

# RAIDERS TEAM TALK

<b>BARROW RAIDERS</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>OLDHAM</b>
CRAIG BOWER	1	GAVIN DODD
JAMIE MARSHALL	2	CHRIS CAMPBELL
PAUL JONES	3	PAUL ANDERSON
ANDY McCLURE	4	JON GODDARD
SHANE IRABOR	5	CHRIS IRWIN
PAUL EVANS	6	SIMON SVABIC
CHRIS ARCHER	7	NEIL RODEN
TAU LIKU	8	STEVE MOLLOY
DAVE CLARK	9	JOHN HOUGH
STEVE JACKSON	10	DAVE MORGAN
JAMES KING	11	LEE DORAN
PAUL LUPTON	12	PAUL NORTON
ANDREW HENDERSON	13	CHRIS MORLEY
ADAM PATE	14	GARETH BARBER
STUART DANCER	15	MARTIN McLOUGHLIN
WAYNE JONES	16	DANNY GUEST
JAMES STAINTON	17	IAIN MARSH

REFEREE:  
S. NICHOLSON

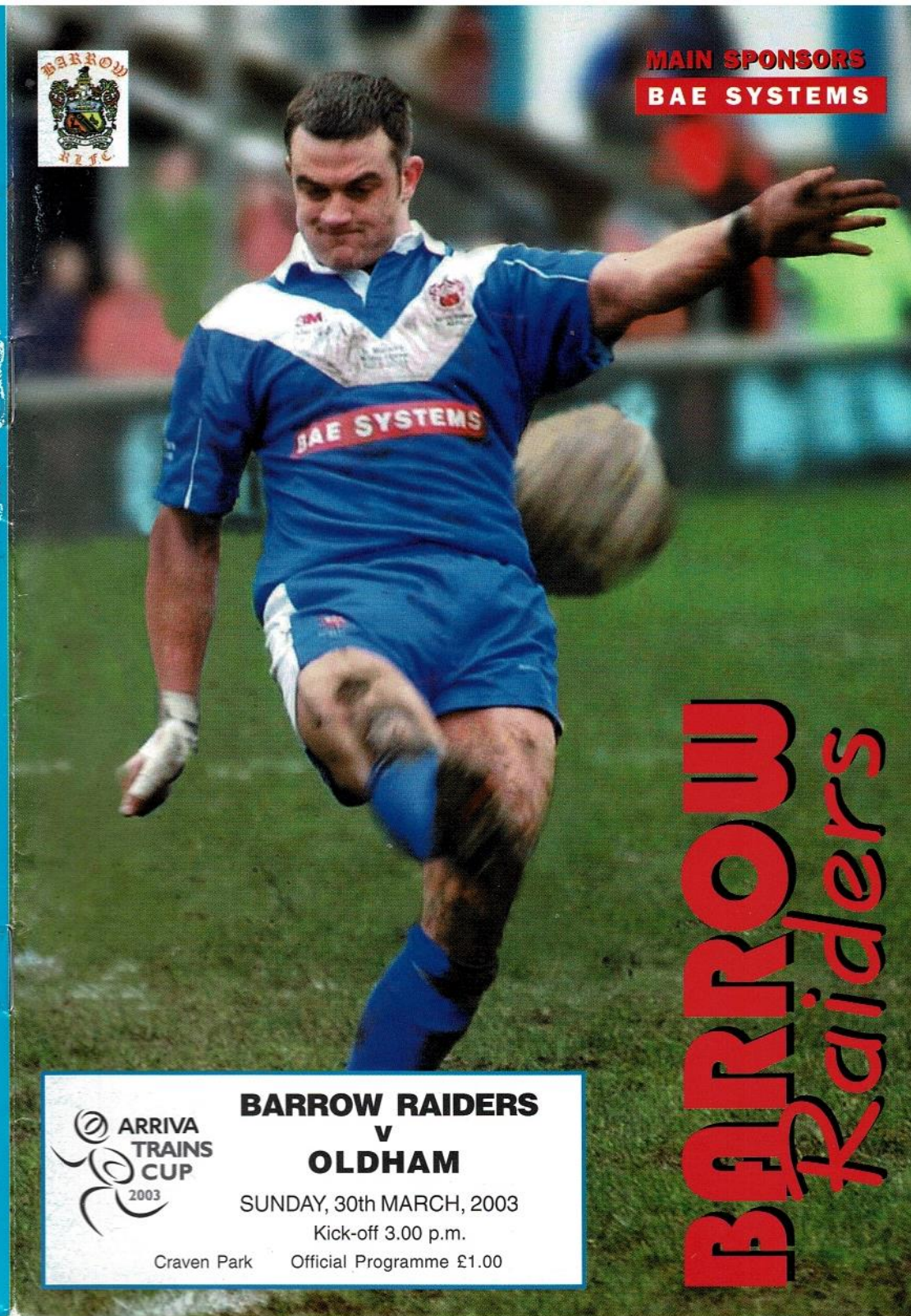
TOUCH JUDGES:  
D. O'NEIL  
G. TOWEY



**NEXT HOME GAME**  
**ARRIVA TRAINS CUP**  
**2003**  
**BARROW RAIDERS**  
**v**  
**GATESHEAD**  
SUNDAY 13th APRIL  
KICK-OFF 3.00pm



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**v**  
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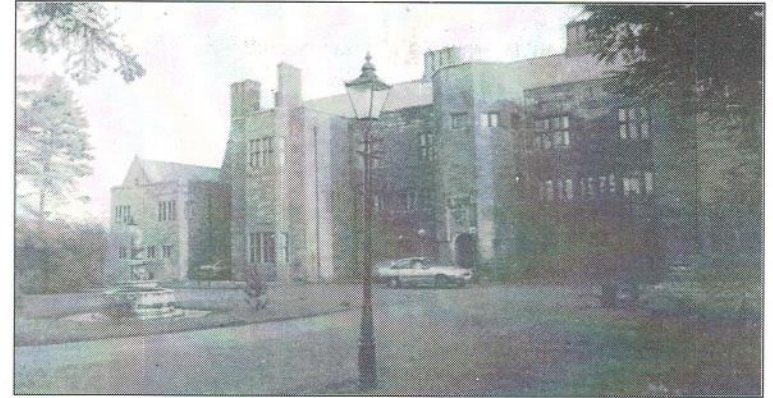
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## Editorial



Today we welcome first division Oldham to Craven Park, a game that Barrow will want to do well in after the 50-11 defeat only last month.

Last weekend the lads convincingly defeated Workington, with some spectacular tries, and it will be nice to see a repeat today.

The Arriva Trains Competition has created more interest than was anticipated, and I believe it is down to teams wishing to do well and make progress into the next stage of the Cup.

With Gateshead at home and Whitehaven away to round off the league section, it looks good for Barrow to get into the quarter finals. The more games the merrier as we build up for what I believe to be a tough second division. It will not be as easy as many pundits thought it would. Just look at York and Hunslet, they are going pretty well so far, and Chorley will be no push over.

