

Oldham RLFC



The Roughyeds

LHF HEALTHPLAN NATIONAL LEAGUE 1
V Featherstone Rovers

OLDHAM



**FEATHERSTONE
ROVERS**

Gavin Dodd	1	Ben Archibald
Will Cowell	2	Jamie Stokes
James Bunyan	3	Steve Dooler
Jon Goddard	4	Ben Feehan
Nick Johnson	5	Matty Wray
Neil Roden	6	Jon Presley
Ian Watson	7	Carl Briggs
Steve Molloy	8	Jim Carlton
Keith Brennan	9	Richard Chapman
Paul Southern	10	Stuart Dickens
Lee Doran	11	Paul Darley
Dane Morgan	12	Richard Blakeway
Lee Marsh	13	Adam Hayes
Pat Rich	14	Craig Moss
Simon Svabic	15	Bryan Henare
Martin McLoughlin	16	Andy Jarrett
Phil Farrell	17	Richard Newlove

Match Officials:

REFEREE: Michael Dawber
TOUCH JUDGES: A Dugdale, P Smith
4TH OFFICIAL: Steve Kilgannon

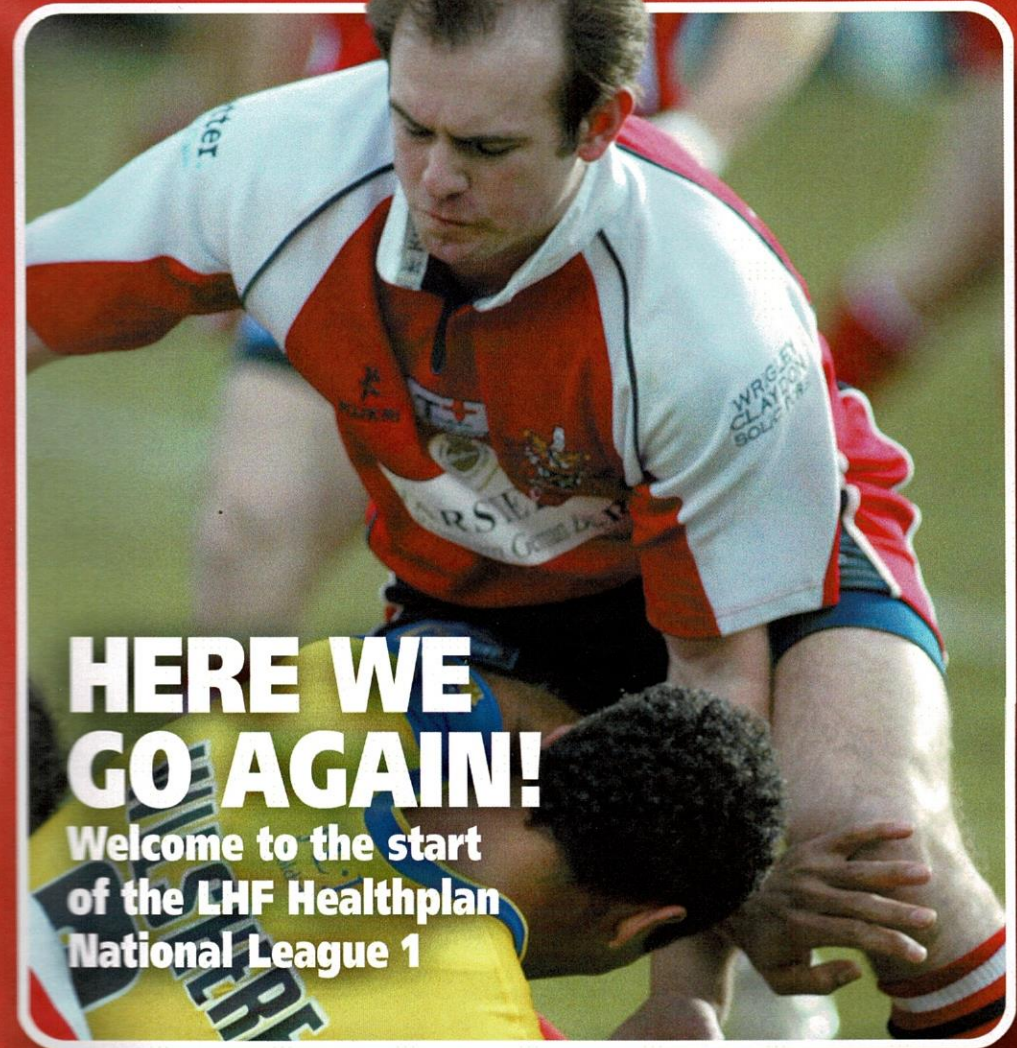
Oldham RLFC

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The Roughyeds

LHF HEALTHPLAN NATIONAL LEAGUE 1
V Featherstone Rovers



HERE WE GO AGAIN!

Welcome to the start
of the LHF Healthplan
National League 1

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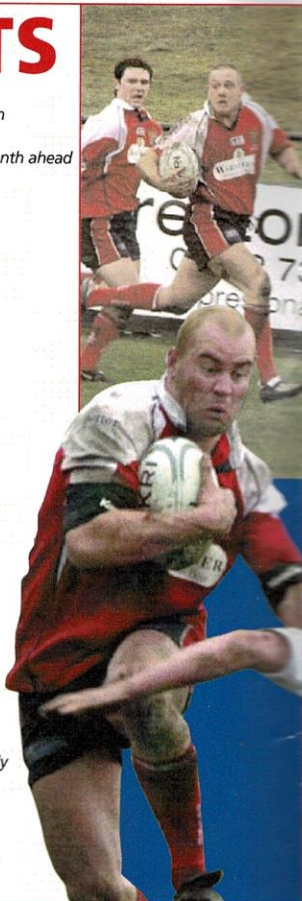
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 Martin Murphy 1966-82
 Andy Goodway 1979-85 & 1993-94

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IN THE CHAIRMAN'S OPINION

with **CHRIS HAMILTON**

Here we go!

Today sees the first game in the LHF Healthplan National League One competition and all the excuses stop right now. For weeks we have had players, coaches, directors and supporters all saying the real business is the league season; well here it is.

Once again there is no doubt that this season is going to be even harder than last and it never ceases to amaze me how the players keep ensuring this happens. When you think that the vast majority of them are working full time in addition to their rugby commitments it is a great compliment to them.

As there is no full time team, as such, in our division this year there will be a few clubs fancying their chances of making it to the Holy Grail and early form in the Arriva Trains Cup would suggest that Leigh, given the level of opposition they have encountered, will be the favourites. The other teams tipped to do well, Hull K.R. and Halifax have shown some inconsistency so far but it is always difficult to gauge what circumstances are prevalent at a club other than your own.

As far as our hopes go I have to say the players at the club this year are capable of mounting a serious challenge and the money spent on recruiting the squad reflects that. We have been guilty of consistently being inconsistent and to that end our destiny, this year, will be down to the mindset of the players and coaches. There is no doubt that when it comes down to playing the so called "bigger" teams we need to make sure we go onto the pitch believing that we can win and reflecting that in our performance on the day. The other thing that will sort the wheat from the chaff will be the ability of players to ensure that their preparation is the best it can be every week, because the one thing you can say with certainty in this league, is that if it isn't, you'll get beaten.

"I have to say the players at the club this year are capable of mounting a serious challenge"

Our visitors today, Featherstone, will also come hoping to get their season off to a flyer and, as ever against Fev, we will have to work hard for anything we get out of the game. The competitiveness of the division is surely shown in our opening four fixtures which, after today, gives us games against Halifax, Leigh and Hull K.R. I am certainly up for it and I am sure the players will be too.

Although these notes are written before the Rochdale game on Good Friday, we have already qualified for the Play Off game in the Arriva Trains Cup, by virtue of finishing second in our group. This means that to qualify for the last eight of the competition we go into an open draw with the four other group runners up and the best third place team, to produce three games and the winners of those games will join the five group winners to go into another open draw for the last eight.

As we have never reached the last eight before, I am hoping that we win our Play Off game and then go on to give ourselves a chance of progressing further in a competition that has proved, over the last couple of years, to be popular as the latter stages are completed.

