

THE TEAMS

WIDNES VIKINGS

HEAD COACH STEVE MCCORMACK
ASSISTANT COACH JOHN STANKEVITCH

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. LOZ WILDBORE | The Crown Inn |
| 22. PADDY FLYNN | The Motorcycle and Scooter Store |
| 3. RICHARD VARKULIS | VIQI |
| 4. TOA KOHE-LOVE | Heritage Museum |
| 16. GAVIN DODD | Alban Electrical Services |
| 6. ANTHONY THACKERAY | Applied Acumen Ltd |
| 7. JAMES WEBSTER | Lady Vikings |
| 19. MICHAEL OSTICK | Roy Jacks Removals |
| 9. MARK SMITH | Derek Twigg MP |
| 10. JIM GANNON | Peter Crosby Landscapes Ltd |
| 11. LEE DORAN | Widnes Past Players |
| 12. RICHARD FLETCHER | The Healing Family |
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| | |
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OLDHAM RLFC

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24. MARCUS ST HILAIRE
4. PAUL REILLY
21. LUCAS ONYANGO
6. JAMES COYLE
7. THOMAS COYLE
16. WAYNE KERR
20. SIMEON HOYLE
25. LUKE MENZIES
17. CRAIG ROBINSON
23. CHRIS BAINES
11. DAVE ALLEN
13. ROB ROBERTS
12. TOMMY GOULDEN
26. LUKE SUTTON
10. JAMIE I'ANSON
8. PAUL HIGHTON

SCRUMS

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PENALTIES

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Officials

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THE VIKING

STORM

Friday 13th February 2009

The Official Widnes Vikings Magazine | Issue 14



O'Connor: 'Grand Finals are top priority'

Widnes Chairman Steve O'Connor says squad "must challenge for honours in 2009"

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Head of Youth Performance: Stuart Wilkinson

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Email: enquiries@widnesvikings.co.uk
Website: www.widnesvikings.co.uk

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World Cup Champions: 1989

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Lancashire Cup Winners:
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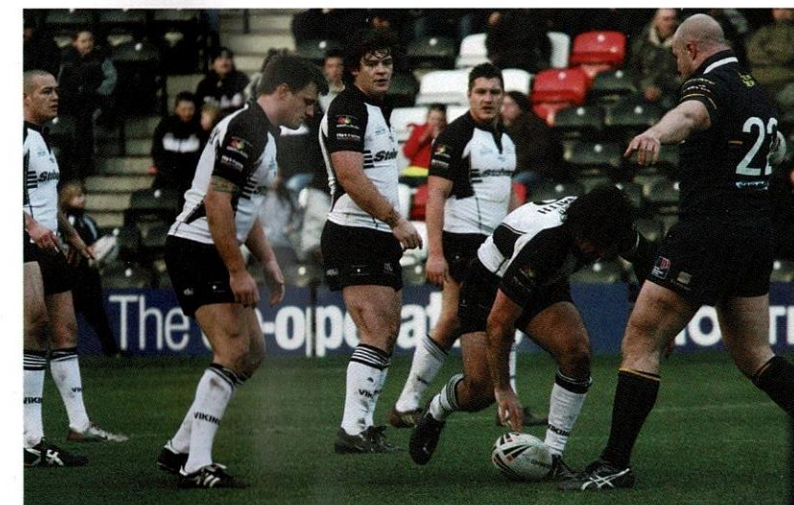
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THE VIKING STORM

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MATCHDAY PROGRAMME

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MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

I would firstly like to welcome everybody connected to Oldham RLFC to the Stobart Stadium for what is for both teams the first competitive game of the season..

There is pressure on us this year specifically as it's likely that the decision making process, involving the RFL, will come after two years activity. The next two years will give all teams, not just us, the opportunity to pitch for Super League and we are all aware of the criteria involving the Northern Rail Cup and the Co-operative Championship.

What we don't want to be doing is worrying about meeting that in year two and that is why there is pressure on us this year.

We are on an even keel with everyone else but I think the squad Steve McCormack has put together should be challenging for the Grand Final of both competitions. Anything short of that will be very disappointing.

We have attracted new fans this year as 350 new season ticket holders will be joining us tonight and the rest of the season - this underlines our plan of having full time fans for a full time squad.

We have some great initiatives lined up for the televised fixture with Toulouse and we hope we can smash our own record of having the biggest crowd for a Championship League fixture. The fact that Sky is around means that they can give clubs like us the coverage that we and the competition needs, as it's a very strong one in its own right.

We had a very fruitful meeting with the Sports Minister, Gerry Sutcliffe MP. He had a full tour of the stadium and he acknowledged all our hard work in what we are doing here in the town, at the club and in the community.

There is a big agenda, politically, for 2012 with the Olympics and it coincides with the promotion to Super League of a Championship club and that makes it a very interesting year for everybody.

It's all in the same time frame and we are preparing and getting the right procedures in place like the ministers are with the London Olympics.

We are working hard for the ultimate goal of Super League and although we don't know what will happen we are working with that Super League mind-set and by the time two years come round we will be in a strong position.

All the staff at the club are still working hard and their hard work is paying off in terms of what we are achieving off the field. Partnerships like the one we have with Halton Borough Council continue to be positive and newcomers like O'Neills are seeing value added in us and we with them and fans will have access to all the latest Widnes Vikings merchandise which is a far cry to what the club has had in the past.

We are all working for a three year plan and are looking forward to the next level. But we must achieve on the field too and we need to see expansion in our game. We have the squad and personnel to do that and we are determined to develop players, Widnes home grown players, and we want that at the heart of the club going forward with one eye on the next three years. We are in tune with fans in the way we are bringing Widnes lads through - the fans wanted that and now they have it. Widnes is a club dedicated to enhancing youth talent.

Last year there were some impressive results in isolation - now we want to see a determined effort to do better and improve. We certainly have the squad and strength in depth now to achieve these goals.

Returning to tonight's fixture; we know it's going to be hard but I know Steve has prepared his players well and I'm excited by the clash and the start of the season.

Enjoy the game
Steve O'Connor



McCormack:

'WE ARE RARING TO GO...'

I would like to welcome Oldham to Widnes tonight for the Northern Rail Cup Group Game and it should be a very entertaining clash. It's certainly one we are looking forward to after the false start against Barrow..

We are all made up that the pre-season games have finished and that they are all over. The pre-season puts you in good stead for the forthcoming season but what we need is real competitive games and we can't wait for tonight to get going.

Oldham will be tough and they have got high expectations this year and this game will be a good test for us. It was disappointing what went on at Barrow but it was no surprise as the weather was poor and half the pitch was frozen, but what it does do is give us more time to prepare for Oldham. The players were well prepared for Barrow and they will be tonight.

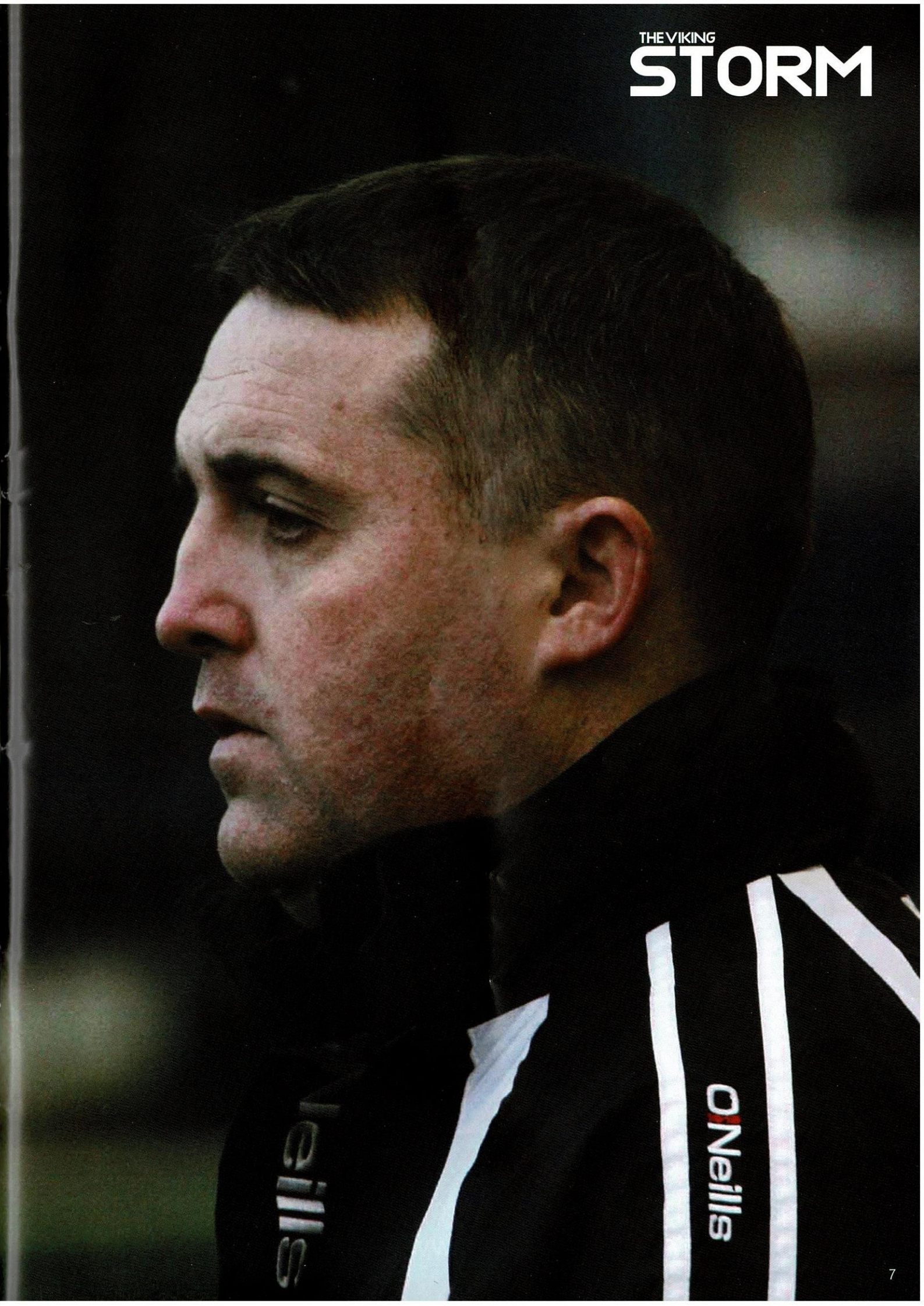
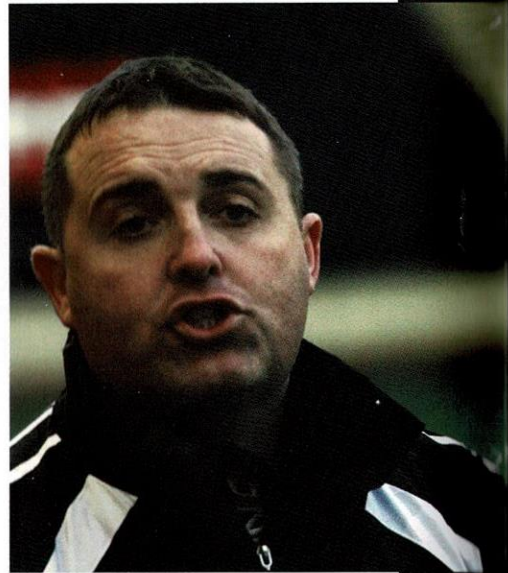
To get through to the next stage of the Northern Rail Cup is our number one priority. We have got four tough games and there is no real margin for error here. We need to make sure we get through but Barrow, Oldham, Gateshead and Blackpool will have something to say about that and they will see us a big scalp - and it's important that we are ready for the challenge.

The young lads have done well and there is a lot been made about that. Shane Grady, Michael Ostick, Josh Simm and Anthony Mullally have all come in and performed but now is the time for our senior players to step up too. We have a good bunch of senior players at the club and we want them to take the senior roles at the club both on and off the pitch. I have been impressed with both the younger players and some of the more experienced professionals and that gives me a selection problem which is always a good thing to have.

It's a very long season and we are at the beginning of our journey and we all need to pull together and do well. There is pressure on everyone here and we all know that but we relish that and look forward to it.

It would be great to get off to a winning start here against Oldham we can build on that and give our fans something to shout about.

Enjoy the game
Steve McCormack





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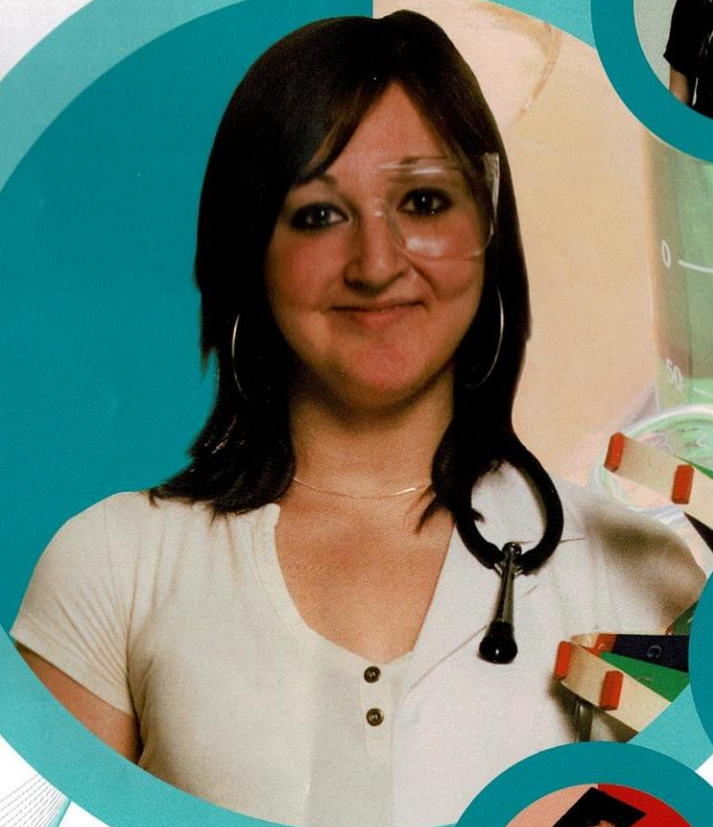
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VIKING NEWS

THE VIKING
STORM



NIGHT GAMES ARE JUST THE TICKET

By John Lawless

I'VE always liked night matches. It's probably because it reminds me of when I was a kid and my dad used to take me to the old Floodlit Trophy games which used to take place on a Tuesday night.

It was winter rugby in those days but I don't remember there being much moaning about the cold, the sleet and the icy wind.