Competition for places at Barrow has got to be tough as it will keep players on their toes as they must not be led to believe a jersey will be hanging up for them each week.

Finally, congratulations to Dave and Mel Clark on the arrival of their son Owain David. The birth over the weekend certainly put a spur into Dave's boots, he was back to his best form.

Paddy



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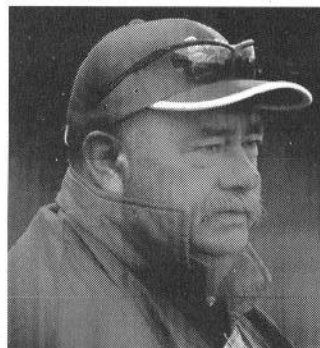
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## Cam's Korero (Crack)

A huge welcome to Oldham's Coaching Staff, Players and Supporters. We at Barrow hope you enjoy our hospitality in the Town and at Craven Park.

Welcome back to Craven Park Iain Marsh and Martin McLoughlin, two players who served us very well last season.

Welcome back Major Norman Baber who has been on holiday these last three months in the land of the boomerang and kangaroos. Norm, when a Director, worked unstintingly on behalf of the Club for many years, and something that is not known, gave a hand on many occasions in the cleaning of the player's changing rooms, and doing the odd jobs that go unheralded at most rugby clubs (thanks Norman).

Good win over our old adversary Workington last Sunday. The team played particularly well at times but we were caught napping on too many occasions against a team like Oldham, if the same prevails today then they will make us pay very dearly.

Great to see Craig Bower hitting better form of late, and he thoroughly deserved his 'Man of the Match' award last Sunday.

We will be worse off here at Barrow with super sub Geoff Luxon breaking his thumb at Chorley - Geoff we wish you a speedy recovery and also to ardent supporter Kath Griffin.