Prior to that we must focus on the job in hand and, so, once again, I ask you to get behind the team and hopefully cheer us on to our first points of the league season.

Enjoy the game,

Chris

1998-2003

Trans-Penine Cup
 Finalists - 1998

Northern Ford Premiership
 Club of the Year - 2000
 Grand Finalists - 2001

MOST APPEARANCES: John Hough, 175 - Jan 1998 - September 2003
CONSECUTIVE APPEARANCES: Phil Farrell, 67 - *April 2nd 2000 - March 15th 2002
 *John Hough was on the team for every match February 1st 1999 - April 16th 2001 (82)

TRIES IN A SEASON: Mark Sibson, 23 - 1999-2000

GOALS IN A SEASON: Pat Rich, 146 - 2000-2001

POINTS IN A SEASON: Pat Rich, 320 - 2000-2001

DROP GOALS IN A SEASON: Neil Roden, 7 - 2001-2002

TRIES IN A CAREER: Mark Sibson, 60 - 1999-2002

GOALS IN A CAREER: Pat Rich, 254 - 1999-2001

POINTS IN A CAREER: Pat Rich, 576 - 1999-2001

DROP GOALS IN A CAREER: Neil Roden, 18 - 2000-2003

TRIES IN MATCH: Mark Sibson v Wigan St. Judes, 4 - Feb 8th 2000 at Boundary Park
 Mark Sibson v Queensbury, 4 - Jan 28th 2001 at Boundary Park
 David Gibbons v Chorley Lynx, 4 - Jan 30th 2001 at Boundary Park

GOALS IN A MATCH: Simon Svabic v Swinton Lions, 10 - Apr 6th 2003 at Boundary Park
POINTS IN A MATCH: Gareth Barber v Dewsbury Rams, 26 - Apr 2nd 2002 at Hurst Cross (7 goals, 3 tries)

DROP GOALS IN A MATCH: Neil Roden v Workington Town, 2 - Dec 17th 2000 at Derwent Park
 John Braddish v Hull KR, 2 - Dec 16th 2001 at New Craven Park

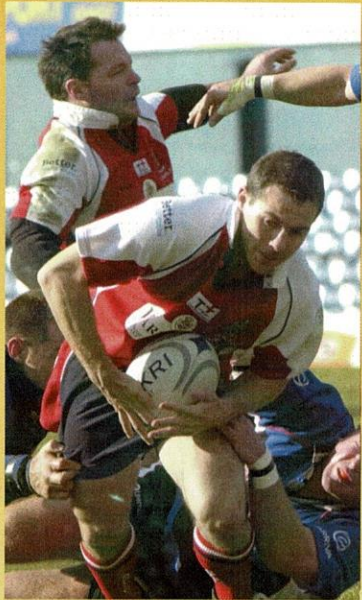
HIGHEST SCORE/WINNING MARGIN: v Yorks Wasps, 70-6 - Apr 1st 2001 at Huntington Stadium
 v Queensbury (amt), 64-0 - Jan 28th 2001 RLCC 3rd Rnd at Boundary Park

The views expressed in this matchday magazine do not necessarily reflect those of the management and staff of Oldham RLFC (1997) Ltd.

We would like to express our thanks to the Oldham Evening Chronicle, League Publications Ltd, Phil Burdge and all concerned for the use of photographs.

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COACHLINES

with **STEVE MOLLOY**

Welcome to the start of the LHF Healthplan National League 1 fixtures and today's visitors Featherstone Rovers and an old colleague of mine, Gary Price whom I spent a few seasons with at the Rovers. Let's hope the fans are out in their droves and in good voice.

Like everybody in the league today we will be looking to start the season well. We have a real tough first month where we find ourselves up against the highly fancied three of Halifax, Leigh and Hull KR and obviously today's visitors Featherstone who have recruited well and have beaten Hull KR already this season in their Arriva Division. Fev and Oldham games are always close fought encounters and I don't expect this one to be any different.

With the Arriva Trains competition coming to a conclusion and us qualifying as runners up it is important we take our recent better form with us into the National League. With

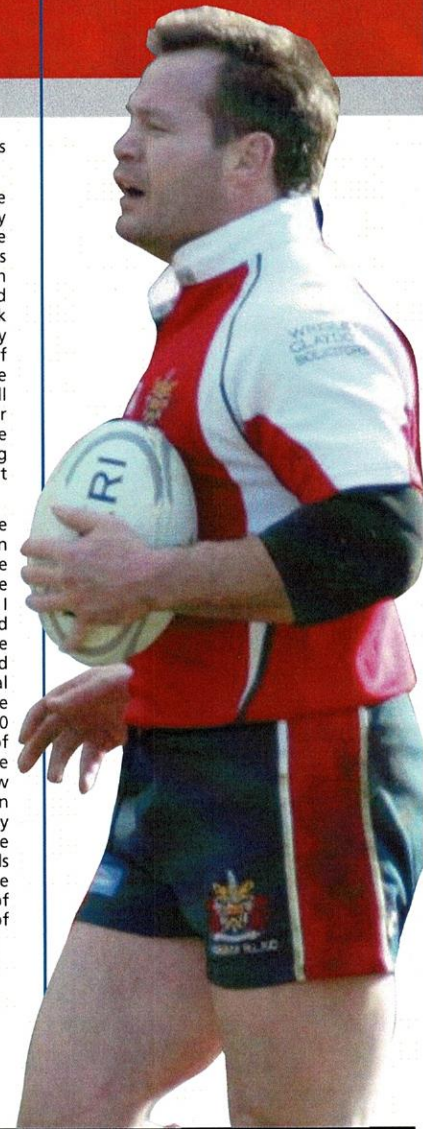
"We have a real tough first month where we find ourselves up against the highly fancied three"

only 18 fixtures a good start is paramount.

As we have gone to press before the Rochdale game I can only comment on our performance against Swinton, which was heavily built up as the game in which Nick Johnson would emulate Geoff Munro's hat trick of hat tricks, which unfortunately didn't happen. But I'm sure if Nick continues scoring with the regularity that he is doing he will be in line for breaking other records. Obviously sides are getting wise to his try scoring feats so it's going to get increasingly tougher for Nick.

I felt we got dragged down a little in the first half of the Swinton game and the half time score line reflected that. But after some gentle prompting at half time I feel the team reacted and showed the calibre of side we undoubtedly are. In the second half we gave a professional performance, even when we were reduced to 12 men for over 30 minutes with the red carding of Lee Marsh. Let's hope the disciplinary hearing tomorrow take his momentary indiscretion as just that and deal leniently with him, for at this crucial time of the year, and the demands injury have put on the squad we cannot afford to lose a player of Marshy's calibre for any period of time.

Enjoy the game,
Steve



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IN THE CAPTAIN'S CORNER

with PHIL FARRELL

In a disappointing first half against Swinton we were dragged a little off course and didn't play to our plan. Because of this there were far too many errors and our completion rate was very poor. But more important was the reaction of the lads to the half time team talk – we came back for the second half, went back to basics and everything came together again. The professionalism of the second half performance was even more important after Marshy was sent off.

All the lads and I were thrilled to bits that Nick (Johnson) was awarded the Arriva Trains Player of the Round for the previous week when he scored his second hat trick. He didn't quite get his hat trick of hat tricks but it wasn't a bad day for him as he also got the Player of the Month Award for March from the Coach. I wonder if Chris (Hamilton) made him do two speeches at the awards after the game, if so Nick would have been devastated, as he absolutely hates having to do those speeches.

Today will be a tough game, it always is against Fev and we will be up against our old buddy Bryan (Elvis) Henare. He is a good player and will be determined to have a good game against his old club. We, however, must be even more determined to get a good start to the league season and pick up two valuable points. I desperately want to play a part in the game but at the time of going to press don't know what the medics and physios will say- but here's hoping.