In the modern era of summer rugby (yes I know it seems a million miles from that now, but I promise it will come), I think night matches are a particularly good idea.

I'm talking here purely in terms of the atmosphere a night match generates.

I realise that if work or other commitments make it difficult for you to get to night games, you're probably not in favour.

But I'm sure there are people in the opposite boat for whom it's more convenient than a Sunday afternoon.

From the perspective of Widnes Rugby League Club, I can certainly see how there may be some advantages in terms of attracting corporate spectators.

And if we really want to be hard-nosed about it, there could be some advantage to the team from playing night games in a predominantly part-time league.

(It is obviously unthinkable that a fine, upstanding club like Widnes would have taken the latter point into consideration).

For those people like myself who have to file match reports, night games do present some problems.

Namely, having to make tight deadlines for the next day's papers when you'd much prefer to slink straight off to the boozier with your mates to dissect the match over a pint or ten.

Reports may well be light on after-match quotes.

But given Steve McCormack says the same things after every match, I think we can live with that.

THE most devastating (legal) tackle I've ever seen was performed in a Widnes versus Oldham fixture at this very ground (then Naughton Park).

Although I can picture how it happened vividly in my mind's eye, I would like to make a plea for other details from anybody out there who remembers it.

My grasp of time is very ropery indeed.

I am often up to a decade out when it comes to remembering when stuff happened.

I've got nieces and nephews of whom I couldn't be certain if they're 20 or 30.

But former Widnes winger John Basnett was definitely the tackler (does that make it early 1980s?).

And the victim was an Oldham half-back whose surname, I think, was Taylor.

I have a feeling, but not a strong one, it may have been a Challenge Cup tie.

Anyway, Oldham worked a big overlap on their right hand side and 'Taylor' received the ball with several men outside him.

Spotting the danger, Basnett flew in from the Widnes left wing and was horizontal in mid-air as he cut the unsuspecting half-back in two.

The second before it happened was a horrifying moment.

It was like watching somebody about to be mown down by a speeding car and being unable to do anything about it.

'Taylor' was annihilated and his seemingly lifeless body was scraped onto a stretcher and carried down the tunnel.

If you can fill in the blanks, let me know. I doubt 'Taylor' can.

LIKE many Widnes fans, I'm really looking forward to a trip to Toulouse this year.

Only problem is, with the way the pound has been going against the euro, it looks like being unbelievably expensive.

We could be looking at the seven quid pint!

A friend of mine who is a regular visitor to that part of the world reckons it would make more sense to stick to the vino.

My girlfriend, who isn't going, suggests staying off the booze altogether.

I've told her I will.

I'm saving up.

SMITH: 'WE ARE IN CONTROL'

WIDNES skipper Mark Smith says the players are in full control of their own destinies this season - despite the media dubbing them the favourites to lift the Championship title this season.

Smith, 25, says the only pressure the players are under is pressure from themselves to perform and from the coaching staff and he is happy for the Vikings to do their talking on the pitch.

He said: "At the end of the day we can't control what is being said elsewhere and all we can do is do our talking on the pitch. As professionals we all have that element of pressure on ourselves as we want to win and perform to the standards that we know we can.

"The competition this year is very good and we know that we will have to perform week in week out to get results but we are all keeping a level head and feet firmly on the ground.

"We haven't started the season yet and I know the lads can't wait to get out there and get going. We have been waiting 14 weeks for this and we are raring to go.

"I know these are clichés and overused phrases but we really are raring to go - especially after what happened at Barrow."

Smith says Steve McCormack and John Stankevitch have prepared the players well and he is happy with the way the friendly games have gone.

He added: "To be fair the games have been just what we needed. I feel that we got more out the recent Saints game than we did when we played Whitehaven as it showed where we need to improve and where we aspire to be.

"I'm not saying that we want to be Saints and play the type of football they play but sometimes when you play teams that are as organised it can be harder for you to adapt.

"We were up against some top international players against Saints and I faced James Roby for the first time and he changed the game for them when he came on and that shows you a what strength they have.

"I have played against Kieron (Cunningham) a lot of times during my days with Wigan and he still is a massive presence for them but you can't ever stop learning.

"We stood up a bit better in the second half and we did all-right but I can assure you that Saints will be doing that to a few teams this year."

Smith says areas like the ruck have already been highlighted by the Widnes back-room staff and he is after big improvements this season.

He said: "We need to sharpen up our play-the-balls though and as a hooker that is what you want to get a roll on. If we can get speedier play the balls and get some real momentum going forward then we can do a lot of damage as we have the creative players in the team to do that.

"There is lot's of things that we can tighten up and your never content as a professional player as we want to improve week on week.

"We've got the squad here to potentially do well but the talking starts on the pitch and it starts tonight."



SAINTS MASTERCLASS

WIDNES VIKINGS 6
ST HELENS 54

ST HELENS produced a near flawless display to brush aside a competitive Widnes Vikings outfit at the snow drenched Stobart Stadium.

Mick Potter's star studded Saints outfit were no match for the Vikings and they created nine well worked tries while giving all fans a glimpse of what they will do to some Super League sides in weeks to come.

The blustering wind and snow covered surface may have posed problems for some sides but Saints put in a typical performance and threw the ball round like a basketball and spectators were treated to some well worked tries and patches of individual brilliance from the former World Champions.

From Widnes' point of view it was probably their biggest test in two years and for spells they put up a fight but the difference in styles and class were evident as Saints turned a 0-6 lead into 0-30 with hardly a blink of an eye.

The most notable reason for that was the sheer speed of the play-the-ball and the slowing down of Widnes' - it really made a difference to the outcome of the game, even though the Vikings weren't ever really in contention.

Ade Gardner and Matt Gidley both went in for doubles while new boy Tony Puletua proved to be a big handful and he kept his nice scoring run intact too.

Widnes' biggest positive of the day came from young prop-forward Michael Ostick.

Having to face Man of Steel James Graham, Great Britain forward Maurie Fa'savalu and man mountain Puletua would be a daunting task for anyone, but the young Widnesian embraced the challenge and was by far and away Widnes' best player for the second consecutive game.

His leg speed, go-forward and some bone crunching tackles made him stand out in a youthful looking Widnes pack and he is one to watch for the future as well as the present.

Things didn't start well for Widnes and they were on the back foot straight away as Saints played Champaign football with Gardner touching down following quick Saints hands.

Sean Long added the extras and he very nearly obliged again as Graham burst onto a short ball on 11 minutes but Widnes' impressive skipper Mark Smith put in the hit of the game by knocking the ball out of Graham's grasp in a excellent ball-and-all tackle.

Widnes enjoyed a good spell of pressure for he next 10 minutes and it was Saints keeping them at bay but the Vikings just couldn't find the probing pass that mattered.

But a few electric play-the-balls later Saints were in again as Gardener touched down out of nothing.

James Roby was thrown into the fray as Saints cranked up the pressure on the home side and he and Long combined to send over Chris Flannery, who wasn't to be stopped from 15 yards.

Rookie winger Jamie Foster landed the first of what was to be seven conversions which deepened Widnes' misery.

Fa'salavu made another try with an exquisite offload to Bryn Hargreaves who put in Long to make it 0-24.

There was no coming back for Widnes from this and when Lee Gilmour powered over down the left flank the game was cut and dried.

Saints didn't relent in the second period but Widnes dug in which was a credit to them.

The second period seemed a lot better for the Vikings and they did get themselves into decent scoring positions but couldn't quite capitalise.

Saints were always in control and Leon Pryce kicked through to Matt Gidley for Saints' next score just after the break.

Widnes fans finally got something to shout about when Paddy Flynn raced over from 60 yards while saving a try in the other end.

Flynn is fast showing signs that he could be a real danger-man for Widnes this season in the Championship with his raw pace and natural try scoring ability and it isn't getting unnoticed at this level either.

At 6-36 the game was dead and buried but Saints continued to put a show on and Gidley crossed for another four pointer three minutes later - just to show who the boss was after Widnes' blistering try.

Gilmour, who looked good in the centre for Saints, put over substitute Tom Armstrong and in the final five minutes Puletua made it two tries in two Saints appearances as he barged his way over on 76 minutes.

Head Coach Mick Potter said he was pleased with what he had seen.

He said: "It was a good hit out for us and we can get a lot from the game. The team I named was probably very close to the starting team, bar one or two players who aren't with us.

"But the game will be a lot different in two weeks time and we will have to assess where we are then.

"Francis Meli will be back with us in training soon and we will have to see what he's like before we put him back and there is Jason Cayless to consider too."

Widnes boss Steve McCormack said the Vikings are improving all the time.

He said: "It was a big game for us and Saints can do that to anyone. I thought they were excellent. We have shown a lot of improvement since the first of our four pre-season games. We have played two very good Super League sides this week and I have learn a lot about the players and the psychology of the players."

He also gave Ostick a huge rap for his man of the match display.

McCormack added: "People have said 'where is the big Aussie or Samoan prop-forward?' We are giving our youngsters a chance here at Widnes and in Michael Ostick we have a young player who is really stepping up and showing signs that he can be a good player for us.

"He needs to keep working hard but he is showing the signs which is good news."



GAMESTAR: Sean Long was at the heart of everything for Saints.

GAMEBREAKER: James Roby's introduction after 20 minutes gave Saints the boost they needed to eventually put a number on Widnes during the first half.

WIDNES:

Tries: Flynn
Goals: Hartley (1 from 1)

SAINTS:

Tries: Gardner (2), Flannery, Long, Gilmour, Gidley (2), Armstrong, Puletua
Goals: Long (2 from 2), Foster (7 from 7)

PENALTIES:

Widnes: 1
Saints: 8

HT (Sts First): 30-0
FT (Sts First): 54-6

REF: Ian Smith ATT: 2562 Pens: 3-8

TEAMS:

SAINTS:

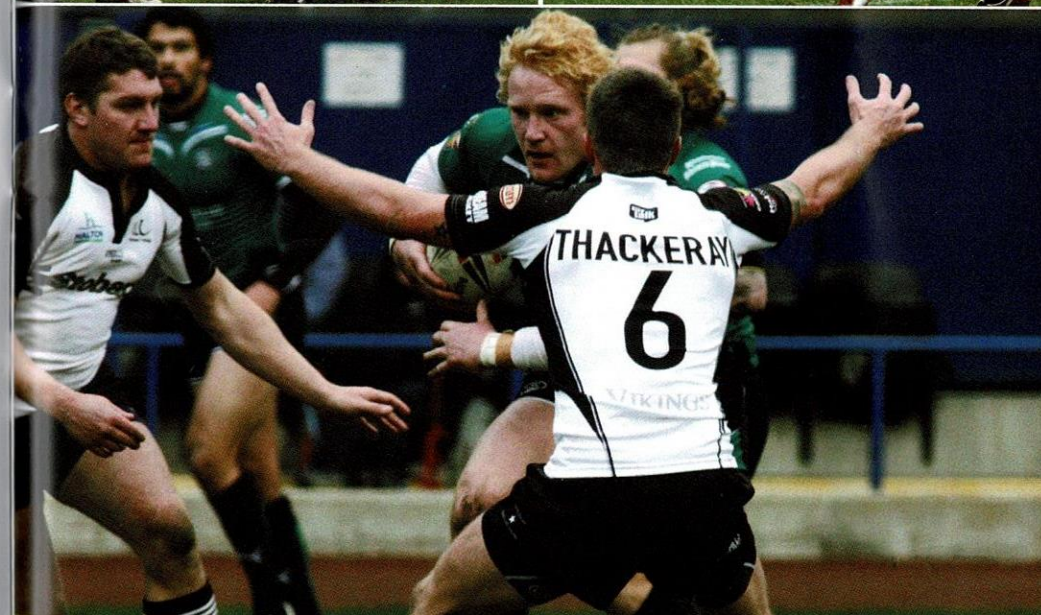
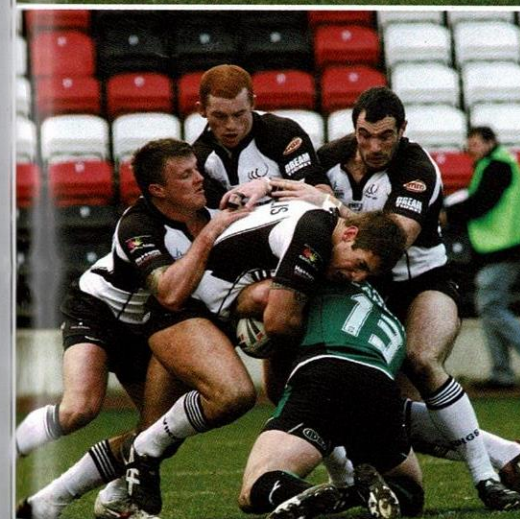
1. Paul Wellens; 2. Ade Gardner; 3. Matt Gidley; 11. Lee Gilmour; 29. Tom Armstrong; 6. Leon Pryce; 7. Sean Long; 10. James Graham; 9. Keiron Cunningham; 16. Tony Puletua; 12. Jon Wilkin; 13. Chris Flannery; 17. Paul Clough.

SUBS: 14. James Roby; 15. Bryn Hargreaves; 19. Chris Dean; 23. Maurie Fa'savalu; 25. Jamie Foster; 28. Matty Ashurst.

WIDNES:

21. Scott Yates; 22. Paddy Flynn; 23. Shayne Grady; 15. Tim Hartley; 16. Gavin Dodd; 6. Anthony Thackeray; 7. James Webster; 10. Jim Gannon; 9. Mark Smith; 19. Michael Ostick; 11. Lee Doran; 18. Matt Strong; 3. Richard Varkulis.

SUBS: 1. Loz Wildbore; 8. Iain Morrison; 12. Richard Fletcher; 17. Ben Kavanagh; 20. Sam Thompson; 24. Josh Simm; 25. Anthony Mullally; 27. Brett Robinson; 31. Dave Houghton.



MARK NAUGHTON 'CLASS OF 2009'

ON TUESDAY 3RD FEBRUARY, WIDNES VIKINGS SUPPORTERS CLUB STAGED THEIR ANNUAL 'MEET THE PLAYERS EVENING' WHICH WAS HOSTED BY MYSELF (MARK NAUGHTON) AND MY PARTNER IN CRIME GARY MCGRATH.

Considering the dodgy weather we'd been experiencing at the time, it was good to see that a healthy crowd had braved the near-arctic conditions and come along and support this long-running event.

