WIDNES VIKINGS V OLDHAM

Northern Ford Premiership

Sunday 12 March 2000
Kick Off 3.00pm

Official Matchday
Magazine £1.50

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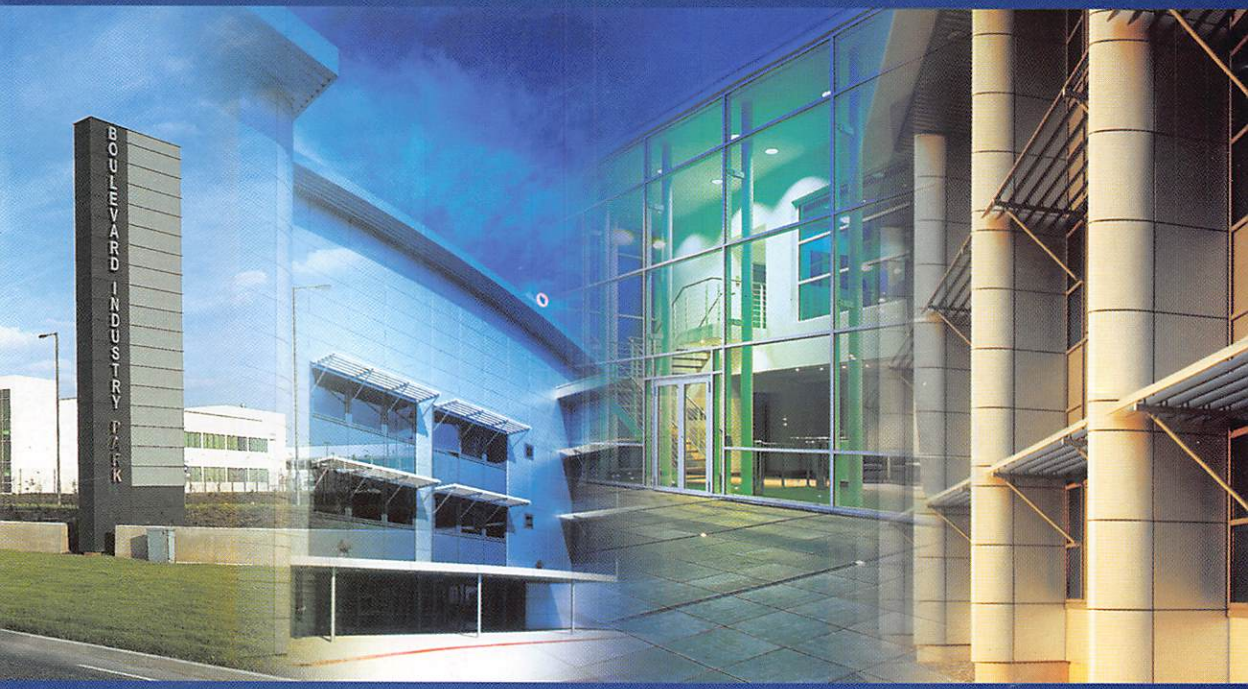

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welcome

WIDNES VIKINGS

CLUB OFFICIALS

Chief Patron;
Rt.HON LORD ASHLEY of STOKE, CH

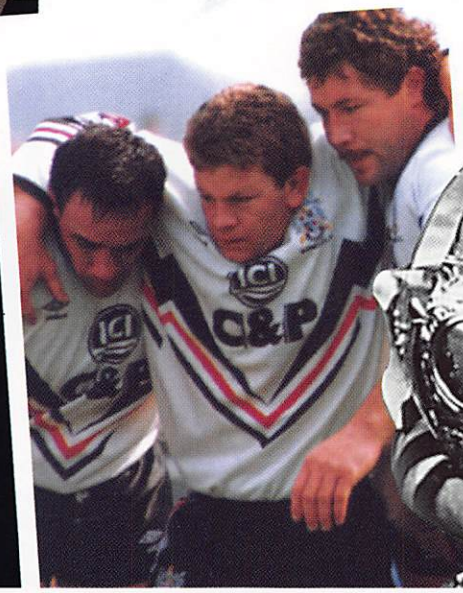
Directors: **A A Chambers** (Chairman), **S Evans, A Harris** (Deputy Chairmen), **T W Fleet** (Managing Director), **E Bate, R Brown, J A Hodgson, J Mills, A Murray, J H Quinn, F Vowles.**

Football Secretary: **Frank Myler**
Football Manager/
Head Coach: **Colin Whitfield**
Alliance Coach:
Bernard Long
General Manager:
Harold Lynskey
Hon. Surgeon: **Mr P Rostron**
Club Doctors: **Dr G Tandy** and **Dr P Stockton**
Physiotherapists:
K Fisher & D Vose
Hon Dental Surgeon;
Mr I Hawley
P.A. Announcer;
Chris Moore

TELEPHONE:
General: 0151-510 6005
Club Shop: 0151-420 0054
Fax: 0151-423 2720

CLUB HONOURS

Rugby League Champions
1977-78, 1987-88, 1988-89
Challenge Cup Winners
1930, 1937, 1964, 1975, 1979, 1981, 1984
Lancashire League Winners
1919-20
Lancashire Cup Winners
1945, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1991
John Player Trophy Winners
1976, 1979, 1992
Premiership Winners
1980, 1982, 1983, 1988, 1989, 1990
Floodlit Trophy Winners 1978
Charity Shield Winners
1988, 1989, 1990
European & World Club Champions
1989



Widnes Vikings Matchday Programme

Designed and Produced by Tobin Design and Steve Fox

Edited by Steve Fox
Editorial by Chris Westwood, Colin Pheysey, Rod Steele.
Photography by Russell Finney, Sportsphoto, Stuart Bogg, Darrell Cooper, League Express

Views expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editor or Widnes Vikings RLFC

VIKING NEWSLINES

WELL DONE TO U21S

Our second string kept up the pressure on Hunslet at the top of the Alliance Division One last Wednesday with a comprehensive thrashing of third placed Oldham by a score of 40-6. Tries came from Briers, Briggs, George, Redicliffe, Hill (2), goals from Jones (2) and Birdseye (6).

David Mills and Mike Hill were the stars of the pack. The threequarters played well together but when Paul George came on for the injured Jones the game stepped up a pace. Good yards and hard running from Adam Hughes gave the team plenty of scope. Briers looked impressive before retiring with blisters. Wiffa shone in bursts along with Kilgannon. In all, a good all round team performance that will but them in good stead for the forthcoming away game with Featherstone and then away to Batley.

TODAY'S SPONSORS

Big Match Hosts - Atlantic Leisure. See us at the stadium and save £££s on your next holiday. Specialists in the Canaries, Florida, South Africa, Cruises and others worldwide. See insert in programme to win a free luxury holiday. Tel. 0151 257 8606

Man of the Match - Spekehall Vauxhall, South Liverpool's only Vauxhall retailer. Their aim is to continually strive for excellence in customer satisfaction and enthusiasm in each of its departments, to the benefit of customers and staff alike.