*Cameron Bell*

## RAIDERS STATS 2003

Player's Name	App's	(Sub's)	Tries	Goals	D.G.'s	Points
ARCHER, Chris	8		1			4
ATKINSON, Phil	6		1	17		38
BOWER, Craig	9		3			12
BYRNE, David	1					
CLARK, Dave	3	1	1			4
DANCER, Stuart	2	3				
DEAN, Paul		3				
EVANS, Paul	7		3	16	1	45
GARDNER, Paul	4	1	3			12
HENDERSON, Andrew	9		3			12
HORTON, Anthony	1					
IRABOR, Shane	9		3			12
JACKSON, Steve	9					
JONES, Paul	5		4			16
JONES, Wayne	5	3	1			4
KING, James	5		1			4
LIKU, Tau	5	1				
LOCKHART, Daniel	2	1				
LUPTON, Paul	5	1				
LUXON, Geoff	1	7				
MANIHERA, Tane	1					
MARSHALL, Jamie	9		10			40
McCLURE Andy	9		3			12
PATE, Adam	2	5	2	4		16
PUGH, Barry		2	1	2		8
STANTON, James		7	1			4

*Including Arriva Trains Cup and Powergen Challenge Cup*

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## OLDHAM Pen Pics...

**Paul Anderson:** Signed from Leigh Centurions for the beginning of the 2003 season. His preferred position is centre three quarter but is not at a loss in the second row. A burly build enables him to make a try out of sheer strength. Was Leigh's leading try scorer the season before last, and is well known for his block-busting runs. His previous clubs include St. Helens and Sheffield Eagles.

**Gareth Barber:** A 21 year-old Oldham born half back who was reared on rugby with his best pal, Leeds and G.B. ace Kevin Sinfield. Barber was with Warrington before signing for Oldham for the start of the 2000/01 season. He is a promising young player who made the Stand off position his own last season. Gareth has been sharing the kicking duties with Simon Svabic this season.

**Chris Campbell:** Started as an amateur with Crossfield and joined Warrington as a 17 year old. In his first season with them he was Alliance top scorer with 26 tries from full back position. Played 10 times for Warrington scoring 3 tries. He then moved to Whitehaven where he was offered a full-time contract if he moved to the area. This was not to his liking so before moving to Oldham had trials with Widnes. When Oldham expressed an interest, Chris quickly impressed and the deal was completed.

**Jason Clegg:** Signed at the formation of the new club from Bradford Bulls, Jason is a bustling go forward Prop, who has become a fans favourite. Has the stamina to put in a full 80 minutes if required, a rare thing for a Prop in the modern game. After many rumours that the 2002 season would be his last, he delighted Oldham fans by putting pen to paper for another season. Unfortunately paramedic exams and training has meant Jason has not been able to put in sufficient training so far this season to capture a regular first team place. Exams now over, Oldham fans look forward to his imminent return.

**Will Cowell:** Played 18 times in Super League for Warrington, mostly as a sub. The 22-year-old Cumbrian, a product of the prolific Kells club, left Wilderspool to join Oldham. A Full back, Wing or Centre, preferring Full back, his chances to impress the coach will probably be as a Centre or Winger. Former Warrington coach Darryl van der Velde spoke well of him before the youngster was invited to join the Roughyeds.

**Gavin Dodd:** A former Royton Tigers youngster, who had a spell with Bradford Bulls Academy team, Gavin is fast on the break yet unpredictable at times. Dodd scored some good tries last season and made the full back position his own, pushing Mark Sibson out onto the wing. Dodd represented G.B. students in Australia and New Zealand and has been selected for Great Britain Under 21's in the past.

**Lee Doran:** Another young player in whom Oldham have a lot of confidence. A Wiganer, Lee has worked his way through the Academy and Alliance teams at Oldham and is now probably one of the first names on the Oldham team sheet each week. Good pace and robust defence give him all the assets required to make a top class second row forward. Showed up well in the NFP Under 21's in 2001 when he was one of five Oldham players in that squad.

**Phil Farrell:** Phil, starting his fourth season with the Roughyeds, has just been appointed club captain. Played most of his rugby at Oldham at second row but it looks like he will fit into the loose forward role this season, a position his older brother Andy fills for Wigan. One of the youngest captains in the league will not be fazed by the responsibility. Unfortunately broke his finger in the Salford game in early March and will be out for at least a month.

**Jon Goddard:** Aged 20. Jon came to Oldham on loan for the 2002 season on the high recommendation of Castleford boss, Graham Steadman. Goddard was reared in Castelford youth and schools rugby before going to 'The Jungle' to play for the Academy side. During his two seasons in their Alliance side, he played three times in the first team in Super League. He was recently signed a contract that will keep him at Oldham for the entire 2003 season. Although a young novice, when first thrown into the first team, he has developed well and made the transition from a full back to a very competent centre.

