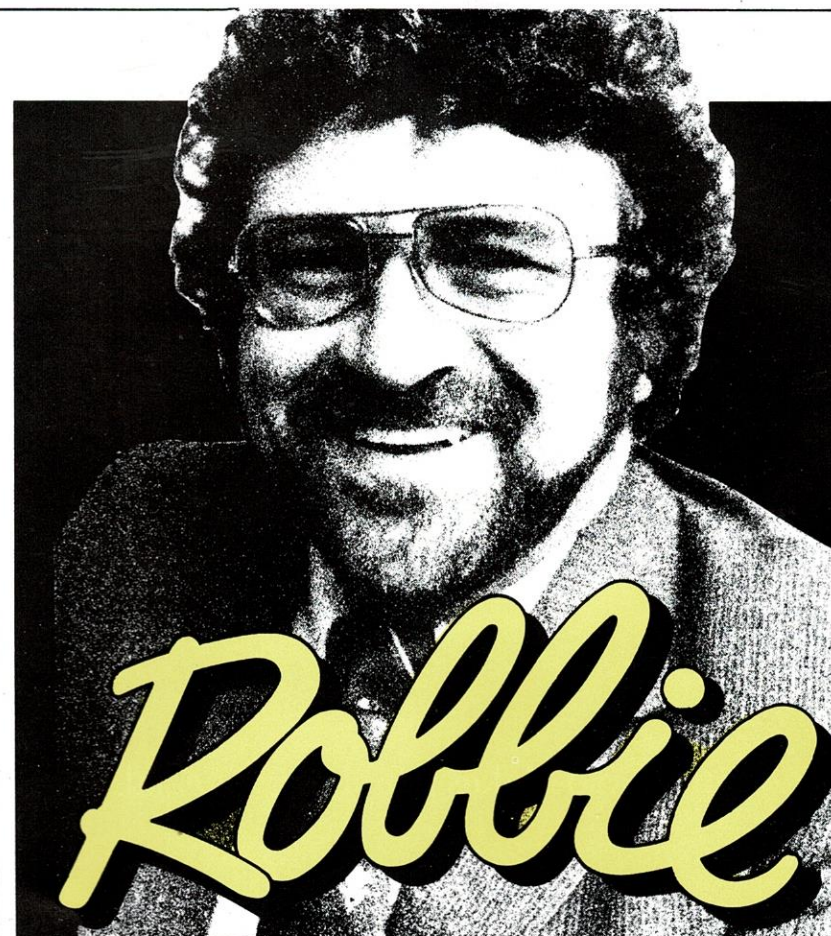
Batley	0	Oldham	44	Paul Round (Oldham)
Hull	19	Leigh	7	David Brooks (Hull)
Leeds	20	Halifax	10	Roy Powell (Leeds)
St. Helens	40	Mansfield M.	0	Phil Veivers (St. Helens)
Salford	14	Dewsbury	5	Gary Jack (Salford)
Springfield B.	14	Wakefield T.	8	Tommy Frodsham (Springfield B.)
Warrington	12	Hull K.R.	8	Gordon Smith (Hull K.R.)
Wigan	26	Castleford	16	Andy Goodway (Wigan)

THIRD ROUND

St. Helens	20	Hull	16	Paul Groves (St. Helens)
Salford	12	Wigan	16	Ian Blease (Salford)
Springfield B.	12	Leeds	22	Bob Eccles (Springfield B.)
Warrington	10	Oldham	14	Neil Clawson (Oldham)

John Player Special Man of the Match

16	Peter Smith (Featherstone R.)
32	Adrian Smith (Heworth)
8	Paul Round (Oldham)
2	Geoff Pryce (York)



Robbie

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