In a system which can only be described as a 'mathematical genius', we introduced the 'Class Of 2009' in blocks of four, in ascending order; however in the absence of Loz Wildbore, first onto the stage was a player described by his Captain, Mark Smith in a recent interview with yours truly, as a 'freak', yes indeed Dean Gaskell, always a man of many words, opened proceedings and told us all of his goals for the year; "I just want to keep on aiming up and trying to get better with each new season, and that's all I can do, really, isn't it?" I couldn't have put it any better myself, mate!

New boy, RICHARD VARKULIS, a player who Steve McCormack readily admits, has impressed him on every occasion that he has coached against him, is certainly looking forward to the season ahead is excited about what may lie ahead.

He said: "To be honest, I've joined Widnes because I'm an ambitious player, and I genuinely believe that I can progress further at this Club, who are easily the biggest Club outside Super League, and hopefully we can make that journey back into the top flight together, and I know that I'm not alone in feeling this way, as the enthusiasm around this place is second to none, and I'm really pleased at how well I've settled in here."

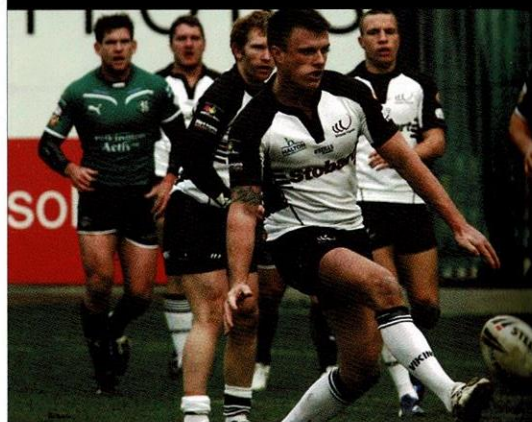
Having been a victim of circumstances out of his control, which led to him leaving the club, TOA KOHE-LOVE is certainly pleased to be pulling the black and white jersey on again. He said: "When Steve phoned and asked me about re-joining the Vikings, I didn't need any thinking time whatsoever, as it's a great club and I consider myself very fortunate to be invited back here. The way things ended in 2007 after the great year we'd had, in reaching two Finals and winning one of them, only to see it all fall apart, was devastating, so hopefully I can put in some good performances again this year and as a Club we can continue to move forward and tick all of the boxes that we need to, in order to get a Super League license the next time around, because they were desperately unlucky not to be granted one, when they were last handed out, that's for sure!"

Joining the Club from Sheffield Eagles is wing-man, DANNY MILLS, whose broken nose at St. Helens on his Widnes debut, has kept him sidelined in recent weeks but now he's back in full working order, and he's desperate to get going again.

"Yeah it wasn't the best of debuts was it?", Mills said. "And missing out since hasn't been the best of starts for me, but overall

I'm really enjoying life at Widnes, even the abuse that I got from Terry O'Connor after breaking my nose was all taken as good fun, and it's a great place to be and I'm glad to be here."

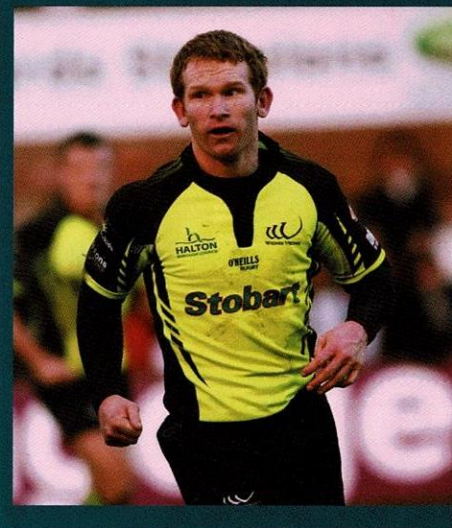
After failing to land him last year, Steve McCormack finally got his man when ANTHONY THACKERAY signed on the dotted line, with the former Castleford man admitting that he was just as keen to come here, as his now Coach was to get him here.



Thackeray said: "Yeah, we spoke about a loan-deal last year, but for one reason or another, it didn't pay off, even though I was extremely keen to come here at the time, so when the opportunity came around again, I was glad to put pen to paper. It's a really professional set-up here at Widnes and everything's going really well, and on the back of a tough, physical pre-season, all the boys are looking forward to the challenges ahead, and hopefully the combinations and partnerships will all fall into place between us as a team, and we can have a big year!"

Pulling on what is seen by many to be the 'poisoned chalice' jersey for the Vikings this year is JAMES WEBSTER, who it must be said, seems pretty undaunted by the task of donning the Number Seven garment, and admitted, "To be honest, it seems to fit all right, mate!"

Joking aside though, he appreciates only too well the responsibility that comes with playing in such a demanding role. "At any Club, the Scrum Half always has a massive amount of responsibility on his shoulders, but I'm obviously going to be looking towards contributing to the best of my ability each week as will all the other players too, regardless of whatever number they've got on their back, and in doing so, hopefully as a Team we can reap any rewards which may come our way."



It's great to see LEE DORAN back in the black and white (or 'electric yellow') isn't it? Mind you, there was a little bit of, "Will he, won't he?" going on for a while, before pen was finally put to paper, so what was that all about?

Doran said: "As soon as the Club expressed an interest in me, I was always coming back. Mind you, now that I am back, I'm treating it as a move to a brand new Club because so much has changed about the place, even though I've only been away for a year and it's really exciting, plus, as all of the players will tell you, when the time finally arrives for you to hang up your boots, quite often you can tell how successful your career was by the amount of Trophies that you've won, and it's fair to say that there's only one place where you're going to win medals in this Division, and that's right here at Widnes, so I'm thrilled to be back!"

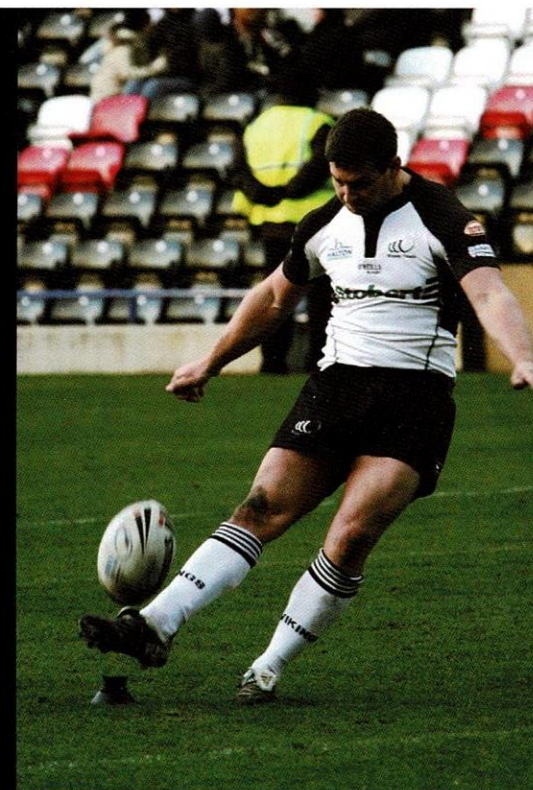
After spending the previous two pre-seasons sidelined through injury and unable to throw himself completely into things, RICHARD FLETCHER is another player who is like a dog on a lead and desperate to be let off and get going again. "Like a couple of the boys have already said, I also believe that I didn't have the best of seasons last year either and I'm determined to show that it was definitely a one-off, so to say that I've got a lot to prove to both myself and my team-mates, is a bit of an understatement really."



Eventually, donning the number thirteen shirt for the Vikings in 2009 in hopefully the not too distant future, will be LEE PATERSON, who as you'd expect is a terrible watcher of the game and would much rather be out-there getting stuck in, instead of ploughing his way through his Rehab programme, on the rocky road to recovery.

Pato said: "To be honest, I didn't actually think that I would find being a spectator too hard, but it's been an absolute nightmare and it gets more and more frustrating the longer it goes on, but in regard of the injury itself, fingers crossed, at the moment there's been no complications whatsoever and everything is going really well and I'm on track, time-wise, so hopefully the end isn't too far away now, so I'm feeling pretty positive and training hard."

After missing a fair amount of games through injury last season, and therefore being classed as something of a 'new boy' this year, by his Captain Mark Smith, did TIM HARTLEY see things this way, too? "Being my first year at Widnes last season, I was absolutely gutted to miss so many games, so to get three out of the four pre-season games under my belt is a huge relief, and with a bit of luck, any niggles and injuries will be a thing of the past now, and I can look forward to a bit more time on the pitch in 2009, where I can repay the faith shown in me by the club, which I'm extremely grateful for!"



'CLASS OF 2009'

CONTINUED...

NEXT IT WAS THE TURN OF FOUR OF THE CLUBS' 'YOUNG GUNS' TO TREAD THE BOARDS.

with firstly **BEN KAVANAGH**, admitting that there was something of a 'feel-good factor' around the place at the moment, "It's a great place to be at, and we're learning something new every single day, which is great, plus we're fortunate that all of the lads get on really well with each other and it's not a case of the older players like Jim Gannon all hanging around together and the younger lads left to do their own thing at all, like you can get at some clubs."

Having worked his way right through the Clubs' youth systems to where he is now, **MATT STRONG** was next on the microphone, and he is hopeful that the experiences he gathered last year in particular, will benefit him long term, "I'm certainly feeling a lot more confident that I was at this stage last year, and as Ben suggested, every day is different and some of the things that as younger players, we are learning from some of the Squads more experienced players can only benefit us, so it's vitally important that we take as much information as we can on board, and then use this to improve our performances whenever we're given the opportunity to do so."

SAM THOMPSON joined Widnes from near-neighbours St. Helens, where despite featuring occasionally in the First team, he readily admits that at 22 years of age, he is at that stage where ideally he should be playing on a more frequent basis, and believes that by moving 'down the road' to the Vikings, he can realise his ambitions,

"Definitely, I've come here in the hope that I can warrant a First Team place and in no way whatsoever do I see it as a step-down at all, and from what I've experienced so far, I have to admit that this place is everything and more, to what a Super League club is supposed to be and everything is extremely professional about the place, and I'm here to give it my best shot, without a doubt!"

Racing in for four tries in Widnes' four pre-season games, was exciting young Winger, **PADDY FLYNN**, who is still "amazed!", firstly how he somehow managed to secure the ball in a one-on-one tackle and then break through and race the next 70 metres to the line against St Helens recently. One thing I was curious to learn though, was being a St. Helens born-lad of course, did he get any stick from the natives in the aftermath of scoring that opportunist effort, "Yeah, I've had a few people stopping me and saying, what did you go and do that for, but you know, they're all worth four points at the end of the day, even though that one was a bit special, wasn't it?"

One thing which has been noticeable in recent times, has not only been the change in body shape of some of the players, but confidence-wise the players are all one year older and wiser than this time last year too, and it was great to see that someone such as **SHANE GRADY** hasn't lost any of his 'cheeky-charm' since his elevation to the First Team squad.

"I feel a lot more comfortable around the players this year if I'm honest with you, and there's absolutely no way that any of the older players would pick on any of the younger lads anyway, because they all know that I'm the 'Don' around here, and what I say goes and I won't stand for any of that attitude!"

JOSH SIMM confirmed that having such banter around the places is great, "I think that it's brilliant, the way we all get on with each other so well, both on and off the pitch, and we've all bonded really well as a Squad and even though we all want to do well as individuals, everyone is always happy to help each other out too, which always comes in handy for me, with me not being such a big fan of training!"

To round off proceedings, the final three players in attendance all had their turn 'in the spotlight' too, with local lad done well, Anthony Mullally first to 'overshadow' both Gary and myself with his presence.

"To be honest, I'm just happy to be involved in things and playing in the friendly games is something that I could only have dreamed of last year and it's all a bit surreal and sometimes feels like a bit of a dream at times, so to be given the opportunity to play for the First Team is something that I'm extremely grateful for and I'm proud to have done, and if I'm lucky enough to get the chance to do it again this season, I'll feel exactly the same way again because I'm desperate to make the most of anything that comes my way."

STEPHEN BANNISTER is another of the Squad's 'unfortunates', having fallen victim to injury in one of his first Training Sessions at the Club, meaning that, he's obviously gutted to have missed out on the action, thus far, especially against his former employers' Salford, "Yes, it would've been nice to crack a few skulls shall we say, but having said that, I'm not bitter in the slightest!"

What is good to see, is that the broken ankle, is now cast-free, so does this mean that it won't be too long before we finally get to see him in a Viking shirt, "Hopefully, but it's one of those injuries that has to heal fully and can't be rushed, which is a bit frustrating at times because you can start to feel as if you're just hanging around the place, but with a bit of luck I'm not too far away now."

And finally, **BRETT ROBINSON**, who having worked his way through the system at Wigan is also now of the age where he feels that he should be playing more often, but as is often the case at certain Clubs', sometimes the Coach always prefers to cherry-pick a recognised 'name player' from another Team and often another Country, instead of giving an opportunity to a ready-made replacement from his own Reserve Team, which must be frustrating to be on the receiving end of, "Well, that's just what happens in Sport I suppose!" admitted Brett, "But it is frustrating yes, but in many ways, sometimes it can also be character building too, and I'm certainly out to make the most of this chance that I now have here at Widnes, and maybe prove a point or two along the way, as well!"

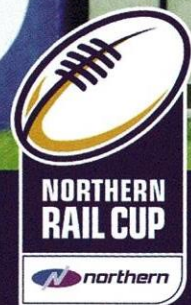


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PAUL COOK: THE MAIN COURSE

It was disappointing that the first scheduled meaningful action of the season had to be called off

Now we will be kicking the campaign off on the not altogether auspicious date of Friday 13th.

I'm not personally a sufferer of paraskevidekatriaphobia – fear of Friday 13th, fact fans - but there will be plenty of others who will spend the day avoiding black cats, ladders and any other form of bad luck charm.

Will the Vikings be in need of any kind of help from supernatural forces? Well we've not got much of a form guide to go on have we?

Oldham did lose a pre-season game to Barrow pretty heavily, but were without several first choice pack members who

would have given them a bit more solidity. Amongst these is the vastly experienced Bob Roberts who has had plenty of run-ins with Widnes in the past.

They are likely to include one or two familiar faces tonight with James Coyle, Paul O'Connor, Lucas Onyango and Dave Allen all ex-Vikings on the Roughyeds' books. The latter suffered an injury against Barrow but is expected to be fit for selection.

The size of Barrow's win, 38-4, suggests that taking them on, away from home, on a freezing Sunday as a first competitive hit-out might have been quite a tricky task. So maybe the postponement wasn't all bad news.

I think the real interest when the season kicks off is how the side lines up, which then gives us in the stands plenty of food for thought.