Talking of Elvis we gave him that name because we all thought he looked a bit like the "King" and once when I went to his house I saw a photo of him dressed as Elvis in fancy dress. I almost got it out of the house but he spotted me and snatched it back. If we don't meet on the field I'll be making sure I have a chat with him over the little matter of some money he owes me. On one of the lads' nights out two seasons ago "Elvis" asked if he could borrow my mobile to phone home. I thought he meant to his wife in St Helens. When he gave me the phone back a quarter of an hour later he had a big smile on his face. When I asked him what was up he told me he had just spent 15 minutes on the phone to his folks in New Zealand. He still owes me for that.

Enjoy the game and let the lads know you're there,

Faz



"All the lads and I were thrilled to bits that Nick (Johnson) was awarded the Arriva Trains Player of the Round for the previous week"

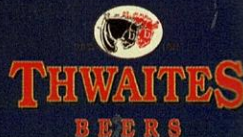
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in yer face

with Geoff Cooke

The last time Great Britain toured Australia my wife and I vowed to be on the next one. Then came the Super League 'war' and change of season. Instead of following Great Britain's rugby league team we find ourselves supporting the England cricket team on their travels round the globe. And it's an experience I can thoroughly recommend.

Having just returned from witnessing two comprehensive victories against the West Indies in Jamaica and Trinidad and sitting glued to the T.V. to see us overwhelm them again in Barbados in front of thousands upon thousands of cheering, passionate England fans and, bearing in mind the similar euphoria of the R.U. team's World Cup victory, it does not take a genius to work out how important international events are. I make no apology, therefore, for returning to this theme. For the sake of players and supporters we have to internationalise our game as much as possible.

Cricket followers on our tour to the West Indies accused us of northern parochialism as soon as we pointed out the importance of the contribution of people like Jason Robinson and Phil Larder to the Rugby Union team's World Cup success. In other words they are not even aware that Rugby League is a NATIONAL game let alone an international one. Yet anyone who regularly reads Rugby League World magazine will be aware that our game is played in a host of countries which never get a mention. It is absolutely vital that the Australians begin to take international football seriously. Great Britain, New Zealand and France already recognize the significance of this aspect of the game and the interest and publicity it can generate.

We ABSOLUTELY MUST HAVE a World Cup in Australia in 2008. And I guarantee that, as with cricket, there will be thousands upon thousands of rugby league fans there to support their side. After all what could be better than combining a trip to one of the world's greatest tourist destinations with your favourite sport? So, my message to the I.R.B. is "get your plans and schedule formulated now"; and to all potential supporters "start saving tomorrow". Otherwise I'll see you at Melbourne on

Boxing Day 2006 for the Australia v. England cricket Test.

Returning from Widnes Vikings to take up the scrum-half spot again for Batley Bulldogs Dean Lawford has been put out of the game, certainly for the season and possibly permanently, by a high tackle against Doncaster. Even if Lawford recovers sufficiently to drag on his boots again he will have a plate and pins in his face for the rest of his life. Coupled with this situation is the news that in Australia Adrian Morley has once more been reported to the disciplinary committee for a high tackle. As you will know head tackling is high on my list of unacceptable practices and should not be condoned no matter who the perpetrator is. However, as an interesting side issue I was surprised by the comment during the recent Powergen Challenge Cup quarter-final that these days over 90% of all tackles are made above the waist. Presumably this is with the intention of preventing the ball carrier getting a pass away. The statistic I would now like to see is how often does this fail, especially since two, three or four defenders may be involved in the tackle and are then taken out of the game? All of this set me thinking that if players were tackling low around the legs many tackles would be one on one and, even if the ball were then passed, the receiver would still be confronted by another potential defender and so on down the line.

Using a sliding defence the last receiver would still have to beat his own man plus the covering fullback. Other than close to your own line this strikes me as sensible defending. Or am I missing something somewhere?



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FROM THE PEN OF

MICHAEL TURNER

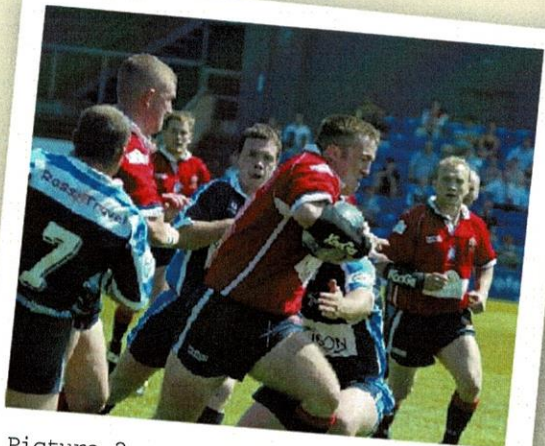
"Roughyeds v Rovers"

Photo 1. The first image goes back to the match at Watersheddings on November 8th 1958. Just seven days earlier Oldham had visited Post Office Road and recorded a comprehensive victory (30 – 8). However, the return match proved a much tougher affair before the Roughyeds finally prevailed 12 – 7. The action shows an Oldham player being hauled down just short of the Featherstone line with colleagues, Jack Keith, Ron Rowbottom, Dick Cracknell and Des McKeown looking on. The attendance was 11,043.



Picture 1

Photo 2. For our second image we feature Roughyed's skipper, Phil Farrell taking on the Rovers defence in last season's encounter at Boundary Park. The match was played on July 13th 2003 when Oldham went on to win an entertaining match (35 – 24) before an attendance of 1,238.



Picture 2

Featherstone Rovers were unable to supply any Player Profiles

AS IAN SEES IT

with IAN WILSON

So here we are at last: the start of season 2004 proper. This is not to say that the ATC games, or the Challenge Cup, are a waste of time. Far from it, in my view. Just ask Workington or Whitehaven what they think of the cup, for example. Both clubs gained enough revenue from their home games against Leeds and Warrington respectively, to put them on a sound financial footing for some time. It's just a great pity that we couldn't do something similar in our Warrington home fixture; why, is an obvious and important question – but maybe for some other time?

With regard to the Arriva Trains Cup, its first benefit is to provide competitive games for we spectators who, by the beginning of February, are getting desperate for their live R.L. fix. Then there is the chance for teams to bed in, establish coherence amongst new squads, and prepare properly for the more serious competition to come. And finally, of course, there are the attractions of the knock out stages and a genuine chance for National League clubs to reach a Final and win silverware.

But I think all agree that the 18 National League games, and what follows them, are the real heart of our season. How do we go into them? What are realistic, but achievable, targets?

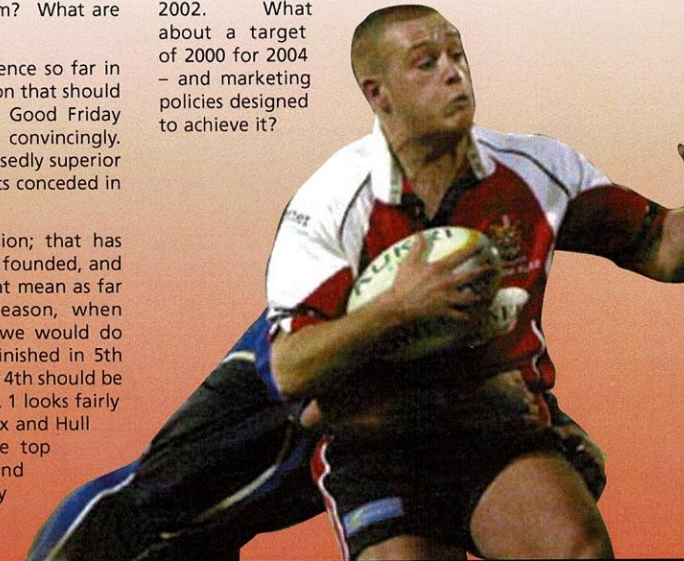
I have to say that the statistical evidence so far in 2004 is very inconclusive. 7 games won that should have been won (I write before the Good Friday game at Spotland)- and not all very convincingly. And in the three games against supposedly superior sides, three thrashings, with 149 points conceded in them.

The objective, obviously, is progression; that has been the case since the new club was founded, and it continues to be so. What does that mean as far as 2004 goes? Given that last season, when statistics from 2002 suggested that we would do well to survive in NL1 in 2003, we finished in 5th place, then I would have thought that 4th should be regarded as a good achievement. NL 1 looks fairly competitive to me, with Leigh, Halifax and Hull K.R. clear favourites to finish in the top three, and Featherstone and Whitehaven also quite strong. Batley

and Doncaster will be no mugs either, with probably Rochdale and Keighley favourites to be the relegation strugglers (though neither of them will be particularly easy to beat, especially on their own grounds.)

