

ALAN DAVIES - THE PRINCE OF CENTRES

by ROGER HALSTEAD

ALAN Davies, that great Oldham centre of the 1950s, has died in a Blackburn hospital from emphysema, just four days short of his 76th birthday.

One of rugby league's post-war greats, and

considered by many supporters of that era to be the best player ever to have worn the red and white hoops and navy blue shorts, he was a centre of sublime skill and dynamic pace, allied to a mean streak that enabled him to be a great survivor in the battleground that was rugby league of more than half a century ago.

His head-to-head battles with the renowned St Helens hard man, Duggie Greenall, were legendary and part of Watersheddings folklore.

But it was his skill with ball in hand and his ability to score tries and to make lots more for his winger that made Alan Davies one of

the most popular and most revered players ever to grace the Watersheddings turf.

He played in 391 Oldham games between 1950 and 1961, when he left to sign for Wigan, and he scored 174 tries to establish himself as the club's all-time leading try scorer --- a record that is unlikely ever to be beaten.

He won 20 Great Britain caps at a time when nearly every leading club in the sport could boast an international-class centre and he toured Australia with Great Britain in 1958, hardly surprising therefore that he was an original member of the Oldham club's hall of fame.

In his book, "Oldham RLFC, the complete history," Michael Turner wrote: "Alan Davies is regarded by many supporters as the best player ever to have played for Oldham, and the fact that he is the most capped player in the history of the club would certainly add weight to that argument.

"He was one of the greatest centres the game has ever known. He lacked nothing in confidence, having great belief in his own ability. He was the complete rugby league player. He had a good eye for an opening and enough pace to capitalise. He was also a good handler with the strength and determination to turn a half chance into a score.

"On defence he was equally resolute, with great timing allied to hard and hard and decisive tackling."

A Leigh lad, Alan joined Oldham from amateur club Dootsons in July, 1950 and made his senior debut on the left wing on September 9 in a 35-8 win against Wakefield.

He went on to become the prince of Oldham centres in the fabulous fifties when the boys from Watersheddings carried off the Lancashire Cup in 1956, 1957 and 1958 and appeared in two championship finals, losing to Warrington at Maine Road in 1955 but going on to beat Hull at Bradford two years later.

Many pundits felt he was extremely unlucky to miss out on the 1954 Great Britain tour Down Under. His winger, Terry O'Grady, made the trip but Alan had to wait four years for the next tour before he was selected to represent his country on the other side of the world with his Watersheddings team mates Ken Jackson and Frank Pitchford.

It was the end of an era when Davies left Oldham in 1961, after ten fabulous years, to join Wigan. He never did fulfill his dream of playing for Oldham at Wembley, but he made it to the Twin Towers with Wigan, for whom he played against Wakefield Trinity in the 1963 Challenge Cup final. He also had brief spells with Salford and Wakefield.

He leaves his wife, Joyce, son Stephen and three daughters, Linda, Sarah and Janice.

Oldham

ROUGHYEDS

RLFC



The official programme of Oldham Rugby League Football Club (1997) Ltd



v Rochdale Hornets

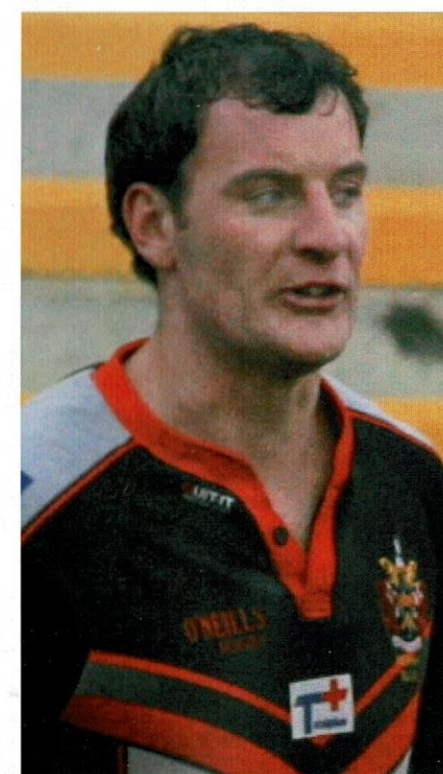
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'TWO BOBS' DEMANDS THAT OLDHAM ARE 'RUTHLESS AT ALL TIMES'!

played 18th Feb



Exclusive . . . by ROGER HALSTEAD
ROBERT Roberts, given the Oldham captaincy for a third term, will urge his team to go for broke in their bid to win promotion in 2009.

Having suffered the "heartbreak" of Grand Final defeats in 2007 and 2008, the Welsh international says the Roughyeds' class of 2009 must sweat blood in their efforts to make it third time lucky this year.

"We've got to go up this time, and we've got to be RUTHLESS in pursuit of our goal," said 29-year-old Roberts, who will never forget his anguish when the final hooter sounded Oldham's defeat by Ellery Hanley's Doncaster in last season's Grand Final at Warrington.

Ellery, now a star of TV's Sunday night blockbuster, "Dancing On Ice", stunned his players at the height of their celebrations when he announced he was leaving the club.

But the post-match drama in the Doncaster dressing room was nothing compared to the stony silence and utter dejection across the corridor where the Roughyeds players were tending their wounds, both physical and mental.

"To lose to Featherstone the year before at Headingley was bad enough," said 'Two Bobs', "but

to lose again a year later was absolutely gutting. I don't think I've ever felt so bad on a rugby field. It tore at the heart.

"We were the nearly men in 2007 and 2008, but this year we've got to be determined to win through and it all starts today with the first hurdle in the Northern Rail Cup.

"Some people claim this competition is a taster for what's to follow, but I can't get my head round that. We are playing for a cup and to experience all the glamour and excitement of appearing in a final and, having played in two such finals on the winning side both times, I can promise it's a great experience for players and fans.

"But, more than that, a good run in the Northern Rail Cup to the quarter-finals would set us up to get our Co-operative Championship One campaign off to a good start. Success breeds success

"I want us to win every game we play, in whatever competition we play, and that's why I say we need to be RUTHLESS in every minute of every game. We must show no mercy. There were times last year when we got a lead and then took our foot off the pedal and that ultimately cost us promotion because we lost out on bonus points.

"We can't afford to do it again and with that in mind it will help us to show a mean streak because there will be such a lot of competition for places within the squad.

"The squad reminds me of the one we had at Huddersfield a few years ago when we went unbeaten through the league campaign. We have a nice blend of ex-Super League players and young lads who aspire to Super League, and that's how it was at Huddersfield back then.

"I'm not saying we'll go through the year unbeaten -- that would be totally disrespectful to some very good teams --- but the big squad will keep everybody, including me, on his toes.

"Last year, when two or three players were out injured, others knew their places were safe. It's different now. To keep his place in the 17 every player needs to perform on a Sunday and then back-up in training during the week. If he doesn't he won't be in the side for very long.

"This should help us to put teams away. We can no longer feel sorry for anyone, otherwise we will end up feeling sorry for ourselves.

"And, having sampled that twice in two years, neither I nor anyone else who was in those Grand Final losing dressing rooms will want to go through the pain again."

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- **Wednesday** ~ news and views from the Roughyeds
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More Rugby in your Chronicle

View from the inside ...



Welcome to the start of another season after what has been an eventful off season in many respects both at the club and for the game in general.

Our last competitive game was of course the defeat in the Grand Final against Doncaster and

there is no doubt that it has taken a while to get over that especially with it being our second consecutive loss in a final with promotion slipping away again.

There was a major review of the season following that defeat and there have been changes- some visible and some not - to hopefully ensure that we are as professional, prepared and enthusiastic as we possibly can be as a club for the challenges that lie ahead this season.

With a different and tough new format for the Northern rail Cup we will be looking to get the season off to a good start and if you look at all of the clubs in the competition it is difficult to see one that looks to have gone backwards in terms of its playing strength.

One exception to that some would argue are our visitors today who have lost some players recently as a result of their financial troubles but despite that meaning they have not had the preparation they would have liked going into this game the main thing is that they are still here and able to build for the future. That coupled with the added spice of a local derby and the extra incentive of being likened to a wounded animal will provide more than enough motivation for the 17 who pull on the Rochdale shirt today. For our part we welcome several new faces to the club both players and coaching staff and we wish them all well in what will hopefully be a long and successful association with the Oldham club.

Tony Benson and his staff have worked hard during the past few months to ensure that the players are well prepared for the eventualities of the season and it is now down to the players to produce the goods on the park. Certainly fitness and strength will not be issues throughout the season and if you look at the depth of

talent in the squad there is no lack of ability either. I have previously made it clear that attitude and mental toughness are the main qualities to achieve success and we are relying on this group of players to demonstrate that they have those qualities in abundance.

We are, as always, grateful to Northern Rail for their continues support of rugby league and the introduction of the Blackpool Nines competition in July will provide an extra and very different event for both players and fans alike.

The support the club has had in difficult times for everybody via season ticket sales has been very much appreciated and we also hope to see an increase in our support base in general this season as we try to bring some enjoyment to you via matters of a sporting kind.

Please, please, please show your support for the lads today and make some noise to hopefully cheer them on to victory.

You will also note a new format for the programme this season with all clubs selling the Game On magazine which you will find inside this programme and only a small numbers of clubs such as ourselves continuing to produce a home programme.

We at the club feel this is an important part of club life and would hope that more and more of you will buy the publication.

Enjoy the game

Chris Hamilton

Chief Executive

LYTHGOE MOTORS - THE DRIVING FORCE

Oldham Rugby League Club are delighted to announce a sponsorship link-up with Lythgoe Motors, Citroen and Mazda dealers, of Middleton Road, Oldham.

It is the first time the Roughyeds have been involved in a major partnership of this kind since the 'new' Oldham club, Oldham RLFC (1997) Ltd, was formed more than 11 years ago.

The deal was rubber-stamped on Tuesday, February 3, and launched at the Lythgoe Motors showrooms in Middleton Road.

Chris Hamilton, the club's Chief Executive, said: "this is a 'first' for the Roughyeds and we are delighted to welcome Lythgoe Motors on board as new and major commercial partners.

"The relationship has been an extremely positive one since talks first started, with a real willingness on the part of Lythgoe Motors to buy into what we are trying to achieve at the town's professional rugby league club.

"John Barker (General Manager) and Mark Beach (Managing Director) have played major roles on behalf of Lythgoe Motors and as far as the club is concerned we will be working hard to ensure that the partnership is beneficial to both parties.

"We intend to develop our links with more ventures as we go along, and we hope this will be merely the start of a long and fruitful relationship."



Speaking for Lythgoe Motors, Mr Barker said: "we are really pleased to join forces with Oldham Rugby League Club. The deal took a while to reach a conclusion, but Chris (Hamilton) can be very persuasive and we got there in the end.

"Seriously, we are delighted to become the club's car partners and sponsors. We are striving to get involved more with the local community and this is a great starting point - a first for us as well as for the club."

A local man, Mr Barker has not watched live rugby league for 20 years, but he was due to be with the Lythgoe Motors party at today's opening game of Oldham's new season against Rochdale Hornets here at Boundary Park in the Northern Rail Cup.

"I like all sports", he added, "but it's a long time since i watched rugby league. I don't think it will be as long until i watch the Roughyeds again . . . Chris will employ his powers of persuasion to make sure of that!"


WHERE AND WHEN WE PLAY



Date	Comp	Opponents	V	Time	Res	Score	Att	
Sun, Feb 8	NRC	Rochdale Hornets	H	3.00pm				
Fri, Feb 13	NRC	Widnes Vikings	A	7.30pm				
Sun, Feb 22	NRC	Sheffield Eagles	H	3.00pm				
Sun, Mar 1	NRC	Hunslet Hawks	A	2.00pm				
Sun, Mar 8	Carnegie CC (3)							
Sun, Mar 15	CC1	Blackpool Panthers	H	3.00pm				
Sun, Mar 22	CC1	Keighley Cougars	A	3.00pm				
Sun, Mar 29	CC1	Workington Town	H	3.00pm				
Sun, April 5	Carnegie CC (4)							
Fri, April 10	CC1	Rochdale Hornets	A	3.00pm				
Mon, April 13	CC1	Dewsbury Rams	H	8.00pm				
Sun, April 26	CC1	Swinton Lions	H	3.00pm				
Mon, May 4	CC1	London Skolars	A	3.00pm				
Sun, May 10	Carnegie CC (5)							
Sun, May 17	CC1	Hunslet Hawks	H	3.00pm				
Sun, May 24	CC1	Swinton Lions	A	3.00pm				
Sun, May 31	Carnegie CC (Quarter-Final)							
Sun, June 7	NRC	(Quarter-Final)						
Sun, June 21	NRC (Semi-Final)							
Thurs, June 25	CC1	York City Knights	A	7.30pm				
Sun, July 5	CC1	Workington Town	A	3.00pm				
Sun, July 12	NRC Final (Bloomfield Road)							
Sun, July 19	CC1	Keighley Cougars	H	3.00pm				
Sun, July 26	CC1	Dewsbury Rams	A	3.00pm				
Sun, Aug 2	CC1	Rochdale Hornets	H	3.00pm				
Thurs, Aug 6	CC1	London Skolars	H	7.30pm				
Sun, Aug 16	CC1	Blackpool Panthers	A	3.00pm				
Sun, Aug 23	CC1	York City Knights	H	3.00pm				
Sun, Sep 6	CC1	Hunslet Hawks	A	3.00pm				
Play-offs start Friday, Sept 11								
Grand Finals Day Sunday, October 4								

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PLAYER PROFILE
No 1 ROBERT ROBERTS



Roger Halstead on the life and times of the Roughyeds captain.

'TWO BOBS' REVELS IN HIS ROLE AS LEADER

ROBERT Roberts was 'chuffed to bits' when new coach Tony Benson took him on one side to offer him the Oldham captaincy for the third year in a row.

The Kiwi boss had declared on taking up the job that he was starting off with a blank sheet of paper and that every player in the squad, from Ben Heaton to Danny Halliwell, was on an equal

footing. Benson arrived with no pre-conceived ideas even though some members of his new squad, including 'Two Bobs', had been with him at Leigh in 2006.

"Perhaps TB was keeping me on my toes. I don't know," reflected Robert. "But when the call came I was delighted to accept because, to be honest, I revel in the role. I love it. I learned some captaincy skills last year and I'll be able to put them into practice this season.

"I see the job as a go-between, that's between club and players and coach and players. I suppose I'm the middle man and I really do enjoy that responsibility off the field.

"On it, I suppose I'm just me. I'm not a shouter and a bawler. I use the quieter 'follow me' approach. I'm heavily involved in the squad's off-the-field activities and I love to pass on a few tips and hints whenever the young lads want a bit of guidance.

"It's also great to have somebody like Paul Highton as vice-captain. We had played a few times for Wales together and I was a friend of his long before he came to the club.

"With his vast experience - 11 years at Salford and nine Welsh international caps - it would be stupid not to call on his know-how. It's also good to have another voice on the pitch, somebody else the lads can tune in to as a change from listening to me."

One of the best-known players on the rugby league circuit, Robert is known as 'Two

Bobs' from Hull to St Helens, from London to Gateshead. He has to thank Jason Critchley for that. As a 16-year-old at Keighley Cougars our hero slipped quietly into the dressing room on the day of his senior debut, shy, uneasy and in awe of players like Daryl Powell, Critchley and Darren Fleary.

"Who've we got here then?" asked Critchley of the tall and rangy teenager. "Robert Roberts," came the reply. "Robert Roberts? . . . Bob, Bob . . . Two Bobs," exclaimed Critchley, and thus was spawned the most famous nickname in Yorkshire.

They were heady days at Keighley, days of Cougarmania, of Phil Larder, of the promotion that never was and of the precocious talent that was 'Two Bobs'.

He had burst on to the scene some years earlier in the junior section of the East Leeds club. The club is in big trouble now, a victim of the credit squeeze, but back then it produced players in numbers and loads of East Leeds lads found their way to Headingley: Rivett, Maguire, Mathers to name but a few.

'Two Bobs', England schools under-16s appearances behind him, went to Keighley and it was there that he won Great Britain Academy honours, made his Cougars debut at 16 and shortly afterwards played at stand-off against Hull in a Challenge Cup quarter-final.

"We took a hiding," recalled Robert, "but it was good experience for me and by the time I was 17 I was pretty much a regular at loose-forward." His travels were soon to begin, however. From Keighley to Hunslet, to Hull, to Halifax, to Huddersfield and then off to Australia where he came under the influence of two former Oldham players in Brett

Goldspink and Peter Walsh. He played for a country team, near Wagga Wagga, where Goldspink was player-coach and then he moved north to Newcastle where Walsh helped to fix him up at Newcastle Knights, where he trained and turned out in reserve grade football.

When he was ready to return to England he called in a favour from his old pal Heath Cruickshank and that's how he came to arrive at Leigh in 2006 and, ultimately, to join Oldham half way through the 2007 season.

Was it a good move to come to Oldham? Said Robert: "I should have done it years ago. If I had, I wouldn't have had as many career hiccups.

Deaks was a big influence on me last year and with Chris (Hamilton) directing operations I can't go far wrong.

"I also have a good working relationship with TB and with TB in charge at Leigh I sampled success in the Northern Rail. We were 16 points down to Hull KR in that final, and we went on to win by two. It was a great day, and it reminded me of the day some years earlier when we were in a similar final with

Huddersfield and I got the man-of-the-match award." These days 'Two Bobs' is never far away from a rugby ball. If he isn't training or playing with Oldham, he is out and about around the town's primary schools in his role as a member of the Roughyeds' community team, working under Sean Mellor.

"I love working in schools with the kids," he said. "Some of them have never even seen a rugby ball when I go in for the first time, but to see the joy on their faces when they master a catch or a pass is just brilliant. We are getting a few of them coming down to our games now and I hope to get more in the coming months."