The absence of a number of players through injury has allowed extra game time for players who might not necessarily have been thought of as first choice, but who have staked their claim very early on.

To my mind the biggest contender for a starting jersey has been Michael Ostick with some very noticeable performances at prop. His commitment in hitting the line has marked him out straight away, and he must be in the running for a front row spot.

We have also seen Paddy Flynn make a decent fist of his chance on the wing with both Danny Mills and Dean Gaskell sidelined with injury.

He looks to have some natural advantages on his side in terms of size and speed, and if he continues to progress then there will be some genuine competition for wing spots this season with Flynn, the aforementioned injury-struck duo and Gavin Dodd all battling it out for two places.

Without wishing to denigrate anyone's performance so far, it does need the competition to have started for real before you can really judge who is going to be the Vikings' stand-out players this season.

That's the biggest let down of last weekend because the friendlies can only ever tell you so much.

What the last game with St Helens told us, however, is that no matter who the tribute is for, it's very difficult to draw a crowd to a pre-season game.

There could hardly have been a bigger name in Widnes's history than Vince Karalius, but even with the match in his honour against a side as successful as St Helens in the current game, it was a struggle to draw 2,500 people to it.

There are several reasons why the attendance would be down. The result was a foregone conclusion, there was football on the telly and it was a bitterly cold day, but it was still a disappointment to see the size of the crowd.

There has been a lot of discussion about a statute – not a bad idea, especially as Saints fans missed their chance by voting for Keiron Cunningham – but I'd like to see something that was more clearly representative of Vinty's visionary approach to the game.

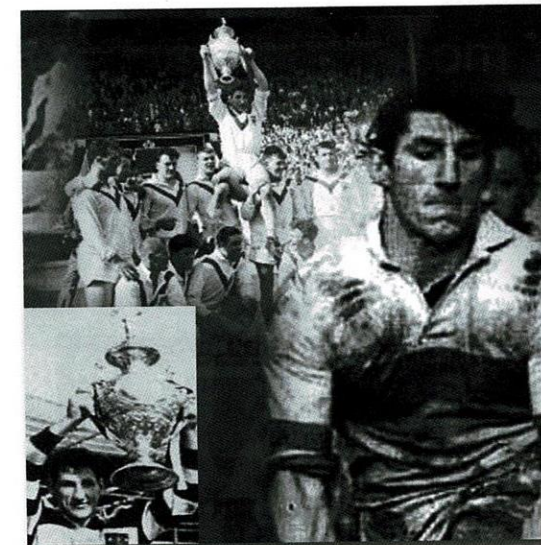
I'd like Widnes to establish a Vince Karalius scholarship to bring in a player from a developing country for a one or two-year spell.

They wouldn't count on the quota, and it would go a small way towards helping strengthen the game somewhere that needs it.

Widnes would also look like they were doing their bit for the overall good of the sport and gain a positive story out of it with every new participant.

It would also help perpetuate Vinty's name and spread it to new parts of the world, as the title of the scholarship would always need to be explained.

Should any of them turn out to be a success, what a tribute that would be to a player who not only made the best of himself, but also demanded the best of his players when he was a coach.



MORRO WANTS SUPER LEAGUE WITH WIDNES

CURRENT Vikings Player of the Year Iain Morrison says he wants to realise his Super League dream with Widnes Vikings after he recently signed a contract extension which will keep him at the Stobart Stadium for a further two-years.

Morrison, 25, has all the attributes of a Super League player now but he says he's happy with life at Widnes in the Co-operative Championship and is playing the 'best rugby league' he has ever played.

He said: "At the moment I'm playing the best rugby league I have ever played in my entire career and that is why I signed an upgrade to my contract.

"Last year was great for me and I was pleased with my form and backed it up at the World Cup but it was extremely disappointing not to get the nod for Super League.

"I want to play Super League and if you ask anybody else at the club they will tell you the same but I really think we can do that next time the licenses come around in two years or so time.

"We know that Leigh, Gateshead, Barrow and Toulouse will all be vying for the same spots but we have to do our job on the field and if we can pick up a Northern Rail Cup or a League then that will put us very much in contention.

"But in the meantime we have to focus on what we are doing now and I'm happy here at Widnes and the coaching staff, the chairman, fans and everyone behind the club have been great with me and it's good to have the support and hopefully this year we can win some silverware."

Morrison claims this year's League competition is as strong as its ever been and he claims the Vikings will have a tough task on their hands.

He added: "I think the standard of rugby in this division has improved and we need to create a fortress here at Stobart Stadium. We need to think that we are the next best thing outside Super League and if we can get some momentum then we have the squad to put us in the frame.

"We know there is plenty of hard work to do this season but we need to set our markers down. Last week it was a very funny feeling not playing on the Sunday but we can't control the weather and the game was called off 20 minutes into our journey to Barrow but the positive side of things is that we get another week to iron out anything that needs looking at and by the time tonight comes around we will be chomping at the bit to get out there.

"Oldham are certainly no mugs and we have looked at them closely and we know we have to perform to get the points we need to progress in this competition.

"We were very disappointed to go out in the Cup last year as we said we wanted to retain it - this year we want to win it back."



STRENGTH IN DEPTH

WIDNES FULL-BACK SCOTT YATES SAYS COMPETITION FOR PLACES HAS NEVER BEEN GREATER AT THE CLUB FOLLOWING STEVE MCCORMACK'S PRE-SEASON SWOOP.

The Vikings have drafted in eight new faces and promoted a host of young starlets from the Academy to change the face of the club and Yates reckons it's having a positive effect.

"The players are buzzing", Yates said.

"Competition for places has never been better here at the club and we have players who can play in a variety of positions and it keeps everyone on their toes.

"I don't think anyone can have a bad game - otherwise you may not be in the side next time around. We have a really strong squad here and we are all looking forward to playing our part."

20-year-old Yates proved himself to be one to watch for the future last season as he made a big impression during his debut season for the club and now the youngster has his sights set on making a play for a starting berth after a hard pre-season.

He said: "I know Steve has brought Loz (Wildbore) in and at the back end of last season he said he was going to bring in a full-back so it wasn't a surprise to see Loz coming in.

"I was in a similar position last year with Ian Hardman and I started the season quite well and if I can get an opportunity then I would love to do the same this season.

"But I am realistic and I know Loz is a very good player and there are plenty of tips I can get off him too as at the end of the day I want to improve and try and hold a place down.

"There are quite a few players in the same boat as me and competition is healthy and we are fortunate to have the strength in depth as over the season you will need it."

Yates signed a new two-year deal at the back end of last season after McCormack showed faith in him and the former St Maries player was more than happy to sign.

"I'm pleased that Steve has seen something in me and I just want to keep working hard and better myself. It was hard last season as players like Dayne

Donoghue, who I have been close to since I signed at the club, were released and that is always hard to see someone go like that and it gives you a bit of a reality check and makes you work even harder and that's what I am doing."

Yates says a conversation with McCormack and assistant boss John Stankevitch made his off-season a purposeful one.

He added: "I wanted to go to 86 kilos but Steve and John didn't want me to over I'm working hard and have put a bit of weight on so that will help too. It's a long season and having a good off-season has really worked in my favour. Now I just can't wait to get out there."



TOP BOSS'S TIPS

SUPER LEAGUE COACHES SHAUN MCRAE AND MICK POTTER HAVE GIVEN THE VIKINGS A GLOWING REFERENCE AHEAD OF THE NEW CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON AND HAVE EVEN TIPPED THEM FOR FUTURE GLORY.

Australian duo Shaun McRae and Mick Potter reckon Widnes has what it takes to get to the top of the Championship tree after putting in spirited displays against the Super League outfits.

Although the Vikings were on the receiving end of two controlled performances, the Aussies still saw huge potential in the Vikings.

McRae said: "I know what it takes to succeed in the Championship and it will take a tremendous performance from a team to finish higher than Widnes

"Widnes remind me of what we were like last year, playing with intensity and attitude.

"Looking at their roster, they are going to have to learn to deal with being favourites in every game but I wish them all the best."

McRae pointed to Widnes' immense attacking arsenal and firepower out wide as the main strengths this season and he was impressed with what he saw.

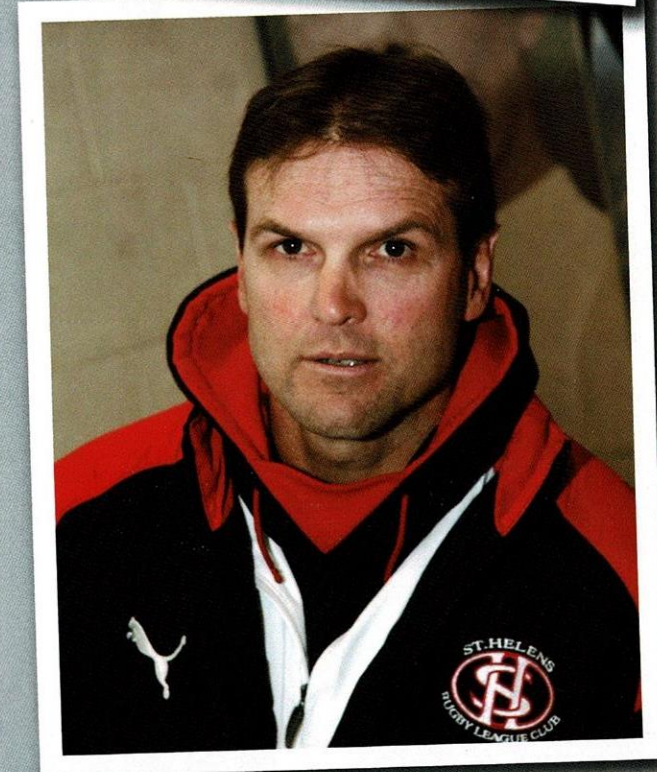
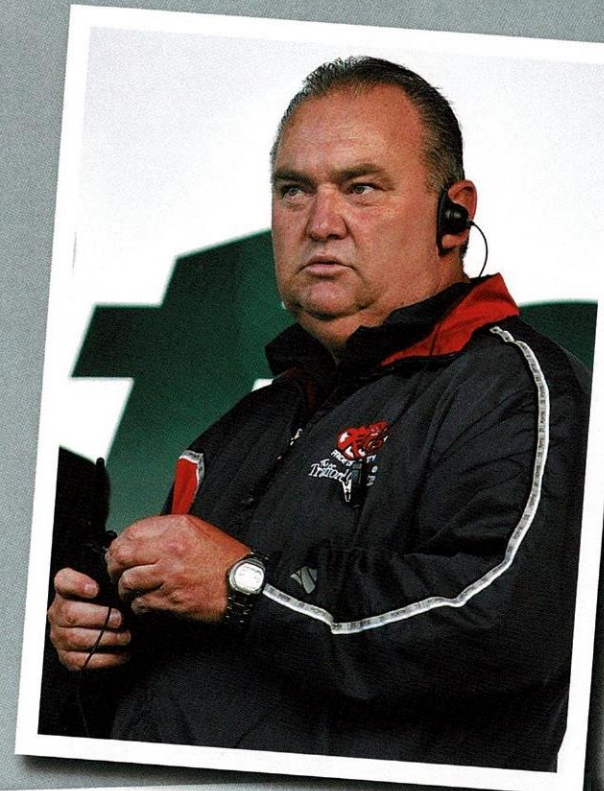
He added: "Widnes certainly have some players who can perform. Anthony Thackeray, Iain Morrison, James Webster, Toa Kohe-Love and Jim Gannon all have Super League experience and that counts in this division.

"Steve McCormack is a very astute coach and he knows what's needed at this level. He has been to National League Grand Finals and I think he's assembled a very good squad. They were very well drilled and if they play to the high levels of intensity that they know they can then they will be hard to stop."

The Vikings have remained tight lipped about their chances this year, as news emanating out of Halifax suggests that they are the real front runners this year.

All will be revealed over the course but Potter echoes McRae's sentiments and gave Widnes a rap for putting a decent challenge up to his Saints.

He said: "Widnes did well and I have had a chat with Steve McCormack and wished him well for the season. They have some good players in there and they gave us a good test ahead of the season. It was a good hit out for us and Widnes played their part in that."





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Widnes Vikings

Kicking Bullying into touch

Unison is supporting a new 'Vikings in the Community' initiative. The project is called 'Vikings against Bullying' and it involves the Viking's Star players venturing into schools promoting the positive message that bullying is unacceptable. They run workshops and assemblies showing the negative effects of bullying and making pupils aware of support available to help protect them against bullies. During the 16 week long project, it has been estimated that over 6,000 children will be involved.

Unison, which is the largest local government union, is proud to be sponsors of this important local project.



CASH FOR KIDS

WIDNES VIKINGS HAVE TEAMED UP WITH RADIO CITY'S CHARITY, CASH FOR KIDS, TO HELP PROMOTE ITS WORK IN THE MERSEYSIDE AREA.

Cash for Kids is the registered charity of Bauer Radio who own Liverpool based Radio City and City Talk 105.9.

The charity raises money to help unwell, disadvantaged and underprivileged children in Merseyside, North Wales, and the North West.

Recently Widnes Vikings donated a 'money can't buy' prize to the charity's on-air auction, helping to take the total amount raised up to £32,000 on the day.

Vikings' Chief Executive Alex Bonney is pleased that the Club will be supporting Cash for Kids in 2009: "Cash for Kids is a great charity which has benefitted organisations in both Widnes and Runcorn and we are delighted to be able to raise their profile in this area and beyond by displaying their logo on the sleeves of our new jerseys."

Collette Lowe from Radio City's Cash for Kids said: "This is an exciting partnership that will hopefully alert many more people to the positive work that we do."



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BE A PART OF A WINNING TEAM

THE Vikings are still Daring to Dream for short and long term success – Widnes fans can too by playing their part in the club's lottery system.

Last year the Vikings were inundated with interest in the new lottery scheme and they are expecting the same response again this season as we approach the first competitive games of 2009.

The Dare to Dream concept is very much alive and kicking at the Stobart Stadium Halton and you can get involved by signing on the dotted line for the Vikings' cash cause.

In return fans will get a unique opportunity of winning large sums of money, which in today's climate would be welcome.

The club appreciates that it's challenging times but is urging spectators to keep the faith both on and off the pitch.

Steve O'Connor, the club chairman, and Halton Borough Council have all put their money where their mouths are and for only £2 per week, Widnes fans can do the same.

In 2008 fans seen an exclusive preview of extracts from the licence application document and viewed a DVD that was compiled to support the bid for a Super League licence, similar initiatives will be implemented this year as Widnes goes for gold in the Co-operative Championship.