Last season, Hull K.R. in 4th place won 10 of their 18 games, 3 more than we did in 5th (though we did have two draws of course). That will not be easy – and, I suggest, will not be achieved unless we can increase the commitment to, and quality of, our defensive effort. It was great to see some of our recent attacking play – and particularly encouraging to see Ian Watson and Paul Southern at last beginning to perform like the quality players we have signed them to be. But real improvement, against good N.L.1 sides (not to mention those in Super League) requires us to prevent more tries than we did last year, when we conceded an average of 28 points per match. If we can get that down by, say 10, then top 4 would surely be assured. Over to the coaching staff!

I would like to suggest one more target, too. Our average league crowd last season was just under 16000 up on 2002. What about a target of 2000 for 2004 – and marketing policies designed to achieve it?



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IN THE NEWS

Well there's no doubting what the big issue in Rugby League was last week as I wrote this article – the choices of stadium for the Challenge Cup Semi Finals. The RFL have defended their decisions to choose Widnes' new Halton Stadium for the Wigan v Warrington semi on 18 April and Warrington's new Halliwell Jones Stadium for the St Helens v Huddersfield semi.

The Halton stadium has a capacity of 12,000 and Halliwell Jones 14,206. Already there have been strong protests from Wigan fans who claim that the 4,900 tickets available for each club at the Halton Stadium will not even satisfy the season ticket holders of both clubs.

The RFL say all four clubs agreed on the venues after extensive talks. Certainly Warrington Wolves' Chief Executive has no complaints and fully supports the decision. On the other hand Wigan Chairman, Maurice Lindsay, although agreeing that the clubs had accepted that decision, still sees problems, as he hadn't anticipated that his club's allocation would be as low as it is, which means all tickets will probably have been sold at the ground on Monday 5 April. This is seen as unfair to Wigan's many fans and indeed season ticket holders who live around the country.

RFL Executive Chairman, Richard Lewis fully backs the choice and said, "We should be playing in front of full stadia. It is simply not true to claim that the two clubs' combined season ticket numbers are greater than the capacity of Halton Stadium. Wigan fans bought 3000 semi final tickets in advance last year and 1000 turned up on the day. Rugby League is too used to its tickets for big matches being very easy to get. They should be hard to come by."

Fans organisations at both clubs, however are very upset and fully expect a bigger crowd than the Halton stadium maximum for the Super League game between the two sides on Easter Monday. One can see both sides of the argument, at least both semis will be played at Rugby League stadia, meaning money is kept in the game and a stadium packed to the rafters looks better on television and adds to the overall atmosphere. But, if true fans are unable to get tickets and let's be honest not all real fans are necessarily season ticket holders it does seem a shame. Added to that is the argument that the RFL are being less than optimistic if they feel a game of this magnitude is not going to draw more than 12000 fans. Just 15 years ago the two same teams drew over 26000 fans to a semi final at Maine Road.



Surely we should be looking to get 20000 fans there and as the Challenge Cup Final shows every year big games in rugby league don't only draw the fans of the two competing sides. Rugby fans will attend a great game whoever is playing. So the optimists say surely Preston's Deepdale or Bolton's Reebok Stadia would have looked full enough on television.

The other news of the week is without doubt good news. That is that the National Leagues have got a sponsor for the 2004 season. LFH Healthplan is a Yorkshire based company and part of the HAS Group. The company's marketing manager admitted that the deal had come about very quickly adding, "The opportunity came to our attention only two weeks ago. We are always looking at what we can do to support our brand, especially in the northern area...The roots of the game are in the north, it is community based and it attracts families. This fits really well with what we do as a company."

This is great news for the three National Leagues who were sponsor less after Ford pulled out after the 2002 season. And now onto that very same League which begins today with the visit of Featherstone Rovers. It promises to be very

competitive again but I'm prepared to put my head on the block and predict how I see the National League One table on 12 September after the last game. Here goes:

- 1 Leigh
- 2 Whitehaven
- 3 Oldham
- 4 Hull K R
- 5 Halifax
- 6 Batley
- 7 Featherstone
- 8 Doncaster
- 9 Rochdale
- 10 Keighley

A few surprises perhaps, but whether I'm close or way off what I can promise is a great season with almost all games being competitive. What more can a Rugby League fan ask for?

NM

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Joe Ferguson

1899 to 1923

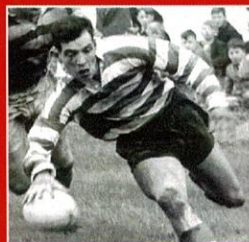
Arguably the greatest ever Oldham player, Joe made a record 627 appearances for the club. But for the First World War his appearances may have crept up to 700, a fantastic record



Alan Davies

1950 to 1961

Of all the big-name players who graced Watersheddings in the "Fabulous Fifties", Alan Davies was king. One of the greatest centres the sport has ever produced, Davies was the complete rugby league player



John Hough

1998 to present

John, a local lad, made Oldham RL history on December 2, 1997, when he became the new Roughyeds club's first signing. With 180 appearances, he is now contracted for 2004 and looking forward to his 7th season as a Roughyed



Across the decades, the Chronicle has kept its readers on the ball with match reports, news and views from Oldham Rugby League Club — the Chronicle's reporters and photographers have been there for every game.

From the club's first game in 1895 to its most successful post-war season in 1956-57 to the present Oldham Roughyeds, the Chronicle has been on the touchline!

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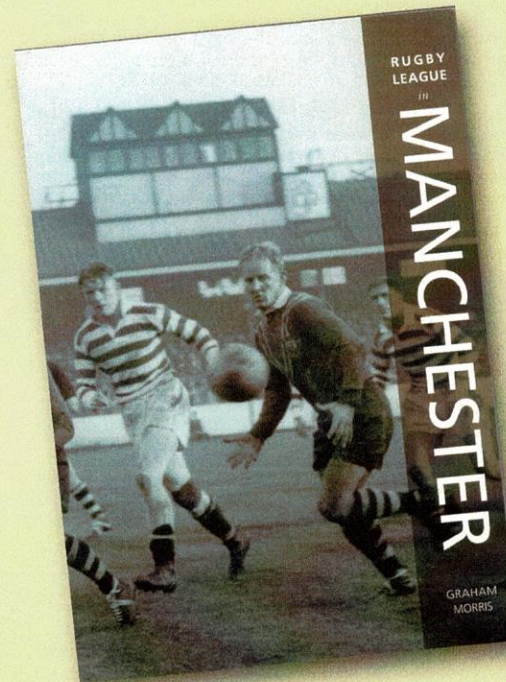
The voice of Oldham for 150 years



WALKERBOUT

With Brian Walker

RUGBY LEAGUE IN MANCHESTER



Long before Manchester United ruled the roost it was the oval ball that dominated the sporting scene in Manchester and its sister city Salford. Football played under 'rugby' rules was the code that drew in the crowds and when the Lancashire Rugby Union was founded in 1881 it was the Manchester region that had the strongest representation of clubs, Broughton, Broughton Rangers, Cheetham, Free Wanderers (based at Fallowfield), Manchester (Whalley Range), Manchester Athletic (Alexander Park), Manchester Rangers (Old Trafford), Salford and Swinton. Oldham were founder members too.

The link with rugby was cemented further when it was uncovered during research in 1982 that William Webb Ellis, credited to be the 'inventor' of rugby when it was purported that at Rugby School in 1823 he picked up the ball and ran (or, if you pay any attention to the RU it's now 'when' he picked up the ball and ran) was christened in Salford in 1807.

Whilst no professional rugby league team has ever carried the name of Manchester the city has certainly contributed significantly to the sport down the years. Fallowfield Stadium the home of Manchester Athletic Club hosted the first Challenge Cup Final to be played in Lancashire when Oldham beat Hunslet in 1899. And Maine Road was the venue when Oldham lost to Warrington in the 1955 Championship Final and then in 1987 played Featherstone Rovers in the Challenge Cup whilst Watersheddings remained frozen to its roots. And which Oldham supporter, who was fortunate enough to be there, will ever forget those amazing topsy-turvy Second Division Premiership Final victories over Featherstone and Hull KR during the eighties and nineties at Old Trafford.