**Danny Guest:** One of the Roughyeds originals. Danny returned to the club three seasons ago. Still a juggernaut weighing in at around the 18 stone mark after shedding somewhere around 2 stone during the close season. Still young by Prop standards, he has pots of potential. Used from the bench as an impact player most of last season, could play in a similar role in a formidable front row this year. Unfortunately broke his thumb in the first match of the season, which has kept him out of the team so far but it is hoped he could make a comeback for today's game.

**John Hough:** John was the first player to sign for his hometown club when Chris Hamilton and his fellow directors formed the new Roughyeds in 1997. Has just signed a new contract to take him to the end of the 2004 season. On his day, one of the best hookers in the National League, a danger to any defence from acting full back. By the end of the 2002 season he had made 152 appearances for Oldham, 37 of them in the 2002 season alone. Last season saw him cross the whitewash on 10 occasions, second only to Lee Doran in the forward try scoring charts. Is presently acting as captain on the field due to the injury of captain Phil Farrell.

**Chris Irwin:** Another player signed from Leigh Centurions at the end of the 2002 season. Chris is happy on the wing or at full back. He has natural pace and will be a great asset to the Oldham back line wherever he is chosen to play. Gained experience with the Centurions playing at the top level of the National League.

**Iain Marsh:** 22-year old goal kicking centre or winger signed from Barrow Border Raiders. Iain, a St. Helens lad, played for Salford for 5 years including some Super League appearances, before signing for St. Helens. Was Cameron Bells first signing at Barrow last season and mainly played as a centre alongside Kiwi Cliff Beverley. Scored 12 tries in 32 appearances. A solid defender and a very strong finisher, Iain can also play in the second row.

**Steve Molloy:** Ex England captain, signed for his second spell at Oldham from Batley Bulldogs. Was the obvious choice as player coach when the previous coach left mid season. A front row forward who has played for Featherstone, Sheffield, Warrington, Sheffield and Leeds. Molloy is a local lad. Made a big contribution to Roughyeds excellent end of season run in which a place in National League One was secured.

**Dane Morgan:** A recent Australian signing, who has played for Melbourne Storm, Wests, and North Queensland. Dane is a giant 6ft. 5in. prop forward. Weighing in at almost 17 stone he has played most of his rugby in Australia at Academy level and is eager to use his time in England to progress to senior level rugby. Despite not playing for 3 months Dane has made a promising start and has already become a firm favourite with the fans with his determination going forward and his tenacious tackling.

**Martin McLoughlin:** Big front row man, can also play second row. Signed from Barrow at the end of the 2002 season, during last season, was twice named in the NFP form team of the month. Has had a quiet but steady start at Oldham but great things are expected of him as he settles into the team.

**Chris Morley:** Older brother of G.B. star Adrian. Like his brother is a no-nonsense second row forward. Signed from Leigh in time for the 2003 season. Chris has the size and mean streak to stiffen up any back row. During Phil Farrell's absence has had his best games yet for the Roughyeds at loose forward.

**Neil Roden:** Signed from hometown club Wigan. The son of Wigan's chief scout, has the scrum half jersey all to himself after winning the accolade of Oldham Players Player of the Year in 2002. One of the best scrum half's outside of Super League.

**Paul Norton:** Paul fits into the unsung hero bracket. His tireless work rate often has him at the top of the tackle count, and will take the ball up all day long given the chance. Signed from Chorley, was definitely a major gain for Oldham. Plays mainly at prop forward, but has also been used in the second row. Has signed an extension to his contract that will keep him with the club until the end of the 2003 season. Unfortunately suffered a career threatening upper back injury at the end of last season. A successful operation however appears to have done the trick and the "Knocker" returned for the Leigh game a fortnight ago as if he had never been away.

**Anthony Murray:** Signed from Swinton for a nominal fee. Can play hooker or scrum half and has also played loose forward. Previous clubs include Wigan, Warrington, Leigh and Barrow. Has impressed greatly this season and kept vice captain, John Hough out of the hooker spot for a couple of games. Unfortunately picked up a knee injury in the Salford game in early March, which has kept him out of contention.

**Simon Svabic:** Signed from Leigh at the end of the 2002 campaign. Started his career in Oldham with the now defunct Bears. A stand off with great guile is an important playmaker in the Roughyeds squad. Is presently sharing the kicking duties with Gareth Barber.

## A DIRECTOR'S VIEW



The 'Arriva Trains National League Cup' (catchy title) is proving to be a very useful pre-season work out for us. With half of the squad new to Craven Park this season and losing players from key positions it was always going to take time for the new players to gel, and how they've gelled! Some of the tries last week were from the top drawer, with good support play and pace out wide, we can look forward to the new season with confidence.