Details of the exciting 'Vikings Dream Ticket' lottery, with the largest single prize in the club's

history, is available through club officials and the website.

For as little as £2 per week fans will receive numerous unique benefits and a membership card bearing the purchaser's exclusive draw numbers. These numbers will be entered into a series of draws including:

- Annual Dream Jackpot worth £10,000 to the winner
- Monthly £1,000 cash prize draw
- Cash prize draw for £100 every weekday from Monday to Friday
- Plus a host of 'money can't buy prizes'

VIKINGS WIDNES VIKINGS

DREAM TICKET

KEEP THE SUPER LEAGUE DREAM ALIVE AND WIN GREAT PRIZES!

WIN £100 EVERY WEEKDAY

WIN £1,000 EVERY MONTH

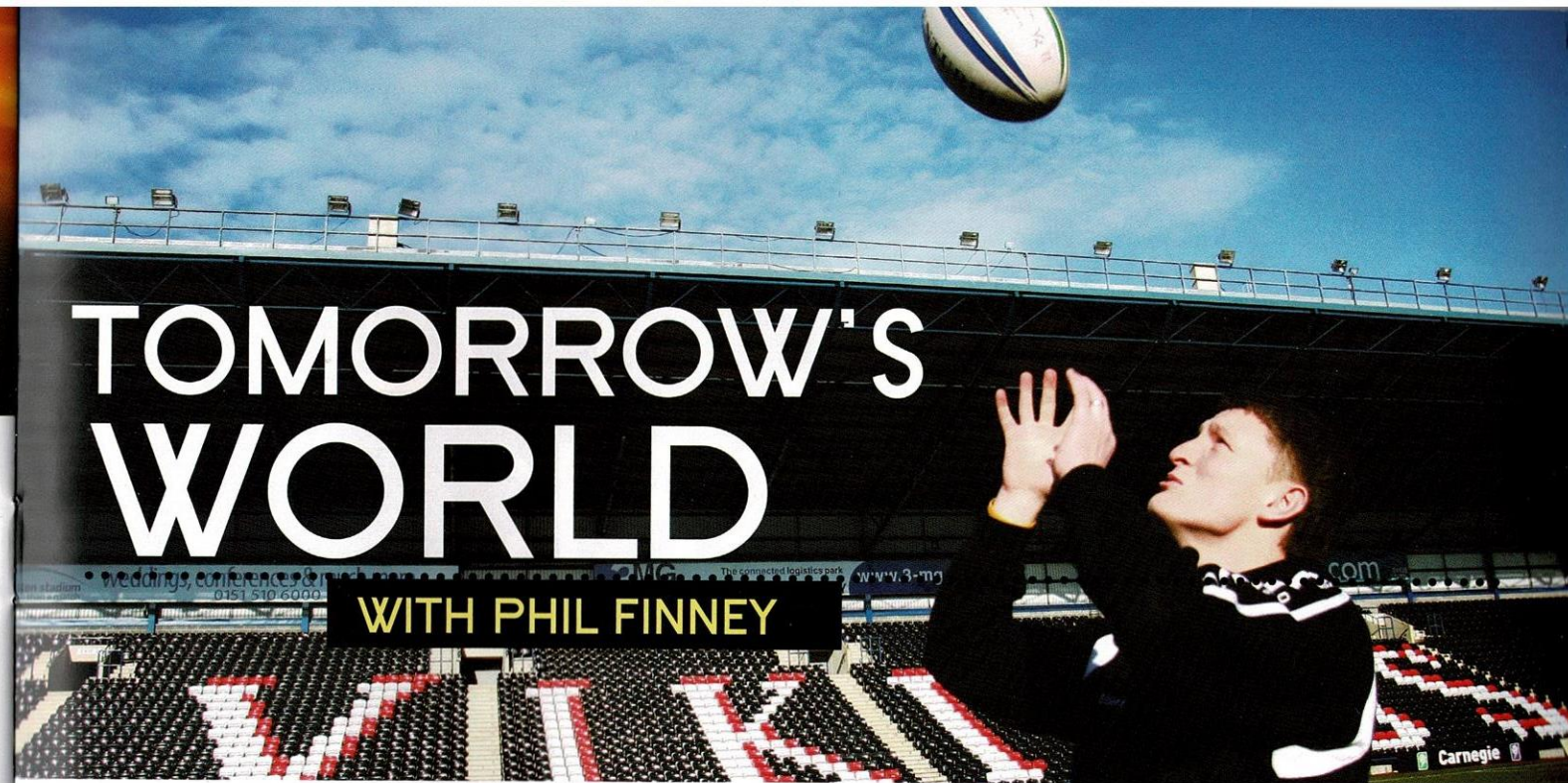
WIN £10,000 DREAM JACKPOT EVERY YEAR

PLUS MANY 'MONEY CAN'T BUY PRIZES'

AIM HIGH!

The club is marketing the lottery to fans on the back of the 'Dare to Dream' concept. It is the club's dream to play in Super League and supporters can help that dream come true

by signing up to the lottery. Vikings Dream Ticket draws will commence shortly. All payments will be made either in advance or by direct debit to avoid the necessity of having cash collectors. Funds generated will aid team development ranging from youth rank through to the first team.



TOMORROW'S WORLD

WITH PHIL FINNEY

WIDNESIAN Phil Finney has been drafted in as the latest piece in the Vikings jig saw to turn back time and produce home grown talent.

Finney, 28, watched Widnes lift the World Club Challenge Trophy aloft at Old Trafford in 1989 – now he wants to see Widnes' young guns of the future do the same.

Finney has put pen to paper at Widnes as the club's Player Performance Manager. His role is a wide ranging one but essentially he will implement, develop and maintain a structure that enables Widnes Vikings scholars to receive the necessary physical, psychological, technical and tactical training that is appropriate to their individual needs.

"My vision for the future is to provide a steady stream of local players establishing themselves as Widnes Vikings first team players. I believe this will assist the club to return to the status it enjoyed when I watched them as a youngster lifting the World Club Championship at Old Trafford,

with local players the Hulmes', Myler, O'Neill, Currier and Dowd forming the nucleus of the team."

In addition Finney will be accountable for the Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence programme. This is a ground breaking government initiative that enables players to gain accreditation for the skills they acquire in the

workplace alongside their educational commitments, whilst obtaining funding for their personal development as Rugby League players.

Finney has tasted what rugby league is like at other clubs after signing for Warrington Wolves as a youngster. He made his first team debut at sixteen years of age, captained the junior and senior academy sides and represented Great Britain and Ireland Young Lions.

He was set to become the next best thing but it turned sour at the Wolves and Finney left the club 'falling out of love with the game'.

He said: "Unfortunately I chose to terminate my contract with Warrington at 19 due to perceived negative experiences in relation to a whole host of factors.

"Personally I still honestly believe the provision offered to me as a young player wasn't what I have seen offered to youngsters here. I lost the love and passion for the game I and so many other people helped me to acquire from an early age.

"These experiences I believe are the motivational forces that have encouraged me to return to the game and ensure no young athletes that I have the opportunity to work with will experience the same 'if only' syndrome I had."

Now Finney has an opportunity to make a difference and he is relishing the task of playing an important part of developing Widnes players of the future after coming back to the game he loved as a lecturer in sport at Riverside College

He said: "Fortunately great parental support ensured I completed my A levels which enabled me to complete a Sports Science degree and train as a PE teacher. After two years working as a PE teacher I was drawn back into Rugby League as the lead Performance Analyst for the RFL in the North West.

"This role gave me responsibilities in identifying talent, observing performances and reporting on player performance from Service Area level through to England U18s helping inform player selection.

"This time served to illustrate the misgivings I believed I experienced as a player are still evident, something I believe is holding outstanding English talent back and ultimately inhibiting the Championship, Super League and England from progressing and competing at an international level."

MINISTER FOR SPORT VISITS THE VIKINGS

Minister for Sport Gerry Sutcliffe MP paid a visit to the Stobart Stadium Halton on Thursday following an invitation from Halton MP Derek Twigg.

The Minister had been invited to witness the community work the club undertakes throughout Halton and the surrounding areas following the incorporation of the Valhalla Foundation at the end of January.

Mr Sutcliffe met with both Vikings and Halton Council officials and was also given a tour of the Stobart Stadium Halton before visiting the Club's new retail outlet in Widnes town centre which he officially opened.

Halton's MP Derek Twigg added, "I was delighted that Sports Minister Gerry Sutcliffe accepted my invitation to visit Widnes Vikings

and the Stobart Stadium Halton. He told me he was very impressed by what he heard and saw and I would like to congratulate the Club for putting on an excellent presentation for the Minister"

Vikings' Chairman Steve O'Connor was equally pleased with the visit. "Mr Sutcliffe is a busy man and I am grateful that he made the time to see what is happening at the Club. Widnes Vikings is more than just a rugby league team, it provides the community of Halton with a focal point and has an impact on thousands of young people within the Borough via its many community activities.



OSTICK: 'THE HARD WORK STARTS NOW'

POWERFUL prop-forward Michael Ostick says his 'real test' is still to come, despite having a blockbusting start to 2009 with some outstanding performances.

Ostic, 21, has been in sparkling form for the Vikings of late with a couple of man-of-the-match displays in the Widnes front row - but the Widnesian is remaining grounded and is not over excited by the praise being heaped on his shoulders by the media and fellow professionals.

He said: "For me the true test is when the season starts and how you fare when the real thing gets going. I'm pleased with the way pre-season has gone but the real work is in front of us and that is when it matters.

"While the pre-season has been good for my confidence, it's now in the past and I will have to be judged on what I do in each and every game."

Top notch performances against Whitehaven, Salford and St Helens has installed him as one of the front runners for a place in Steve McCormack's starting pack this evening and Ostick says he wants to make that a regular thing.

He said: "My goals for this year is to cement a regular place in the team. That is going to be hard as we have a lot of forwards who can play in the front-row but that is my personal goal.

"Taking on the likes of James Graham and Maurie Fa'savalu did wonders for me and playing against the likes of them every week is where we all want to be, both personally and as a club.

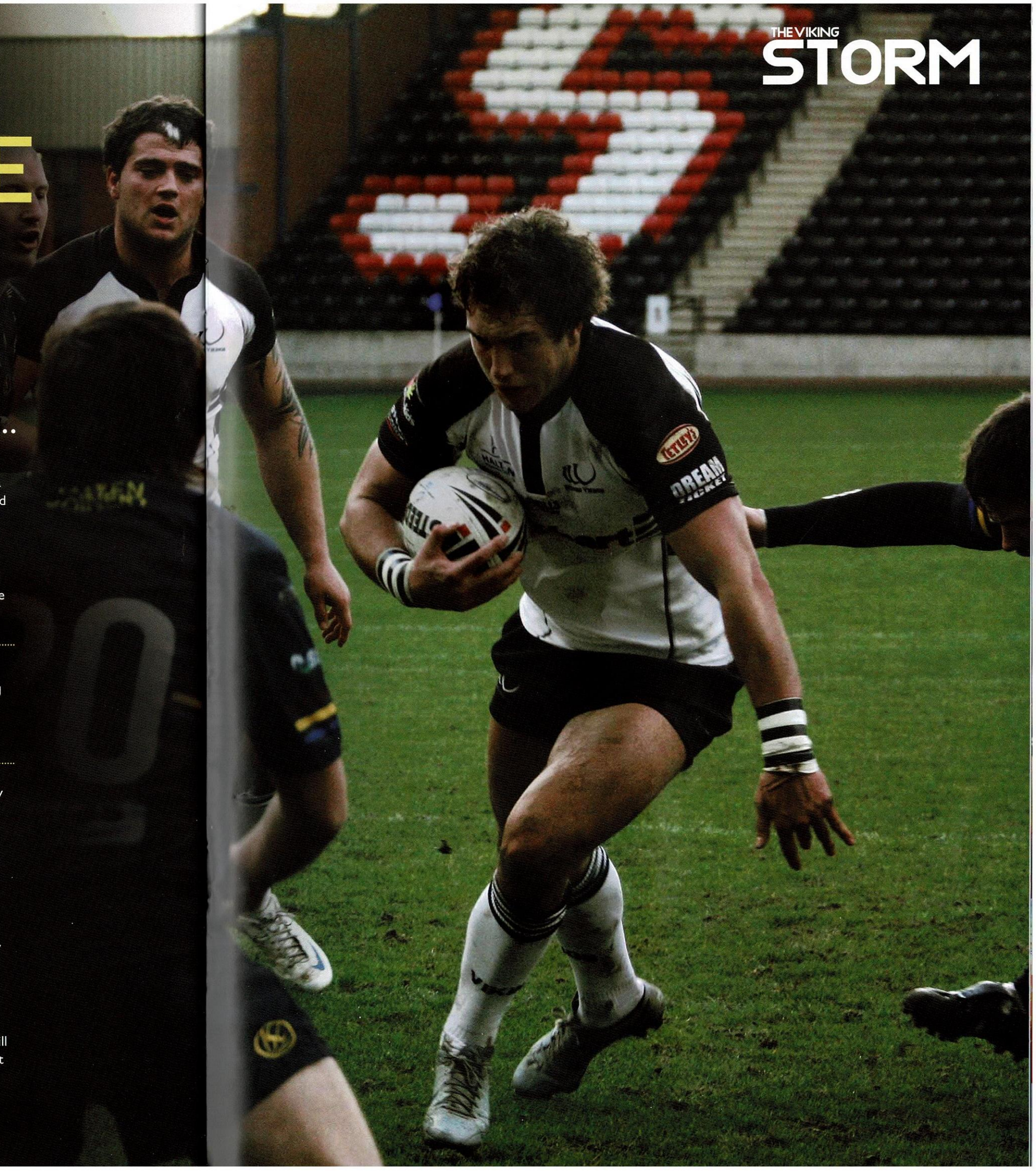
"I want to keep on improving as well and we have some really good experienced professionals here at the club who can help me do that.

"My fitness levels are there now and I'm ready for action and hopefully that will be tonight."

Ostic says Oldham will be tough opponents and he is looking forward to renewing some old rivalries with former team mates.

He added: "Oldham are a good side and it's going to be a hard game for us. I know a few of the lads there and they are looking forward to coming here and taking us one, but we are ready too - it should be a good game.

"The lads were all disappointed that we couldn't get our season going last Sunday at Barrow as that would have been a good starting point for us but we will focus on Oldham and will have prepared for them and hopefully we can get the points."





PERFORMANCE PATHWAYS FOR YOUNG GUNS

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH STUART WILKINSON

WHAT does it take to become an accomplished rugby league player?