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INTRODUCING THE NEW BOYS IN THE CLASS OF 2009



DAVID ALLEN (23), back-row forward. Former Wigan Warriors and Widnes Vikings star, who

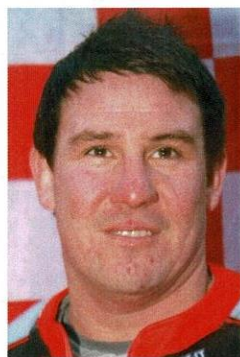
has already produced glimpses of his outstanding talent in two pre-season games. Wigan recruited him at the age of 11 and he made his senior debut, at the age of 16, in a Good Friday derby against St Helens - some debut! A year before that he toured to Fiji, New Zealand and Australia with North-West Counties under-16s when he revealed that his favourite player was Andy Farrell,

ANDY BALLARD (22), goalkicking winger. Another product of the Wigan Academy, as were his 2009 Roughyeds team mates James and Thomas Coyle, David Allen and Gary Sykes. Ballard, like Allen and James Coyle, toured Down Under with NW Counties youth in 2001, and his favourite player at that time was Henry Paul. Leaving Wigan for Salford, he was the City Reds' under-21s players' player of the year in 2007. In his two pre-season outings for Roughyeds he has notched a total of

three tries.

THOMAS COYLE (20), half-back. Learned his trade with Wigan St Pat's and Wigan Warriors, just like his elder brother James, who needs no introduction to Oldham fans. The brothers were born to play rugby league, given that their grandfather and father both played for Wigan before them. Bernard, their dad, has been associated with St Pat's for years. Thomas graduated to the senior side at Wigan and then went out to Halifax on loan in 2008 before joining big brother at the Roughyeds.

LEE GREENWOOD (28), winger. One of the more experienced players in the squad, Lee has played for Sheffield, Halifax (two spells), London Broncos, Huddersfield and Leigh. In his 80 Super League outings he averaged a try every two matches. He has been a prolific scorer outside Super League as well, notching up 24 tries in 28 games for Leigh in 2006, when he worked under the coaching of Tony Benson, and 23 tries in 29 games for Halifax a year later.



PAUL HIGHTON (32), prop. Named by Tony Benson as the squad's vice-captain, Paul has more than

200 Super League appearances on his impressive CV - 30 for Halifax and 181 for Salford City Reds. He has also played a significant amount of international rugby, winning nine caps for Wales. Halifax and Featherstone were among his early clubs before he moved back across the Pennines to join Salford, where he stayed for 11 seasons and earned a testimonial.

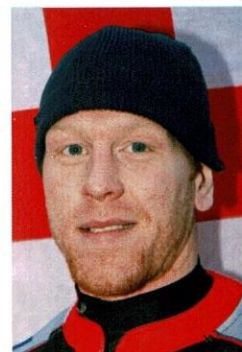
JAMIE I'ANSON (21), prop. Reared in the Leeds Rhinos Academy, Jamie boasts England rep honours at academy level. He departed Headingley to



move to South Wales to join the emerging Celtic Crusaders club at the start of their highly successful Co-operative NL2 campaign of 2007. Making his Crusaders debut aged 19, he picked up the club's Young Player of the Year award in 2007, but he fancied a return North and Oldham suited him fine. Made a total of 44 Crusaders' appearances in two hugely successful seasons at Bridgend.

WAYNE KERR (24), prop. This Irish international

from Co.Kildare has made a meteoric rise in the last two years. Up to 2006 he was playing rugby league at a modest level in Ireland. But his raw talent was spotted, and he quickly played for Ireland in New Zealand and in Russia before reaching the pinnacle of his career so far when he turned out against Samoa in the last World Cup in Australia. Tony Benson, who took him to London Skolars last year, has had a major influence on his career to date.



PAUL REILLY (32), centre/fullback. Another of the squad's

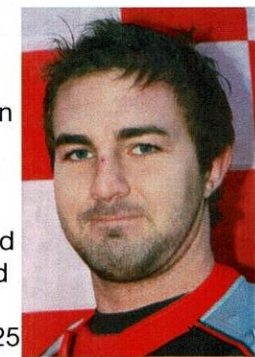
experienced campaigners, Paul spent 11 seasons with his hometown Huddersfield club before moving on for one year at Wakefield Trinity Wildcats where he suffered a spinal injury. Now over that, he wanted to end his playing career in a part-time environment and it suited him fine to join up with his long-standing close friend Marcus St Hilaire here at Oldham. Paul has played more than 150 games in Super League and he joins skipper Robert Roberts, vice-captain Paul Highton and his mate 'Junior' among the squad's "seniors".

CRAIG ROBINSON (23), second-row. A hustler and a bustler, this workaholic second-

row forward is the brother of former Roughyeds prop Adam Robinson. Like Adam, he was reared at Wakefield Trinity Wildcats, but his path then took a different direction to that of his brother when he went to Rochdale and spent three seasons with the Hornets. As well as playing rugby league, he is working hard to make it available to others in his role as development officer for the Wakefield Service Area.

GARY SYKES (22), hooker. Another new recruit well known to coach Tony Benson, who was his boss at Leigh in 2006. Gary, like so many others in the Oldham squad, learned the ropes with Wigan

Academy before playing a major role in Leigh's third-place finish in 2006 behind Hull KR and Widnes, figuring in 25 of Leigh's 31 games that year. He was back at Wigan in 2007, then on to Swinton Lions in 2008 before joining Roughyeds for 2009. Gary was out of luck in his second pre-season game, at Leigh of all places, when he damaged medial ligaments in a knee.



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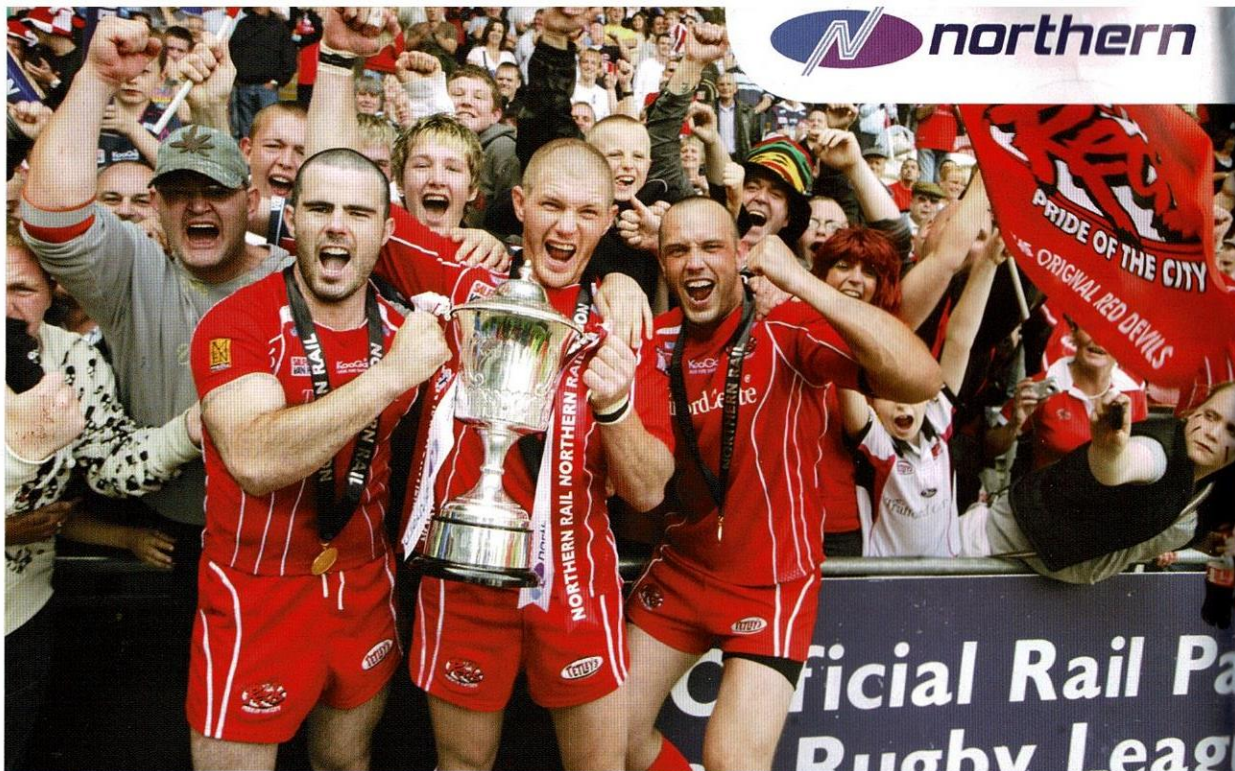
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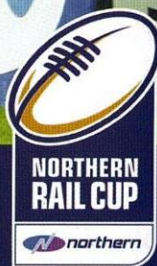
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 February 5-12, 2009

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NEXT WEEK

Getting posh at Leigh's new ground ... in the community with Widnes ... Paul Sculthorpe is the Co-operative Ambassador



Happy New Season – in fact a happy new everything!

IF YOU hadn't noticed, there's something called a 'credit crunch' going on. Money's tighter than a duck's doodad, and that's hitting everyone, from the chairman of a multi-national bank to the custodians of our kiddies' piggybanks. But this is Britain, land of the stiff upper lip and the show must go on – or in the brand new 2009 world of Rugby League, it's 'Game On' time!

What is Game On? Well let's get clear what it's NOT first – this isn't an RFL product foisted on the clubs. It's a ground-breaking collaboration between the clubs of the co-operative Championships themselves and the publishing team at NewsPost Ltd, an independent company and 'cousin' to the trade paper League Weekly.

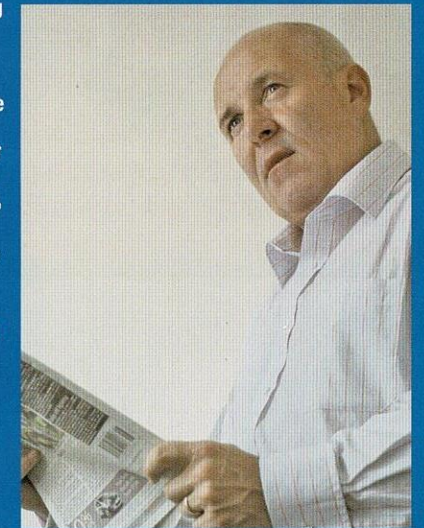
Game On will be sold at matches during the Northern Rail Cup, co-operative Championship and Challenge Cup campaigns and is intended ultimately as a replacement for clubs' individual match programmes. That doesn't mean some clubs won't still produce their own programmes or supplement Game On with add-on news and information as well, but within these pages there's a wealth of material that we hope will appeal to the RL community.

The vast majority of semi-pro clubs lose money on their programmes, and were looking for a better way to do the job – one which reduces the workload on overworked staff and **MOST IMPORTANTLY** has the potential to make them **MORE MONEY!** The logistics and costs of producing 20 (now 21 with Toulouse) different home programmes, the work of selling advertising (and getting the money in) is a massive burden on most clubs. With Game On the clubs have a direct line to ALL fans in the Championships and from every copy sold £1 goes straight into your club's coffers. Those potential lost advertisers? The challenge is for clubs to turn them into sponsors, or maybe take ads on pitch-side boards etc.

We think our 'big brothers' in Super League will be looking on with envy at the Championships' very own matchday magazine, and throughout the season we want to work with you, the diehard RL fans, to develop our new publication. Send us your letters, your thoughts, your ideas, and just like your team, we hope to work harder, improve our performances and achieve better results throughout the year.

As we said – these are tough economic times and it's going to take teamwork for all of our Rugby League clubs to make it through unscathed. But it's match day and the ref's about to blow his whistle – it's **GAME ON!**

Danny Lockwood
 Chairman, NewsPost Ltd

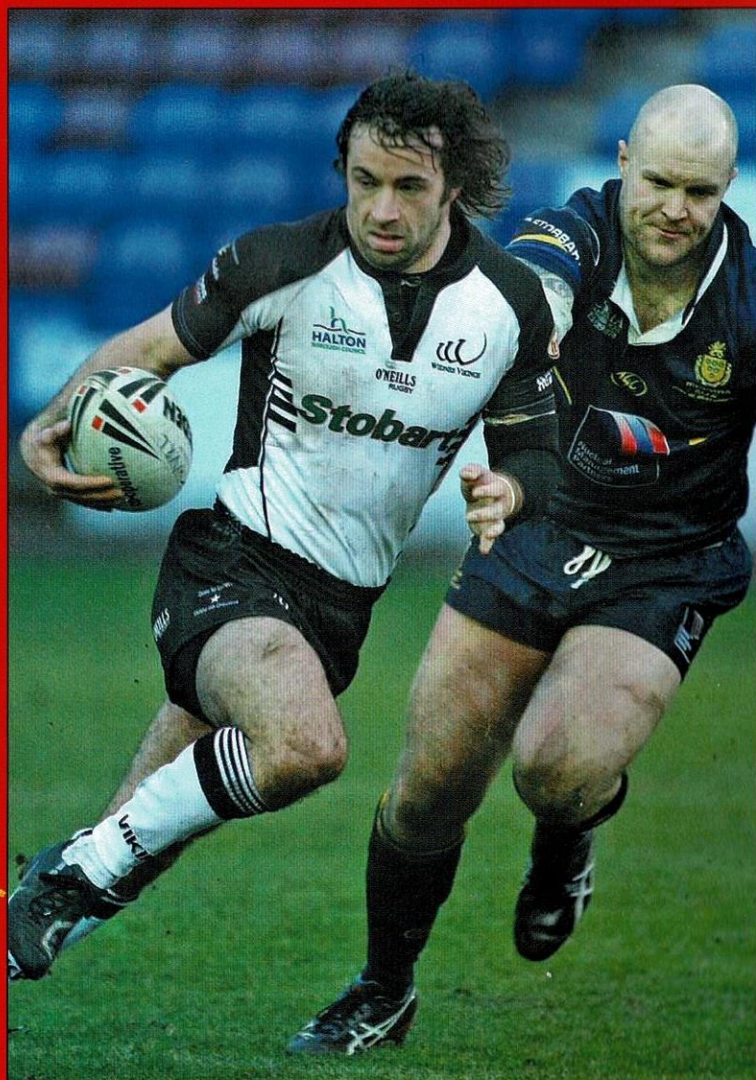


GAME ON explained – reducing the burden on clubs and maximising revenue opportunities

Learner and meaner



The Northern Rail Cup kicks off with a new-look format. There are fewer games but the prize has never been more valuable as PAUL BENNETT explains



Mark Smith will be expected to make things happen for much-fancied Widnes Vikings

THIS season's Northern Rail Cup promises to be the most fiercely contested ever.

Since its move to Blackpool in 2005, the showpiece final of the competition has been one of the real highlights of the rugby league calendar, growing in stature year on year.

Families from fans of finalists Hull KR, Castleford, Leigh, Widnes, Whitehaven, Doncaster and Salford – and the other Championship clubs too – have relished a mid-season weekend away at the traditional British seaside resort.

But there's now extra motivation for the most ambitious clubs to make it all the way to Bloomfield Road on Sunday, July 12.

Each of the three winners of the Northern Rail Cup over the next three seasons will, along with the co-operative Championship Grand Finalists from 2009 and 2010, be eligible to apply for a licence to play in engage Super League from 2012.

The Rugby Football League have laid down the gauntlet to clubs to ensure performances on the field still have a real bearing on the promotion process.

And those clubs with eyes on joining the big boys of the elite competition will be going all out to tick that box at the earliest possible opportunity.

This year's competition has been streamlined, making each fixture on the way to the final even more crucial for the 20 competing clubs.

The old seven group format has been replaced by two Pools of 10, with each Pool containing five teams from the co-operative Championship and five teams from the co-operative Championship One.

Each team will play just four fixtures against clubs from within their Pool, including two from their own division and two from the other.

The top four teams in each Pool at the end of the first stage will progress to the Quarter Finals on the weekend of June

2008 winners Salford celebrate their final victory over Doncaster



NRC POOLS

POOL 1: Halifax, Widnes Vikings, Sheffield Eagles, Gateshead Thunder, Barrow Raiders, Oldham, Keighley Cougars, Rochdale Hornets, Blackpool Panthers, Hunslet Hawks.
POOL 2: Leigh Centurions, Whitehaven, Featherstone Rovers, Batley Bulldogs, Doncaster, Dewsbury Rams, York City Knights, Workington Town, Swinton Lions, London Skolars.

NRC DATES

February 8: Round 1 fixtures.
 February 13 & 15: Round 2 fixtures.
 February 21 & 22: Round 3 fixtures.
 March 1: Round 4 fixtures.
 June 6/7: Quarter-finals.
 June 20/21: Semi-finals.
 July 12: Final.

FULL NRC FIXTURES CAN BE SEEN ON P46/47

6/7, unlike last season when the competition included a Round of 16.

The Semi Finals will be contested on June 20/21 when two lucky teams will be looking to book their places at Bloomfield Road.

The new streamlined format arguably increases the chances of the competition's lesser-fancied clubs, with the 10 teams from co-operative Championship One all hoping to emulate the heroics of Doncaster, who stunned League One Batley Bulldogs 21-12 in last season's semi finals before bravely going down to red hot favourites Salford in the final.

Having seen them strengthen in the off-season, many will have their eyes on the likes of Dewsbury, York and Swinton to see if they can break through to the latter stages while ambitious Oldham – National League Two play-off finalists in the past two seasons – could be a real dark horse for Northern Rail glory under their new coach Tony Benson, who tasted success at Bloomfield Road in the 2006 final with Leigh Centurions.

Leigh themselves, under Neil Kelly, will undoubtedly have their sights set on the trophy as they plot a Super League licence application in the summer of 2011.

With the new Leigh Sports Village now open for business, the Centurions have some of the best facilities outside of the top flight which, combined with their proud history and wealth of local talent, they hope will be enough to convince RFL chiefs to give them the thumbs up for promotion.

Meanwhile, there will arguably be no club as desperate to prove a point to league bosses than the Widnes Vikings – narrowly edged out of a licence by Salford and the Celtic Crusaders last July.