Now, before the cynics jump in, everyone at the club is aware that the victories have come against what could be classified as the weaker sides in the division. So, for that reason, no one is getting complacent and we all look forward to testing ourselves against sides from Division One over the next two games. The lads have done their bit and now it is up to us to get behind them and who knows how far we could go in this competition. One thing's for sure, we'll need more than 788 through the turnstiles if we are to continue to make progress so why not persuade a friend, neighbour or relative to come to the game with you, it could make all the difference.

I see the R.F.L. are up to their old 'shoot themselves in the foot' routine this week with the victims this time being the Academy sides outside of Super League (surprise, surprise). The Barrow Academy, who have done themselves and the club proud over the last couple of seasons now face a new season (due to start at the beginning of April) in a division which includes only three other sides, Doncaster, Oldham and Sheffield. And what do the progressive thinkers propose in the place of the Academy League..... a return to the days of A- team rugby!!! Are these people paid by Twickenham? Our Academy is our future and we must continue to fight for what is our only hope of developing local talent, something that our A-teams have consistently failed to do.

Welcome to today's visitors Oldham, and a big thank you to everyone connected with the club who took time to visit Kath (you know, quiet, unassuming, long hair) when she was taken ill at Boundary Park recently. I know your kindness was appreciated by Kath, Tony and all Barrow supporters.

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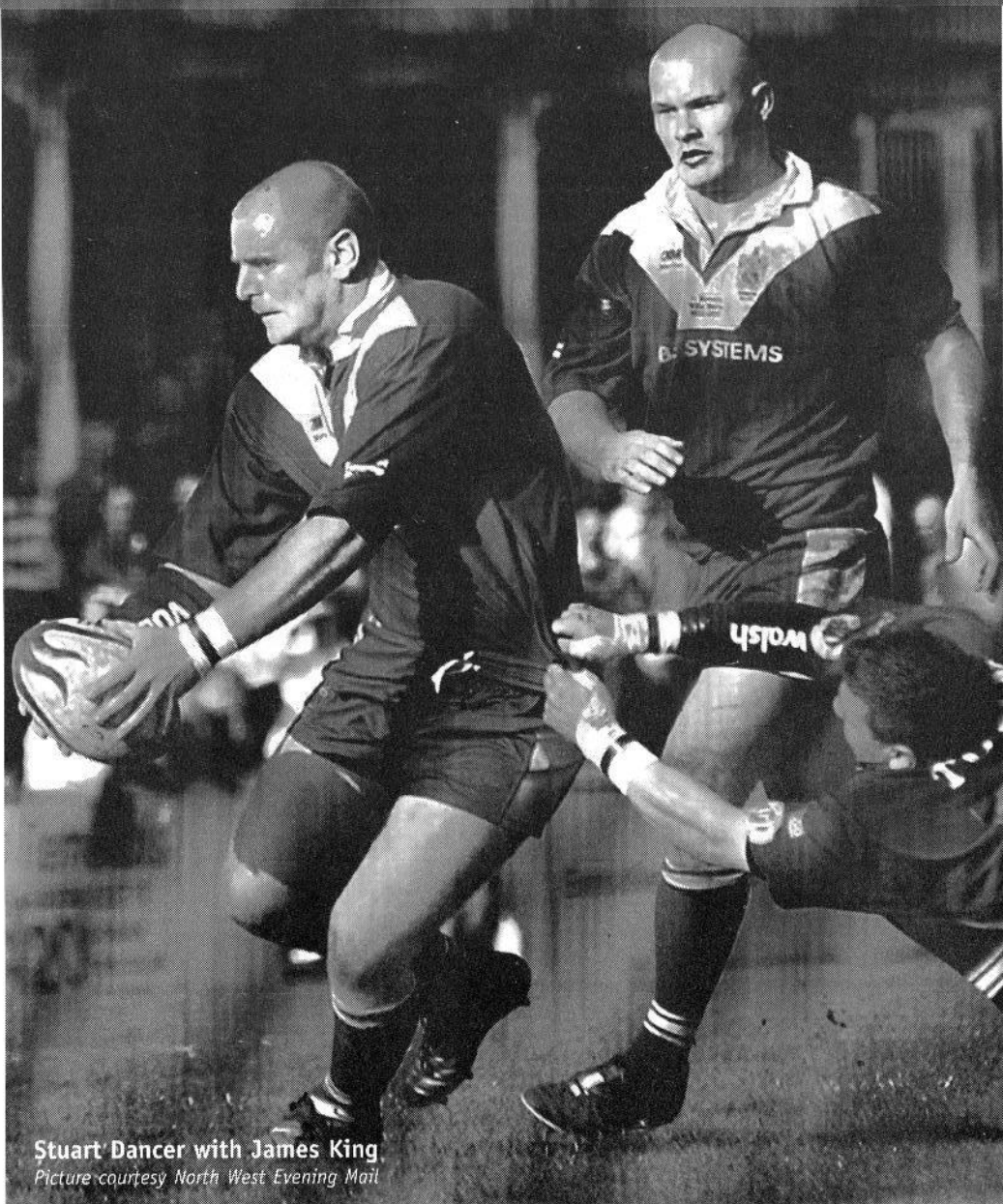
The following have already joined!