They specialise in providing a friendly point of contact within its Sales and After-sales departments of the business, to both the private motorist and the corporate customer in the area.

NEW STOCK IN SHOP

We have some excellent new lines in stock at the shop at very reasonable prices. Gloves are £4.99, scarves £4.99 and T-shirts £4.99. Track suits (age 3/4 years, up to XL) start at £32.99. For £19.99 you can get one of our excellent fleeces, or if it's the wet weather you are worried about why not check out the waterproof short jackets at just £26.99.

These are just a few of the many bargains - call in and have a look.

WEST BANK BEARS

A warm welcome to West Bank Bears U8s and their counterparts from Saddleworth who will be providing the half-time entertainment today. We are sure you will give both teams a great reception.

LAST CALL FOR REPLICA JERSEYS!

This years' jerseys have been a runaway success and we are now down to the last few replicas in each size. After this batch we WILL NOT be getting any more in stock, so if you are intending to purchase one, act now or risk disappointment.

VIKING NEWSLINES

CREDIT CARD

A note to all those supporters who took out a Widnes RL Credit Card a year or two back - with effect from May the company issuing the cards will no longer be paying a commission to the club based on the amount you spend. Of course the cards are still valid and you may well decide to keep using yours but it is only fair to let you know that the club will no longer be seeing any benefit from you doing so.
We are currently investigating the possibility of a partnership with another credit card company and we will let you know the details if we are able to put a deal in place.

WORLD CUP

Although we will not have tickets on sale until July/August for the World Cup quarter final here at the Auto Quest Stadium, booking forms will be available within the next few weeks from the Club Shop.

TRAVEL TO YORK

Follow the M62 to Junction 34.
Take the A19 north to Selby/York.
Turn right onto the A64, and stay on this road until a left turn at the A1036 to York.
Go straight ahead at the first roundabout, then turn right by the big pub on the left.
Follow the signs for Pigeoncote Industrial and Shopping Estate.
The ground is behind the shopping centre.

VIKINGS TACKLE RACISM

Widnes Vikings are backing a thirteen point plan from the Rugby League to tackle racism. Spectators who indulge in racist chanting or abuse will be banned from the Auto Quest Stadium.

PROGRAMME COVER STARS

As well as our in form number nine Phil Cantillon, today's cover features a picture of Frank Myler in action for Widnes in the early 1960s.
Long before he captained Great Britain to an Ashes win in Australia on the 1970 Tour, Frank was a Rugby League legend as a strong running stand-off or centre with an eye for a try scoring opportunity. For many years he held the Widnes record for tries in a season. After his long and distinguished playing career came to end he became one of the top coaches in the game, taking charge at Naughton Park, Oldham as well as having charge of the 1984 GB Tour Down Under. Of course he is still very much involved in the sport as Football Secretary for the Vikings.

JUNIOR SEASON TICKETS

Under 16s season tickets are still on sale and are great value at just £15.

BALL BOY SPONSORS?

You will notice that the ballboys are resplendent in their new kit this week. If you or your company would like to sponsor the ballboys and have your name emblazoned upon the back of the tracksuits, please contact Harold at the shop on 0151 420 0054.

COLIN'S COLUMN

Due to circumstances beyond our control we have been unable to bring you Colin's column in this week's programme. It will return in time for our next home programme.

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vikings noticeboard

SUPPORTERS CLUB

The Supporters Club will be running trips to all our away games this season.
For details and to book your place, see Alan Rae by the bar in the South Stand at half time on match days or contact him at his shop in Sunningdale Avenue, te. 0151 424 2524.

LIFELINE

Over £1700 is paid out in prizes EVERY WEEK in the Widnes Vikings Lifeline.
If you would like to join - the cost is just £1 per week, or you would like to become a Lifeline Agent, contact the Club Shop on 0151 420 0054.
Remember, you will be helping the club with this vital fund raising initiative.

WIDNES INTERNET

Although the Vikings do not have an official Internet site, there is an excellent unofficial site at www.widnes.demon.co.uk/vikings where you can keep up with the latest news and match reports concerning your favourite team - the Widnes Vikings.

PAST PLAYERS

The Widnes club has a thriving Past Players Association, with regular get togethers of the men who have worn the famous Black & White jerseys.
Their Annual Dinner is one of the highlights of the calendar.
The man to contact for more information is Ray Owen.

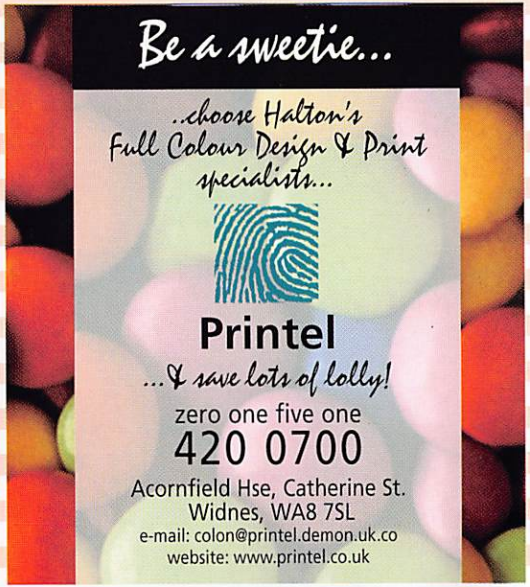
Contact List: General 0151 510 6005 • Club Shop 0151 420 0054
Fax 0151 423 2720 • Internet www.widnes.demon.co.uk/vikings