The licence snub was a bitter blow to chairman Steve O'Connor and the club's loyal band of supporters, but success in the Northern Rail Cup or the co-operative Championship in the coming seasons would help them compile a compelling case for inclusion next time around.

Halifax, Whitehaven and Featherstone, too, hold strong ambitions of top flight rugby league in future ... and could Northern Rail Cup glory hold the key for the return to Super League of Sheffield Eagles or Gateshead Thunder? – two clubs with big ideas outside of the game's traditional heartlands.

Of course, only two clubs can actually make it all the way to the final on July 12

but, for the first time, the RFL and sponsors Northern Rail are ensuring that all 20 clubs will be involved in the family-friendly weekend on the Lancashire coast with the launch of the new Northern Rail 9s tournament.

The 18 teams that don't make it to the Northern Rail Cup final will compete just down the road at Fylde RU – the home of Blackpool Panthers – in an exciting festival of rugby league, showcasing the thrilling shortened form of the game.

That tournament will kick off on Saturday, July 11 and eight teams will make it through to the Quarter Finals of the Northern Rail 9s Cup the following day whilst the remaining 10 will contest the Northern Rail 9s Plate competition.

The finals of both those tournaments will then be played as curtain raisers to the main event at Bloomfield Road, making for a tremendous action-packed rugby league day out.

And it all begins this weekend with the first round of Pool fixtures.

So show your club colours proudly, clear your throats and get ready to sing and shout for your beloved team as they look to book a ticket to finals day.

All aboard ... full steam ahead ... IT'S GAME ON!!!

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the world according to
WILKO

Jon Wilkin, a Co-operative 'Good for everyone' ambassador, knows all about playing in the Co-operative Championship having played for Hull KR in the old National Leagues before joining St Helens in 2002. Here he talks about the World Cup, what he's been up to during the break and his views on the season ahead

WE ARE on the verge of a brand new season for Rugby League and I'm as excited as ever. The break has been great for just stepping away from the game a bit and enjoying time with my girlfriend and family. I even tried to cook my first meal over Christmas which got a mixed reception!

The World Cup for me was a very enjoyable experience and I am immensely proud of representing my country. The way we performed was disappointing. I played in three out of the four matches we had but the team's displays certainly didn't match the desire we had to win and talent in the squad so the results were very difficult to swallow. That was the case especially for me following on from the Grand Final defeat last year.

It has been said that the reason for our under performance is the mix of players in the squad; that the majority come from Saints and Leeds – and it's true to a certain extent. When you get so many players from one club you are bound to get clashes but that is what international sport is all about. We have to be man enough to get over any differences and let the rugby do the talking. It's all about bridging that divide and playing at your best for your country.

In terms of my own preparation for the new season, I've just come back from some warm weather training with St Helens. It was great to get the ball in hand and really get some yards built up in the legs.

This season is all about development and I mean in Rugby League from top to bottom, it's time to see more home grown talent making it onto the pitch. Players like Ade Gardener and I began playing in the Championship and through a lot of hard work and gradual development we found ourselves in the Super League.

I think we need to develop the way in which we push and nurture our own English talent – we have a strong and rich heritage and we need to be aware of this.

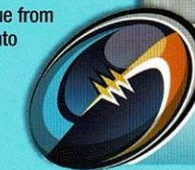
Picking players like Steve Menzies, who recently signed for Bradford at 36, ahead of say a young English talent, to me is worrying. If we want to raise the standard, develop the game and ultimately improve the national side then we all need to play our part and I see clubs and players in the Co-operative Championship as a key part in the puzzle.

I think we were all hoping for a successful World Cup and last year we didn't deliver so the onus is now even more on the players in all leagues, the clubs and sponsors to help strengthen the reputation of our sport as well as our national side.

Not only should the players perform week in and week out for the faithful supporters that come and watch, but also help strengthen that rich 'x factor' that we all can see in Rugby League. It doesn't cost a lot to watch a game of rugby league compared to many other sports, and being part of a Rugby League family is being part of the community, embracing the core values that are present in both, much like a community is good for everyone; rugby league is good for everyone. From top to bottom we all have a responsibility to the community; we all have a responsibility to grow the game, to help enrich the future of our sport.

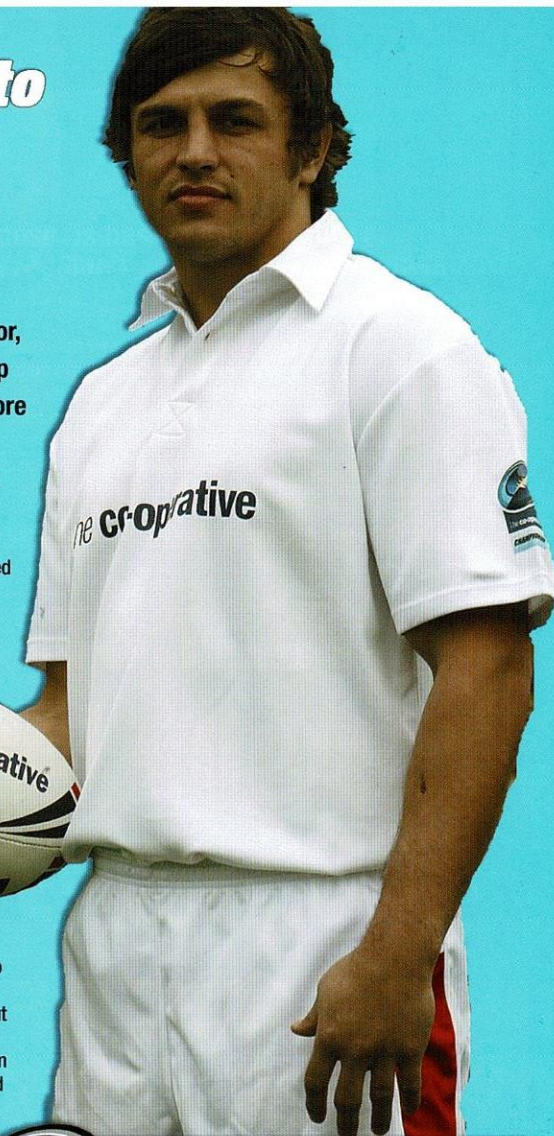
This season I think Saints and Leeds hold strength for Super League, but I think Warrington will make the play-offs and Hull KR, my old club, will be the surprise package of the season.

In the Co-operative Championship, Widnes will do well simply because of their playing roster and the facilities at the club. Halifax will again be strong with their attacking style of play but what is sure is that we are in for a real bruising, enthralling and hopefully first class display from now until October. Good luck everyone, let's make this the best season yet!



The co-operative
CHAMPIONSHIP

Jon Wilkin is a Co-operative
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REPORTS, OPINION
AND ANALYSIS

ON SALE
EVERY
MONDAY



OFFMESSAGE

Every week a prominent figure from the Championships has the opportunity to 'get a few things off their chest'. GAME ON kicks off with Batley Bulldogs chairman and current President of the RFL, solicitor Kevin Nicholas

IT WAS in the corridors of the House of Lords that I was asked by Danny Lockwood to write a few words in this first historic publication, mainly because I am currently President of our sport. I was honoured to be asked – especially by a Dewsbury lad – and the location was perfect, as one of the finest buildings in the world where we were attending a dinner organised by MPs with a passion for Rugby League. Our sport has a history to be proud of and the House of Lords building makes you proud to be British.

Our coach at Batley, Gary Thornton, gave our Chief Executive Paul Harrison a motivational book, the theme of which is turning negatives into positives and now I have been hooked into the idea for 2009 to help improve our club. The approach is to turn difficult situations around. As a New Year's resolution it is not easy, yet it does work and even trying to do it on occasions itself can boost your spirits. Try it, it's worth a go.

I thought I would jot down some of my personal views of some issues in the game and how I think we can go forward. We all know about the credit crunch but as a sport we have signed up with partners and sponsors who have already committed to Rugby League and so whether it is partly by luck or not, in 2009 our sponsorships are solid. RFL Ltd as a governing body goes into 2009 financially healthy on the back of a profit. The World Cup at least financially was a success and so we are not burdened with losses there. So everything is good so far.

In our Leagues we begin with the Northern Rail Cup where the fixture format has changed, in my view for the better, with less games at the group stage, which will be more meaningful and a planned festival on the weekend of the final at Blackpool, which if all clubs and supporters buy into it, will be a tremendous event in the Rugby League calendar. If we can get all clubs represented at the final in their team colours it will be a spectacle in a smaller but similar way to Wembley and the Challenge Cup Final.

Then we have the Co-operative Championship. At Batley, we already have a fully booked trip to Toulouse and are looking to organise a second trip, as we failed to appreciate the interest this would generate. Representatives from Toulouse attended one of our club meetings and their genuine enthusiasm was infectious. They wish to play in our league in its own right, not just as a stepping-stone to Super League. I am convinced about that, even though I was sceptical before meeting them.

When Richard Lewis first came to Rugby League as an outsider looking in, he observed that a vital element of the growth of our sport had to be international competition, which clearly gives the sport a higher profile and potentially can generate income to vastly improve the finances of clubs. I agree with him totally. We are nowhere near where we want to be yet, but an improved French Rugby League would

help tremendously and Catalans and Toulouse improving standards is a start, the next step being for them to reduce their foreign players. We are going in the right direction by giving Toulouse a chance. It is possible to think of negatives but if we think positive and embrace the idea, it has a better chance of succeeding for the benefit of all.

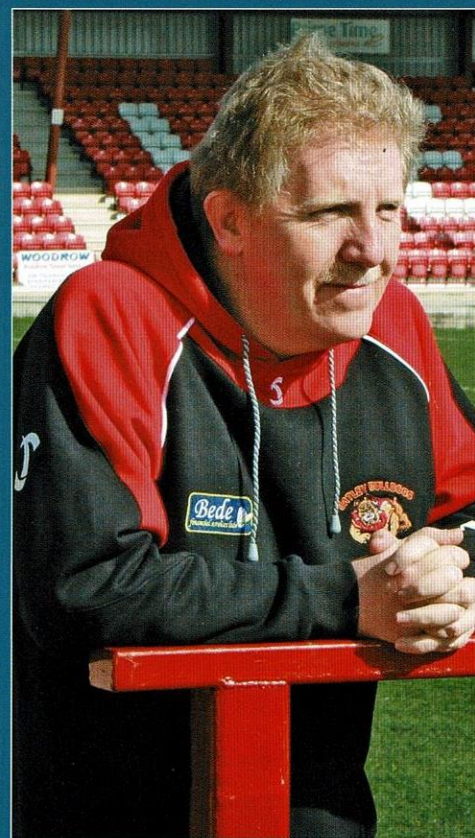
England under-achieved in the World Cup and as one of the thousands who travelled down under, that hurt badly. The RFL are undertaking a thorough de-brief to improve matters going forward. The past is history, so where do we go now? Our coach, Tony Smith has become a British citizen and although I do not know him well, my gut feeling is that he is a genuine man with ability who will learn and prosper now that the RFL have shown him support. I believe he is the best man for the job but I also believe his successor should be British, whether Tony wins the Four Nations or World Cup or not. We must believe that he can do that and that all the home nations improve over the next five years as part of our optimism and pride in being British.

International players come from Super League, so if we are to succeed, those clubs' attitudes need to change. The quota of foreign players is reducing but still clubs try to get round the rules and that needs to change. In my view it is the one vital thing which will help improve our international performances and create a bigger pool of young players for Tony Smith to choose from.

The 2010 season is the time when things must change and where there is a will there is a way – so let's be optimistic. However, clubs may sign foreign players as a short term fix because they think that is what supporters want. So if people want more British players, they need to let the clubs know. That also applies to our leagues as well.

Finally, 'debt' seems a dirty word at the centre of everything, but in Rugby League it is certainly a reality that burdens all and my club is no exception. We have increased money through Sky TV deals and all clubs are striving to use it to improve their businesses and increase income. However, we also need to look at reducing costs and we need to match expenditure with income.

The players deserve as much money as we can afford but "afford" is the critical word. This season will be make or break for many clubs including mine but if we can survive and turn things round this year, we can prosper like never before. Let's be positive we can do it and a review of our position in this magazine the same time next year, could see us going from strength to strength on and off the field, so let's hope so. Enjoy your rugby in 2009.



THROUGH the winter, co-operative Championship and Championship One clubs have been strengthening their squads for another long, hard season. Here, Game On picks out each coach's key signing for the new campaign...

Movers and shakers

CO-OPERATIVE CHAMPIONSHIP 1



BLACKPOOL PANTHERS

KEY SIGNING:
IAN HODSON
PANTHERS coach Martin Crompton has been a busy man in the off-season and is plotting a run to the play-offs in 2009. Blackpool have made several key signings – particularly at half back with the captures of Martin Keavney and Liam McGovern. Back row Ian Hodson, however, adds great experience to the pack having been part of the Oldham's Grand Final side only last October.



snap up Australian half back Danny Evans, but the pivot was denied a visa. That leaves ex-Featherstone Rovers back row Hughes as the Cougars' highest profile new arrival – but Keighley fans will have to wait to see their new buy in action. Hughes is currently nursing a knee ligament injury and is facing a race to be fit for the start of the league season.

LONDON SKOLARS

KEY SIGNING:
JAYMES CHAPMAN
FORMER Halifax Super League centre Chapman could prove a handy addition for the Skolars upon his return from rugby union, although new London boss Callum Irving's pre-season theme has been on keeping the members of last year's squad together. Unlike previous years, the club has shunned overseas signings and concentrated on up-and-coming local talent such as Orrioso Agbareh, Ollie Bloom and Smokey Junior.



OLDHAM

KEY SIGNING:
PAUL HIGHTON
THE emphasis at Boundary Park in the off-season has been on retention of last season's squad, which was narrowly pipped to promotion by Doncaster in the play-off final. In ex-Salford stalwart Highton, the Roughyeds have added further experienced fire power to their pack. Arguably, though, the club's key new recruit is actually coach Tony Benson who has been enlisted with the task of finally moving the club up a division.



ROCHDALE HORNETS

KEY SIGNING:
CASEY MAYBERRY
THE Hornets' plans have been hit by their recent financial troubles, which have cost them both Carl Forber and



Lee Marsh. Centre Casey Mayberry, though, is a strong signing from Blackpool Panthers and will help fill the void left by top points scorer Carl Sneyd, who left the club for Swinton after the Hornets' move into administration.

SWINTON LIONS

KEY SIGNING:
GRAHAM HOLROYD
SWINTON had a poor season in 2008 but their prospects look much brighter for the up-coming campaign after a strong recruitment drive. While Paul Southern, Mike Wainwright and Carl Sneyd look great additions, former Halifax veteran Holroyd is a signing that has raised a few eyebrows around the league. Holroyd could put the Lions in promotion contention.



WORKINGTON TOWN

KEY SIGNING:
STEVEN ROPER
TOWN have lost one of their top talents over the off-season with hooker Shaun Lunt moving to Huddersfield Giants. But they believe they've recovered some of that lost creativity with the signing of half back Roper from Widnes Vikings. Roper's organisational skills could be the key to Town having a better year under Dave Rotheram this time around.



YORK CITY KNIGHTS

KEY SIGNING:
RICHARD KNIGHT
BACK ROW forward Knight arrived at the club from Keighley Cougars as a young player but with plenty of experience at this level. As the Cougars' vice captain, Knight can bring further leadership qualities to Paul March's pack at the Huntington Stadium. Cougars boss Barry Eaton was very keen to keep the player and March is delighted to have lured him away from their division rivals.



CO-OPERATIVE CHAMPIONSHIP



BARROW RAIDERS

KEY SIGNING:
GARY BROADBENT
LOCAL lad Broadbent has fulfilled his ambition of playing for his home town club, signing from Cumbrian rivals Whitehaven. Haven coach Ged Stokes is sad to see the veteran ex-Salford Super League star go, describing him as the best full back in the division. Broadbent could prove a crucial last line of defence for coach Dave Clark as the Raiders look to consolidate their place in the Championship.



BATLEY BULLDOGS

KEY SIGNING:
DALE CARDOZA
EX-SUPER LEAGUE centre Cardoza gives the Bulldogs more potency in the threequarter line. Coach Gary Thornton hopes the former Huddersfield, Halifax and Warrington star, allied with fellow centre Danny Maun, can ensure the perennial underdogs can mount a challenge for the play-offs over the next 12 months.



DONCASTER

KEY SIGNING:
PAUL HANDFORTH
THE price of Doncaster's success in National League Two and the Northern Rail Cup last season was the loss of their star half back Luke Gale, who has been given the chance to shine in Super League by Harlequins. But the Dons, now under the guidance of Ellery Hanley's former assistant Tony Miller, have brought in a vastly experienced replacement in the shape of Paul Handforth. With experience of Super League at Castleford and Wakefield, and NLI experience at Featherstone Rovers to boot, Handforth might be the wise head needed to get the best out of talented young stand off Kyle Briggs.



FEATHERSTONE ROVERS

KEY SIGNING:
IESTYN HARRIS
EASILY the biggest name signing of the off-season, the capture of the former Great Britain and Wales dual code international from Bradford Bulls underlines the ambitions of the club. Featherstone have received a huge profile boost with the arrival of



Harris alongside coach Daryl Powell, but the veteran stand off still has plenty to offer on the field too. He may not have pace, but Harris's vision, creativity and leadership could prove deadly at this level.

GATESHEAD THUNDER

KEY SIGNING:
ANDREW HENDERSON
ANOTHER playmaker making the step down from Super League, former Castleford hooker Henderson offers Thunder real ability and experience at dummy half. Having captained the Tigers to Grand Final glory twice (in 2005 and 2007), the Scotland international knows what this competition is all about and helps compensate for the loss of their outstanding scrum half Dan Russell.



HALIFAX RLFC

KEY SIGNING:
BOB BESWICK
FAX boss Matt Calland pulled off a real coup by luring the Irish World Cup star away from co-operative Championship title rivals Widnes Vikings. The former Wigan star's versatility and leadership will help fill the hole left by veteran stand off Graham Holroyd's departure to Swinton Lions. Stand off or back row Dwayne Barker, signed from Harlequins, will also have plenty of responsibility on his shoulders whilst winger Rob Worrincy is a really exciting capture.