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. Nigel Howard                            | 15. Amanda Buttress  |
| 2. Ossie & Ida Barker                      | 16. Steve Groves     |
| 3. Bill Capstick                           | 17. Jos Kenley       |
| 4. Doug - Strand Engineering               | 18. Dougie Lockhart  |
| 5. H. - Strand Engineering                 | 19. Alan Tucker      |
| 6. Neil Martin                             | 20. David Tucker     |
| 7. Stuart Aldridge                         | 21. Rita Tongue      |
| 8. James Atkinson                          | 22. Linda Irvine     |
| 9. The Globe Inn, Ulverston                | 23. Anne Atkinson    |
| 10. Alan Winward                           | 24. Christine Wilson |
| 11. Tommy Rawlinson                        | 25. Don Wilson       |
| 12. Peter Wilson                           | 26. Tracy Livesey    |
| 13. A. Stoker, Furness Park Motor Services | 27. Jimmy Lewthwaite |
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Your name could be next - why not join today - contact any Board Member or Club Official



# Camera Action



Stuart Dancer with James King  
Picture courtesy North West Evening Mail

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# RAIDERS FACTS & FIGURES 2003



Barrow Raiders – Arriva Trains Cup – Barrow Raiders

Date	Opposition	Time	F - A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Jan 12th	ST. HELENS (Friendly)	H 2.00	W 18-16																	
<b>ARRIVA TRAINS CUP</b>																				
Jan 19th	CHORLEY	H 2.00	D 18-18	Horton	Marshall	McClure	Bower	Irabor	P. Jones	Archer	W. Jones	Henderson	Jackson	King	Byrne	Atkinson	Lockhart	Luxon	Dean	Lupton
<b>TXU CHALLENGE CUP 3rd ROUND</b>																				
26th	EMBASSY	H 2.00	W 70-6	Bower	Marshall	McClure	P. Jones	Irabor	Evans	Archer	W. Jones	Henderson	Jackson	King	Gardner	Atkinson	Pugh	Luxon	Pate	Stainton
<b>ARRIVA TRAINS CUP</b>																				
Feb 2nd	Workington	A 3.00	W 20-10	Bower	Marshall	P. Jones	McClure	Irabor	Evans	Archer	W. Jones	Henderson	Dancer	Gardner	Jackson	Atkinson	Pate	Luxon	Dean	Stainton
<b>POWERGEN CHALLENGE CUP 4th ROUND</b>																				
9th	SALFORD	H 2.00	L 6-22	Bower	Marshall	McClure	P. Jones	Irabor	Manihera	Archer	Liku	Henderson	W. Jones	Jackson	Gardner	Atkinson	Pate	Luxon	Clark	Stainton
23rd	WHITEHAVEN	H 3.00	L 18-30	Bower	Marshall	Lockhart	McClure	Irabor	Evans	Archer	W. Jones	Henderson	Jackson	Lupton	Gardner	Clark	Pate	Luxon	Liku	Stainton
March 2nd	Oldham	A 3.00	L 11-50	Pate	Marshall	Lockhart	McClure	Irabor	Bower	Evans	Liku	Henderson	Dancer	Lupton	Jackson	Luxon	Pugh	Dean	W. Jones	Stainton
9th	Gateshead	A 3.30	W 28-24	Pate	Marshall	Bower	McClure	Irabor	Evans	Archer	Liku	Henderson	Jackson	King	Lupton	Atkinson	Gardner	Luxon	Dancer	Stainton
16th	Chorley	A 3.00	W 28-22	Bower	Marshall	Atkinson	McClure	Irabor	Evans	Archer	Liku	Clark	Jackson	King	Lupton	Henderson	Luxon	Dancer	Jones W.	Stainton
23rd	WORKINGTON	H 3.00	W 44-18	Bower	Marshall	Jones P.	McClure	Irabor	Evans	Archer	Liku	Clark	Jackson	King	Lupton	Henderson	Pate	Dancer	Stainton	Jones W.
30th	OLDHAM	H 3.00																		
April 4th	Whitehaven	A 7.30																		
13th	GATESHEAD	H 3.00																		
18th	WORKINGTON	H 3.00																		
21st	Gateshead	A 3.30																		
May 4th	SHEFFIELD	H 3.00																		
11th	London	A 3.00																		
25th	YORK	H 3.00																		
June 1st	Keighley	A 3.00																		
15th	SWINTON	H 3.00																		
22nd	CHORLEY	H 3.00																		
29th	Hunslet	A 3.30																		
July 13th	LONDON	H 3.00																		
20th	Sheffield	A 3.15																		
27th	GATESHEAD	H 3.00																		
Aug. 3rd	Workington	A 3.00																		
10th	York	A 3.00																		
17th	KEIGHLEY	H 3.00																		
24th	Chorley	A 3.00																		
31st	HUNSLET	H 3.00																		
Sept. 7th	Swinton	A 3.00																		