WIDNES VIKINGS 2000 FactFile

	V	K.O	Result	(H-T)	Referee	Pens.	Att.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
DECEMBER 1999																								*non-playing substitutes in brackets*
26 Leigh	A	3.00	L16-24	(8-10)	I Smith	7-3	4,468	MunroT	Cheetham	Leuila	Briers	VerbickasT	ManssonT	Donohue	Hansen	Cantillon	Eccles	DSmith	Adams	Myler	PSmith	Mann	Hill	GeeT
JANUARY 2000																								
2 LANCS LYNX	**H**	**3.00**	**W64-8**	**(26-8)**	**R Connolly**	6-3	**3,837**	**Munro3T**	**Cheetham**	**Briers2T**	**Percival**	**VerbickasT,10G**	**Mansson**	**Donohue2T**	**Hansen**	**CantillonT**	**Eccles2T**	**Gee**	**Mann**	**DSmith**	**Hulme**	**Leuila**	**Myler**	**Adams**
9 HUNSLET	**H**	**3.00**	**W30-21**	**(12-12)**	**S Nicholson**	7-6	**3,758**	**Munro**	**CheethamT**	**Percival**	**Briers**	**VerbickasT,5G**	**Mansson**	**DonohueT**	**HansenT**	**Cantillon**	**Eccles**	**DSmith**	**Mann**	**HulmeT**	**Myler**	**Adams**	**Leuila**	**Gee**
23 SWINTON	**H**	**3.00**	**W22-14**	**(10-4)**	**J Connolly**	12-4	**3,695**	**MunroT**	**Leuila**	**Myler**	**Percival**	**Verbickas5G**	**Mansson**	**Donohue**	**Hansen**	**Cantillon2T**	**Eccles**	**DSmith**	**Mann**	**Hulme**	**Long**	**Adams**	**Hill**	**Gee**
30 W HULL (SCCC3)	**H**	**3.00**	**W76-8**	**(40-2)**	**G Shaw**	9-8	**2,301**	**Munro2T**	**Briers**	**Percival2T**	**Leuila**	**VerbickasT,10G**	**Mansson**	**Donohue**	**HansenT**	**Cantillon4T**	**Eccles**	**Gee**	**Mann**	**HulmeT**	**CheethamT**	**Adams**	**Hill**	**DSmith2T**
FEBRUARY																								
6 Whitehaven	A	3.30	L6-13	(6-12)	P Lee	4-6	1,384	Munro	Cheetham	Percival	Leuila	VerbickasG	ManssonT	Hulme	Hansen	Cantillon	Eccles	DSmith	Adams	Gee	Long	Mann	Hill	O'Neill
13 Dewsbury (SCCC4)	A	3.00	L16-29	(8-12)	J Connolly	7-14	2,455	Munro	CheethamT	Percival	Leuila	Verbickas2G	Mansson	Hulme	Hansen	Cantillon	EcclesT	Mann	Adams	DSmith	(Myler)	Fitzpatrick	Hill	GeeT
20 BARROW	**H**	**3.00**	**W17-10**	**(16-4)**	**P Taberner**	8-7	**3,058**	**Munro**	**Cheetham**	**Percival**	**Myler**	**Verbickas2G**	**Mansson**	**Fitzpatrickdg**	**Eccles**	**CantillonT**	**Mann**	**Gee2T**	**DSmith**	**Hulme**	**(Leuila)**	**Hill**	**Hansen**	**Adams**
27 SHEFFIELD	**H**	**3.00**	**W3-0**	**(2-0)**	**P Lee**	5-7	**2,871**	**Munro**	**Cheetham**	**Percival**	**Myler**	**VerbickasG**	**Mansson**	**Fitzpatrickdg**	**Argent**	**Cantillon**	**Eccles**	**Gee**	**DSmith**	**Hulme**	**Leuila**	**Hansen**	**(Donohue)**	**Mann**
MARCH																								
1 Rochdale	A	7.30	W34-8	(20-4)	K Kirkpatrick	13-12	807	Munro	Cheetham	Myler	Percival	Verbickas3T,5G	Mansson	Fitzpatrick	Argent	Cantillon	EcclesT	GeeT	DSmithT	Hulme	Leuila	Hansen	Donohue	Mann
5 Workington	A	3.00	L10-16	(6-10)	R Silverwood	9-11	882	Munro	Cheetham	Percival	Myler	VerbickasG	ManssonT	Fitzpatrick	Argent	Cantillon	EcclesT	Gee	DSmith	Hulme	(Leuila)	Hansen	Donohue	Mann
12 OLDHAM	**H**	**3.00**																						
19 York	A	3.00																						
26 BATLEY	**H**	**3.00**																						
APRIL																								
2 Hull KR	A	3.00																						
also TransPennine Final																								
9 KEIGHLEY	**H**	**3.00**																						
16 Dewsbury	A	3.00																						
21 LEIGH	**H**	**3.00**																						
24 Lancs Lynx	A	3.00																						
30 DONCASTER	**H**	**3.00**																						
MAY																								
7 Featherstone	A	3.00																						
14 Hunslet	A	3.30																						
21 ROCHDALE	**H**	**3.00**																						
26 Swinton	A	7.30																						
29 WHITEHAVEN	**H**	**3.00**																						
JUNE																								
4 Barrow	A	3.00																						
11 WORKINGTON	**H**	**3.00**																						
18 Oldham	A	3.00																						
25 HULL KR	**H**	**3.00**																						
JULY																								
2 Batley	A	3.00																						

NFP LEAGUE TABLE (at 6/3/00)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	Pts
Leigh	9	7	0	2	268	156	112	14
Dewsbury	8	7	0	1	187	84	103	14
Featherstone	9	6	1	2	227	141	86	13
Hull K R	9	6	1	2	139	90	49	13
Doncaster	8	6	0	2	191	89	102	12
WIDNES	9	6	0	3	202	114	88	12
Swinton	8	5	0	3	199	145	54	10
Barrow	8	5	0	3	203	158	45	10
OLDHAM	8	5	0	3	194	158	36	10
Whitehaven	8	4	0	4	155	131	24	8
Keighley	8	4	0	4	173	162	11	8
Batley	8	3	0	5	130	183	-53	6
Hunslet	8	2	0	6	130	171	-41	4
Sheffield	9	2	0	7	122	173	-51	4
Rochdale	8	2	0	6	154	223	-69	4
Workington	8	2	0	6	107	232	-125	4
York	8	1	0	7	80	202	-122	2
Lancashire L	9	1	0	8	110	359	-249	2



TOP TRIES

Weston	Doncaster	11
Sini	Doncaster	10
Flynn	Dewsbury	9
Frazer	Whitehaven	9
Cantillon	Widnes	8
Cross	Leigh	8
Hall	Doncaster	8
Sibson	Oldham	8
Booth	York	7
Coley	Swinton	7
Coussons	Swinton	7
Craig	Swinton	7
Fairclough	Leigh	7
Lee	Keighley	7
Magorian	Barrow	7
Munro	Widnes	7
Verbickas	Widnes	7
Wray	Hull KR	7

TOP GOALS

Rooney	Featherstone	53
Eaton	Dewsbury	48
Verbickas	Widnes	42
Holt	Barrow	37
Wingfield, P	Leigh	35
Watson	Swinton	34
Hewitt	Hull KR	28
Wood	Keighley	27
Rich	Oldham	24

TOP POINTS

Rooney	Featherstone	127
Verbickas	Widnes	112
Eaton	Dewsbury	102
Holt	Barrow	87
Wingfield, P	Leigh	82
Watson	Swinton	72
Booth	York	68
Wood	Keighley	65
Dorahy	Rochdale	58
Sibson	Oldham	58
Hewitt	Hull KR	56
Rich	Oldham	56
Weston	Doncaster	54

NFP LEAGUE GATES

	High	*Low*	*Average*
Widnes	*3837*	*2871*	3442
Leigh	*4468*	*2070*	2907
Hull K R	*3402*	*2007*	2532
Keighley	*2809*	*2422*	2530
Oldham	*3562*	*1522*	2438
Dewsbury	*3180*	*1469*	2082
Featherstone	*2589*	*1867*	2044
Doncaster	*2130*	*1768*	1963
Sheffield	*2732*	*1278*	1874
Hunslet	*2054*	*997*	1384
Swinton	*2567*	*885*	1376
Batley	*2381*	*748*	1354
Whitehaven	*1548*	*927*	1315
Barrow	*1637*	*871*	1310
Rochdale	*2112*	*784*	1132
York	*1554*	*701*	1060
Workington	*1111*	*882*	973
Lancashire L	*888*	*223*	426