LEIGH CENTURIONS

KEY SIGNING:
DAVE ARMITSTEAD
THE Centurions beat off several rivals for the signing of the Australian loose forward. Named co-operative National League Two player of the season for 2008, Leigh fans will have high hopes that the talented former Barrow Raiders pack star can give them an extra edge as they look to challenge for the Championship title. Full back Stuart Donlan, a Leigh lad, is another key recruit from Castleford and has been named as club captain for 2009.



SHEFFIELD EAGLES

KEY SIGNING:
AARON GROOM
THE Eagles made waves with the announcement



they had secured the services of the Fijian half back star, who was an impressive performer at the recent World Cup in Australia. Groom may not be in the UK until the start of the league campaign but the former Canterbury Bulldogs star, who made six NRL appearances last year, could catapult the club into title contention. Groom is one of four World Cup players signed at the Don Valley, with PNG pair Yere Menzie and Trevor Exton and Samoan Tangi Ropati also brought in by boss Mark Aston.

TOULOUSE OLYMPIQUE

KEY SIGNING:
ERIC ANSELME
THE Frenchmen will be the unknown quantity in the co-operative Championship this season, but one new player will be relatively well known to fans in England. The French international back row forward, part of his country's World Cup squad, had a spell with Super League champions Leeds Rhinos last year.



WHITEHAVEN THEOHAROUS

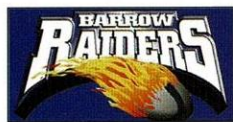
KEY SIGNING: JAMIE WITH
ex-Gateshead scrum half Dan Russell denied a visa and teen talent Gregg McNally injured in the final game of pre-season, the 21-year-old Theoharous is a crucial 11th hour capture for the Cumbrians. The promising pivot has NRL experience with Penrith Panthers and – crucially – the relevant qualifications to get him in the country. Haven coach Ged Stokes hopes he's unearthed a real gem here.



WIDNES VIKINGS

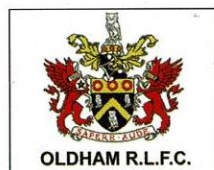
KEY SIGNING:
JAMES WEBSTER
PLENTY has been made of Iestyn Harris's high-profile switch to Featherstone, but Widnes fans may feel they've made the best piece of business of the off-season with the capture of Australian half back James Webster. The diminutive scrum half was a key member of Justin Morgan's Hull KR side until an injury forced the club to draft in Michael Dobson. With Webster unable to seal a move to city rivals Hull, he has returned to the lower division – a competition he won with the Robins in 2006 when, ironically, his side beat Widnes in the final. His partnership with fellow new recruit Anthony Thackeray promises to be an exciting one.





BARROW'S Fijian star recruit Waisale Suka was named the

2008 best Fiji Bati player after scooping a double at the Fiji National Rugby League Award Night in Suva. The Raiders-bound player walked away with the Vodafone Fiji National Rugby League 2008 Player of the Year award and the Rugby League World Cup Best Forward. The 24-year old Lomaiviti player, who was the vice captain of the Vodafone Fiji Bati team to the Rugby League World Cup in Australia, was elated with his win. Best and Fairest Player of the Year Award went to team skipper Wes Naiqama.



OLDHAM have high hopes of their full-back recruit from American Football, 23-year-old

Anthony Bingham.

Having played semi-pro soccer for Bradford Park Avenue, Altrincham and Mossley – and American Football for Dresden Monarchs – he's a young man in a hurry. He has signed a two-year contract, but aims to be a first-team regular long before then. "At 23 I need to be getting a move on," said Bingham, who has impressed in pre-season.

Meanwhile Scott Mansfield earned a back-slap from Tony Benson after the 17-year-old's debut at Barrow last Sunday. The ex-Saddleworth Rangers boy did over 40 minutes at loose-forward to get his first taste of senior action. "I was proud of him," said Benson. "It was a big ask, but he did exceptionally well."

Aussie David McKay (21), a promising half or hooker, has been released from his Roughyeds contract to go home unexpectedly for personal family reasons.

A MEMBERSHIP form for fans to join the new Oldham Supporters Club is in circulation. Annual membership is £10 for adults and £7.50 for OAPs and students. Members will receive a 5 per cent discount on club merchandise; a 25 per cent discount on Challenge Cup final tickets; pin badge; membership card; and a discounted rate at functions and events.

HUNSLET HAWKS have appointed Steve Parnell from Leeds Rhinos. He will join the club's Youth Development Staff and will be Head Coach of the recently formed Parkside Hawks, who will compete for the first time in this season's Summer Conference.

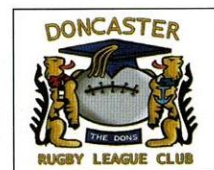
Mark Marshall, Youth Performance Manager, said "Steve is one of the best up and coming coaches around and at 28 years of age has a very level head on such young shoulders. He will prove a huge asset and will help the development of local young talent.

"His credentials have been rubber stamped with his contribution to a highly successful East Leeds U-18s in the National Youth League."

Meanwhile Hunslet have completed their third international signing with the capture of PNG star Nico Slain.

The PNG second row or prop joins Charlie Wabo and Michael Mark at the South Leeds club. Hawks General Manager Alan Stephenson said: "Nico completes our signings for the 2009 season and indicates our growing optimism for the future."

Nico added: "I am delighted to be given the opportunity of playing in the UK and I know Hunslet Hawks are determined to do well this season."



DONCASTER has a new youth team following the creation of West Doncaster Warriors.

The team, set up by co-operative Championship side Doncaster in partnership with Balby Carr Sports College, is for under 11s and 12s and is based as Balby Carr Sports College.

Anyone interested in joining the squad should ring Adam Lloyd on 01302 765888.

THE WIDNES VIKINGS are opening a new retail outlet.

The venture is in partnership with new kit suppliers O'Neill's Rugby.

The store will stock the majority of



the merchandise that was available prior to Christmas at the Stadium along with many more lines for all the family.

The store is at Unit 2 Liebig Court, Widnes, which is adjacent to ASDA in the town centre.

BLACKPOOL have signed former Oldham winger Gareth Langley.

Langley has played in two play-off finals for the Roughyeds but was forced to undergo shoulder surgery in the off-season and wasn't offered a new deal at Boundary Park.



Although Langley still has around four to six weeks to go in his rehabilitation, Panthers boss Martin Crompton has moved to snap him up for the 2009 Championship One campaign.

KEIGHLEY coach Barry Eaton says he expects new signing Carl Hughes to be fit for the start of the Championship One campaign in March.

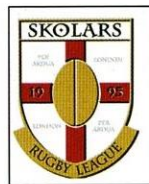
The former Featherstone loose forward suffered a medial ligament strain in the Cougars' pre-season cross-code challenge match against Bradford & Bingley RU.



It was originally feared he might miss the entire season, but further scans later suggested he would return within three months.

Now Eaton says Hughes is progressing well and expects him to return against Oldham at Cougar Park on March 22 – if not sooner.

LONDON SKOLARS have been dealt a cruel double injury blow. Up and coming youngster Smokie Junor has suffered a fractured fibia and will be ruled out of action for around eight weeks.



Full back Jermaine Coleman, meanwhile, is set to miss the entire season having been forced to undergo another knee reconstruction.

CLUBS! SEND IN YOUR NEWS TO:
gameon@newspost.co.uk

Looking on the bright side...

Dear Game On,

The Rugby Football League is rubbish. England are rubbish. Summer rugby – well that's just rubbish.

We need games with 63 scrums, played in ankle deep mud, won in the last minute by a drop goal that scrapes in off the post.

I don't want a pint of lager that costs £3.60, I want a flask of hot Bovril and I don't want to sit in some poncy stand, I want my toes to get so cold they think they've walked home on their own.

Stand-off halves? Rubbish, the lot of them. Give me a Hardisty or a Topless or a Millward any day.

Roger would still weave his magic against these Australians and New Zealanders and win the World Cup on his own, with just Brian Lockwood to knock seven bells out of the opposition pack.

Heritage Centre has 'kicked off'

THE Rugby League's Museum and Heritage Centre at the George Hotel in Huddersfield re-opened this week after a winter break.

The fascinating exhibiton at the 'home' of Rugby League is now open every Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 11 am to 4 pm every week through the season until Friday October 9, 2009.

Entry to the Heritage Centre is absolutely free and for first time visitors to the George Hotel is directly opposite Huddersfield's main railway station.

FEATHERSTONE forward Jamie Field was set to miss today's game with Leigh after the club decided a niggling back injury needed a scan. Coach Daryl Powell was hoping to have back before too long however.

WORKINGTON coach Dave Rotheram looks like being without key man Dean Burgess for some time. Burgess suffered a knee injury in a pre-season friendly with Barrow and could be out for "months". Rotheram said the prop was due to see a specialist but things did not look promising.

GATESHEAD will be without Matty Barron and Danny Wilson for up to three months with a foot and shoulder injury respectively.

Referees? Well they really are rubbish. Where's Eric Clay and Mick Naughton and Fred Lindop when you need them? They wouldn't need video refs. They wouldn't even need to be in the same half of the field to disallow a try. And they'd be sure to equal it out. That's what we need.

Eddie and Stevo? Rubbish. Couldn't hold a candle to Eddie Waring – and he was rubbish as well.

And all of that put together is why for 70 years I've been watching The Greatest Game, week in, week out.

Keep up the good work.
Ebenezer Scrooge

Of course it's a 'fake' letter. We wouldn't really pretend we'd been sent one before the first edition, could we? But don't be shy, send us your thoughts, complaints and ideas preferably by email to gameon@newspost.co.uk! We'll print what we can.

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GAME ON will be produced for every regular round of Northern Rail Cup, Co-operative Championship matches, plus play-offs (up to the final) and initial stages of the Carnegie Challenge Cup. It will be on sale primarily at clubs on match day but fans can guarantee a copy by contacting Mrs Adele Latham on 01924 439498.

Copies can be bought singly for £2.50 (inc p&p) or by multiples thereof.

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Barrow v Widnes



Sunday February 8, 2009. Kick off 2pm. CRAVEN PARK

BARROW 2009 (Players & Sponsors): 1 Gary Broadbent Advance Roofing Supplies 2 Mike Backhouse Johnston Recruitment 3 Ian Bell, 4 Liam Harrison Premier Solutions 5 James Nixon Furness Heating Components 6 Liam Finch Jim Redfern Associates, 7 Liam Campbell, 8 Brett McDermott Saunders Transport 9 Andrew Ellis The Marine Travel Company 10 Lee Dutton, 11 Andrew Brocklehurst Estuary Electrical 12 Martin Ostler E.P. Access 13 Andrew Bracek R.F. Miller accountants 14 Paul Noone Shaun Anderson Osteopath 15 Chris Young Abbey House Hotel 16 Jamie Butler Larry Hunt, Cross Keys 17 Scott Kaighan, 18 James Finch Jim Redfern Associates 19 Chris Larkin, 20 Nick Beach, 21 Joe McKenna Larry Hunt, Cross Keys 22 Ned Catic Optec Fibres 23 Walsale Suka BAE Land Systems 24 Allpate Tani SITA (U.K.) Ltd. 25 Sevania Koro E.P. Access 27 Darren Holt Jim Redfern associates

BARROW RAIDERS			WIDNES VIKINGS		
Scorers	Squad	Position	Squad	Position	Scorers
	Gary Broadbent		Scott Yates		
	Mark Backhouse		Paddy Flynn		
	Chris Larkin		Shane Grady		
	Liam Harrison		Tim Hartley		
	James Nixon		Gavin Dodd		
	Liam Finch		Anthony Thackeray		
	Liam Campbell		James Webster		
	Brett McDermott		Mike Ostick		
	Andy Ellis		Mark Smith		
	Jamie Butler		Jim Gannon		
	Andy Bracek		Lee Doran		
	Paul Noone		Matt Strong		
	Andrew Brocklehurst		Richard Varkulis		
	Ian Bell		Loz Wildbore		
	Chris Young		Iain Morrison		
	James Gordon		Richard Fletcher, Ben Kavanagh,		
	Joe McKenna		Sam Thompson		
	COACH: DAVE CLARK		COACH: STEVE McCORMACK		

LAST SIX RESULTS: LLLWWL (2008)
 LAST SIX HOME: WWWWLW
 TRIES (2008): James Nixon 35
 GOALS: Darren Holt 99
 DGs: Darren Holt 6
 MAN TO WATCH: Gary Broadbent

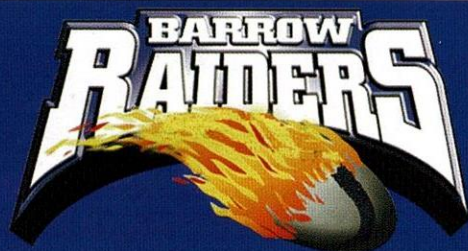
MATCH OFFICIALS

Referee: P. Brooke
 Touch: P. Grundill, R Cowling
 Fourth Official: S. Barrie

BENNETT'S BET

"Barrow have recruited strongly, but the Vikings are a major force - Widnes by 8"

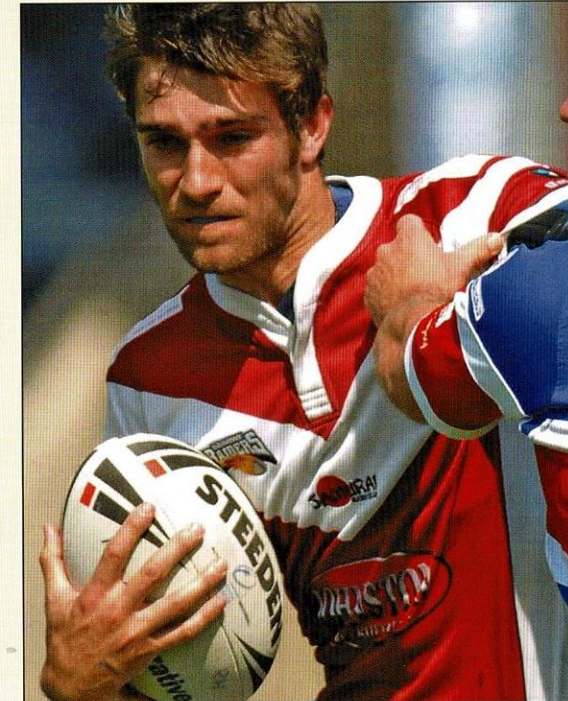
LAST SIX RESULTS: WLWWLL (2008)
 LAST SIX AWAY: LDLWWL
 TRIES (2008): Dean Gaskell 17
 GOALS: Tim Hartley 55
 DGs: Bob Beswick 1
 MAN TO WATCH: James Webster



CLUBCALL

Barrow v Widnes

We are up for the Cup



The prolific James Nixon, who rejected a move to Harlequins

THE Barrow club will be taking the Northern Rail competition very seriously as it is probably our best chance of silverware.

But the game against Widnes will also be a test of how ready we are to meet the challenge that awaits the Raiders in the Co-operative Championship following our promotion last season.

We met in the same competition last year. At Widnes, due to a rearranged fixture taking place in midweek, I was obliged to field an under strength team and we were punished as a result. At Craven Park we were able to turn out a full squad and managed to overcome the Vikings in the return fixture.

We are awaiting the arrival of four potentially key players who are pending the issue of visas but should still be able to turn out a unit that will be capable of winning the game.

The fact that there are fresh faces to come into the squad should mean that those who have first shout at claiming a place will do their utmost to keep it. Competition for places leads to better performances and can only be a good thing for the club.

The Widnes squad has pace and quality right across the park and like any team coached by Steve McCormack will be organised and well motivated. It is no secret Barrow were also in the hunt for the signature of James Webster and we are well aware of his qualities.

Knowing what he can do is one thing, stopping him is another but if we are to compete against sides like the Vikings we need to be able to deal with such problems.

We are not short of pace and quality ourselves with prolific try scorer James Nixon having turned down an offer from Harlequins to remain with his home town club.

Of the new guys Andy Bracek, Paul Noone and Andrew Brocklehurst will be well known to most supporters. They provide the pack with a little more size up front and are no slouch-

es about the field either. Chris Young has come down the coast from Workington. He is an Aussie who was born in England and impressed at Town last year with his power and determined attitude.

The pre-season has gone well with the local players who helped Barrow gain promotion last year having stuck in at the gym and bulked up to give themselves the best chance of a place in the team.

Given the qualities of both teams the game should prove not only a test for both out-fits but a treat for the spectators.

Dave Clark

We're investing in the Raiders' future

By Vice-chairman
DAVID SEAR

THE Furness area is eagerly awaiting the start of the new season. From what people are saying the anticipation is such that we should, given a half-decent day, attract a sizeable crowd to the Northern Rail game against Widnes.

Last time a Barrow team was promoted into what is now the Co-operative Championship the then coach Peter Roe had to make do with a squad that wasn't strengthened and in reality was probably weaker than the team that had gained promotion.

As a result they went straight back down on the back of valiant but ineffective performances played out in front of ever diminishing home crowds. This had a knock-on effect in following seasons as it is hard to get people back through the gates once they have stopped coming. This time around we have made a conscious decision to invest in fresh person-

nel to ensure that we are competitive in the higher division. It is always a gamble as you can never be sure as to how individuals will knit as a team, but by speculating on players we hope to accumulate via the turnstiles. The start of the Northern Rail campaign will see us without 5 players because of work permit/visa delays but we will still have several players making their debuts for the Raiders in a competitive game.

Gary Broadbent and Liam Campbell will be new faces in the squad having arrived from Whitehaven and Workington respectively. Although at different ends of their careers both have rejoined their home town club. The Craven Park fans will be able to enjoy Gary's swan-song in

the game after distinguished service at Salford and Whitehaven whilst by comparison Liam is just at the beginning of what promises to be an illustrious career.