What kind of a start will a burgeoning teenager need to further his career in the game? What tools are needed to make it as a rounded professional?

What do the coaches who work with these young men need to do to provide them with the tools to make this happen? Well, these are all questions which Widnes' forward thinking Head of Development has been working on all his career and now, thanks to his hard work and the relentless effort of the Vikings youth coaching staff the signs are now here that the club does have the next David Hulme or Tony Myler waiting in the wings.



Wilkinson, the coach who brought the likes of Rob Burrow, Kevin Sinfield and Chev Walker through at Headingley and gave them a steady foundation to become international stars, because of Leeds much sort-after talent; Wilkinson has at least one of his former Academy players featuring 13 of the 14 Super League Clubs. He has been hard at it at the Vikings for the past 12 months in establishing ways of developing the next crop of talent and now the Cumbrian is finally giving Widnes fans and the watching world (and there are plenty of onlookers from Super League monitoring Widnes) an insight into his development plan.

Wilkinson said: "Ultimately the aim of the development team here is to provide the head coach with home grown players from

Widnes and the borough of Halton. That is the aim and already there are players who have broken through.

"What we want is a team of players who all come from the area. We are making massive strides and what we are doing is unique in rugby league."

This news will come as music to Widnes' fans ears as spectators across the town have been calling for this kind of action for years and already people are starting to look at Widnes as a paradigm for youth success. Not only is the club attracting the best young talent – it is doing it for the right reasons.

Wilkinson explains: "We are pipping the likes of Saints, Wigan, Warrington and Salford for the best players. They are coming here because the people involved in youth performance (either coaching, mentoring or educating) simply care about these young men and the club. They are Widnes people who fully understand what's expected and can give them what it takes to become top rugby league players and good people off the field.

"We haven't got the Super League badge or the money to get players in but they are choosing us because of the things we have in place."

The Stobart Stadium today is a different animal to the one Wilkinson was introduced to more than 12 months ago. A recruitment strategy under pinned with a succession plan for local players and coaches, supported by a Scouting system which is headed up by Dave Rolt, as well as expert coaches with Super League and international coaches such as Stephen O'Neill and Esene Faimalo, are passing on their knowledge to Academy players; youngsters are benefiting from education and sports science with specialised course with partners Riverside College and Edge Hill University.

There is a tremendous feel good factor and camaraderie among the youth set up and these are all things Wilkinson has tried and tested and now developed further from his days with Leeds.

He added: "We know it works but what happened at Leeds has gone, what we are building here at Widnes is totally unique and bears little remembrance to any thing at Leeds or in the game.

"After conducting a feasibility study of us actually becoming successful in producing 'Home Grown Talent' we had to be creative and design a 'performance pathway' for local players and coaching talent, that suited the areas current strengths and weaknesses. The strength of what will achieve lies in its partnerships with local schools, colleges and Universities, and putting the 'Widnes back in the Vikings'.

"The plans we have here are massive, Terry O'Connor, Steve McCormack, John Stankevitch and all the coaches are involved have dovetailed into this philosophy by actually providing these young players with 1st team opportunities, giving these young men some real inspirational and achievable goals; that one day their dreams will come true.

"Between, the voluntary coaches working on the scholarship and the professional, I think we have a fantastic team, I believe they are the most talented I have worked with'. The potential of actually 'institutionalising a system' could well be realised – my own personal goal for the game itself.

"The projects that we have implemented are successful and we have now tapped into Liverpool and Runcorn and have players involved and playing at the club at various youth levels.

THE VIKING STORM

"What else we offer youngsters is advice on growing up to a decent human being and doing it for the team. We want players to be rounded individuals and when times running out, their backs are against the wall and you're under your own posts dropping out when the score-lines could go either way – we want players to dig deep and do it for each other. This is where the real talents in a player show's through.

"What we are doing here at Widnes goes beyond rugby in some instances and we are putting players and youngsters first."

For more news on Stuart's plans for the future stay in touch with The Viking Storm.

Essential listening for early morning Merseyside

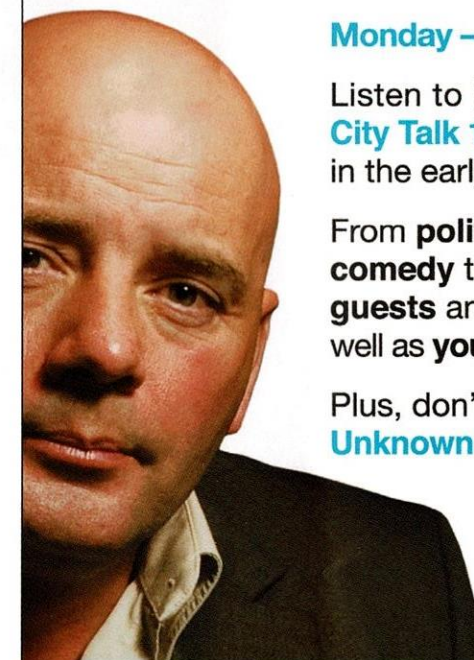


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WIDNES VIKINGS

WIDNES VIKINGS 2009

ANTHONY MULLALLY

Prop
DOB 28/06/1991
Squad Number 25
Sponsor: Mullally's Barbers

GAVIN DODD

Wing
DOB 28/02/1981
Squad Number 16
Sponsor: The Dennett Family

JOSH SIMM

Prop
DOB 08/11/1989
Squad Number 24
Sponsor: Riverside College Sports Dept.

MATT STRONG

Second row
DOB 17/12/1988
Squad Number 18
Sponsor: The Fraser Family

ANTHONY THACKERAY

Halfback
DOB 19/02/1986
Squad Number 6
Sponsor: VIQI

IAIN MORRISON

Second Row
DOB 06/05/1983
Squad Number 8
Sponsor: Museum Visitors

LEE DORAN

Second row
DOB 28/06/1991
Squad Number 11
Sponsor: Swavesey Newsagents, Cambridge

SCOTT YATES

Full back
DOB 08/09/1988
Squad Number 21
Sponsor: Available

JAMES WEBSTER

Scrum Half
DOB 11/07/1979
Squad Number 7
Sponsor: VIQI

LEE PATERSON

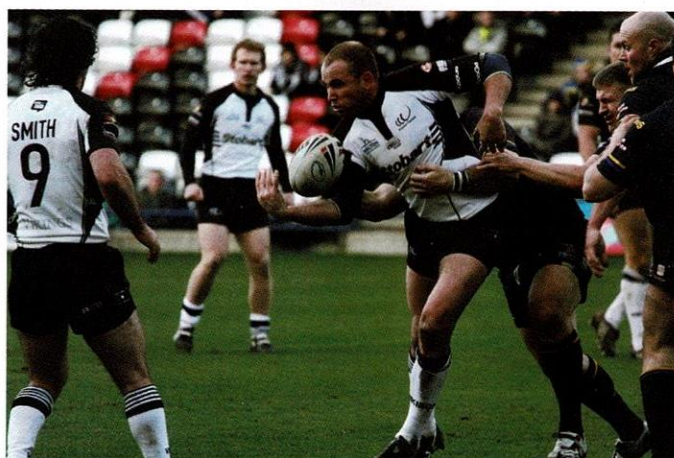
Loose forward
DOB 05/07/1981
Squad Number 13
Sponsor: Robert Johnson

SHANE GRADY

Full back
DOB 13/12/1989
Squad Number 23
Sponsor: West Bank Bears ARLFC

DANNY MILLS

Wing
DOB 10/08/1982
Squad Number 5
Sponsor: Kath Filkin



JIM GANNON

Prop
DOB 16/6/77
Squad Number 10
Sponsored: Widnes World

DEAN GASKELL

Wing
DOB 12/04/1983
Squad Number 2
Sponsor: Barbara Spence

JOHN DUFFY

Half back
DOB 02/07/1980
Squad Number 14
Sponsor: James Owen

MARK SMITH

Prop
DOB 08/11/1989
Squad Number 9
Sponsor: R J Lewis

RICHARD VARKULIS

Centre
DOB 01/01/1980
Squad Number 3
Sponsor: Widnes Supporters Club

TOA KOHE LOVE

Centre
DOB 02/12/1976
Squad Number 4
Sponsor: Widnes Supporters Club

TIM HARTLEY

Stand off
DOB 02/01/1986
Squad Number 15
Sponsor: Marcus Booth

RICHARD FLETCHER

Second row
DOB 17/05/1981
Squad Number 12
Sponsor: Widnes Supporters Club

LOZ WILDBORE

Full back
DOB 23/09/1984
Squad Number 1
Sponsor: John Mather and his many sons!

PADDY FLYNN

Wing
DOB 11/12/1987
Squad Number 22
Sponsor: Lesley and Reg Warner

BEN KAVANAGH

Prop
DOB 21/03/1988
Squad Number 17
Sponsor: Uncle Jack

MICHAEL OSTICK

Prop / Second row
DOB 23/01/1988
Squad Number 19
Sponsor: Halton Borough Council

SAM THOMPSON

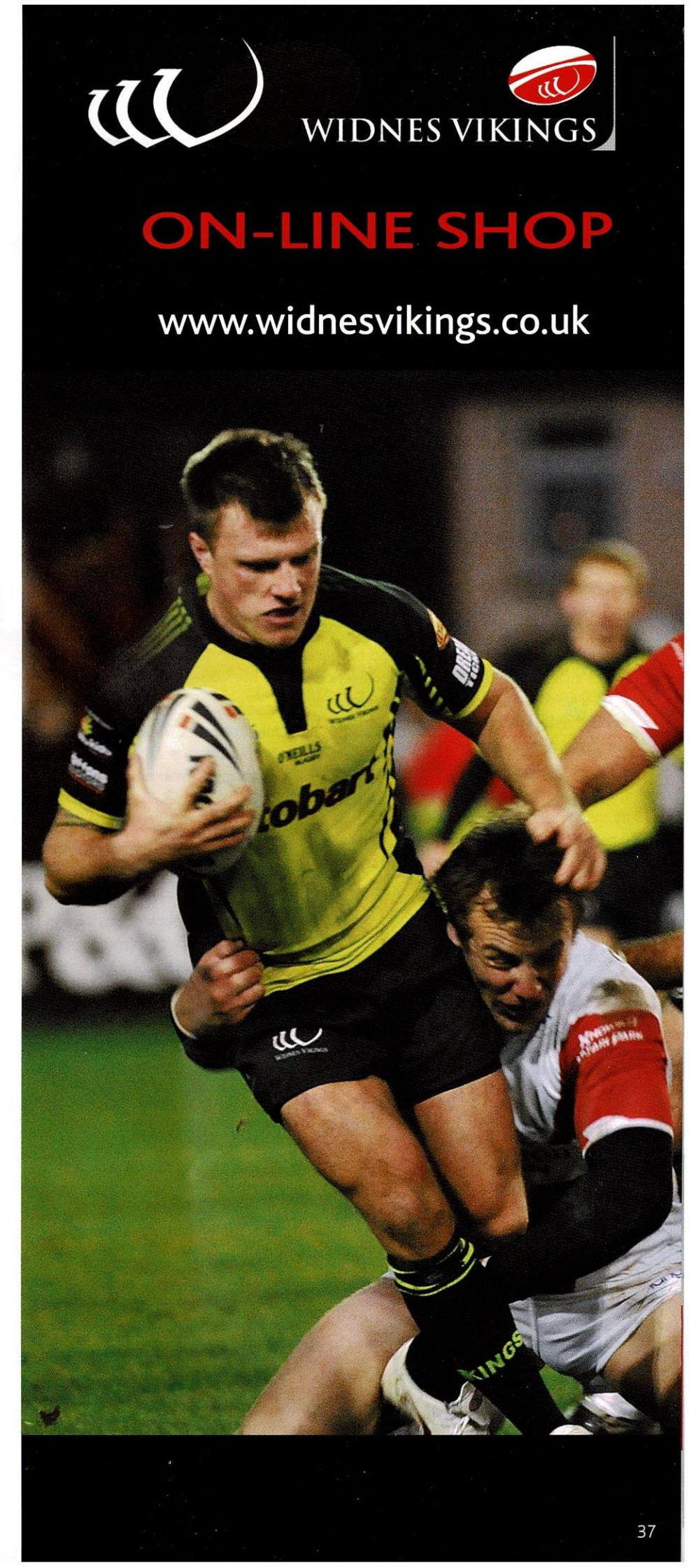
Prop
DOB 09/10/1986
Squad Number 20
Sponsor: Learn Fox

STEVE BANNISTER

Second Row
DOB 18/10/1987
Squad Number 26
Sponsor: North West Contracts

BRETT ROBINSON

Forward
DOB 1989
Squad Number 20
Sponsor: Available



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VIKINGS SERVE THE GAME AN ACE

Widnes new signings are 'ace' according to Head of Youth Development Stuart Wilkinson. The signings of the six scholarship players last weekend has been helped by the Club's involvement with the Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence, (AASE).

The Government's flagship programme is funded by the Learning and Skills Council and Widnes is one of only two clubs in the sport to be offering this scheme to potential recruits. Only players who have the realistic potential to achieve excellence in their sport and are seeking to perform at the highest level as their main career goal are eligible for the programme.

The Widnes youngsters will continue their education at Riverside College Halton as they undertake an eight unit NVQ which will look at the qualities a player requires to make an impact in the sport including physiological, psychological, lifestyle and communication.

"We have been developing our own 'club performance pathway' for our young players alongside education institutions such as Riverside College, Edge Hill



University and Liverpool John Moores University," said Wilkinson. "It's the strength of these partnerships that is appealing to our young players and their parents.

"Having a pathway that can nurture all aspects of a young person's life for the next four years helped fight off Saints, Wigan, Warrington and Salford, for the signature of these young 'Widnes born and bred' lads.

"Only last year Widnes Vikings lost two of the country's outstanding young players to Super League Clubs in Liam Hulme and Ben Karalius, whilst Richard Myler moved to Salford City Reds. These signings have

lessened the blow and this may not have happened if such a pathway was in place a year ago.

"There is no doubt that the current philosophy of the senior management group of playing the town's home grown talent in the first team gives these young men some real inspiration to achieve their life long dream of playing for the Vikings."

The six players, who play their club rugby at Widnes St Marie's, will line up in the Vikings' Foundation side this year as well as staking a claim for a place in the Academy side later in the season.

VIKINGS TURN BACK THE CLOCK

Widnes Vikings have enlisted the services of two of their former greats as they look to give the Academy youngsters the best possible preparation for their rugby league career.

Ex -Widnes forwards Esene Faimalo and Steve O'Neill have joined Stuart Wilkinson's coaching staff as the Head of Youth Performance looks to create a top class coaching team to work with the Club's promising youngsters.