APPEARANCES & SCORERS

	1999/2000						WIDNES CAREER					
	App	Sub	T	G	dg	Pts	App	Sub	T	G	dg	Pts
Adams, Gareth	3	5	0	0	0	0	26	9	5	0	0	20
Argent, Steve	3	0	0	0	0	0	7	8	1	0	0	4
Briers, James	4	0	2	0	0	8	32	11	11	0	0	44
Cantillon, Phil	11	0	8	0	0	32	46	0	22	0	0	88
Cheetham, Andy	9	1	3	0	0	12	9	1	3	0	0	12
Donohue, Jason	5	2	3	0	0	12	5	2	3	0	0	12
Eccles, Cliff	11	0	5	0	0	20	11	0	5	0	0	20
Fitzpatrick, Karl	4	1	0	0	2	2	4	1	0	0	2	2
Gee, Steve	7	4	5	0	0	20	7	4	5	0	0	20
Hansen, Lee	7	4	2	0	0	8	96	6	7	0	0	28
Hill, Mike	0	6	0	0	0	0	4	19	1	0	0	4
Hulme, David	9	1	2	0	0	8	429	34	160	0	1	623
Leuila, Afi	5	4	0	0	0	0	5	4	0	0	0	0
Long, Karl	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	8	2	0	0	8
Mann, George	6	5	0	0	0	0	34	11	4	0	0	16
Mansson, Paul	11	0	3	0	0	12	41	1	17	0	0	68
Munro, Damian	11	0	7	0	0	28	65	0	39	2	0	160
Myler, Danny	6	2	0	0	0	0	44	26	14	15	0	86
O'Neill, Andy	0	1	0	0	0	0	11	17	0	0	0	0
Percival, Chris	10	0	2	0	0	8	53	11	19	0	0	76
Smith, Dave	10	1	3	0	0	12	18	13	5	0	0	20
Smith, Peter	0	1	0	0	0	0	98	6	36	0	0	144
Verbickas, Simon	11	0	7	42	0	112	29	0	21	49	0	182

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Entertainment

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Function Suites

The Auto Quest Stadium has the two most prestigious facilities in Halton to host your functions, offering great food at competitive prices in a relaxed atmosphere. From a dinner for 350 to a christening for 10, the Bridge and River Suites can accommodate your requirements. A unique setting for your wedding, conference or any occasion whether business or pleasure.

VIKING VISITORS OLDHAM RLFC

CRAIG BARKER Local lad who was with the Bears before signing for the Roughyeds when one club died and the other was born in 1997. A stand-off half with a neat pair of hands, this product of the Waterhead amateur club is still waiting for the opportunity to command a senior place consistently. **KEITH BRENNAN** A late entrant into the pro ranks, Keith played for Higginshaw and Shaw Rhinos before impressing as an amateur for Oldham towards the end of the 1999 season. Did enough to be offered a contract for 2000 at the age of 25. An extremely accomplished scrum half who is expected to push player-coach Mike Ford all the way for the number 7 jersey. **MARK CAMPBELL** One of 16 new boys brought to the club by Mike Ford during the first two months of the player-coach's reign. Formerly with Leeds Rhinos and Keighley Cougars. A 28-year-old hard-working back-row forward. **LEO CASEY** Needs no introduction. A tough prop, who played with the former Oldham club, Featherstone Rovers, Swinton and Rochdale Hornets before signing for the Roughyeds for the 1999 season. Captained the side and, at the age of 32, became a firm favourite with the crowd. An Irish international, he was the first and only Oldham player to command a transfer fee of £100,000 when Peter Fox took him to Featherstone. **JASON CLEGG** A product of Littleborough RL club, this heavyweight prop turned pro for Bradford Bulls and had a stint with Batley before signing for the Roughyeds shortly after the club was formed. Made a first team place his own property in 1999 and earned selection for the West of Pennines side against an East side coached by Mike Ford. **MIKE FORD** A scrum half who has been making the right sort of headlines all his sporting life. Played for Wigan at Wembley when only 19. Also starred for Leigh, Oldham, Castleford, Warrington, Wakefield and South Queensland Crushers. Toured down under with Great Britain in 1988. Coached Bramley to mid-table respectability in 1999 before landing the Oldham job. **ANTHONY GIBBONS** One half of the twin combination which played for Leeds Rhinos and Bramley before joining Oldham at the start of the 2000 season. A utility back, 23-year-old Anthony is earmarked to play right centre. **DAVID GIBBONS** The other twin. Like brother Anthony, David turned pro with Leeds Rhinos as a 17-year-old to follow in the footsteps of their uncle, Neil Hague. Both became household names at Headingley and played more than 20 senior games, including several in the first Super League season of 1996. **DANNY GUEST** This 22-year-old, 18 stone prop was an up-and-coming youngster with the Bears. He played for the Roughyeds in the new club's first ever, and historic, game at Rochdale on January 1 1998, but then joined Keighley on a round-robin return to the Roughyeds via Lancashire Lynx. **JOEY HAYES** A young winger who has crammed a lot into his relatively short spell as a pro. Made his name with St. Helens, for whom he played in a Regal Trophy final and a Super League Premiership final to earn a place on the Great Britain tour squad which went to New Zealand, Fiji and Papua New Guinea in 1996. Suffered a setback with a serious knee injury, but fought back to play 11 Super League games with Salford Reds in 1999. **CHRIS HOLLAND** Aged 21 and a product of the youth game in Wigan, Chris has played for England and Great Britain Students and took the man-of-the-match award in England's defeat by New Zealand at Hull in the last World Cup. **JOHN HOUGH** Will go down in local RL history as the first player to sign for the new Oldham club when it was launched in the autumn of 1997. Has had two cracking seasons in 1998 and 1999, when he took the club's player of the year award. A native of Oldham, John played more than 30 senior games for Warrington. **KEVIN MANNION** Another Wiganer, 22-year-old Kevin is a ball-playing loose-forward who made his senior debut with Rochdale Hornets when only 16.