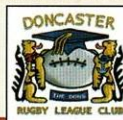
The signings have not just been on the field as we have also bagged the services of John Thomason from Swinton who is employed as Strategic Partnerships Manager. John is another who is returning to his roots and is responsible for building up our links with other organisations and looking at innovative ways of using our staff and facilities. His mantra is 'Barrow Raiders - not just a rugby team'.

This appointment together with that of a commercial manager 12 months ago shows how we are trying to grow as a business.

New signings on and off the field, a town buzzing with talk of the Raiders and Widnes first up at Craven Park - it has the makings of an exciting season.



Batley v Doncaster



Sunday February 8, 2009. Kick off 2pm. MOUNT PLEASANT

BULLDOGS 2009 (Sponsor in brackets): 1 Ian Preece, 2 Ben Feehan Mavis, Mac and Jack 3 Dale Cardoza, 4 Danny Maun Fletcher family 5 Johnny Campbell Laurie and Andrew Grailey 6 Mark Barlow Batley Rock and Roll 7 Paul Mennell Batley Nash 8 Byron Smith, 9 Kris Lythe The Benson family 10 Luke Stenchion Leyland Paints 11 Kevin Crouthers Brian Hooley 12 Mark Toohey George & Mary Gomersal 13 Ash Lindsay Study Centre 14 John Gallagher, 15 Anthony Henderson 16 Johnny Simpson, 17 Craig Potter, 18 Jermain McGilvary Gary Tingle & Lorraine Harrison 19 George Flanagan Norman Thewliss 20 Dave Tootill, 21 Nathan Armitage, 22 Nat Browne Stanningley u14s & u17s 23 Chris Buttery, 24 James Archibald, 25 Damien Reid, 26 Jamie Aitcheson, 27 Darryl Cardiss, 28 Danny Samuels, 29 Jack Watson Mary Hughes

BATLEY BULLDOGS			DONCASTER RLFC		
Scorers	Squad	Position	Squad	Position	Scorers
	Ian Preece		Scott Jones		
	Ben Feehan		Dean Colton		
	Darryl Cardiss		Ryan Steen		
	Danny Maun		Shaun Leaf		
	Jermain McGilvary		Wayne Riettie		
	Mark Barlow		Kyle Briggs		
	Nat Browne		Paul Handforth		
	Craig Potter		Michael Haley		
	John Gallagher		Craig Cooke		
	Luke Stenchion		Nathan Freer		
	Kevin Crouthers		Peter Green		
	Mark Toohey		Ross Divorty		
	Ash Lindsay		Josh Weeden		
	Nathan Armitage, Dale Cardoza		Mark Castle,		
	Chris Buttery, Anthony		Craig Holt,		
	Henderson Johnny Simpson,		Garry Ellery,		
	Jack Watson		Jake Bassinder		
COACH: GARY THORNTON			COACH: TONY MILLER		

LAST SIX RESULTS: LWLWLL (2008)
LAST SIX HOME: LLLWLL
TRIES (2008): Paul Mennell & Danny Maun 12
GOALS: Kevin King 59
DGs: Francis Maloney 3
MAN TO WATCH: Mark Barlow

MATCH OFFICIALS
Referee: D. Merrick
Touch: M Beadle C Neilson
Fourth Official: J Downham

BENNETT'S BET
"Back the Bulldogs for revenge for last year's semi - Batley by 16"

LAST SIX RESULTS: WLWWW (2008)
LAST SIX AWAY: LLLWLW
TRIES (2008): Luke Gale 30
GOALS: Kyle Briggs 79
DGs: Luke Gale 5
MAN TO WATCH: Kyle Briggs



KERR INTERIORS

from Concept to Completion



CLUBCALL

Batley v Doncaster

Injuries already a worry as big kick off beckons



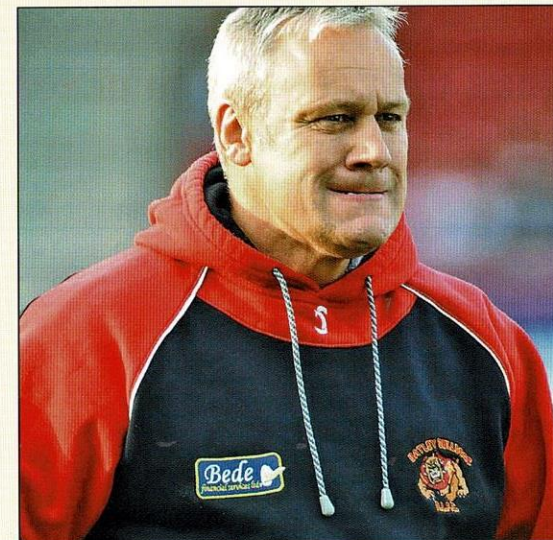
WELL the start of the season seems to have come round really quickly this time around.

After a good pre-season we are raring to go in the Northern Rail cup. Apart from our defeat against Huddersfield last week, I have been reasonably happy with our preparations so far, and the squad is looking in good shape.

I don't have the biggest of squads in the division but I am happy with the quality. We have some competition for places all over the park now, and no-one can rest easy on their performances, on or off the field.

We performed pretty well against Dewsbury and Hull KR, but this is where the real season starts. I have been hit with injuries to some key players who have not featured at all yet in the pre-season games.

Kris Lythe and James Archibald both had off-season knee operations and are a few



Batley coach Gary Thornton

weeks off full recovery yet. To add to that Jonny Campbell tore a cartilage on Boxing Day and has a knee operation this Friday and Paul Mennell is a couple of weeks off with an AC shoulder joint injury he picked up against Hull KR.

The loss of Mennell in particular - my captain and on-field organiser - has hit us hardest, but it is up to the other players to stand up and take on that role.

Mark Toohey will be vice captain this season and I will

be looking at him to take on the mantle and lead our on field organisation, together with the more senior players. I'm also looking forward to getting Jermain McGilvary for the season.

He has spent most of his pre-season with the Giants but will now spend more time with us as he starts his season-long loan with us.

This week we take on Doncaster who have gained promotion to the Championship under the successful guidance of Ellery Hanley. Though things have changed quite a bit for them on and off the field I'm sure it will be a tough contest for us and one we are relishing.

Tony Miller has taken over and is an experienced and respected coach and in Kyle Briggs they have a really talented half back as good as any in this competition.

Stalwarts Shaun Leaf, Dean Colton, Peter Green and Craig Lawton are all tough competitors, so it has the makings of a good game.

Build up has been great but let's get it on now

AT LAST we get underway properly after players have been involved in pre season training for three months and have taken part in three friendlies. I hope supporters of all clubs are chomping at the bit to watch today's games.

This season promises to be a vital season for all clubs in the Co-operative Championship and I think it will be make or break. We at Batley are delighted with our position at this stage as our friendlies have been successful both on and off the field, even though perhaps the performance against Huddersfield was a little disappointing.

The re-launch of our lottery has been a success and we have negotiated a deal regarding a mast, which if there are no hiccups will enable us to reduce our debts significantly. Our plan to eliminate our debts over the next three years obviously depends upon income standing firm this year.

Gates are probably the deciding factor in many ways but we have now recruit-

By Kevin Nicholas Batley chairman

ed Lesley O'Callaghan on the commercial front and so far things are looking reasonably good, despite the well publicised recession.

The hub of our business plan is a new Function Suite, where stage one is obtaining financial help via the New Facilities Trust. We are told that we will be advised regarding our bid by late February. We are optimistic there and then the hard work begins but with that boost and with the help of others, including supporters, we can achieve our goal. If we have a quality function suite it will take us to a new level and undoubtedly will make the business a viable one. As soon as we know the position, you will know.

The Toulouse trip was instantly fully booked which was a massive surprise to us if not to John McVeigh, who was always confident of making it a success.

He is looking to run a second trip but we need 32 more people to express interest to make it viable.

The cost will depend upon flights but we are looking to run the trip at an approximate cost of £300, travelling out on Friday and returning on Sunday afternoon.

However, to achieve that price we need to book early, so if you are interested in going we need know your provisional interest by no later than next week. Then we can give you an exact price and only at that point would you need to commit and pay a deposit. A decision will be made by February 21 whether or not we are running this trip.

So to today's game and welcome to our friends from Doncaster, who of course beat Oldham to achieve promotion last year. We are well aware of our defeat to them in the Northern Rail Cup semi-final last year and so clearly today is an important one for our club.

Let battle commence. Enjoy the game.



Keighley v Gateshead



Sunday February 8, 2009. Kick off 3pm. COUGAR PARK

COUGARS 2009: 1 George Raynor Frank Atkins 2 Sam Gardner Dolphin Stairlifts 3 Dan Potter The Clarksons 4 Oliver Pursglove Mr & Mrs Glover 5 Gavin Duffy J&M Fisher 6 Jon Presley Joyce Barret Mobile Hairdressers 7 Danny Jones Phoenix Trophies 8 Andy Shickell Mr & Mrs Philipps 9 James Feather D & M Procter 10 Simon Bissell Swaggs Hair Studio 11 Will Cartledge Mr & Mrs Rothera 12 Neil Lowe Phil Lund Motor Engineers 13 Carl Hughes Mr & Mrs Rothera 14 Jermaine Wray Oddities Giftware 15 Craig Brown Mr & Mrs Bardgett 16 Brendon Rawlins Cougar Pride Centre 17 Scott Law J&M Fisher 18 Greg Nicholson M Croft & T Pycroft 19 Craig Fawcett R Weir Property Maintenance 20 Daley Williams Rex Procter & Partners 21 Ryan Smith Frank Atkins 22 Lee Mapals Emily & Flynn Walker 23 James Hutchinson 24 Luke Sutcliffe, 25 Wayne Sutcliffe. Non-numbered: Dan Belcher, James Haythornthwaite, Tim Bibby, Tom Hall Fresh Radio, Ben Saga Cougar Cubs, Jack Copperwaite

KEIGHLEY COUGARS			GATESHEAD THUNDER		
Scorers	Position	Player	Squad	Position	Scorers
		George Rayner			Crawford Mathews
		Sam Gardener			Robin Peers
		Ryan Smith			Ben McAlpine
		Lee Mapals			Kevin Neighbour
		Gavin Duffy			Stewart Sanderson
		Dan Potter			Neil Thorman
		Ollie Pursglove			Luke Branighan
		Jon Presley			Jason Payne
		Craig Fawcett			Andrew Henderson
		Danny Jones			Ryan McBride
		Andy Shickell			Rhys Clarke
		Simon Bissell			Dylan Nash
		Scott Law			Michael Knowles
		Craig Brown			Ryan Clarke, Chris Parker
		Jermaine Wray			Dave Vernon, Jonny Scott,
		James Feather, Will Cartledge			Mark Dack
		Neil Lowe, Greg Nicholson			
COACH: BARRY EATON <small>Sponsored by The Cox Family</small>			COACH: CHRIS HOOD		

LAST SIX RESULTS: WLWWL (2008)
 LAST SIX HOME: WWWWWW
 TRIES (2008): Jon Presley 17
 GOALS: Danny Jones 91
 DGs: Craig Fawcett 1
 MAN TO WATCH: Andy Shickell

MATCH OFFICIALS
 Referee: G. Hewer
 Touch: P Wharton, G. Wallace
 Fourth Official: C. Dean

BENNETT'S BET
 "No roll over for promoted Thunder this one - Gateshead by 4"

LAST SIX RESULTS: WWWWWW
 LAST SIX AWAY: WLLWWW
 TRIES (2008): Stewart Sanderson & Kevin Neighbour 20
 GOALS: Dan Russell 128
 DGs: Dan Russell 1
 MAN TO WATCH: Andrew Henderson



CLUBCALL

Keighley v Gateshead



We'll be looking to give very best a tough game

2009 is here and players, coaches, staff, sponsors and fans alike are all looking forward to the forthcoming season with the same optimism.

Things are certainly no different at Keighley as we look forward to hopefully another progressive year.

After a difficult and disruptive pre-season with injuries to key new players and the problems we have had with the new overseas ruling, we will be going into the Northern Rail Cup campaign without being able to select from a full strength squad.

We have new signings Carl Hughes out until around the start of the league fixtures and Daley Williams out for another 2-3 weeks having not featured in pre-season. Also Wayne Sutcliffe and Ben Sagar are still not 100% following knee reconstructions in the off-season.

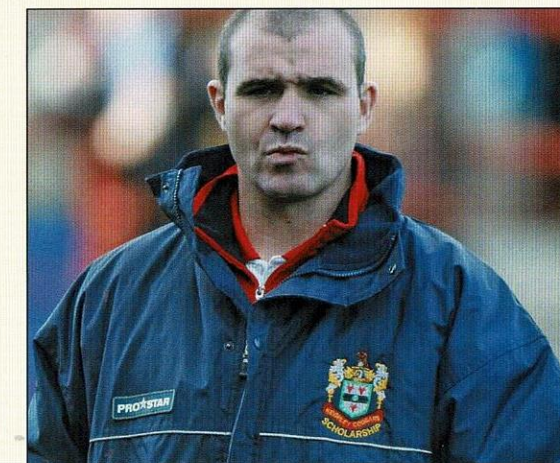
Add to that the news we were unable to register Daniel

Evans because of changes to the overseas ruling.

However we are delighted to have secured a work permit application with the RFL for our powerhouse prop Brendon Rawlins although he is not eligible until his new visa is processed which could take around four weeks.

You could say that we are already behind the eightball so to speak from the start but even allowing for the disruptions we have encountered I firmly believe we have a very good squad of players here at Keighley and we will be going out with the belief we can win every game. The team here is very capable of producing good rugby to test any outfit we come up against.

May I pass on my congratulations to both Gateshead and Barrow who we come up against in this year's Northern Rail group stage. Both teams earned promotion from our division with Gateshead winning the league and Barrow



Keighley coach Barry Eaton

runners up. We had good tussles with these teams last season and with a bit of luck we hope to be in a position to emulate their achievements ourselves over the next few years.

2009 looks to be the most competitive season to date in the Northern Rail and in both

leagues, with no team guaranteed to be top of the pile and no team that looks weak.

It should make for a really exciting year and one that we at Keighley hope to play a massive part in.

Enjoy the game, Barry

Great work going on behind Cougar Park scenes

TODAY we begin a new season starting, as previous seasons, with the Northern Rail Cup Competition.

We entertain Gateshead Thunder here at Cougar Park in the first round in a slightly different styled competition, culminating in a big Blackpool Weekend not only for the two finalists.

This year we have a full weekend RL9s competition for all the other English based clubs, with the final as curtain raiser to the big match.

We have had a mixed bag of results in our pre-season friendlies, but whatever the scores or results, they serve their purpose for coaches and players.

Sad to say it was not too entertaining for our brilliant band of supporters, but it gave them a first view of the new signings and the club a little pot of money to move forward into this new and hopefully promising season.

From the publicity the club has been getting in recent months, I am sure you have seen that things are happening big

CHAIRMAN NEIL SPENCER

time down at Cougar Park, mainly thanks to Helen Carter and her fund raising administration team. We are also pleased with the excellent ideas and projects coming from our Development Dept headed up by Dean Muir and Tom Hall. My thanks go to one and all for their efforts.

However the final ingredient, especially in these exceptional credit crunch times, is you, our sponsors and our friends on the terraces. We sincerely hope you approve because your input makes it all happen, for all of us.

Barry and his team made great strides last season getting to the play-offs. Lets hope the lads who have had faith and stayed for another season, together with the quality new signings, can make that further step. With the good news of Brendon Rawlins being granted discretionary exemption by the RFL in the new

Border Agency ruling, this team, I am sure will be capable of standing up to Championship opposition. No predictions, but that doesn't stop ambition!

With all these increased operations going on at the Cougars, we two codgers Colin and myself, (don't panic there is plenty of life here yet), felt we needed someone to share the load. Obviously someone a bit younger, but with the same passion we have for the club and town.

We were pleased we found such a volunteer who fits the bill, and we are pleased that this week we welcomed on to the Board Gary Fawcett of Link Telecom.

Gary and his company are going to be a great help to the Cougars' administration activities. More importantly Gary will be a valuable addition, sharing in the load of running a fast expanding sporting club, while ensuring continuity of professional rugby league in Keighley and the necessary links of the club to the community.

Enjoy your rugby.

Big names and big ambitions

CLUB FOCUS –
FEATHERSTONE
ROVERS



Every week in Game On we will profile a different club from the Championships. We kick off with Featherstone Rovers, who certainly seem to be heading in the right direction. Chief executive Andy Prout laid out their grand vision

FROM signing one of the biggest names of the summer era to bidding for a licence in Super League, and from plans for a brand new stadium to renaming their current ground after a loudmouth Radio 1 DJ, over the past few seasons Featherstone Rovers haven't exactly been short of ambition.

With a long history (they were founded in 1906) and with three Challenge Cups (1967, 1973 and 1983) and one Championship (1977) to their name, Featherstone is a name synonymous with the greatest game.

But you'd be forgiven for thinking the club's glory days were consigned to history – along with the mining industry for which the town (population now only 16,000) and wider area were renowned. Formerly a regular top division side, Rovers haven't been in Super League since its inception in 1996 and for years, in truth, never looked like they'd ever have the chance.

But talk to those in charge at Post Office Road (now the Chris Moyles Stadium) these days and you'll find plenty of drive to move the club forward. One day, maybe even back into the top flight.

If the Rugby Football League's decision to move towards a controversial 'licence' system for Super League ended the prospect of automatic promotion, it at least gave the more ambitious co-operative Championship clubs a detailed blueprint for action ... 'improve your stadium, grow your business and your fan base and prove you're financially viable and you're in'.

Rovers, one of 18 clubs that applied for a Super League licence last summer, have set about that task. And while they may have known they were doomed to failure with their 2008 bid, and even if they still might not be in a realistic position to challenge for licence in 2011 either, the aim is there to make Featherstone Rovers a force again one day and – perhaps more importantly – the catalyst for the regeneration of a whole community.

"We're blessed in that we own 17

acres of land next to Post Office Road," said the club's chief executive Andy Prout. "We want the rugby club and that land to be the basis for transforming what was previously a small mining village into a sustainable town that's an attractive place to live.