Technically, as is Old Trafford, the magnificent Station Road Stadium at Swinton, before it was sinfully demolished was in the city of Salford and the 1964 Challenge Cup semi-final replay played there against Hull KR still remains the most talked about match in Oldham's recent history. As though not to be outdone the Willows hosted Oldham's Challenge Cup semi-final victory against Wigan in 1926 and not forgetting in more recent times that the Roughyeds took their Challenge Cup encounter against Ace Amateurs to Salford whilst once again Watersheddings resembled the Artic.

The recently published Rugby League in Manchester superbly written by the respected modern historian Graham Morris is the latest addition to the Tempus Images Of Sport series. It runs right through to the modern day including the cross code Wigan v Bath encounter held at Maine Rd and each of the Grand Finals hosted by Old Trafford. But for my money the highlight of this book is the coverage given to Belle Vue Rangers a team that I still vaguely remember watching as a youngster back in the mid 50's and with it a reminder of the exploits of the famous Belle Vue and Oldham borne international wingman Stan McCormick

The sporting heritage of Manchester and Salford, though, goes far beyond the boundaries of association and rugby football boasting that within its boundaries over 12,000 sporting organisations cater for 300,000 sportsmen and sportswomen. The 17th Commonwealth Games held at the new City of Manchester Stadium was a magnificent success and it surely won't be long before league is played at that stadium too.

Graham has surely picked an exciting time to publish his latest book worth every penny of its £12-99 price tag. Available from Sportspage's bookshop in St Anne's Sq, Manchester or order through any branch of Ottakers, Waterstones or Books etc. The ISBN number is 0-7524-3087-4

NATIONAL LEAGUE TALK

with GARETH WALKER of RUGBY LEAGUER & LEAGUE EXPRESS



THE BIG KICK-OFF!

THE real deal of the LHF Healthcare National League seasons start on Easter Monday - and it's what everyone has been waiting for.

That's not to say the Arriva Trains Cup group stages hasn't had its merits - the competition has provided some terrific action.

But the league campaigns are what the National League season is all about. Both NL1 and NL2 have a hugely competitive look about them.

Leigh Centurions will start as favourites for NL1, though not in the overwhelming manner that Huddersfield and Salford were in the past two years.

The Centurions have taken several teams apart during the ATC, and with coach Darren Abram insisting they have plenty of improvement left in them, they will certainly take some stopping.

This year's relegated team, Halifax, have not taken on that favourites' tag due to a combination of their lack of a full-time squad (as opposed to Huddersfield and Salford), and some indifferent performances in the ATC.

But make no mistake about it, with players of the calibre of Anthony Farrell, Phil Cantillon and Jon Roper in their ranks they should be among the front runners.

Hull KR have been a little up and down so far, but should also be among the NL1 leaders, along with Whitehaven, whose run to the Challenge Cup quarter-finals has shown their potential. Both teams will have to win consistently away from their own, fortress-like home grounds to ensure a top four spot.

Oldham and Doncaster have both shown glimpses of their potential, while if you are looking for a dark

horse then Batley Bulldogs - even without the injured Dean Lawford - could emerge from the pack and provide a real challenge.

Featherstone Rovers look the most difficult team to assess - their results have included a home defeat to 12-man York, and an against-all-odds win at Hull KR.

But most people expect the relegation battle to be fought out between Keighley Cougars and Rochdale Hornets, though no doubt respective coaches Gary Moorby and Bobbie Goulding believe their sides can pick up enough wins at home to avoid bottom spot.

In NL2, the strong favourites are York City Knights - and justifiably so, after an impressive ATC campaign and a run to the Challenge Cup quarter-finals.

Their main challenge is likely to come from last year's Grand Finalists Sheffield Eagles, whose recent recruitment has significantly strengthened what looked a paper-thin squad.

Hunslet Hawks and Barrow Raiders should also be up there, though they are also clubs who need to win more regularly on their travels.

Swinton Lions have battled against injuries so far but have several quality players, while Dewsbury Rams should be a force under respected coach Andy Kelly.

Workington Town and Chorley Lynx are both undergoing a period of rebuilding under new coaches, but both will have outside hopes of making the top six.

And though development clubs Gateshead Thunder and London Skolars are again expected to make up the bottom two, some encouraging displays in the ATC have suggested that both are capable of picking up wins during the course of the season.

Rugby Leaguer & League Express we will be publishing a midweek edition to cover the Easter Bank Holiday action. Our Easter Special will be on sale on Thursday 15 April, and will report on all the action from Easter Monday and Tuesday. It will, as usual, cost just £1. Make sure you order your copy, so you won't miss any of the Easter action.

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PLAYER PROFILE

LEE MARSH

WHEN one door closes another opens . . . it was always like that in sport and the Roughyeds door closed and opened for Phil Farrell and Lee Marsh respectively during the last off-season.

Phil, the Roughyeds captain, picked up a shoulder injury while playing for Ireland alongside Neil Roden and Lee Doran.

To cut a long story short, he needed an operation and it was about this time that Oldham were made aware that Lee was available and would be interested in coming back to the club after a short loan spell at the end of last season.

Whitehaven coach Steve McCormack, who knew all about Lee from the days when they were both at Salford City Reds, wanted to take him to the Recreation Ground. After seriously considering the move, however, St Helens-based Lee felt he would not be able to cope with the travelling to Cumbria several times a week and concluded that he would be better off at Oldham.

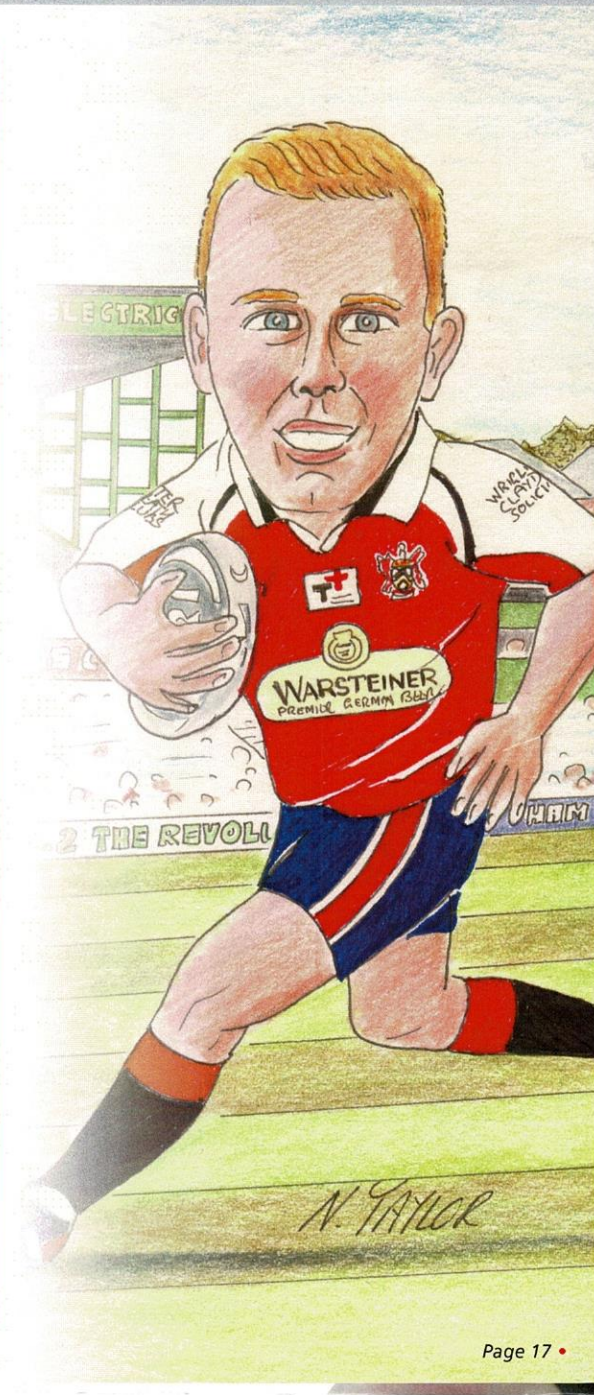
He already knew what life with the Roughyeds was like after his five games here at the end of last season. He played in each of the last five matches in the second-row alongside a young player who had just joined the club on a short-term agreement to the end of the season, Craig McDowell.