AIDIE MEAD Starting his third season with the Roughyeds after playing initially for the Bears. Did well as a centre in the Bears Alliance team of 1997, but prefers wing. **JOE MCNICHOLAS** Played his first senior game in the Bears' last match at Leeds. Broke his leg for the Roughyeds in the new club's first league game at Workington and missed the rest of the 1998 season. **CHRIS NAYLOR** A young prop formerly with the Academy sides at St. Helens and Salford. Big and strong, Chris played for England in the last Students World Cup. **ANDY PROCTOR** Named captain of the club by Ford for the 2000 season. This former Saddleworth, Wakefield Trinity, Oldham and Bramley prop forward, now aged 30, won a man of steel award while with Trinity, as the club was then called. **PAT RICH** Another of the younger signings, 21-year-old Pat is a native of the North East. Played regular senior rugby for Keighley in 1999, while studying for a law degree at Leeds. **WES ROGERS** A strong second-row forward, Wes has joined his home-town club after stints with Widnes and Swinton. **MARK SIBSON** An exciting full-back and goal kicker, this 23-year-old played for Loughborough University for four years before turning out for Castleford's Alliance side. **IAN SINFIELD** Local lad, Ian signed for an played Super League rugby with Salford before joining the Roughyeds in 1998. **NATHAN VARLEY** One of the best tacklers in the club, Nathan played for the Roughyeds in 1998 and 1999 after signing from Bradford. Missed much of the last season, but is fully fit now and raring to go in the new millennium.

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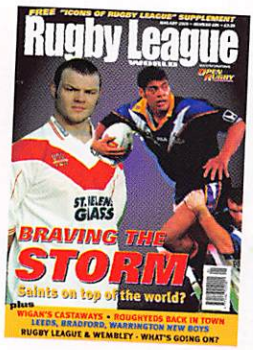


QUESTION TIME

1. Last week's result at Workington was a particularly disappointing one but of course it is not the first time we've come a cropper at Derwent Park.
Readers might recall that we lost there in a Lancashire Cup tie in August 1991 when we had a team full of superstars - that was the first game of Frank Myler's second spell in charge. One name conspicuous by its absence from the Widnes team sheet that day was Martin Offiah who was just starting his long dispute with the club prior to his move to Wigan.
What we want to know is which player, a Cumbrian, wore the Widnes number five jersey in that first match of the post-Offiah era?

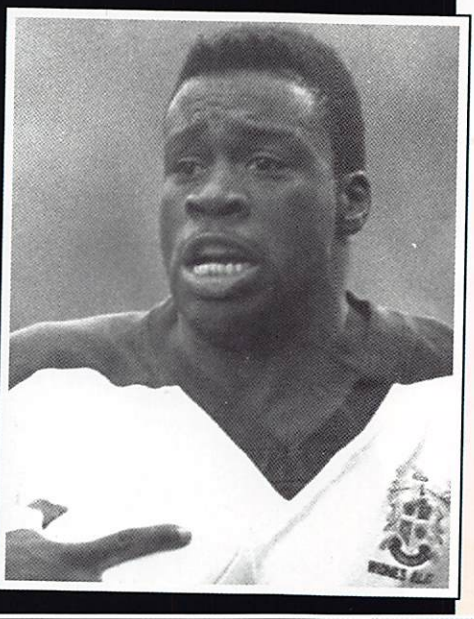
2. Which two former Widnes players have coached Oldham in the past fifteen years? A clue is that one of them was in the Vikings first team as recently as 1998.

3. Today we could well see David Hulme and Mike Ford on opposite sides for the umpteenth time in their careers. But what distinction do they share with a select band of players including David Plange, Terry O'Connor and Bobbie Goulding?

4. From which club did Oldham sign Afi Leuila?

5. For no particular reason the next question concerns the Salford squad for the 1998 season. Of the players who made first team appearances for the Reds that season no less than eight have played for Widnes at some stage of their careers. Can you name them? Actually we reckon that if you can get five you are doing pretty well.

Answers on William Boot page



Martin Offiah.... see question one

today's mascots

Thomas Sweeney is six years old and attends Ravensbank First School in Worcester. He likes all sport and would like to play rugby. His favourite player is Simon Verbickas.

Adam Hartshorn is eleven and lives in St Helens. He goes to Sherdley County Primary School and Adam is also a fan of Simon Verbickas.

1. REARRANGE THESE LETTERS FOR THE NAME OF A POPULAR WIDNES PLAYER: VAIN COMB KISSER

2. WHERE DO OLDHAM PLAY THEIR HOME GAMES?

3. NEITHER TEAM SCORED A TRY IN THE GAME AGAINST SHEFFIELD TWO WEEKS AGO. THE SAME THING HAPPENED LAST YEAR IN A GAME WE WON 6-2. WHO WERE WE PLAYING THEN?

4. HOW MANY POINTS FOR SEVEN TRIES, THREE GOALS AND A DROP GOAL?

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Welcome To The New Willennium!

WILLIAM BOOT

After the bitter disappointment at Workington, the Rochdale win seems a long time ago, even though it was only ten days past.
But there were plenty of good points at Spotland, enough to suggest that the performance at Derwent Park was a temporary blip. For example the length of the field try started by Chris Percival and finished by Simon Verbickas was one of the best we've scored in many a year.
Actually I don't think that was my favourite part of the evening. The moment which will live longest in my memory is when the PA announcer informed everyone that Jason Donovan was on the Widnes' substitutes bench. We should be so lucky (not!).

Jason Donovan

Another thing which made me laugh was a letter in League Express last week from a Wigan fan saying how much she enjoyed watching NFP rugby at Leigh.
Nothing wrong with that in itself, except she went on to say: "they have arguably the best ground outside Super League." I have been racking my brains to see if I can think of any better grounds than Hilton Park in the NFP. So far I have only come up with Widnes, Swinton, Featherstone, Oldham, Keighley, Hunslet, Sheffield, Rochdale and York. Although I suppose you could also make a pretty good case for Dewsbury, Hull KR, Doncaster, Barrow, Lancashire, Batley, Whitehaven and even Workington. Have I missed anyone out?

Some bloke stood near me last week was slagging off individuals in the Widnes team within the first two minutes of the game.
There's nothing like supporting your team, is there and you wonder why on earth people like that bother making a 300 mile round trip just to moan.
Anyway his analysis had to be taken with a pinch of salt given that he shouted "come on Simon" the first time Danny Myler had the ball and then "well tackled Cliff" after a particularly fine stop by Steve Gee.

I didn't hear that hatchet job on Super League broadcast by Five Live a week last Thursday having gone to see Toy Story 2 instead (which I'd thoroughly recommend, certainly in preference to self important radio programmes - and don't leave before the end credits).
Anyway, back to Five Live and although I didn't hear it, I read enough about it and heard a sufficient number of trailers to know that it was the usual nonsense trotted out by the media concerning the News Co contract and all that flowed from it. Heaven knows, I'm no apologist for Super League and I'm certainly no friend of

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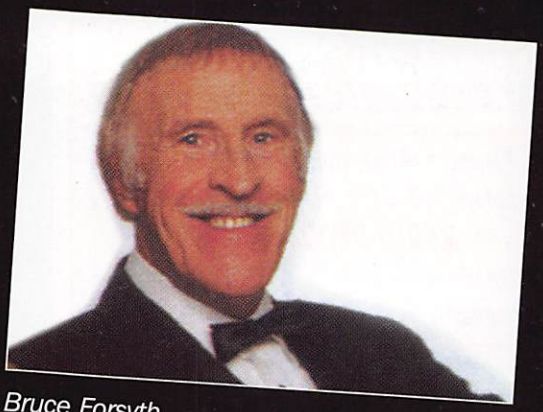
Mr Murdoch (not that he is losing any sleep over that state of affairs) but I do object to our sport being singled out for attack because of the financial travails of some clubs. If you were to take a look at just about any Nationwide league soccer club their balance sheets would make us appear like millionaires in comparison and they've also had a few bob of Sky's money over recent times as well, have they not?.