"Our aim is to build a new stadium – with a capacity of say 6,000 that can be expanded as our crowds grow – that would not just be a rugby ground but would also be a community sports hub offering educational and health services.

"At the moment, we're very much at the design stage and running feasibility studies but we've been working with the local council, local housing associations and developers, the NHS Primary Care Trust, educational services and Sport England.

"Most importantly we met with one bank this week that may be willing to stump up part of the funding – we're talking multi-millions – as long as the strategic partners are in place. And we've already had a supermarket chain express an interest in building a store.

"Of course the credit crunch has had a massive impact on everyone and that's been the reason for the delay. Last summer, the people we were working with felt we could be able to firm up plans within two to three months and that has now changed.

"But the hope is that something can happen in the next 18 months to two years so that by the time of the next licence application, in 2011, we can have a brand new stadium or be very close to having one.

"The brown field land that Post Office Road is on will need to be used for the housing and retail developments, so the first thing we need to do is make sure we have somewhere else to play."

Long term, should the ambitious plans of the club and local community come off, Featherstone will be looking to enjoy a boom in population that, in turn, would give Rovers a far greater potential pool of support.

In the short-to-medium term, the



Iestyn Harris has Stuart Kain in support during Featherstone's impressive friendly victory over Halifax. The former GB international's signing is a perfect illustration of the club's ambitions

rugby club are intent on getting the current inhabitants as involved with the Rovers brand as possible – and that doesn't just mean turning up for a game every fortnight.

Building on their 2007 co-operative Community Programme of the Year award, Rovers now have a five-strong community team, led by Kevin Hobbs and also including three players (Ian Hardman, Jon Steel and Matty Dale) and Laura-Beth Jaggar – a former circus performer, redcoat and cruise ship entertainer who is now the club's entertainment manager; teaching circus skills, dancing and cheerleading in local schools.

The club also visit schools, colleges and police and prison services with

their 'Tackling Temper' anger management course – and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

"We say that rugby is just a 14th of what we do here because we only have a home game every fortnight," says Prout. "Rugby alone can't sustain a club. All the top Super League clubs, like Leeds and St Helens, have excellent community programmes.

"We want people to get involved with the club and use our services and we're creating new revenue streams for ourselves.

"We're also telling people to just come and give us a try. One of the things that has really stuck with me is when Angela Powers of Sky TV came to one of our games to assess our licence

application and the first thing she said was that she apologised for thinking our ground was a shed.

"When people actually roll up at the Chris Moyles Stadium they see it's not just a field in the middle of nowhere – it's a really good facility as it is, although we do want better. We want people to realise that Featherstone isn't the pokey little hole some people think it is."

Of course, Rovers concede that once they have attracted their audience they have to captivate it with a thrilling product on the field – hence the recruitment of coach Daryl Powell and star player Iestyn Harris.

The club's bid for on-field success, which would allow them to lodge an application for Super League with the

RFL again in 2011, begins with the visit of Leigh Centurions in the Northern Rail Cup today.

And Rovers' new head coach has also made his lofty ambitions clear.

"At a supporters evening, Daryl Powell was asked what he would class as a successful season – and he said 'two trophies'," says Prout.

"That would definitely be nice, but if it doesn't happen this year then we don't think it will be too far down the line. We don't think we've got too much wrong right now.

"We want to be in Super League one day, but we're realistic and our goal right now is to be playing the best rugby we can at the top end of the Championship."



Oldham v Hornets



Sunday February 8, 2009. Kick off 3pm. BOUNDARY PARK

OLDHAM 2009: 1 Paul O'Connor Sporting Image 07894 122315 2 Andy Ballard Premier Signs UK 01706 649267 3 Danny Halliwell Totalplus Communications 0161 343 8181 4 Paul Reilly Totalplus Communications Ltd 0161 343 8181 5 Lee Greenwood Tech Doors 0161 626 5049 6 James Coyle Office Supplies Now 08458 333001 7 Thomas Coyle Nigel Marland 8 Paul Highton John Barrett 9 Gary Sykes, 10 Jamie l'Anson Rudy Wilkes and Bev Mayall 11 Dave Allen, 12 Tommy Goulden 13 Rob Roberts John and Lynda McAndrew 14 Richard Merrill, 15 Jason Boults Clayton Green Brewers Fayre 16 Wayne Kerr Karen and Paul Gough 17 Craig Robinson, 18 Neil Roden, 19 Craig Littler, 20 Simeon Hoyle Cagney and Lacey 21 Lucas Onyango, 22 Phil Joseph Maureen and Peter Woodhead 23 Chris Baines, 24 Marcus St Hilaire Totalplus Communications 0161 343 8181 25 Luke Menzies, 26 Luke Sutton

OLDHAM ROUGHYEDS		HORNETS RLFC	
Scorers	Position	Player	Position
Paul O'Connor		Liam Grundy	
Andy Ballard		Martin Ainscough	
Lucas Onyango		Janan Billings	
Danny Halliwell		Sam Butterworth	
Marcus St Hilaire		Casey Mayberry	
Paul Reilly		Wayne Corcoran	
Lee Greenwood		Tommy Gallagher	
Thomas Coyle		Liam Bretherton	
James Coyle		Martin Gamble	
Martin Roden		Andy Isherwood	
Paul Highton		Mick Fogarty	
Wayne Kerr		Mark Brocklehurst	
Jamie l'Anson		John Gillan	
Jason Boults		Craig Johnston	
Luke Menzies, Steve Gibbons		Chris Giles	
Phil Joseph, Chris Baynes, Tommy Goulden,		Ian Sinfield,	
Rob Roberts, Craig Robinson		David Best, Paul Raftery	
COACH: TONY BENSON		COACH: DARREN SHAW	

LAST SIX RESULTS: WWLWWL
 LAST SIX HOME: WWWLLW
 TRIES (2008): Mick Nanyan & James Coyle 21
 GOALS: Mick Nanyan 139
 DGs: None
 MAN TO WATCH: Paul Reilly

MATCH OFFICIALS
 Referee: C. Halloran
 Touch: R. Stokes, W. Turley
 Fourth Official: M. Craven
BENNETT'S BET
 "Should be straightforward for Oldham against their disrupted rivals - Oldham by 28"

LAST SIX RESULTS: WWLWWL
 LAST SIX AWAY: WWWLLW
 TRIES (2008): Martin Ainscough 28
 GOALS: Carl Sneyd 110
 DGs: Jimmy Elston & Chris Hough 1
 MAN TO WATCH: Martin Ainscough

SUPPORTING OLDHAM

OLDHAM EVENING Chronicle

People caring for people

CLUBCALL Oldham v Rochdale

We're ready - but credit to our Rochdale rivals

DOESN'T time fly when you're having fun? We've just completed a grueling 3-month, pre-season training program under the watchful eye of Martin Roden. Every player has responded well and made good gains in their strength and fitness. Things haven't been all plain sailing with the cold weather limiting our training on the pitch with the ball in hand. Mind you we've had it easy compared to our poor mates over the hill at Rochdale.



Oldham coach Tony Benson

The players and loyal supporters have really gone through the mill and the fact that the majority of players have hung in there through what must have been difficult times really shows the commitment they have to the great game and their club. Personally for the sake of the game it's great to see one of the game's traditional clubs front up here today for what's bound to be a torrid and hard-fought encounter.

John Hough is now hard at work assembling a quality reserves side from the local area. John and Leo Casey's hard work last season paid off with five of their players signing professional contracts and the introduction of Mark Smith and Anthony Bingham to the Cooperative Championship squad for this season. They will obviously be bolstered by the inclusion of any fit players not required by the first team for any particular game.

The friendly games so far have been encouraging. Although they are training runs, I think

any team we have put out has gelled quickly and played some entertaining rugby. I've been particularly pleased with the defence which has been tenacious and aggressive but has rarely drawn penalties.

All in all it's been a useful exercise, everybody has had plenty of game time, combinations have come together and we are getting used to how each other plays.

It's now time to string it all together and play like we train for 80 minutes.

For the players today's game has taken an age to come about. The team is ready, the players have fought hard to wear the Oldham jersey and I'm confident they are offering nothing but their best game. However we are realistic. We haven't bought into this "you'll walk this Comp" talk. We know this is only one of 28 games and we need to keep improving in each one of them to reach our ultimate goal.

Great clubs aren't built on one win or the season we went up. They are built on people. Massive selfless contributions by players, supporters, volunteers and directors over hundreds of years. Unfortunately this great club has lost a few of those people in the last month. As a team we would like to acknowledge the contributions and pass our condolences to the families of these great Roughyeds. Alan Davies, Mick Hough, Jimmy Russell, Joe Collins and families - this one's for you. Enjoy the game!

Rough notes...
 TONY Benson and chief executive Chris Hamilton will be on a forum at Oldham St Anne's amateur club on Monday, February 16 (7.30). Referee Robert Hicks, Leeds skipper Kevin Sinfield and former Rhinos star Barrie McDermott are also being lined up for this Oldham RL Players' Association function.

TWO Welsh internationals will have leadership roles at Boundary Park this season. Robert Roberts keeps the Oldham captaincy and his fellow 'Taffy' Paul Highton - nine Welsh caps - will be his right-hand man and vice-captain.

PHIL WOOLAS MP, Minister for Immigration, has become president of the Oldham Players' Association, while Manchester City's long-serving secretary Bernard Halford, who played for Oldham's A team at Watersheddings in his youth, is vice-chairman.

OLDHAM'S Easter Monday clash with Dewsbury will kick off at 8pm because Oldham Athletic are at home to Crewe in the afternoon with just three hours to turn a soccer pitch into a rugby ground. "We are grateful to Athletic for their co-operation," said chief exec Chris Hamilton.

Enough of the prelims - let's get down to it

THREE months of hard graft in pre-season is now over and we are back at the starting gate of the 2009 campaign. I know I speak for every player in the sport when I say: As players we can't wait to get back into the REAL action.

The pre-season games are all well and good, but there is nothing like the real thing. . . and what a way to start for us with a Northern Rail Cup clash against the old enemy and our derby rivals Rochdale Hornets.

Rochdale's problems have been well documented. In their fight to build a future they have the best wishes of everyone here at Oldham, but for 80 minutes this afternoon those good wishes will have to be put on hold for very obvious reasons.

Adversity often produces great team bonding and we know that Hornets will be determined today to come to Boundary Park and put on a huge performance. They will want to give us a right good game - just like

ROBERT ROBERTS, Oldham captain

the 'new' Roughyeds did back in 1998 when they went to Spotland in the new club's first-ever game and gave Hornets the shock of their lives.

From our point of view, it is very important we get off to a good start, and that applies as much to each and every player individually as it does to the team and the club. We have built a good, strong squad for this year and every member of that squad doesn't need telling that if we don't perform well on any given day we will be struggling to keep hold of the jersey.

That apart, I really want to do well in the Northern Rail Cup, which is a great competition. I've twice been on the winning side in the final, or its equivalent competition, first with Huddersfield a few years ago and then with Leigh in 2006 when we beat Hull KR,

with TB (Tony Benson) in charge. With only four going through from a pool of ten it is going to be a tall order.

We are not sure what sort of a squad Rochdale will be throwing at us, but Darren Shaw will have them fired up. Players like Ainscough and Sinny always give us problems. I don't know whether Besty (David Best) is still there or not, but if he is you can be sure that he and I will probably find each other on the pitch, as we invariably do, and then have a long friendly chat afterwards!

We need to make Boundary Park a bit of a fortress again, as we did last season. That's where the fans come into play. They did us proud last year and we are hoping to have a few more this time. It's a bonus that all our home games this year will be at Boundary Park. It's a superb playing surface and when it dries out it will give us a fast track... and that's just what the doctor (or more precisely Tony Benson) ordered to bring out the best in the players the club has assembled.

Get your name on this page! Sponsor a player for £250 and help support the Skolars. Contact the Skolars office on 0208 888 8488 for more details



Skolars v Dewsbury



Sunday February 8, 2009. Kick off 3pm. NEW RIVER STADIUM

SKOLARS 2009: 1 Ollie Bloom, 2 Corey Simms, 3 Dene Miller, 4 Jaymes Chapman, 5 Austen Aggrey, 6 Jermaine Coleman, 7 Paul Thorman, 8 Dave Ellison, 9 Gareth Honor, 10 Glenn Osborn, 11 Matt Thomas, 12 Paul Hyder, 13 Al Barker, 14 Frankie Reid, 15 Danny Burke, 16 Bobby Wallace, 17 Orriso Agbareh, 18 Tony Williams, 19 Ian Cairns, 20 Smokie Junor, 21 Jaroslaw Obuchowski, 22 Andre Vine, 23 Dion Chapman, 24 Graham Spencer, 25 Dave Bowen, 26 Ollie Fountain

LONDON SKOLARS		DEWSBURY RAMS	
Scorers	Squad: Position	Squad: Position	Scorers
	Corey Simms		Craig Bower
	Olu Iwenofu		Lee Lingard
	Olly Fountain		Tom Colleran
	Ollie Bloom		Bryn Powell
	Chad Isles		Austin Buchanan
	Paul Thorman		Simon Cook
	David Ellison		Liam Finn
	Lee Nissen		Keegan Hurst
	Bobby Wallace		Luke Haigh
	Matt Thomas		Mike Emmett
	Olly Williams		Alex Bretherton
	Jaymes Chapman		Adam Robinson
	Malachai Forester		Pat Walker
	Gareth Honor		Gary North, Taran Wildey
	Orriso Agbareh		Adam Hayes, Ian Tonks, Liam Crawley
	Danny Burke		Kane Epati, Chris Spurr, Gareth Greenwood
	TBC		Andrew Bostock
	COACH: CALLUM IRVING		COACH: WARREN JOWITT

LAST SIX RESULTS: LLLLLL (2008)
 LAST SIX HOME: WWLLLL
 TRIES (2008): Austen Aggrey, Corey Simms, Wayne Kerr 10
 GOALS: Paul Thorman 79
 DGs: Jamie Nowland 1
 MAN TO WATCH: Paul Thorman

MATCH OFFICIALS
 Referee: M. Dawber
 Touch: J. Farrell, J. Greenwood
 Fourth Official: J Cadogan

BENNETT'S BET
 "Jowitt's Rams will teach plucky London a lesson - Dewsbury by 10"

LAST SIX RESULTS: LLWLLL
 LAST SIX AWAY: LWLLLL
 TRIES (2008): Andrew Bostock, Chris Langley 13
 GOALS: Pat Walker 73
 DGs: Liam Finn 1
 MAN TO WATCH: Pat Walker

Our Community Sponsors



CLUBCALL

Skolars v Dewsbury

Our local policies are paying off in a big way

WELCOME to all of you this afternoon for our first game in the Northern Rail Cup 2009. There's a change in the format, but our first game sees the return to New River of Dewsbury Rams who were our opposition in our first game in the professional ranks back in 2003.

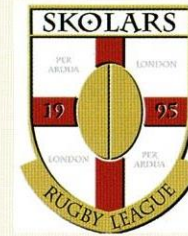
Pre-season started earlier in the winter this year and has gone well. Callum Irving has stepped up to the Head Coach's role. He's now ably assisted by Kevin Reith, who has been behind Hainault Bulldogs' rise up the amateur ranks over the last three years and Terry Fogarty, with NJ Rule working as conditioner.

The City Challenge friendly against Quins RL down at the Honourable Artillery Club gave the coaching staff a good chance to see the squad in action under pressure. Quins had a pretty strong side out that day and it will only help the side to have played against quality Super League opposition.

The shorter format of the Northern Rail Cup means all sides have to hit the ground running if they are going to qualify for the knockout stages and with four group stage matches apiece there is little room for a slip up.

The bookies have us as underdogs, so we look forward to creating a few upsets again, as we did at Bridgend and Sheffield last year.

The much publicised problems encountered by several clubs in obtaining visas for overseas players may have a big impact on a number of sides in the Super League and the Northern



Rail Cup. I also expect the stricter regulations will affect a few county cricket sides as well this summer.

We have not been affected on the playing side. We've been committed to a strong junior development programme from back in our amateur days and that has really started to bear fruit.

The intention at the end of last season was to bring on the local youngsters, as evidenced by our presence in the Gillette National Youth League for the first time.

That joint venture with Hemel Stags has worked well and has given those youngsters some really good experience against some very good more established sides.

The general delays in getting visas in Australia has impacted our off-field plans, but hopefully Phil Browne (no relation incidentally) will have joined us as General Manager in the last week.

Off-field activities are vital for the financial security of all clubs, especially in the current economic climate. The new look Championship and Northern Rail Cup should help engender the professional game below Super League and no doubt like most of you, I can't wait for the season to start.

Enjoy The Game

**Terry Browne, Chairman
 London Skolars RLFC**

Return of the Mx9s action

Sunday 28th June sees the return of the London International Mx9s after a break in 2008.

It's a carnival of Rugby League, with sides from all over the UK and beyond competing in the internationally renowned tournament.