Wilkinson said, "To have two Widnes legends who have competed at the top level can only be of benefit to the youngsters. These are players who have been there and done that and will be inspirational figures at this level.

"Esene has already spent some time working with the youngsters and with Steve on board, the players, especially the forwards, will have two quality mentors.

O'Neill, who has coached at the top level both nationally and internationally, is delighted to be back involved at Widnes. "I am really looking forward to working with the youngsters. Widnes has had a great reputation over the years for producing top quality players and I hope that I can pass on the benefit of my experience to

them and help their development into first team players."

Faimalo added, "I've really enjoyed the last few months being part of the junior set up and I think that with Stuart and Steve we have a great coaching team. There are some really good juniors coming through the Scholarship system and we need to develop them further to ensure Widnes has a strong youth structure when we look for the 2012 licence bid."



Co-operative **CHAMPIONSHIP TALK**
Gareth Walker in association with **League Express**

EXCITING NEW ARRIVALS

SO here we go again with a second attempt at the big kick-off, after the recent bad weather put paid to the entire Northern Rail Cup programme last week.

All ten fixtures were postponed and rearranged, but hopefully we'll have a full programme on our hands this weekend to allow most fans their first glimpses of their clubs in-competitive action.

Among a host of new signings at each club this season will be a cluster of players who featured prominently in last year's World Cup - which is a mouth-watering prospect for all Championship supporters.

Several of those have still to receive their visas, but the chances are that you will come across a few of these players in the weeks before the start of the league campaign.

Sheffield Eagles have signed four such recruits, and Hunslet Hawks and Barrow

Raiders three apiece, and each player will be fascinating to watch.

Sheffield have brought in two Papua New Guineans in Trevor Exton and Menzie Yere, plus Samoan Tangi Ropati and perhaps most excitingly, Fijian scrum half Aaron Groom.

Yere - a centre - is the current PNG Sportsman of the Year, and scored a World Cup try against Australia, while forward Exton started all three games against England, New Zealand and the Kangaroos.

Utility back Ropati starred at fullback in Samoa's 42-10 play-off win against France, but it was undoubtedly Groom that created the biggest impact.

He played scrum half throughout Fiji's run to the semi-finals, though he could be the last of the Eagles' quartet to arrive due to the time, involved processing visas.

Once on these shores, Groom will be joined by three fellow countrymen at ambitious Barrow, including his halfback partner from the World Cup, Alipate Noilea.

Hooker Waisale Sukanaveita and second row or centre Seva Koroi will also line up at Craven Park, and the capture of the trio has enthused a local community already buoyed by the club's recent success.

The same can be said at Hunslet Hawks, who welcomed their trio of Papua New Guineans to the club just before the weekend's big freeze out.

They have signed one of the World Cup's most recognisable faces in the dreadlocked Charlie Wabo, who made a significant impact against England in October as a substitute hooker.

He will be joined by back rower Nicko Slain and three-quarter Michael Mark (who missed out on World Cup selection but toured Europe with PNG in 2007), and all three are set to be key figures for Graeme Hallas' side in 2009.

The fact that such high profile players will be operating in the Championship and Championship One this season speaks volumes for the progress the game has made at this level in recent years.

Fans of those three clubs - and everyone they come up against this year - should take every opportunity to watch these world stars in action.

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For the **BEST** Co-operative **CHAMPIONSHIP COVERAGE**
MORE PAGES EVERY WEEK

WORK IN THE VALHALLA FOUNDATION GOES FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

By Tim Holmes

There have been several new initiatives launched this year within schools that have gone down a storm.

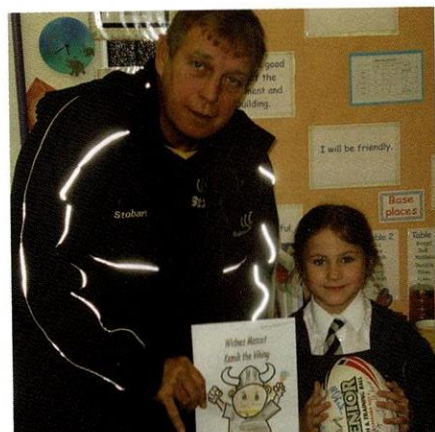
The first is an interactive lesson that sees John Foran, Tim Holmes and Martin Davidson teach the children the Viking way of life and brings the Vikings back to life from Valhalla. The session is made up of video clips, quizzes and gives the children the opportunity to design their own authentic Viking tapestry. Secondly and hot off the press the Valhalla Foundations Sports Media Training. This enlists the interviewing skills of Mark Naughton and is an interactive lesson teaching the children the required skills to deal with the media. They are put through a filmed post match interview as players and coaches which are later reviewed and role play scenarios' as coaches delivering inspirational team talks. This activity enlists the help of a professional interviewer and each school is left with hard copies of their television appearances.

This year sees the introduction of another new project from the Vikings in the Community team. We are opening our doors to classes of school children to come

and have a tour of the rugby club and have a look at what really goes on behind the scenes. The children are shown the pitch, the gym and office areas. They are given the opportunity to meet and speak to people who work for the club and finish their tour with a visit to the Widnes Vikings Heritage Museum.

All this is as well as the continuing coaching sessions that cover the core skills involved with playing rugby league and having fun. Thanks to money from O'Connors and Sportsmatch, afterschool sessions can now be offered for free under the Viking Raid Project.

As you can see 2009 looks to be a busy year for the Valhalla Foundation as it continues to grow and diversify not only in Halton but the surrounding areas such as Vale Royal, Liverpool and Knowsley.



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VIKINGS DAY

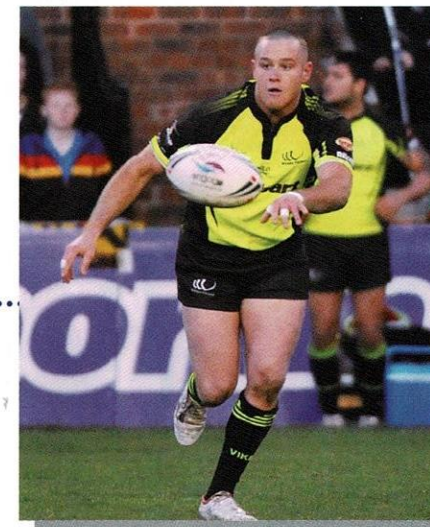
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GAVIN DODD SPEAKS OUT



Gavin Dodd, a native of Oldham, and his partner Victoria currently live in Saddleworth with their two-year-old son Harrison. Gavin joined Widnes from Oldham, having previously been on the books at Bradford. At the end of 2008 'Doddy' had amassed 557 points, including 105 tries, in a career total of 225 appearances.

...and how has life changed generally at Widnes since Steve O'Connor took over? As above. The general mentality has improved and the system is now head and shoulders above anything I have ever been involved with before.

What rule change would you like to see in the game? I think facilities should be made available for a 'video ref' at every game.

Is there any particular match that you looked for when the fixtures were announced, or team you would like to meet in the Challenge Cup? Obviously Oldham are my previous, and hometown, Club and I remain a fan. Drawing them in our (NRC) group is quite exciting.

Most annoying habit of a team-mate? Jim Gannon is tighter than a submarine door.

Favourite and worst away grounds? Favourite - Doncaster. A great stadium and I broke the 'points record' there. Worst - Celtic Crusaders !!

How did the feeling of an 'off-field' failure to get into SL compare to losing out in the conventional 'field of battle' of a Grand Final? Not really as bad in all honesty. The decision was totally out of the team's control, so the focus wasn't on any personal failure.

How does pre-season 2009 compare to 2008? More intense - due mainly to the amount of preparation that was allowed to be made. Also the trip to Portugal was a great success.

What do you remember of your senior debut at Oldham? A Northern Ford Premiership game versus Lancashire Lynx. I played fullback and the opposing fullback was the great Steve Hampson. I scored - he didn't!

Gavin, Tell us which game stands out as your personal career highlight? Both Grand Finals with the Vikings double up as career highlights and lows.

...and which Widnes game stands out as a personal highlight? Obviously breaking the Club record for 'points in a game' in 2007 at Doncaster is one that sticks in the memory.

Which Widnes player(s) have you particularly enjoyed playing alongside? Smithy and me are the current longest serving players and throughout that time he has been a great leader. Iain Morrison has been a joy to play with. Not only as he makes me seem good-looking, but he is a funny guy to have around, as well as the team 'talisman'.

Who has been your most difficult opponent? Gavin Clinch - got me with a 'I on I' steal twice in a game!

Facilities at the Stobart Stadium are the envy of many SL clubs. What do you think has been the most important improvement? I think everything to do with the players at the stadium has had a massive overhaul and the professionalism that breeds is the biggest improvement.

...and at Widnes? It was pre-season against Warrington and the highlight was the opportunity to line up alongside one of my favourite players - David Peachey.

Person or event that had the biggest influence on your career? At 18 Mike Ford approached me and asked me to join Oldham from Bradford to play 1st team rugby at Oldham. I was about 4th in the pecking order for fullback at Bradford. They released me and I haven't looked back.

Which team did you support as a boy and who was your favourite player? Oldham, and my favourite player was Jason Temu

Other sporting interests? I love most sports and am an avid Manchester Utd fan. Also enjoy watching my 'mrs' play netball - so she tells me!

What do you think you would have been if not a rugby player? Better looking

Would you like to stay in Rugby League when your playing career ends, or do you have other plans? I'm currently training to be a plumber at college, so that is a good option for me. This great job can't last for ever, but I can't see myself ever being too far away from the sport, although I have a good few years left in me yet!

Thank you Gavin for talking to 'Viking Storm'

STORY BY MIKE HEALING



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SALFORD SHAKE UP

by Martin Lacey

WIDNES VIKINGS 12
SALFORD CITY REDS 40

SALFORD'S Craig Stapleton eclipsed big money signing Ray Cashmere by turning in a master-class display in the front row which allowed pivots Stefan Ratchford and Richie Myler to pick off Widnes in the friendly clash at Stobart Stadium.

Stapleton left off where he started last season for the City Reds, leading from the front, and the former Crunulla man provided the platform for Salford's cruising win against Co-operative Championship side Widnes.

Stapleton was everywhere for the Reds and his boss, Shaun McRae, was waxing lyrical about the Aussie forward after a sparkling performance - one in which out did that of former Queensland Cowboy Cashmere.

He said: 'I thought Craig gave a very strong performance out there. He was excellent for us and was a stand out player. He led from the front and was strong all round.

"Ray was probably a bit off today. He wasn't too well before the game and that sapped his energy levels a little but he will probably be a bit disappointed. It's something that I'm not worried about but he's a lot, lot better than that."

Widnes boss Steve McCormack was unhappy with his troops after they 'took a step backwards' from the thumping they gave Whitehaven two weeks ago.

He said: "We need to improve a lot as I thought we took a step back from where we were the other week. If we play like that in the Northern Rail Cup or the Championship then we will get beat.

"We couldn't quite get to grips with Craig Stapleton and he punished us down the middle and the likes of Richie Myler and Stefan Ratchford then came into it.

"We were very 'one up and one out' and hardly passed the ball all night. When we did pass the ball we looked good but that was few and far between for my liking and we have to work on that."

The gulf in class was clear in certain parts of the field; where Salford has experience and power - the Vikings were found wanting but McCormack refused to use 'inexperience as an excuse'.

Willie Talau terrorised Widnes down the left flank while the Salford pivots, including the impressive Jeremy Smith, exploited some lacklustre Vikings defence.

The Vikings hardly penetrated the Salford line in the first half - their only score coming seven minutes from the half-time hooter through an Anthony Thackeray interception.

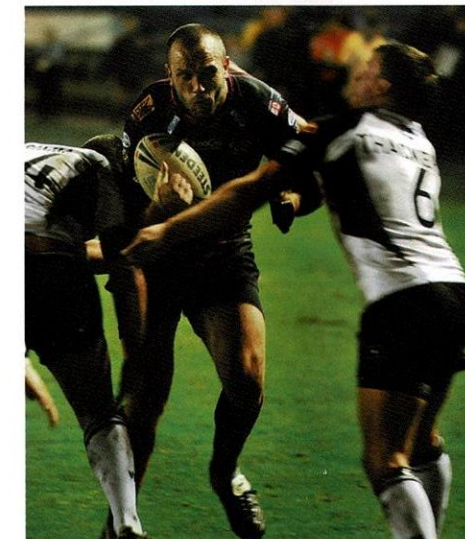
Former Widnes man Karl Fitzpatrick went over on 14 minutes and was followed up by Talau and then Jordan Turner for well worked tries just before the half hour mark.

Myler rounded off the scoring in the first forty minutes with a solo effort but Widnes, at 6-16 weren't out of it, just not at the races to get back into it.

Ratchford collected his first of the night off a Myler stab through and then Stuart Littler powered over out wide.

Paddy Flynn gave Widnes a consolation six minutes from time - one of the best moves of the evening but they were seldom.

Ratchford, a delightful kicker of the football, hoisted a bomb up at the death and he was on hand to pick up the pieces from his own handy work to score close to the end.



GAMESTAR: Craig Stapleton - had an outstanding game taking Salford forward and on the front foot.

GAMEBREAKER: Richie Myler's try on 52 minutes signalled the end for Widnes.

WIDNES:

Tries: Thackeray 33, Flynn 73
Goals: Dodd 2

SAINTS:

Tries: Fitzpatrick 14, Talau 18, Turner 26, Myler 32, Ratchford 61, 78, Littler 67.
Goals: Wilshire 1 Turner 2 Ratchford 2

WIDNES MOM: Anthony Thackeray

HT (Sts First): 6-26
FT (Sts First): 12-40

ATT: 1938 Pens: 12-8

TEAMS:

WIDNES:

1 Loz Wildbore; 22 Paddy Flynn, 23 Shane Grady, 3 Richard Varkulis, 16 Gavin Dodd; 6 Anthony Thackeray, 7 James Webster; 19 Michael Ostick, 27 Brett Robinson, 11 Lee Doran, 8 Iain Morrison, 12 Richard Fletcher, 14 John Duffy.

SUBS: 9 Mark Smith, 17 Ben Kavanagh, 18 Matty Strong, 20 Sam Thompson, 21 Scott Yates, 24 Josh Simm, 25 Anthony Mullally, 26 Dave Houghton.