I also object to blatant distortion of the facts and that is what is going on when people complain that there is no RL on telly any more because Sky have got it all.

The truth is that the only rugby which Sky have which the BBC used to have are the internationals and even there the Beeb still get highlights. The Regal Trophy has gone altogether, of course, but that was inevitable once the decision was made to switch to the summer and the extra Challenge Cup coverage almost makes up. In the dim and distant the BBC did used to show the County Cups but they lost interest in these in the late 1980's (local commercial TV screened the last two or three years), something which may well have helped hasten the demise of those famous old competitions.

And as for league rugby - well that just makes my blood boil. I was talking to a mate not long ago who had clearly swallowed the media hype, hook line and sinker. "It was better when we used to have league games shown on the BBC instead of Sky" he said. It may well have been, but you'd have to have a pretty long memory to recall the time when the Beeb last showed championship matches live. It certainly goes back to the Eddie Waring era, which places it at least before 1982, probably further still in the mists of time.

For all those subsequent years the rights to the Slalom Lager/Stones Bitter Championship were going begging. Granada and Yorkshire TV dabbled with them for a while, but at any time the Beeb could probably have secured league rugby on a twenty year contract for the price of one of Bruce Forsyth's wigs. But did they bother? Of course they bloody didn't. They were happy to skim off the cream, being the cup comps, to pay peanuts for international rugby on annual contracts, to allocate us thirty seconds per year on the Sports Review and generally to use us as filler material on



Bruce Forsyth

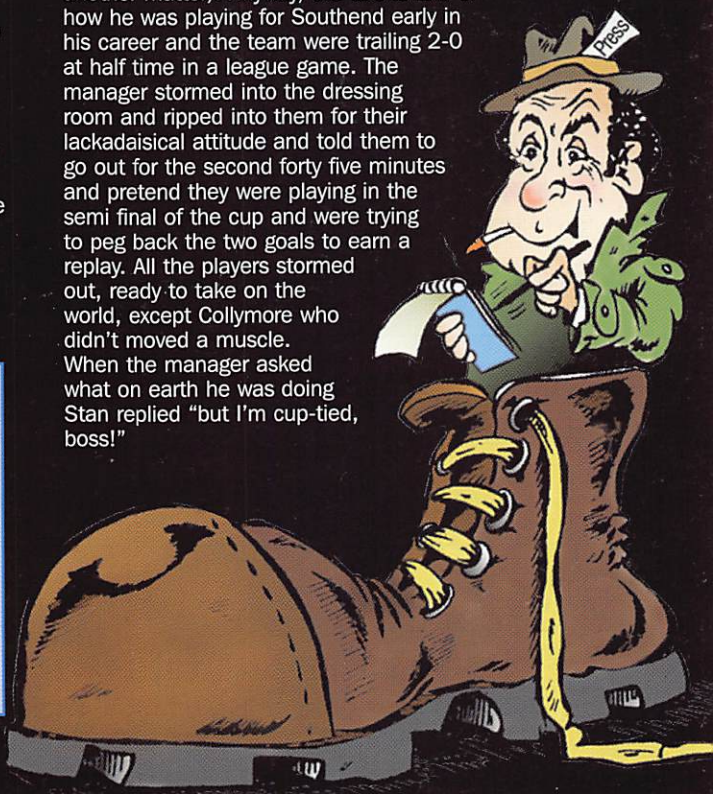
Grandstand. And now that another broadcaster has come along who takes Rugby League seriously (albeit because of the lucrative Australian markets, but that's another story) the Corporation are squealing like stuck pigs.

Can we expect a follow up programme from the holier-than-thou On The Line team concerning the appalling treatment meted out to RL by the BBC over the past thirty years or more? And if not, why not?

■ **The following story has absolutely nothing to do with RL but it is so good I just had to pass it on to you.**

It concerns Stan Collymore who gets a bad press, to say the very least, but who is apparently an extremely funny bloke (although whether Ulrika would agree is another matter). Anyway, the tale is told of how he was playing for Southend early in his career and the team were trailing 2-0 at half time in a league game. The manager stormed into the dressing room and ripped into them for their lackadaisical attitude and told them to go out for the second forty five minutes and pretend they were playing in the semi final of the cup and were trying to peg back the two goals to earn a replay. All the players stormed out, ready to take on the world, except Collymore who didn't moved a muscle.

When the manager asked what on earth he was doing Stan replied "but I'm cup-tied, boss!"



QUESTION TIME.

1. Paul Davidson! 2. Frank Myler, John Fieldhouse. 3. Both have played at Wembley as schoolboys and in a Challenge Cup final. 4. St Helens. 5. Gary Broadbent, Cliff Eccles, Esene Faimalo, Phil Hassan, David Hulme, Andy Platt, Luke Saveliio, Phil Waring.

JUNIOR QUIZ.

1. Simon Verbickas. 2. Boundary Park. 3. Rochdale. 4. Thirty-five.

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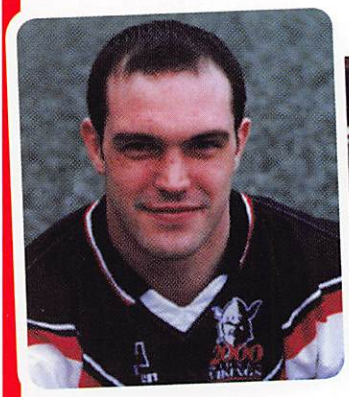

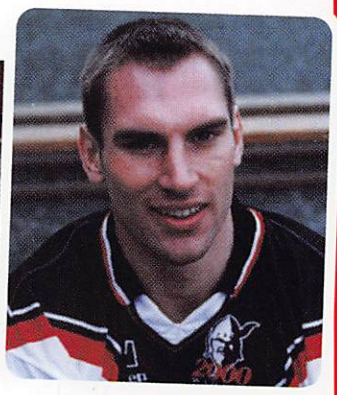

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TRAINSPOTTING

We are really paranoid, well not paranoid, but extremely sensitive about our television commentators aren't we?