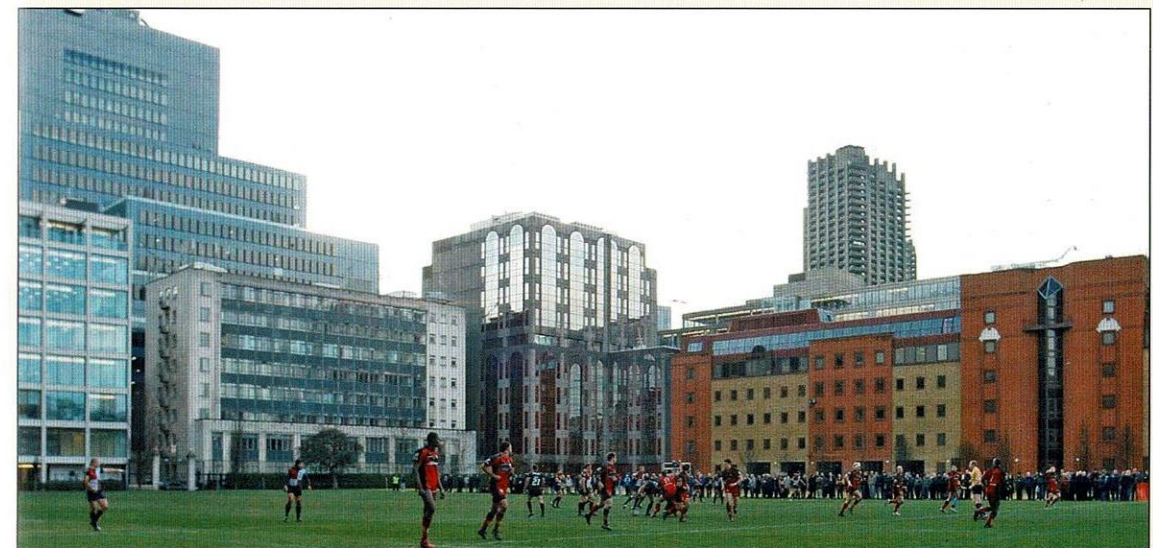
There will also be a steel band, food stalls and family fun!

New River will also play host that day to the Co-operative Championship 1 game between London Skolars and Dewsbury Rams.

Friday Night Lights is on!

Friday 28th August sees New River Stadium host Friday Night Lights - the fixture in London sports fans diaries, the superb annual eve of Challenge Cup fixture.

The day includes: Co-operative Championship 1 fixture: London Skolars v Keighley Cougars, live entertainment from a steel band, BBQ and food stalls, plus there will be a junior curtain raiser. Contact the club office on 0208 888 8488 for more details of both events.



CITY LIFE: The Skolars and Harlequins get to grips under the shadow of the Square Mile's financial edifices in their pre-season run out, watched by a good crowd of city workers enjoying a lunchtime with a difference. The game took place at the Honourable Artillery Company HQ in City Road.

Match sponsor: Drax Power Ltd

Match ball sponsor: Shepherd Building Group



York v Whitehaven



Sunday February 8, 2009. Kick off 3pm. HUNTINGTON STADIUM

KNIGHTS 2009: 1 Danny Ratcliffe The Taylor Centre 2 Steve Lewis Jinnah Group 3 John Oakes Rodney Gee 4 Dave Clayton Team Electric Services 5 Johnny Waldron James Dixon 6 Adam Mitchell Smith Wilson 7 Paul March Delta Training & Consulting 8 Danny Ekis, 9 Paul Hughes Stabler International 10 Adam Sullivan Ken Walker & Co Accounting 11 Rob Kelly Pam & Martin Calvert 12 Tom Haberecht Cue Ball Snooker Club 13 Richard Knight Sheard Packaging 14 Tom Hodgson Chris Hearld 15 Chris Clough British Thornton 16 Jordan Ross 17 Scott Woodcock Evolution Tattoo Studio 18 Steve Grundy Yorkshire Building Society 19 Kris Peacock Claire & Steve Harbron 20 Adam Jones D & M Building & Paving 21 Dave March Julie's Bakery 22 Tom Stancliffe, 23 Adam Endersby Balfour Beatty 24 David Leeke, 25 Garry Green Lance Kearon Acupuncture For Health 26 Danny Grimshaw Brian Watson 27 Luke Watling HC Engineering 28 Wayne McHugh Monk Bar Model Shop 29 Mark Applegarth Laura Dixon 30 Mike Mitchell Mrs Watson

YORK CITY KNIGHTS			WHITEHAVEN		
Scorers	Squad	Position	Squad	Position	Scorers
	Lee Waterman		Craig Benson		
	John Oakes		Derry Eilbeck		
	Tom Haberecht		Robb Jackson		
	Mike Mitchell		John Patrick		
	John Waldron		Craig Calvert		
	Adam Mitchell		Marc Bainbridge		
	Danny Grimshaw		Gregg McNally		
	Adam Sullivan		Ryan McDonald		
	Paul Hughes		Graeme Mattinson		
	Danny Ekis		Karl Edmondson		
	Rob Kelly		Spencer Miller		
	Carl Barrow		Andy Gorski		
	Mark Applegarth		Leroy Joe		
	Tom Hodgson,		Chris Smith		
	Chris Clough,		Tanni Lavulavu		
	Scott Woodcock, Steve Grundy,		Mark Jackson,		
	Chris Peacock, Adam Jones		Mathew Tunstall, Danny Barker		
	COACH: PAUL MARCH		COACH: GED STOKES		

LAST SIX RESULTS: WWLWL (2008)
 LAST SIX HOME: LWWWWL
 TRIES (2008): Lee Mapals 18
 GOALS: Adam Mitchell 51
 DGs: None
 MAN TO WATCH: Adam Mitchell

MATCH OFFICIALS

Referee: T. Alibert
 Touch: S. Moss, L. Todd
 Fourth Official: P. Ward

BENNETT'S BET

"Stokes will have his men fired up - Whitehaven by 12"

LAST SIX RESULTS: WLWWL (2008)
 LAST SIX AWAY: WLLWWL
 TRIES (2008): Ade Adebisi 22
 GOALS: Carl Rudd 67
 DGs: Marc Jackson, Tane Manihera 1
 MAN TO WATCH: Gregg McNally

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Shepherd Group



CLUBCALL

York v Whitehaven

We're muscling up for an exciting new season

WELCOME back everyone to our first competitive fixture of the season.

The close season has been a very busy one in regards of the amount of work done in bringing in new faces to the club, while also retaining 75% of last season's team.

The new players have fitted in really well and a strong team ethic has already emerged.

This season also saw the squad undertake a controlled weights programme which hopefully will help as the season progresses.

We have a very large squad this season, which allows us to put pressure on every position within the team.

A number of the new players who have joined the club were on the fringes of Super League clubs. They have obviously seen that York as a club offer a genuine opportunity for young players to play first team footy and we look forward to seeing them in action.

Adam Sullivan looks in great shape having undertaken his first pre-season in three years after playing back to back rugby.

All the long term injured players who had post season operations are very close to fitness, with Richard Knight and Danny Ekis the closest to a return to playing, Danny Ratcliffe being only a week or two behind them.

The friendlies have also seen the club offer



James Ratcliffe
Director of Rugby

trials to players from the amateur game and also our College Development Centre.

This also shows our commitment to offer Professional Rugby to some of the best talent in the area.

At the time of writing we have won two of our friendlies, something which took us 12 games this time last year, hopefully this will be a good sign.

The league this season will be a very competitive one with Oldham, Dewsbury and Swinton all looking strong after bringing in some quality players themselves.

Hunslet will also be a stronger proposition with their newly signed interna-

tionals.

All I can say is we will continue to keep working hard to offer a good performance week in, week out and we ask you to carry on with your fantastic support which truly is a great help to the team.

Enjoy the game

Danny Ekis ... close to a return



A warm welcome

GOOD afternoon and welcome to this afternoon's opening Northern Rail Cup match against Co-operative Championship contenders Whitehaven.

It seems like a very long time since we were last in competitive action and I know everyone at the Knights is really looking forward to the 2009 campaign.

May I start by welcoming players, directors and club officials from Whitehaven. The last time the Knights took on Whitehaven at the Huntington Stadium was in 2006 while the Knights were in National League One.

That match was arguably the best performance the Knights put in all season and resulted in a victory against a top Whitehaven side.

Prior to today's game is the final of the Selby Primary Schools tag rugby league tournament which is kindly sponsored by Drax Power Limited.

The partnership between Drax and the Knights is one that has flourished over the last three years and we are extremely grateful for the support they have given the club. Representatives from Drax are at today's match and we hope they have an enjoyable afternoon and witness a good display from the Knights.

Ian Wilson
General Manager

Support coming from far and wide

AFTER A busy off season it's great for all concerned to see the action begin in earnest.

It's fantastic to see so many new sponsors coming on board and joining the Knights for the coming campaign, and it's good to see so many sponsors not only coming from the city of York and surrounding areas but also from a wide geographical area such as Alsager in the potteries, Delta Training and Consulting, Gill Bookmakers from Rotherham and G.T.L from Skegness, to name but a few.

Much has been written regarding the new sponsorships that the Knights have attracted for the year ahead, and very welcome they are too, but without the support of our longstanding patrons the Knights would not be in a position to advance the squad, and club as a whole.

Much thanks must go out to the Shepherd Group for their continued support,

**Simon Moat
Commercial Manager**

Portakabin have been tremendous to the Knights once again, and I'd like to make a special mention of Ken Walker of K Walker and Co Accountants, a truly great supporter of the club.

Ken not only supports the team week in week out, but finds the time to attend all club gatherings and events held. His generosity to the club is greatly appreciated.



Looking ahead the club are constantly trying to develop new initiatives to fit in with sponsors' individual needs and requirements.

One such initiative has seen a first for the club in B & G Discos sponsoring the Knights water carriers shirts for 2009, and another first for the club is having prominent artist Amie Antoniak produce and donate a painting for the club, entitled 'Spirit of the Knights' that went on offer to the supporters by method of sealed bids.

Not only does the winning bidder walk away with an original piece of art, but also bring in revenue to the club.

If you would like to discuss sponsorship opportunities or know a friend or business colleague who may be interested, please give me a call at the club office on 01904 758234.

All the best.

IN P R O F I L E

BRENDON LINDSAY
SHEFFIELD EAGLES
Squad Number: 6

BACKGROUND

NAME: Brendon Phillip Lindsay

AGE: 32 (DOB: 21/09/77)

POSITION: Stand Off

HEIGHT: 5'8". WEIGHT: 13st 6lbs

MARITAL STATUS: Engaged

BORN: Sydney, Australia

AMATEUR CLUB: Lots of different teams
in Australia

SIGNED PRO: 1995

PREVIOUS CLUBS: Again, quite a few in Australia

FAVOURITES

CLUB SUPPORTED AS A KID: Canberra Raiders.

SOCCER TEAM: Sheffield United.

OTHER SPORT: Surfing.

HOBBIES: Surfing, Golf.

FOOD: Sushi.

DRINK: Jim Beam and Coke.

HOLIDAY: Scotland.

MUSIC: Anything.

FILM: Braveheart.

TV: One of the CSIs.

SUPERSTITIONS: I always tie my left boot up first.

CAREER

BEST TEAMMATE: Ged Corcoran.

BEST OPPONENT: In England it would be James Ford but in Australia Andrew Johns.

BEST PLAYER IN THE WORLD: Isreal Folau. He is just an awesome talent.

BEST COACH I'VE PLAYED FOR: I'd better say Mark Aston.

COACH I'D LIKE TO PLAY FOR: Ricky Stewart.

MY STRENGTHS: Organisation.

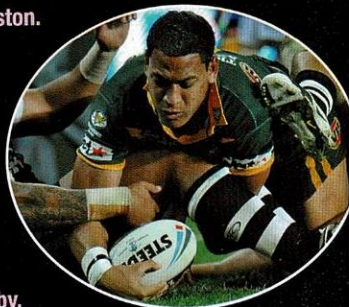
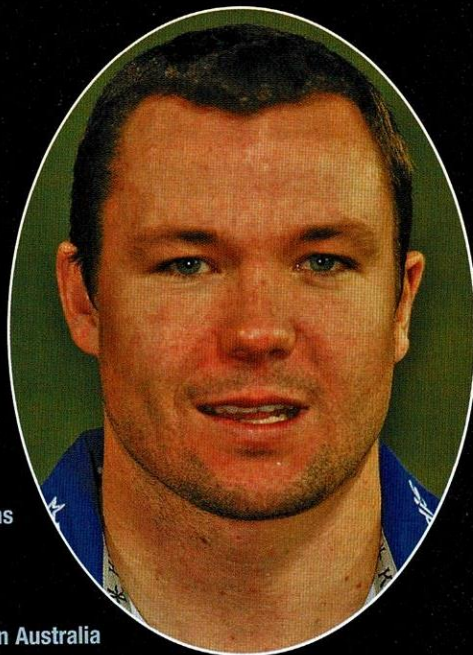
MY WEAKNESSES: Speed.

HIGHLIGHT: NRL debut.

LOWLIGHT: I am very happy to say I don't have one.

ULTIMATE WISH: To win the Northern Rail Cup.

AFTER FINISHED PLAYING: Something to do with rugby.



AHEAD OF THE GAME

PAUL BENNETT gives his slant on life in the Championships

Ambition is alive and well

FOR ALL THE fuss about the Super League licence system shutting the gates on clubs outside the top flight, I don't think I've ever been quite as excited about a season of Championship rugby league.

Sure, there's no promotion anymore – but that hasn't stunted the ambitions of the clubs below the elite league. In fact, for all the scaremongering, it's probably had exactly the reverse effect.

Clubs can no longer satisfy their supporters by paying lip service to the idea of promotion; they have to actually show they're willing to put in the necessary time and investment to make their Super League dream a reality.

Featherstone Rovers – a club in focus in this first ever edition of 'Game On' – are a case in point. Over at the Chris Moyles Stadium, they're deadly serious about a licence application in the not-altogether-too-distant future.

And now, knowing they can't simply get promoted by winning the Grand Final, they're putting the foundations in place for the club to grow its commercial activity and its support and are taking steps towards a new stadium.

And ironically, I reckon it's those kind of developments that are leading to a better product on the field by making the prospect of joining a Championship club altogether more attractive to some of the game's bigger names.

Would Iestyn Harris have dreamt of playing for Featherstone had they been happy to just plod along without thought to growing the club off the field as well as on it? Would Andrew Henderson be so willing to have signed for Gateshead if Thunder weren't such a forward-thinking club with ambitions, one day, of returning to very highest level in British rugby league?

Even if these players may have long-since retired from the game when those clubs manage to fulfil their ambitions, they can at least take satisfaction from the fact they were there when the momentum all



TAKING FLIGHT: Andrew Henderson is a massive signing for Gateshead Thunder

started. It's the same notion that convinced New Zealand legend Stacey Jones to sign for Les Catalans (although I suspect the pay packet wasn't too shabby either).

Credit then to the RFL for having the vision to adopt the licence system, not just for the advancement of Super League but for the betterment of the lower leagues too.

Credit to them, also, for dangling one large juicy carrot in front of the clubs as far as the Northern Rail Cup, which kicks off our season this weekend, is concerned.

Winning the final in Blackpool in July will allow clubs to apply for a licence come 2011, making the oft-maligned

trophy now just as important as a spot in the Championship Grand Final.

And that's only fair to the competition's terrific sponsors, Northern Rail, who – in this testing financial time – have extended their backing of the cup until 2012.

Both they, and The Co-operative, have shown great commitment to, and enthusiasm for, our beloved sport and they deserve our collective efforts – as a game – to make the product that they sponsor increasingly attractive. And right now I think we – as a game – are doing just that.

So much, then, for the non-Super League clubs being left in the dark ... if anything the future's looking as bright as ever.

IN P R O F I L E

PAUL THORMAN,
LONDON SKOLARS (captain)
Squad Number: 7

BACKGROUND

NAME: Paul Michael Thorman

AGE: 26 (DOB: 28/09/82)

POSITION: Scrum half

HEIGHT: 5'9". **WEIGHT:** 12st 9lbs

MARITAL STATUS: Girlfriend

BORN: Newcastle

AMATEUR CLUB: Newcastle Eagles

SIGNED PRO: 2000 (Gateshead Thunder)

PREVIOUS CLUBS: Gateshead Thunder, York City Knights

FAVOURITES

CLUB SUPPORTED AS A KID: Wigan – They were winning everything and we didn't have a club up in Newcastle. They were on TV on a Saturday afternoon on Grandstand in the Challenge Cup, so it's Wigan.

SOCCER TEAM: Newcastle United, which is unfortunate at the minute.

OTHER SPORT: Cricket.

HOBBIES: I'm doing jigsaws at the minute.

FOOD: My girlfriend's mum's Beef Wellington.

DRINK: Lager.

HOLIDAY: That would have to be Florida – Orlando.

MUSIC: Hilltop Hoods – it's Aussie hip hop.

FILM: The Dark Knight. Great film. Heath Ledger for an Oscar!

TV: QI.

SUPERSTITIONS: None at all.

CAREER

BEST TEAMMATE: Of my current teammates, I'll go for Dave Ellison in terms of ability.

BEST OPPONENT: Scott Hill was pretty good when we played against Harlequins last year so I'd probably have to say him.

BEST PLAYER IN THE WORLD: Apart from myself? I'd probably say Greg Inglis.

BEST COACH I'VE PLAYED FOR: Well, as I haven't played for Callum Irving at the Skolars yet, I'll have to say Mick Cook at York.

COACH I'D LIKE TO PLAY FOR: Probably Craig Bellamy of Melbourne Storm.

MY STRENGTHS: I suppose, in my position, it would have to be communication and organisation really.

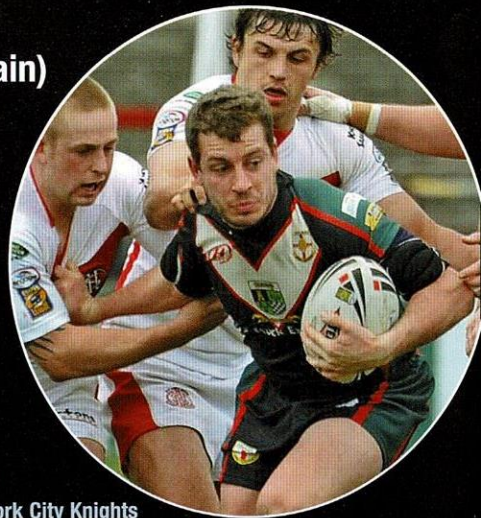
MY WEAKNESSES: Probably speed – or lack of it. That's all I'm gonna say. I don't want to put myself down too much!

HIGHLIGHT: Winning National League Two with York in 2005.

LOWLIGHT: Getting relegated the season after.

ULTIMATE WISH: To win the competition with London Skolars.

AFTER FINISHED PLAYING: I'm currently working in the development department at the club so it would be something related to sports development – if not rugby league development. I'd like to stay within sport within some shape or form.