More significantly, Phil Farrell captained the side from loose-forward, but Phil's injury was to leave a hole at the back of the pack and the Roughyeds soon discovered that it was tailor-made for the versatile Marsh.

He came to the club with a reputation for being able to play at second-row, loose-forward, stand-off or centre. But he made it clear he didn't like centre and, in an interview in the Oldham Evening Chronicle, he said his choices, in preferred order, were stand-off, loose-forward and second-row.

As fate would have it, player-coach Steve Molloy was looking for somebody to fill the gap left by his club captain's injury.

Craig Farrimond, another new recruit, wore No 13 in a festive-season friendly at Whitehaven for the SEAT Trophy and



N. TAYLOR

LEE MARSH CONT...

Lee Doran played there in the next warm-up match against Rochdale Hornets at Boundary Park for the Law Cup.

But by the time the season proper began with the visit of Chorley to Boundary Park in the Arriva Trains Cup on February 1 Marsh had got the loose-forward jersey and he did enough to stick hold of it through February and March, on into April and up to the present time.

Born in St Helens and reared in rugby at Blackbrook, Lee was spotted by a Salford City Reds scout and taken to the Willows where he came under the watchful eye of the then academy coach at Salford, Steve McCormack.

Having only recently celebrated his 21st birthday, Lee was only a youngster at The Willows, but he managed to get a total of seven Super League games under his belt in seasons 2001 and 2002 at the age of 18 and 19.

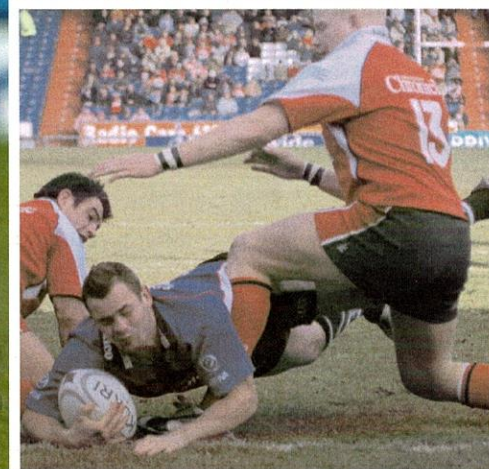
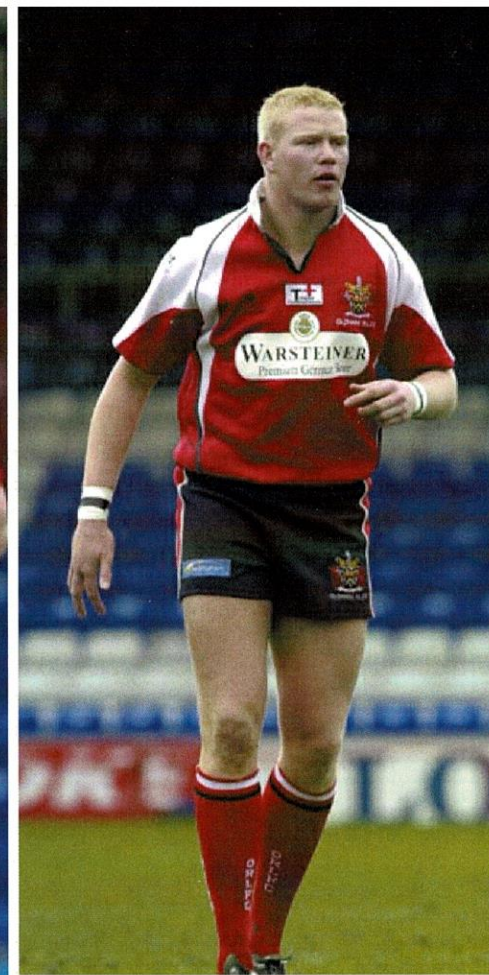
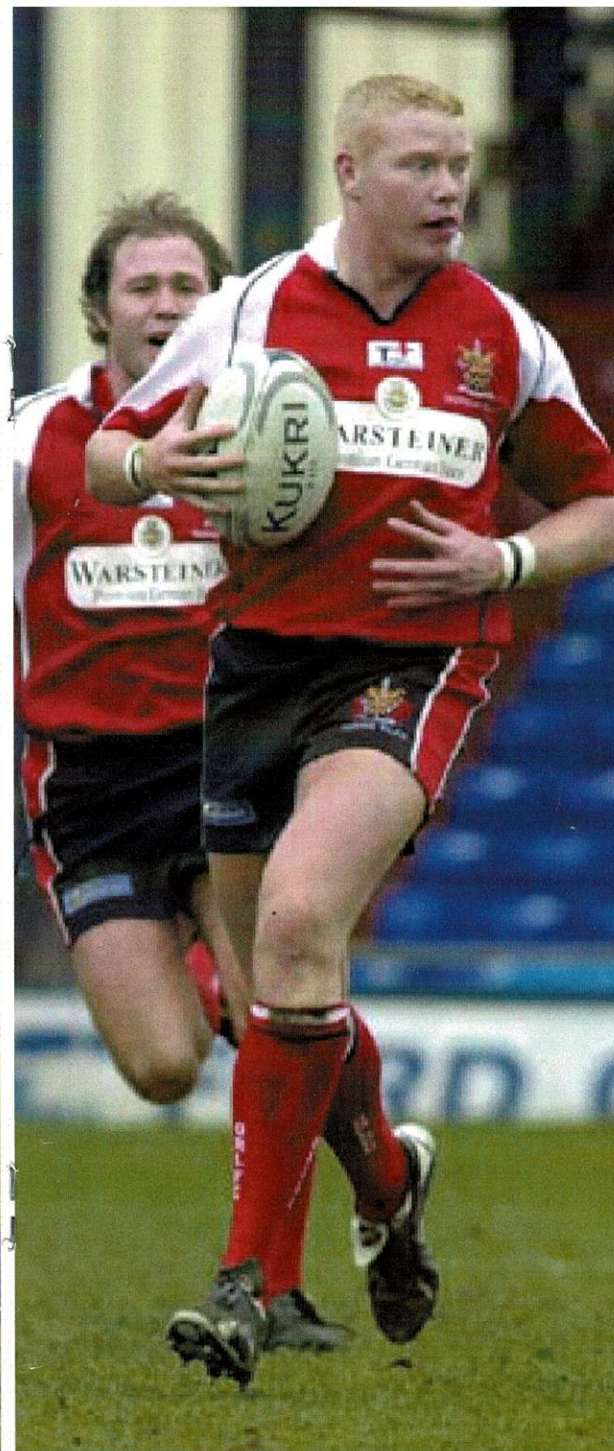
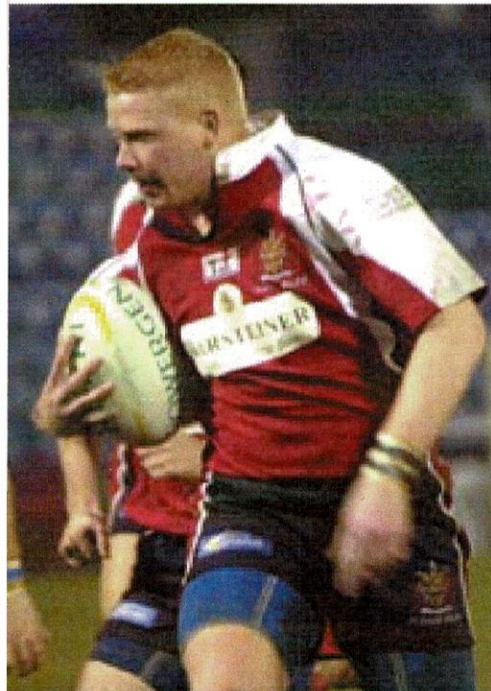
He was a full-time pro at Salford, but his desire to get more regular first-team rugby caused him to seek pastures new and the rest, as they say, is history.