Every programme (sorry, match day magazine) writer and contributor to the prestigious Rugby Leaguer Letters to the Editor section has a go...and often with plenty of justification. But there's more to it than that. Take Stuart Hall, sometime colleague of Eddie Waring on It's A Knockout, currently fronting the JIB Sports advertising campaign and, importantly, a soccer (I'll never call it football) commentator on Radio Five Live. Why was it OK for Hall to front one of the tackiest (and this is going some) game shows ever to grace our telly and not lose credibility for his sport like Eddie is perceived to have done? Why are the surreal ramblings which constitute his post match summaries not held up to ridicule in the same way that Eddie's more fanciful outpourings were? Easy: there are many soccer commentators on radio and TV, so Hall's rococo style is balanced out, it was the same when the team from Billericay played their joker and when he's trying to flog JJB's end of range bargains.

All Rugby League had was Eddie. He truly was the voice of Rugby League. Waring mangled the language, reinforced all sorts of stereotypes and quite often didn't interpret play all that well. But he sure knew his Rugby League, as his CV shows.

Mike Stephenson has a lot in common with Eddie Waring. He's a Dewsbury lad, he's a bit quirky with his use of English and he says lots of things that the expert fan (and aren't we all experts?) disagrees with. He also knows his Rugby League. The difference is that he has a counterpoint in the rather more urbane Eddie Hemmings, he has far better production values than Eddie Waring, who didn't have the luxury of even the most primitive form of action replay for instance.

And there's the rub. Stevo is the Eddie Waring of today and I reckon he makes, on the whole, a good job of it. Yet the current BBC incumbents, with all their improved production values, albeit nowhere near as good as SKY's, don't seem to be hacking it. If Eddie Waring had had all those toys at his disposable, he would have been unstoppable. I don't want to have a go at Ray French because; I've done it before, I like him, and whatever you say it doesn't make any difference. We all know what his peccadilloes are, although he called some brilliant games at the back end of the Challenge Cup last year.

Jonathan Davies on the other hand is another proposition. We've talked about his siren like voice, his lack of touch with the current game and the fact that he only got the job because he used to be a Rugby Union player as well. The reason he is a different proposition is that there are loads of his contemporaries who are more articulate, use their voices better and have an exclusively Rugby League pedigree - I offer you Paul Cullen as an example. Who could replace Ray? Not John Champion, he does soccer on Saturdays and people are already starting to have a go at him because he's a smart a**e.

Which brings me to the point where I once again reiterate the idea that whoever it is, people will have a go at them because, well, your supposed to aren't you?

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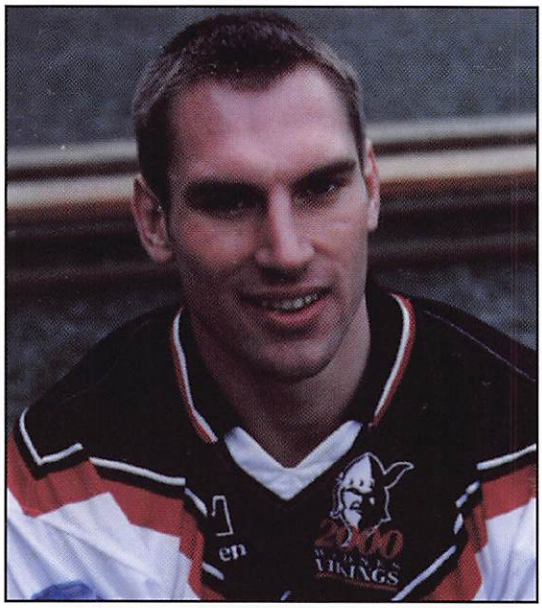
memories ARE MADE OF THIS

There have been plenty of big games between Oldham and Widnes down the years but, despite both clubs having collected plenty of silverware between them, we have yet to meet in the final of a major cup competition.

Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that the Roughyeds most succesful periods, prior to 1930 and the during the 1950s, were two eras in which our club was relatively week. On the other hand Oldham weren't so strong when we were in our pomp in the 1930s, 70s and 80s.

There won't be too many people here today who remember it, but arguably the most importand meeting between the sides was in 1934 in the semi final of the Challenge Cup. We were bidding to reach our second Wembley final in five years whereas Oldham were bidding for their first visit to the twin towers. The game, played at Swinton in front of a crowd of 17,577 payinfg £1,050, was a close one but we prevailed by the score of 7-4 before going on to lose in the final against Hunslet.



As all students of the game will know, Oldham are still waiting for their first visit to Wembley some sixty-odd years later and on the occasion when they came closest to achieving that there was also a Widnes connection. The cup semi final draw of 1964 saw us paired with Castleford and Oldham drawn to play Hull KR. Amazingly both ties finished all square - the only time that has happened in the Wembeley era, with our game seing a 7-7 scoreline and the Robins-Roughyeds encounter resulting in an equally dour 5-5 draw.

Our replay, in Castleford's backyard in Wakefield, was another close encounter but we triumphed by a score of 7-5. Over at Swinton history was being made. The scores were once more level, 14-14 at eighty minutes but Oldham had established a 17-14 lead over the Humbersiders in extra time. A Widnes-Oldham Challenge Cup final beckoned, but the lack of floodliights at the Swinton venue meant that the light wasn't good enough to play out the full period of extra time and so the match was abandoned. The Roughyeds chance had gone and they were well beaten by 12-2 in the third game.

A footnote to those amazing sequence of matches is that all five attracted attendances in excess of 25,000, no mean feat given that the replays were played in midweek in an era before motorways.

Of the several other occasions when Oldham came close to reaching Wembley, the 1990 campaign stands out not just because they were a second division side who were cruelly denied a final place by a late disallowed try in the semi against Warrington, but also because they achieved a shock 16-4 win against a star-studded Widnes team in the semi-final here on Lowerhouse Lane, with a couple of ex-Chemics Keith Newton and Duncan Platt doing the damage that day

One game that the Roughyed fans will not thank us for recalling is last season's match at the Auto Quest when we racked up a club record victory of 84-0 against a visiting team severely depleted by injuries. Phil Cantillon (pictured) was our hero that day, bagging five tries to equal the club record.

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the Pheysey FILE

It's about time we came up with some positives about Rugby League after the negatives of last week's report on Super League. The On The Line programme, on Radio 5, presented an in-depth view of Super League via the thesis of a Sheffield University student.

The research evidence claimed that when Super League started five years ago its performance criteria was increased crowds, establishment of clubs in development areas, a larger TV audience and greater sponsorship in terms of the number of sponsors and the amount of sponsorship achieved. On all counts Super League has apparently failed, other than to have slight increases on average attendances. There are no new clubs in development areas – gone are Paris, Sheffield and Gateshead. Despite the superb coverage of RL on Sky TV, audiences are tiny in comparison to those who watched RL on Grandstand on Saturday afternoons. Smaller TV audiences have apparently reduced the amount of sponsorship received by the game as a whole and for SL clubs in particular. Even the Challenge Cup format has been criticised because of the failure of NFP clubs to offer any meaningful resistance to SL clubs. So I have decided to find some good news of my own about the NFP and share it with you. Elsewhere in the programme this season we have seen figures which reflect a steady increase in attendances for most clubs. But those who scrutinise such figures carefully suggest that the totals so far may not be an improvement on last year overall. But, I am here to tell you that they are! If we look at the games played so far this season and compare them with the identical fixture last season, we can achieve a direct comparison. The table below shows who has had the largest total increases in numbers and also in percentage terms. Remember that last year not all teams played each other home and away. We also have to ignore attendances for teams who have played Sheffield Eagles at home this year because there was no corresponding fixture last year.