SALFORD:

1 Karl Fitzpatrick, 2 Jon Wilshire, 14 Jordan Turner, 4 Willie Talau, 3 Mark Henry, 6 Jeremy Smith, 7 Richie Myler, 8 Ray Cashmere, 9 Mal Alker, 10 Craig Stapleton, 20 Luke Adamson, 12 Rob Parker, 13 Luke Swain

SUBS: 11 Ian Sibbit, 15 Stuart Littler, 16 Phillip Leuluai, 17 Robbie Paul, 18 Lee Jewitt, 19 Stefan Ratchford



OLDHAM ROUGHYEDS

ONES TO WATCH

PAUL REILLY

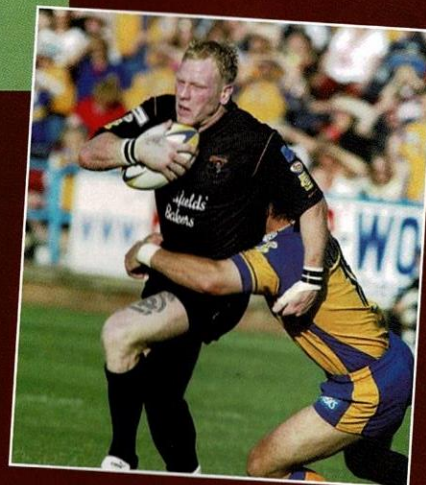
PAUL Reilly joined Oldham in the off-season from Wakefield after spending 11 years at Huddersfield where he was a permanent fixture at full-back in recent years. He has been moved to centre by head coach Tony Benson and has had an immediate impact already.

He bid farewell to Super League at the age of 32 in order to have a final fling in Oldham's 2009 promotion bid in Co-operative Championship One.

Reilly has over 150 Super League games under his belt and is a dangerous customer with the ball in hand. He can bang a bit too and he won't be frightened to put his shoulder into the Widnes backline, if given the opportunity.

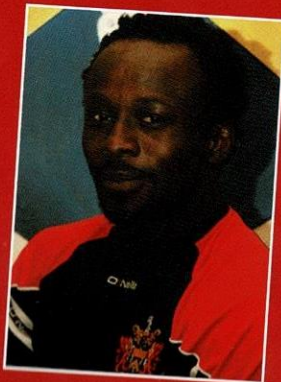
He is a big name capture for the Roughyeds and will do some damage in Championship One where he will link up with his pal Marcus St Hillaire in what could be a devastating partnership.

Injury ruled him out of most of the Wildcats 2008 campaign but he is now back to full fitness and is ready for action.



LUCAS ONYANGO

Vikings fans will know Lucas Onyango fairly well after a brief spell at Widnes under Frank Endacott and then Steve McCormack. Unfortunately things didn't work out at the Stobart Stadium and he went to Oldham where he has established himself as a fans favourite.



The Kenyan flier is probably the fastest winger outside Super League and he has scored some first class tries for Oldham during his two seasons at Boundary Park.

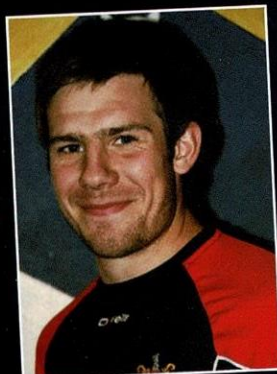
He has plundered 29 tries in 41 appearances which speaks for itself. The former Manchester Rugby Union and Sale Sharks man may still have what it takes to play at a higher level and Widnes fans will be hoping he doesn't get too many open opportunities as he will make McCormack's side pay as his pace is blistering. He can defend decently well too but look out for his eye for the line and freeflowing running style.

JAMES COYLE

James Coyle is another ex-Widnes man and he has reignited his career with Oldham. He has excellent pedigree hailing from Wigan and spending many seasons with the Warriors as a youngster.

In 2006 he played every game for the Vikings apart from the Grand Final. He had the chance to sign full-time with Widnes but decided to go back to Wigan. Coyle may think he will have a point to prove after failing to win over the Widnes spectators during his time here – he will be keen to let them know what they have missed out on. He is still a very talented player and another one who could turn it on with a flick of a switch. He has a superb passing game and tricky short kicking game which could pose problems for Widnes if they don't shut him down.

He is the focal point and driving force for Oldham and everything comes from his hands. Neil Roden partners the Wiganer and the pair work excellently in tandem.



TURNING BACK THE CLOCK - WIDNES TRIUMPH OVER OLDHAM

WIDNES' EFFICIENT AND CONVINCING VICTORY OVER OLDHAM IN THE 2001 NORTHERN FORD PREMIERSHIP WAS ONE OF THE VIKINGS FINEST MOMENTS IN RECENT YEARS.

IT brings the memories flooding back and all Vikings fans will remember the superb homecoming Neil Kelly and his side received when Widnes paraded the Trophy to the town.

It was supposed to be the start of a fresh new era and a five year plan devised by Kelly but it was never seen through.

Steve O'Connor, Widnes chairman, talks about his own three year plan for the club with the Dream of once again returning to Super League. The Vikings may be more than 24 months away from a decision but one glimpse around the stadium today and a look at the quality on the field suggests O'Connor and everybody connected to this famous club is back on the right lines and is a beacon for the Co-operative Championship - a quality competition (like the NFP was) in its own right.

Looking back, the club celebrated their return to the top flight after promotion and relegation was restored to rugby league in 2001 when the newly-crowned Northern Ford Premiership champions succeeded where previous Grand Final winners Hunslet and Dewsbury failed after meeting the requirements of the independent franchise panel.

The Vikings became the first side to go up from the Premiership since Wakefield were promoted in 1998, while the Super League wooden spoonists will become the first team to be relegated since Oldham Bears went down in 1997.

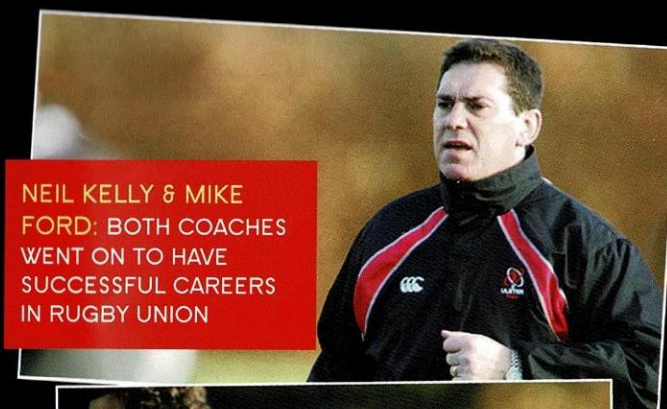
Widnes were the biggest casualties of the shake-up that heralded the advent of summer rugby in 1995 and their return to the big time marks the completion of a remarkable transformation.

The famous club, founder members of the breakaway Northern Union in 1895, were world club champions in 1989 and made Wembley their second home with seven Challenge Cup final appearances from 1975-84.

But their fortunes hit rock bottom following their controversial omission from Super League I in 1996.

Try machine Phil Cantillon ensured fallen giant Widnes finally planted a foot in the Promised Land. Widnes landed their first trophy for nine years to shatter reborn Oldham's hopes of moving back into the big time. Favourites Widnes held a slender 10-4 interval lead until Cantillon darted over from dummy half for his 48th try of the season - a record for a hooker. Cantillon's incisive midfield breaks had put Oldham on the back foot with centre Jason Demetriou bagging two tries to seal victory and promotion for Widnes.

NEIL KELLY & MIKE FORD: BOTH COACHES WENT ON TO HAVE SUCCESSFUL CAREERS IN RUGBY UNION



HAVEN DEMOLITION

WIDNES VIKINGS 40
WHITEHAVEN 22

THE Vikings continued their bright start to the 2009 season with a solid victory over Whitehaven at Stobart Stadium Halton.

Steve McCormack, up against his old club, also kept his winning streak against the Cumbrian outfit and is still yet to be defeated by his former employer.

Seven different scorers crashed over for the Vikings, including a John Duffy brace, and already the signs are there that the Vikings are to be a real force in the Championship this season.

One of the reasons why that might be is the sheer quality throughout the squad and the fact that players are upping their games as McCormack has strength in depth in every area.

Duffy, who had an excellent World Cup with Scotland, threw down the gauntlet with a superb display, but Michael Ostick stood up to be counted and James Webster showed his class and experience in guiding Widnes around the park.

Whitehaven too have some very capable players and Gregg McNally once again was a stand-out performer for Haven and was backed up by the likes of Leroy Joe and youngster Paul Lancaster.

Ged Stokes was impressed with they way his side started but Haven found it hard to keep up the intensity of a superb first twenty minutes in which the visitors had plundered three tries to Widnes' one.

Widnes looked sloppy in the opening exchanges and the tone was set from the first seconds of the game as the Vikings hacked the ball out of play to immediately put themselves on the back foot.

McNally, pulling the strings for Haven, sent in Spencer Miller with a delightful short ball. The stand-off converted to give Haven a deserved lead.

Haven found themselves 10-0 in front when Rob Jackson touched down after good work from Marc Jackson who had to leave the field shortly after the try with a hand injury which Stokes said after the game needed an x-ray.

The conversion was missed but Haven were still in control up until Sam Thompson set up Ostick for a simple walk in try.

Tim Hartley added the extras but Widnes slipped up again when Derry Eilbeck notched Haven's third out wide.

Widnes finally woke up on the 20 minute marker when Duffy grabbed the game by the scruff of the neck and he darted over as the Vikings piled on the pressure.

Webster, who was thrown into the fray by McCormack after acknowledging Widnes' slow start, put over Richard Fletcher to make it 14-16.

Just before the break Duffy added another in similar fashion to his first and the Vikings had just edged it going into the sheds.

Webster's kick to substitute Paddy Flynn on 46 minutes was well executed and that effort gave Widnes some daylight between Haven.

Craig Calvert replied for Haven with an 80 metre interception try after Duffy had flung out a long ball - the first thing he had done wrong all day - but that try had little impact and no significance to the result.

Richard Varkulis, who didn't see that much of the ball during the 80 minutes, showed what he could do with better service by dummieing his way over from short range, Fletcher's conversion making it 30-22 to the Vikings.

Gavin Dodd missed a golden opportunity to extend Widnes' lead further as he fumbled over the line but Dean Gaskell made one count after he latched onto Fletcher's cut out pass.

Loz Wildbore had one disallowed for a forward pass but Anthony Thackeray had the final word three minutes from time with a solo effort.

McCormack picked out Ostick and Mark Smith for special attention post match.

He said: "I thought Michael Ostick deserves a massive rap for his display and Mark Smith too. John Duffy, when he got the ball in his hands in the second half, really got into the Whitehaven defence.

by Martin Lacey

GAMESTAR: John Duffy has certainly given Steve McCormack some food for thought on his starting half-backs come February.

GAMEBREAKER: Duffy's try just before the break gave Widnes the confidence to complete the job in the second period.

WIDNES:

Tries: Ostick 9, Duffy 20 37, Varkulis 55, Flynn 46, Fletcher 31, Gaskell 61, Thackeray 77
Goals: Hartley (3), Fletcher (1)

HAVEN:

Tries: R Jackson 6, Calvert 51, S Miller 4, Eilbeck 14
Goals: McNally (2), Bainbridge (1)

TEAMS:

WIDNES:

21 Scott Yates, 2 Dean Gaskell, 23 Shane Grady, 15 Tim Hartley, 16 Gavin Dodd, 6 Anthony Thackeray, 14 John Duffy, 19 Michael Ostick, 9 Mark Smith, 20 Sam Thompson, 3 Richard Varkulis, 11 Lee Doran, 12 Richard Fletcher

SUBS: 1 Loz Wildbore, 7 James Webster, 10 Jim Gannon, 22 Paddy Flynn, 24 Josh Simm, 25 Anthony Mullally, 27 Brett Robinson, 99 Nick Peet

HAVEN:

20 Marc Bainbridge, 5 Daniel Smith, 3 Rob Jackson, 4 Derry Eilbeck, 2 Craig Calvert, 24 Gregg McNally, 7 Leroy Joe, 16 Ryan MacDonald, 25 Chris Smith, 8 Marc Jackson, 11 Andy Gorksi, 12 Spencer Miller, 14 Danny Barker

SUBS: 1 Craig Benson, 9 Graeme Mattinson, 17 John Walker, 18 John Patrick, 21 Taani Lavulavu, 22 Matt Tunstall, 23 Marc Shackley, 13 Dexter Miller, 15 Tyrone Dalton, 19 Stephen Fox, 6 Paul Lancaster, 10 Ryan Campbell

THE VIKING STORM

Home games in bold.

MATCH DETAILS 2009

DATE	OPPONENT	V	KO	Res	Att	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
JANUARY																						
Sun 18 Jan	Whitehaven	H	2pm	W 40-22																		
Tue 27 Jan	Salford City Reds	H	3pm	L 12-40	1938																	
FEBRUARY																						
Sun 1 Feb	St Helens	A	1:30pm	L 6-54																		
Sun 8 Feb	Barrow	A	2pm																			
Fri 13 Feb	Oldham (NR Cup)	H	7:30pm																			
Sat 21 Feb	Gateshead Thunder (NR Cup)	H	6pm																			
MARCH																						
Sun 1 Mar	Blackpool (NR Cup)	A	3pm																			
Sun 8 Mar	Challenge Cup	H	3pm																			
Thu 12 Mar	Toulouse	H	7:30pm																			
Thu 19 Mar	Hullfax	A	7:30pm																			
Sat 28 Mar	Sheffield Eagles	H	6pm																			
APRIL																						
Fri 10 Apr	Leigh Centurions	H	3pm																			
Mon 13 Apr	Doncaster	A	3pm																			
Fri 17 Apr	Batley Bulldogs	H	7:30pm																			
Sun 26 Apr	Sheffield Eagles	A	4pm																			
MAY																						
Fri 1 May	Barrow	H	8pm																			
Thu 7 May	Whitehaven	A	7:30pm																			
Thu 14 May	Leigh Centurions	A	7:30pm																			
Sat 23 May	Gateshead Thunder	H	6pm																			
Sun 31 May	Batley Bulldogs	A	3pm																			
JUNE																						
Sat 13 Jun	Featherstone Rovers	H	6pm																			
JULY																						
Sat 4 Jul	Doncaster RLFC	H	6pm																			
Sun 19 Jul	Gateshead Thunder	A	3pm																			
Sat 25 Jul	Toulouse	A	8pm																			
Fri 31 Jul	Hullfax	H	7:30pm																			
AUGUST																						
Sun 9 Aug	Featherstone Rovers	A	3pm																			
Sat 15 Aug	Barrow	A	6:30pm																			
Sat 22 Aug	Whitehaven	H	6pm																			