He still helps out with the coaching at his former amateur club in St Helens, so enthusiastic is he about rugby league, and he has shown on numerous occasions while playing for Oldham this season that he is an accomplished all-rounder in rugby terms.

A sound and solid defender, he can read a game, throw a nifty pass and kick a bit --- talents which he hopes to put to good use as the Roughyeds embark on another season of National League first division rugby, starting with today's game against Featherstone Rovers.

He had the misfortune to be sent off in the recent Arriva Trains Cup game against Swinton here, but he was extremely down in the dumps afterwards. As player-coach Steve Molloy said: "Lee isn't that sort of player. He is a good pro who prides himself on doing things right. I didn't see the incident, but I know Lee and I know it would not be anything malicious."

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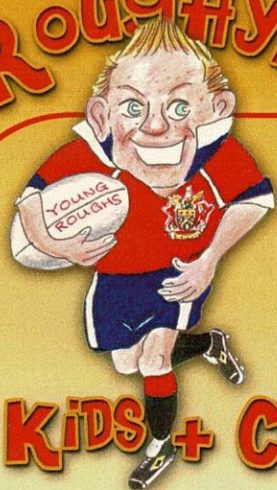
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WHAT A MATCH AGAINST THE "HORNETS" BET YOU ALL REALLY ENJOYED THAT RESULT, BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS NOTE WE MAY WELL HAVE DRUBBED THEM ON THEIR OWN TURF AS WELL. LET'S HOPE SO.

The mascot for today's match is eleven year old Mark Felix, who goes to Bare Trees Primary School. Mark's hobbies are rugby and playing the tuba, his favourite player is Gavin Dodd.

Thanks once again to our sponsors Saddleworth Sports, F R Elswood Ltd, The Oldham Advertiser, Cartridge World Oldham, Warburtons bakery & ASDA Chadderton.

Good Luck to Steve & the "Lads".

See you soon.

Janet & Carole



TODAYS MASCOT

Mark Felix

Age: 11

Hobbies: Rugby and Playing the Tuba

Favourite Player: Gavin Dodd

OLDHAM RUGBY SUPPORT GROUP

Today sees the start of the League season and we wish the lads all the best in the challenge ahead. Let's hope that we have a prolonged spell without further injuries, as the squad has certainly suffered its fair share since the start of the Arriva Trains competition. The lads have worked extremely hard in recent weeks to make such a positive impact following a jittery spell, and deserve some luck as their reward.

Thanks to every one who bought raffle tickets in the Big Egg Draw. £300 was raised and this will be split equally between fundraising for the club and the breast cancer charity, Breakthrough. Your support is much appreciated. Last Thursday our Easter EGGstravaganza will have been held. We hope that everyone who went to the party started their Easter with an enjoyable and fun evening.

Finally our best wishes to Alison Wild, a fellow club volunteer. She has been unwell recently and had to have a spell in hospital. Hope you are feeling better now, Alison.

DON'T MISS OUT - COME AND JOIN US

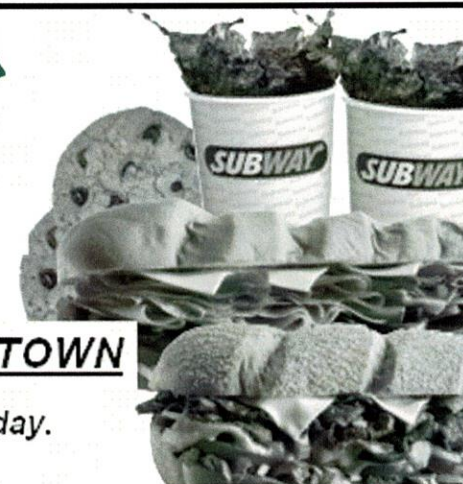
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ON THIS DAY

DON YATES LOOKS BACK TO APRIL 12TH YESTERYEAR

Eighty years ago Oldham suffered a disappointing defeat when they met Wigan in the final of the Rugby League Challenge Cup. The match was staged at the Athletic Grounds, Rochdale on Saturday 12th April 1924 and attracted tremendous interest throughout the north of England. As a result a crowd of 41,831 attended the match. At the time this was a World record attendance for a rugby league club match. The huge crowd spilled onto the playing area and so mounted police were called upon to patrol the touchline so that the match could be completed. It was reported that centre Jack Parker scrambled under one of the horses in order to score one of the five Wigan tries. Oldham were beaten 21-4, their points coming from goals landed by full-back Ernie Knapman and second-row forward Albert Brough.

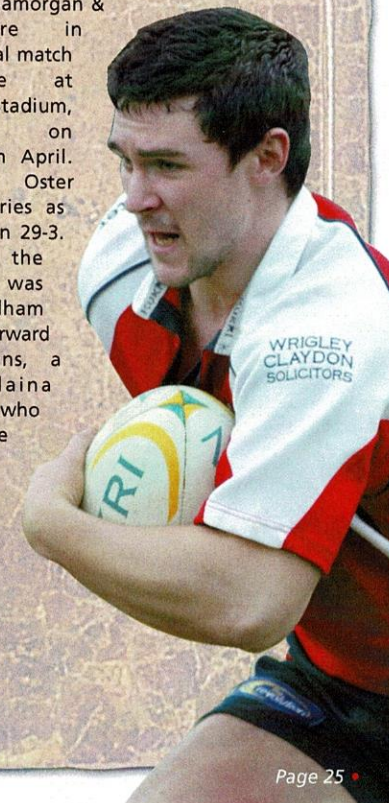
Oldham enjoyed a better afternoon on Saturday 12th April 1958 when another record was established as the Roughyeds defeated Hunslet by 38 points to thirteen at Watersheddings. Oldham scored eight tries in that match and full-back Bernard Ganley landed seven goals. Ganley's seventh goal was his 208th of the season and broke the record of legendary goal kicker Jim Sullivan, who had landed 207 during the 1933-34 season for Wigan, England and a Rugby League XIII. Ganley went on to kick 219 goals during that 1957-58 campaign, a record which lasted until 1973 when Salford's David Watkins recorded 221 successful kicks.

On Monday 12th April 1926 a crowd of 23,000 were attracted to Taff Vale Park, Pontypridd for the Wales-England international. At the time it was the biggest crowd to watch a rugby league match in Wales and the spectators were treated to a feast of fine, attacking rugby. Typically, the Welsh rugby union press criticised the match stating that '... kicking was sacrificed for passing...' and pointed out to their readers that the ball was only kicked nine times in the first half! England, who won 30-22, included two Oldham players in their line-up, second-row forward Bob Sloman and winger Sid Rix, who scored one of the eight England tries.

The Welsh Valleys have provided a number of players for the Oldham club down the years. On

Saturday 12th April 1947 two Oldham players were in the Welsh team which met France at St.Helens' Field, Swansea. In addition the Welsh second-row comprised of a former Oldham player, Doug Phillips (Belle Vue Rangers), and another, Bryn Goldswain (Hull Kingston Rovers), who was to join the club later and make a significant contribution to the formation of the great Oldham side of the 1950s. The Oldham players who were with the club at the time were loose-forward Les Thomas, signed from Llanelli RUFC, and the former Cross Keys RUFC centre Norman Harris who was outstanding in the Welsh victory. He scored the first Welsh try and set up the second as Wales built up a 15-2 lead early in the second half. France came back strongly in the final quarter but Wales hung on to win 17-15.

Oldham's test half-back Jack Oster played a big part in Lancashire's County Championship clinching victory over Glamorgan & Monmouthshire in 1930. That vital match took place at Wilderspool Stadium, Warrington on Saturday 12th April. Stand-off Oster scored two tries as Lancashire won 29-3. Included in the Welsh side was another Oldham player, loose-forward Emlyn Watkins, a former Blaina RUFC forward who joined the Roughyeds from Leeds.