As you can see, almost every club has increased attendances when comparing this years attendance figures with those of the same fixture last year. Eleven clubs have shown an increase in attendances for every comparable home game played so far. Hunslet, it appears, are this seasons only losers.

	Difference	% Diff
Widnes	3849	89
Doncaster	3674	88
Leigh	3366	58
Dewsbury	3238	47
Oldham	2210	44
Keighley	2054	41
Featherstone	1706	41
Swinton	1335	37
Hull KR	1253	36
Barrow	993	36
Rochdale	993	32
Batley	901	26
Whitehaven	830	26
York	687	24
Workington	669	18
Lancs Lynx	100	9
Hunslet	-934	-17

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TODAY IN THE NFP

With Dewsbury in action at Leeds last Friday in the Quarter Final of the Challenge Cup, their game against York has been rescheduled. But apart from that game there is a full programme of fixtures in the NFP today. Incidentally, if the Rams beat the Wasps then they will be assured a place in the final of the Trans-Pennine Trophy against Leigh.

DONCASTER v HUNSLET

The Dragons came through a potentially tricky derby game at Sheffield last Sunday with a win that was more convincing than the 16-10 scoreline suggests, since they scored four tries to the Eagles one. Just a week earlier they had put up a highly creditable performance at Wigan and it seems that St John Ellis has done a fine job in moulding together his big-money team into a well organised unit which plays a good brand of football.

It might be a little too strong to say that the Hawks are in crisis but the latest high-profile departures from South Leeds Stadium - Greame Hallas and Dean Hanger - suggest that all is not well in David Plange's squad. He is now left to rely on a very youthful team and it will be a major test of his coaching credentials as to whether he can improve on their current record of just two wins from eight games.

Editor's Verdict: Doncaster have been very clinical so far this season and I don't expect them to slip up against the Hawks.

FEATHERSTONE v BATLEY

Rovers are one of the form teams in the division at present having won their last five games and they are also scoring plenty of points into the bargain. Teenage halfback Jamie Rooney continues to be the driving force behind the success but a big blow to the men from Post Office Road will be the loss to Salford of Brad Hepi. The arrival of the experienced Kiwi coincided with their recent revival and they will certainly miss his power in midfield.

Ex-Rovers coach David Ward will lack nothing in motivation as he takes a side full of former Featherstone lads back to their old stomping ground. The Bulldogs form this season has been a real mystery. On their travels they have won three out of four, including a 32-16 drubbing of Swinton on their last road game, which is playoff form. But they still haven't managed a single win on their own paddock. It was a similar story last year and one which Ward must solve if his team are to achieve their potential.

Editor's Verdict: Every week I predict one or two shock results and every week there are one or two shock results...though not the ones I've plumped for. I'll stick my neck out and take the Bulldogs to extend their good away form.

HULL KR v WHITEHAVEN

The Robins put behind them the disappointment of that controversial defeat against Leigh with a resounding victory at Batley last weekend.

Kiwi halfback Leroy Joe at last seems to be finding his feet following his move from Whitehaven and Mark Hewitt is earning glowing reports for his all-round play as well as his goalkicking.

Whitehaven are another enigma club. They followed up a 98-0 drubbing at Wigan with their first away win of the season at Rochdale and then lost their 100% home record at the hands of Swinton. Last week's loss probably had something to do with the absence of hooker Aaron Lester (pictured) who coach Kevin Tamati

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has admitted is at the heart of most of his team's good work.
Editor's Verdict: Whitehaven normally don't like travelling to Lancashire, let alone to the East coast, so expect a comfortable home win in this one.

KEIGHLEY v SHEFFIELD

After their recent big win over Dewsbury and 28-8 up at half time against high flying Leigh last week, it all seemed set fair for the Cougars for another big scalp. But the Centurions bounced back for a sensational 36-28 win which will have been a big blow to the confidence of the Keighley side.
Sheffield continue to trouble most sides in the competition - they ran Doncaster close following on from that nail biter at the Auto Quest a fortnight ago - but their big problem is that they just aren't scoring enough tries. Their thin squad is also stretched to the limit by a number of injuries to key players.
Editor's Verdict: Expect the Eagles to give a good account of themselves but to be unable to outscore the free flowing Cougars.

LANCASHIRE LYNX v LEIGH

The plight of the Lynx was epitomised when three of their players failed to turn up last week and coach Steve Hampson was forced to register himself as a player only minutes before the game at Oldham, which predictably resulted in a fifty point mauling. Hampo was threatening to seek employment elsewhere if the situation at the club did not improve, with a role as personal trainer to golfer Darren Clarke being one possibility.
Leigh, on the other hand, are riding the crest of a wave. Five successive wins include consecutive away victories at Hull KR and Keighley. Alan Cross and Andy Fairclough are their in-form players with eight and seven tries respectively.
Editor's Verdict: The League Against Cruel Sports should have something to say about this mis-match. I tip Leigh to win by the odd point or two.

ROCHDALE v WORKINGTON

We recently triumphed comfortably at Rochdale and then lost at Workington five days later so a form line might suggest a Town win. But of course sport doesn't always work out like that. Much will depend on whether Aussies Dane Dorahy and Shayne McMenemy return for the Hornets and whether they can improve a somewhat leaky defence.
Although Workington worked extremely hard for their win last week they didn't look too threatening with the ball in their hands and they will need some inspiration from the likes of Dave Watson if they are to pick up another two points.
Editor's Verdict: A tough one to call but I'll go with Rochdale.

SWINTON v BARROW

The Lions are another team who must frustrate their supporters. A shock home reverse against Batley was followed by a superb win up at the Recreation Ground, Whitehaven. Former Salford centre Phil Coussons was in irresistible form last week and he is the man who Barrow will need to watch closely.

The Raiders put in an excellent performance here at the Auto Quest a few weeks ago, with halves Darren Holt and Tane Manihera (pictured) bossing the show. Much attention will focus on recent recruit from Aussie RL, fullback Rod Maybon.
Editor's Verdict: The Raiders to trouble the Lions but the home side to emerge victorious.

WIDNES v OLDHAM

Can our lads bounce back from last week's shocker at lowly Workington? With a tough month of fixtures to come in April it is vital that we get back on the winning trail immediately.
After a couple of defeats, the Roughyeds got back to winning ways by putting a half century on whipping boys Lancashire Lynx. And although it is a vastly different (and stronger) Oldham side than that which came to the Auto Quest last year, they might feel they have a score to settle on behalf of their club following our 64-0 win in this fixture in 99.
Editor's Verdict: No prediction!

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