## First Fundraiser - Phil Atkinson's Testimonial Year



Preparations are well under way for Phil Atkinson's Testimonial Year.

The first fundraiser, a 10-Pin Bowling Challenge Night has been booked for Friday 6th June, 7.30 start.

Cost of £11.95 per person includes two games of Bowling, Hot and Cold Buffet, DJ/Compare, Shoe Hire, and Trophies for winners. Teams of between 4 and 6 are required. Further details from the Rugby Shop or Terry at The Winning Line Trophies, Crellin Street, Tel: 434250.

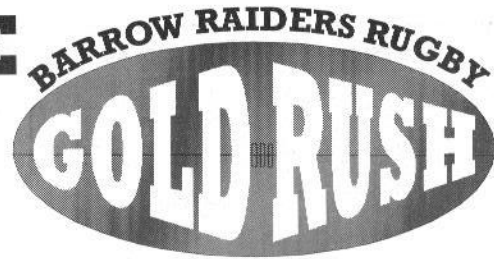
## BARROW RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Fully supports the "LETS TACKLE RACISM IN RUGBY LEAGUE" campaign and welcomes all players and spectators irrespective of their ethnic or racial origins. Racism has no place in our game, and racist chants are totally unacceptable. Allow everyone to enjoy the game.



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1	X	£20
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20	X	£5

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1	X	£20
2	X	£10
20	X	£5

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## ARRIVA TRAINS CUP TABLES - as at 23rd March 2003

NORTH GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Whitehaven	7	7	0	0	236	86	14
<b>BARROW RAIDERS</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>9</b>
Chorley Lynx	7	2	1	4	128	174	5
Workington Town	7	1	0	6	107	222	2
Gateshead Thunder	7	0	0	7	112	349	0

EAST GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Featherstone Rovers	7	5	0	2	203	123	10
Doncaster Dragons	7	5	0	2	184	107	10
Hull Kingston Rovers	7	5	0	2	170	137	10
York City Knights	7	2	0	5	150	198	4
Sheffield Eagles	7	1	0	6	90	215	2

WEST GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leigh Centurions	7	6	1	0	231	128	13
Salford City Reds	6	5	1	0	388	66	11
Rochdale Hornets	7	4	1	2	204	171	9
Oldham	7	2	1	4	165	198	5
Swinton Lions	6	0	0	6	58	230	0

CENTRAL GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hunslet Hawks	7	5	0	2	156	134	10
Dewsbury Rams	7	5	0	2	155	133	10
Batley Bulldogs	7	4	0	3	240	106	8
Keighley Cougars	7	3	0	4	155	134	6
London Skolars	7	0	0	7	97	313	0

ARRIVA TRAINS CUP QUARTER FINALS - SUNDAY 18th MAY

ARRIVA TRAINS CUP SEMI FINALS - SUNDAY 8th JUNE

ARRIVA TRAINS CUP FINAL - SUNDAY 6th JULY

## WHITEHAVEN GAME

Sunday, 6th April 2003 at Whitehaven will now be played  
Friday, 4th April 2003 at Whitehaven - 7.30 p.m. kick off.

Supporters Coach leaving Walney Prom 4.14 p.m.

£6.00 Adults - £4.00 Junior Raiders

Contact Karen on 820273 or call in Rugby Shop

## SUPPORTER'S PAGE



- penned by  
themselves -

Welcome everybody

A grand game last week, we took a few minutes to get started but some of Barrow's play in the first half was as good as anything seen for a while. At last Mr. Bower gave us a fuller view of what he's capable of, and nice to see Paul Jones motoring down that wing again. The forwards are also busting anything they come up against - Brilliant!