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STATISTICS

Player stats for season 2004

Player	Appearances (Including Subs) [Max. 12] (inc Law Cup)	Tries	Drop Goals	Goals	Total Points
Jon Goddard	12	3	-	-	12
Will Cowell	12	7	-	-	28
Iain Marsh	8	6	-	-	24
Gareth Barber	12	2	-	17	42
Nick Johnson	12	13	-	-	52
Simon Svabic	11	-	-	22	44
Ian Watson	12	2	-	2	12
Paul Southern	11	2	-	-	8
John Hough	5	-	-	-	0
Dane Morgan	11	4	-	-	16
Lee Doran	12	3	-	-	12
Martin Elswood	8	1	-	-	4
Craig Farrimond	4	-	-	-	0
Gavin Dodd	12	6	-	-	24
Gavin Johnson	2	-	-	-	0
Adam Sharples	4	-	-	-	0
Neil Roden	9	8	-	-	32
Martin McLoughlin	11	-	-	-	0
Steve Molloy	10	-	-	-	0
Lee Marsh	11	3	-	2	16
Keith Brennan	9	1	-	-	4
James Bunyan	6	1	-	-	4
James Lomax	2	-	-	-	0
Pat Rich	2	1	-	5	14

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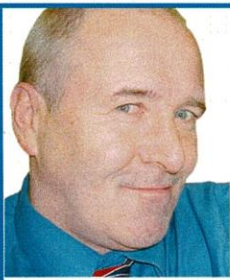
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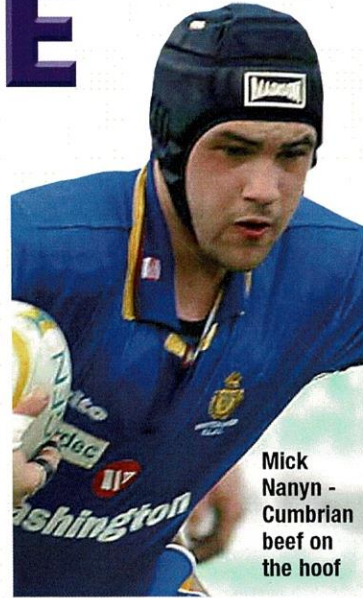
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LEAGUE WEEKLY



Mick Nanyin - Cumbrian beef on the hoof

JUST as the scientific community has failed to find concrete evidence of a dinosaurian amphibian doing tumble turns at either end of Loch Ness, neither has anyone yet deduced what it is about the M6 (north of Blackpool) and its effect on rugby players' physiques. Watching Whitehaven clatter a few Warringtonian egos up and down the Recreation Ground in the Powergen Challenge Cup brought a few memories flooding back. Chief amongst them was the undeniable fact that Cumbrian teams look a darn sight bigger on their own cabbage patches than they ever do once they've strayed south or east of Kendal.

It's not just that Whitehaven (reputedly) used to screw the coat hooks in the visitors' changing room about 7ft high. Gulp. When you got out on the field (and for me it was more likely to be Millom or Egremont) the opposition really did stand taller, run harder, and look like they eat raw meat – before the poor beast had been slaughtered. Many's the team bus, amateur and professional, that has travelled without a full complement, owing to a late epidemic of 'Cumbrian flu'.

"It's me back coach, honest!" "What's oop with it lad? Slipped disc? Or is it just that big yellor streak running up and down thy spine...?"

"It's the wife, coach, she's insisting I go Christmas shopping" ... "But it's March the 14th sunshine!" And the good old reliable one: "I'm having to work overtime Saturday morning, coach. Can't get out of it." So what if the 'victim' hadn't had a job since he left school? I know blokes in the National Conference who chose their club for the new season based on how many Cumbrian outfits were in the division.

Maybe it was a distance thing – each mile travelled north actually diminishing the physical powers of the bold adventurers. If so there's an argument that it works in reverse because those Cumbrian giants, seemingly carved out of Lakeland fells when breathing the Irish Sea air, were often reduced to a set of hillocks by the time they reached Hull. As some clubs have a home and away strip, maybe Cumbrians have a home and away team?

Or more probably, just like good old Nessie, it's all in the imagination. Either way, it was good to see the Cumbrian flag flying proudly in the cup quarter finals.

ONCE you conquered the fear of the Cumbrian field trip, there was always plenty to look forward to – and for we West Yorkshire sides it was the regular stopover in Skipton on the way back, by which time – win or lose – spirits were always uncommonly high. You might have lost a fallen comrade or two – not left in a Lakeland hospital, but more likely a result of them falling into an A66 hedgerow during one of the several loo stops. (Well, it would have been impolite to decline the Cumbrian hospitality). Then it was a knees-up and some more tackling practice – and the only kind I've ever been keen on by the way – this time during a protracted game of kiss chase round Skipton's pubs. Mind you, some of those farm girls bore striking resemblances to the blokes who'd just spent an afternoon kicking lumps out of us. It was probably a good job that my tackling, even at its mediocre 'best', was never that good. Happy days.

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Fixtures

DATE	OPPONENTS	CUP	VENUE	K. O.	RESULT	W/L	ATT
01/02/04	Chorley Lynx	AT Cup	Home	15.00	64-14	W	1096
06/02/04	Castleford Panthers	Powergen CC	Home	19.30	16-8	W	1003
15/02/04	Leigh Centurions	AT Cup	Away	15.00	51-32	L	2316
22/02/04	Swinton Lions	AT Cup	Away	15.00	18-30	W	783
29/02/04	Sharlston Rovers	Powergen CC	Home	19.45	24-4	W	1301
07/03/04	Leigh Centurions	AT Cup	Home	15.00	10-54	L	1805
14/03/04	Warrington Wolves	Powergen CC	Home	15.00	10-44	L	2859
21/03/04	Chorley Lynx	AT Cup	Away	15.00	10-40	W	370
28/03/04	Powergen CC Quarter Finals	Powergen CC					
28/03/04	Rochdale Hornets	AT Cup	Home	18.00	56-12	W	1214
04/04/04	Swinton Lions	AT Cup	Home	15.00	42-15	W	983
09/04/04	Rochdale Hornets	AT Cup	Away	19.30			
12/04/04	Featherstone Rovers	NL 1	Home	15.00			
18/04/04	Powergen CC Semi Final 1	Powergen CC					
18/04/04	Halifax	NL1	Away	15.00			
25/04/04	Powergen CC Semi Final 2	Powergen CC					
25/04/04	AT Cup Play-offs	AT Cup					
02/05/04	Leigh Centurions	NL 1	Home	15.00			
09/05/04	Hull Kingston Rovers	NL1	Away	15.00			
15/05/04	Powergen CC Final	Powergen CC					
23/05/04	Rochdale Hornets	NL 1	Home	15.00			
30/05/04	Batley Bulldogs	NL 1	Home	15.00			
06/06/04	AT Cup Quarter Finals	AT Cup					
13/06/04	Keighley Cougars	NL1	Away	15.00			
20/06/04	Whitehaven	NL 1	Home	15.00			
27/06/04	AT Cup Semi Finals	AT Cup					
04/07/04	Doncaster Dragons	NL1	Away	15.00			
11/07/04	Halifax	NL 1	Home	15.00			
18/07/04	At Cup Final	AT Cup					
25/07/04	Leigh Centurions	NL1	Away	15.00			
01/08/04	Hull Kingston Rovers	NL 1	Home	15.00			
08/08/04	Rochdale Hornets	NL1	Away	15.00			
15/08/04	Batley Bulldogs	NL1	Away	15.00			
22/08/04	Keighley Cougars	NL 1	Home	15.00			
29/08/04	Whitehaven	NL1	Away	15.00			
05/09/04	Featherstone Rovers	NL1	Away	15.00			
12/09/04	Doncaster Dragons	NL 1	Home	15.00			
19/09/04	NL 1 & 2 Play-offs	NL1					
26/09/04	NL 1 & 2 Play-offs	NL1					
03/10/04	NL 1 & 2 Play-offs	NL1					
10/10/04	NL 1 & 2 Grand Finals	NL1					
17/10/04	NL 1 & 2 Prom/Releg. Play-offs	NL1					

Key

AT Cup – Arriva Trains Cup
 Powergen CC – Powergen Challenge Cup
 NL1 – National League Division 1

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