So where does this leave us? One more win and we should be through to the next round. Who knows the rules to this competition? Is it an open draw for the remaining 8 teams? Let's hope so, because we are quite capable of beating teams like Batley, Featherstone or Hull KR at home. So two home draws and it could be final time, and who knows the crowds may start flowing back.

So today's game against Oldham is a good marker. There's also a bit of the revenge element. They put 50 points into us only a few weeks ago, but it wasn't a true reflection of the game. We have a stronger team out today, and we feel that with that with a little luck we are capable. Also, to prove a point to the lads that left Barrow last season to go to a better team.

So a big 'Barra' welcome to Oldham. Join us for a few pints after the game in the Raiders Bar and we'll swap a few tales. We remember a few years ago that one of your supporters fell in love with a girl from just out of Barrow, he used to visit her quite often. He was a typical amorous Lancashire Toddy but she was quite shy and retiring. After months of holding hands and promises of everlasting love he finally persuaded her to "make love". Candle lit dinner, romantic music, lovingly they slowly undressed. Finally down to their underwear he edged down his boxers. "My God"! she exclaimed, gawking at his rugby ball sized baby makers. "What do you call them"! she said... "Oldham and Askam"! he replied - BUM-BUM.

The old un's are the good un's.

Finally, a problem that needs nipping in the bud. We've been harping on this season about how Hendo, the coaches and the rest of the players have created a great team spirit. Well there are rumours of a serious rift in the changing room and to incidentally why some of the team are tiring in the second half. Apparently Cameron is pulling certain players off at half time and the other players are seriously unhappy because they are only getting oranges! We always said these players were a handful to work with Cameron!

Bye.

## SUPPORTER'S PAGE



# SPONSOR'S PAGE

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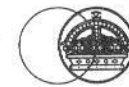
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# Camera Action



Paul Evans kicking through  
Picture courtesy North West Evening Mail

## NATIONAL LEAGUE TALK

with GARETH WALKER of RUGBY LEAGUER & LEAGUE EXPRESS



### BRING BACK THE ALLIANCE?

THE Senior Academy First Division is about to get underway, allowing National League clubs to field an under-21's side that could strengthen their future and provide a pathway to the first team. So why are only four clubs entering?

The competition was originally supposed to include seven sides, though for various reasons, Leigh Centurions, Rochdale Hornets and Dewsbury Rams all withdrew. That leaves just four teams - Sheffield Eagles, Oldham, Barrow Raiders and Doncaster Dragons.

At the time of writing, the format for the competition had yet to be finalised, with the proposal being that the clubs play each other four times, which hardly seems ideal.

So why are only four clubs taking part? The reason cited by many clubs is a financial one, with clubs often preferring to put money into their first team squad, or in some cases to run a Junior Academy at under-18's level.

But there is a growing feeling among National League coaches that clubs outside Super League should revert to the old fashioned Alliance team, where there is no age limit.

Several National League clubs have a surplus of first-team players, who are all too old to play in the under-21's, which permits just three over-age players.

"You have to give players more chance to develop, some mature later than others and I know I did as a player," says Doncaster coach St. John Ellis.

"I didn't play my best football until after I was 27."

Chorley Lynx boss Darren Abram added: "It's crying out for an Alliance competition at this level.

"That allows younger players to learn their trade off senior players.

When I started at Warrington I played with the likes of Les Boyd and Paul Cullen in the reserves. Where you're an apprentice you start working with a skilled workman to learn from him, and it should be the same in Rugby League."

Keighley Cougars - who are running an under-18's side but not a Senior Academy this year - are currently looking to arrange friendly's with other clubs to give their first-team fringe players a game.

However, RFL spokesman Bill Appleton stated that only one club has voiced official concerns over the under-21's structure, and that the opinions are those of individual coaches.

And not all clubs at this level feel that the under-21's system is wrong, with Leigh - despite their withdrawal - supporting the structure and saying they will field a team next season if the divisions are set up differently. Featherstone Rovers coach Andy Kelly said: "Having an under-21's is the way forward.

"It fits in with the Sport England pathway, and if clubs have too many overage players at their club then it is their fault for signing so many. We limited the number of senior players at the club to give younger players more opportunities."

It's an issue that requires further examination both by the clubs and the RFL, because it's clear that most clubs would benefit from being able to run more than one side, whatever the age limit or financial difficulties.

Finding a solution may not be easy though.

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