ON THE MONEY!

Totesport's expert Rugby League odds compiler Mike Oxley gives Championship fans a few tips on where the betting value lies this season...

This year's Northern Rail Cup competition will have a fresh new look with the 20 competing teams from the Co-operative Championships playing on the opening group stage format thus providing a more streamlined and hopefully better betting opportunities over the next few weeks.

All the English based Co-operative Championship and Championship 1 clubs have been divided equally into two pools for the group stages with five teams from each division in each pool.

In recent years a lot of the teams taking part in the competition have fielded experimental sides, which meant the games were a nightmare to handicap for the bookmakers – it meant that punters with their ear close to the respective camps would Hoover up the value.

But with the advent of the Super League franchise system, one of the stipulations is for a championship side wishing to apply for the Super League to appear in a competition final in the next three years.

This basically means from a betting perspective that every team will be doing their utmost best to make the final.

Analyzing the outright and pool betting, I think one team that have recruited wisely and have also made a statement with the clientele they have taken on in their coaching staff is Featherstone.

With the credit crunch biting, some of the Super League teams have had to curtail their warm weather training, plans Hull and Hull KR having to cancel their trips abroad.

On a trip back from Spain a couple of weeks ago I bumped into Iestyn Harris, Daryl Powell and the rest of the Featherstone team at Malaga airport, where they were catching a flight back to Manchester then a coach back to Featherstone.

They had done a week's warm weather training on the Spanish coast, and that says to me that when the Super League teams are cutting back on costs that a team like Featherstone have ambition and are trying to go places in the next couple of years. As such I think 7/2 for Featherstone to win pool 2 in the Northern Rail Cup is the ante-post bet of the tournament. The only dangers to them are Leigh and Whitehaven, and as a bookmaker I would try and get Whitehaven in the book at 5/2.

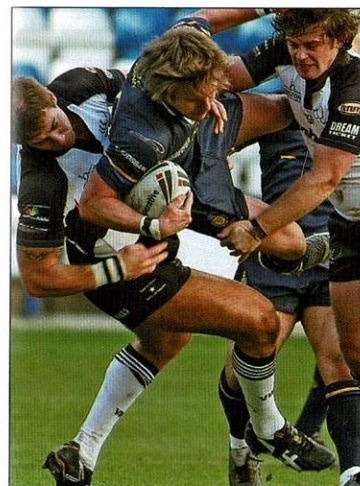
I think trying to pick the actual winner of the competition is not an easy task, Widnes are worthy favourites with the squad they have put together for the coming season, and with the likes of Halifax and Featherstone strengthening their squad with quality players over the last few months, the competition for the outright title is wide open.

Glancing over this weekend's matches I would take Hunslet away to Sheffield if a bookmaker gives them +30 or more on the handicap. Hunslet have recruited well close season and have a bigger and better squad than last season. I make Featherstone 8 point favourites at home to Leigh but I am sure a lot of other bookies will have this game closer to scratch, so Featherstone are the bet for me.

From a betting point of view in the early weeks I would punt the teams with 16 or more start on the handicaps.

With the sloppy pitches and cold weather, the teams with the start seem to stay in front and are hard to peg back on the handicap. Good luck!

Widnes - still worthy favourites



Mike 'the money' Oxley



bet online

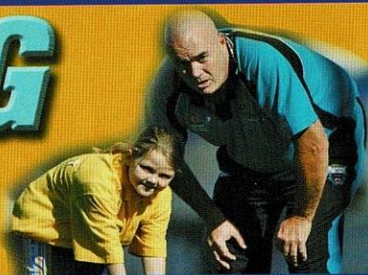
totesport.com



bet by phone

0800 221 221

SPREADING THE WORD



Spelling it out in the schools

Every week one of our Championship clubs will outline their sterling work in the community. YORK CITY KNIGHTS kick us off

SINCE the club's inception in 2003, the York City Knights have prided themselves on been a family-orientated, community club.

Since 2006 the Knights' community development department has been run under the banner of the York City Knights Foundation.

In that time more than 30,000 children at 120 different schools have benefited from a wide range of programmes.

Although the Foundation is committed to rugby league development it also aims to provide opportunities for participation in other sports and advice on important issues such as healthy lifestyles, nutrition and team work.

This work would not be possible without the generous support of a number of key partners in our area including the Shepherd Group and Drax Power Limited.

The recent Selby Primary Schools tag rugby league qualifying festivals were kindly sponsored by Drax Power Limited and produced some fantastic matches.

Twenty three schools from the Selby District were involved and all received coaching from the Knights development team.

Two heats were held at Abbey Leisure Centre to determine which teams would qualify for the finals,

which are being held as a curtain raiser to today's Northern Rail Cup clash against Whitehaven.

Members of Drax Power Limited have been invited to today's game and will present a trophy to the winning team. The event is now in its fifth year and is keenly supported by the Barlby School Sports Partnership and the Sports Development Unit at Selby District Council.

The Knights' development team were recently joined by Hugh Bayley MP, who is a trustee of the Foundation, and the Lord Mayor of York Brian Watson at Tang Hall Primary School in York. Mr Bayley joined in the fun with the children and was full of praise for the Foundation,

"The Knights are enthusiastic about their role on and off the field and work hard to create an interest in sport and to promote healthy lifestyles," said Mr Bayley.

"Their commitment and enthusiasm enables children of all ages are able to enjoy and take part in the game.

"These young people are the future of Rugby League and some of them will go on to become great and famous players."

The development team are now busy preparing for the York Primary Schools tag rugby league festival which will involve around 50 schools.



York MP Hugh Bayley joins pupils from Tang Hall Primary School at one of the City Knights' community sessions

This event is the biggest of its kind in the York area and is something all of the schools involved look forward to every year.

A number of players now in the Knights' first team squad were involved in this programme when it started six years ago and the pathway available for talented young players is available for all to see.

As well as the sporting side of things the Knights recently teamed up with Heart Research UK and delivered a Healthy Heart Assembly Project in local primary schools. The Knights educated young people about the importance of keeping your heart healthy by taking part in regular exercise, eating a balanced diet and regular rest and recuperation.

In 2006 the Knights launched a 'Tag-ability' programme for children with disabilities. This has grown significantly over the last three years and now involves approximately 120 children from 12 special schools from

across North Yorkshire. The aim of the programme is to establish weekly sessions at a local amateur club so the children can enjoy participating in Rugby League on a more regular basis.

As well as our work in primary schools the York City Knights are committed to providing opportunities for children in secondary schools. The club currently facilitates two main competitions, the Carnegie Champion Schools in conjunction with the RFL and the Marston Moor 9s which is run as part of the York International 9s weekend.

As well as the benefits to the community the club are also now seeing local talent in the first team.

The likes of Sam Blaney, Adam Jones, Tom Stancliffe and Oliver Wilcox Harrison, to name but a few, were all involved in the tag programme when it was established six years ago and it is fantastic to see so much local talent in the squad.

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KNOW YOUR STUFF?

AROUND THE CLUBS

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT EACH OF THIS WEEKEND'S HOME CHAMPIONSHIP CLUBS?

1. BARROW – Which country does new Raiders signing Andy Bracek represent?
2. BATLEY – Which two current Super League clubs has new signing Dale Cardoza previously played for?
3. FEATHERSTONE – For which Welsh rugby union team did Rovers' star stand off Iestyn Harris previously play?
4. HALIFAX – From which club did Widnes sign Bob Beswick, who has since moved to The Shay for the 2009 season?
5. KEIGHLEY – In what year was Keighley RLFC formed – 1874, 1876 or 1878?
6. LONDON – For which club did new Skolars signing Jaymes Chapman play Super League before moving to rugby union?
7. OLDHAM – For which trophy do the Roughyeds compete against today's opponents, local rivals Rochdale Hornets?
8. SHEFFIELD – Who won the Lance Todd Trophy as the Eagles beat Wigan to win the Challenge Cup in 1998?
9. SWINTON – At which club did new signing Graham Holroyd begin his professional career?
10. YORK – Knights loose forward David March was signed from which Super League club at the end of 2007?

NORTHERN RAIL CUP KNOWLEDGE

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE CHAMPIONSHIP'S VERY OWN CUP COMPETITION?

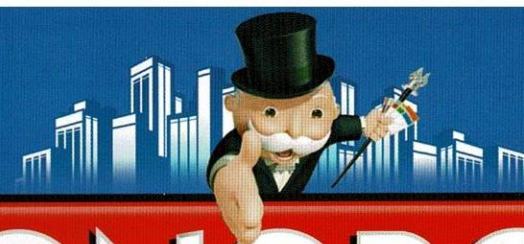
1. On which date will the final of the 2009 Northern Rail Cup be held?
2. How many teams will be competing in the inaugural Northern Rail 9s tournament in Fylde on the weekend of the Northern Rail Cup final?
3. By what score did Salford City Reds beat Doncaster in last season's Northern Rail Cup final?
4. How many different clubs have won the Northern Rail Cup since its inception in 2002? Can you name them all?
5. At which ground – also the home of a Football League club – played host to the Northern Rail Cup final in 2003 and 2004 before the final's move to Blackpool?
6. How many current co-operative Championship coaches have previously won the Northern Rail Cup?
7. Which current engage Super League club have lost the Northern Rail Cup final a record three times?

ANAGRAMS

CAN YOU REARRANGE THE FOLLOWING ANAGRAMS TO MAKE THE NAMES OF THREE CHAMPIONSHIP CLUB COACHES?

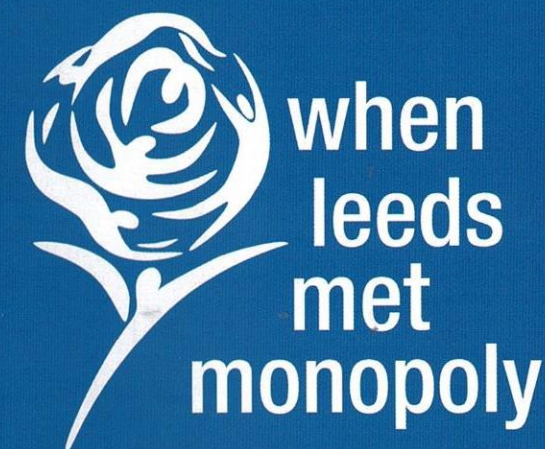
1. HAUL CRAMP;
2. I'M VULCAN GIRL;
3. END RASH WAR

ANSWERS: NORTHERN RAIL CUP KNOWLEDGE: 1. Sunday, July 12; 2. 18; 3. 60-0; 4. Five and Wigan (2007); 5. Spodden, Rochdale; 6. Two – Tony Benson (2006) and Steve McCormack (2007); 7. Hull KR.
AROUND THE CLUBS: 1. Wales; 2. Huddersfield Giants and Warrington Wolves; 3. Cardiff Blues; 4. Wigan Warriors; 5. 1876; 6. Halifax; 7. The Law Cup; 8. Mark Astom; 9. Leeds Rhinos; 10. Wakefield Wildcats.
ANAGRAMS: 1. Paul March; 2. Callum Irving; 3. Darren Shaw.



MONOPOLY

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Play Monopoly with Leeds Met and you could win a fabulous holiday in St Lucia...

Leeds Metropolitan University has launched the Leeds Met Monopoly Challenge, and is attempting to break a world record in support of local and international volunteering initiatives.

Take part in this Monopoly tournament and have a chance to win a £6000 holiday for four at the Coconut Bay Resort & Spa in St Lucia!

Heats begin on 28 February 2009, and we want as many people to register as possible...

Register a team of 5 and you'll receive a limited edition Leeds Monopoly board.

Register as an individual and you'll get a limited edition 'When Leeds Met Monopoly' t-shirt.

There are hundreds of prizes to be won... so what are you waiting for?

Visit www.leedsmet.ac.uk/monopoly to sign up now!

GET YOUR FIX...

Your guide to Northern Rail Cup and Championships for 2009

NORTHERN RAIL CUP



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8

Barrow Raiders v Widnes Vikings	14:00
Batley Bulldogs v Doncaster RLFC	14:00
Featherstone Rovers v Leigh Centurions	15:00
Halifax RLFC v Blackpool Panthers	15:00
Sheffield Eagles v Hunslet Hawks	15:00
Keighley Cougars v Gateshead Thunder	15:00
London Skolars v Dewsbury Rams	15:00
Oldham v Rochdale Hornets	15:00
Swinton Lions v Workington Town	15:00
York City Knights v Whitehaven	15:00

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13

Widnes Vikings v Oldham	19:30
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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Doncaster RLFC v Featherstone Rovers	15:00
Gateshead Thunder v Sheffield Eagles	15:00
Leigh Centurions v London Skolars	15:00
Whitehaven v Batley Bulldogs	15:00
Blackpool Panthers v Keighley Cougars	15:00
Dewsbury Rams v Swinton Lions	15:00
Hunslet Hawks v Halifax RLFC	15:00
Rochdale Hornets v Barrow Raiders	15:00
Workington Town v York City Knights	15:00

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Widnes Vikings v Gateshead Thunder	18:00
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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22

Batley Bulldogs v York City Knights	14:00
Featherstone Rovers v Dewsbury Rams	15:00
Halifax RLFC v Barrow Raiders	15:00
Whitehaven v Workington Town	15:00
Keighley Cougars v Hunslet Hawks	15:00
London Skolars v Doncaster RLFC	15:00
Oldham v Sheffield Eagles	15:00
Rochdale Hornets v Blackpool Panthers	15:00
Swinton Lions v Leigh Centurions	15:00

SUNDAY, MARCH 1

Barrow Raiders v Keighley Cougars	14:00
Gateshead Thunder v Rochdale Hornets	15:00
Leigh Centurions v Whitehaven	15:00
Sheffield Eagles v Halifax RLFC	15:00
Blackpool Panthers v Widnes Vikings	15:00
Dewsbury Rams v Batley Bulldogs	15:00
Workington Town v Featherstone Rovers	15:00
Doncaster RLFC v Swinton Lions	13:00
Hunslet Hawks v Oldham	14:00
York City Knights v London Skolars	14:00



CO-OPERATIVE CHAMPIONSHIP

THURSDAY, MARCH 12

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Widnes Vikings v Toulouse Olympique	19:30

SATURDAY, MARCH 14

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Barrow Raiders v Doncaster RLFC	18.30

SUNDAY, MARCH 15

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Batley Bulldogs v Featherstone Rovers	15:00

Sheffield Eagles v Leigh Centurions	15:00
Whitehaven v Gateshead Thunder	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Oldham v Blackpool Panthers	15:00
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THURSDAY, MARCH 19

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Halifax RLFC v Widnes Vikings	19:30

SATURDAY, MARCH 21

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Toulouse Olympique v Sheffield Eagles	19:00

SUNDAY, MARCH 22

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Featherstone Rovers v Whitehaven	15:00
Gateshead Thunder v Barrow Raiders	15:00
Leigh Centurions v Batley Bulldogs	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Workington Town v Rochdale Hornets	15:00
Blackpool Panthers v Hunslet Hawks	15:00
Dewsbury Rams v York City Knights	15:00
Keighley Cougars v Oldham	15:00
London Skolars v Swinton Lions	15:00

THURSDAY, MARCH 26

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Batley Bulldogs v Gateshead Thunder	19:30

SATURDAY, MARCH 28

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Whitehaven v Toulouse Olympique	18:00
Barrow Raiders v Halifax RLFC	18:30
Widnes Vikings v Sheffield Eagles	18:00

SUNDAY, MARCH 29

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Doncaster RLFC v Leigh Centurions	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Rochdale Hornets v Dewsbury Rams	15:00
Swinton Lions v Keighley Cougars	15:00
York City Knights v Blackpool Panthers	15:00
Hunslet Hawks v London Skolars	15:00
Oldham v Workington Town	15:00

THURSDAY, APRIL 9

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Sheffield Eagles v Doncaster RLFC	TBC

FRIDAY, APRIL 10

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Halifax RLFC v Batley Bulldogs	20:00
Gateshead Thunder v Featherstone Rovers	18:00
Barrow Raiders v Whitehaven	15:00
Sheffield Eagles v Doncaster RLFC	15:00
Widnes Vikings v Leigh Centurions	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Rochdale Hornets v Oldham	15:00
Workington Town v Hunslet Hawks	15:00
Blackpool Panthers v Swinton Lions	15:00
Dewsbury Rams v London Skolars	15:30
Keighley Cougars v York City Knights	19:30

MONDAY, APRIL 13

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Featherstone Rovers v Sheffield Eagles	15:00
Leigh Centurions v Barrow Raiders	13:00
Batley Bulldogs v Toulouse Olympique	15:00
Doncaster RLFC v Widnes Vikings	15:00
Whitehaven v Halifax RLFC	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Swinton Lions v Workington Town	15:00
York City Knights v Rochdale Hornet	15:00
Hunslet Hawks v Keighley Cougars	15:00
London Skolars v Blackpool Panthers	15:00
Oldham v Dewsbury Rams	20:00

THURSDAY, APRIL 16

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Gateshead Thunder v Sheffield Eagles	19:30

FRIDAY, APRIL 17

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Widnes Vikings v Batley Bulldogs	19:30

SATURDAY, APRIL 18

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Toulouse Olympique v Leigh Centurions	19:00

SUNDAY, APRIL 19

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Halifax RLFC v Doncaster RLFC	15:00
Whitehaven v Featherstone Rovers	15:00

THURSDAY, APRIL 23

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Leigh Centurions v Featherstone Rovers	19:30

SATURDAY, APRIL 25

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Barrow Raiders v Batley Bulldogs	18:30

SUNDAY, APRIL 26

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Halifax RLFC v Gateshead Thunder	15:00
Doncaster RLFC v Toulouse Olympique	14:00
Sheffield Eagles v Widnes Vikings	16:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Rochdale Hornets v London Skolars	15:00
Workington Town v York City Knights	15:00
Dewsbury Rams v Hunslet Hawks	15:00
Keighley Cougars v Blackpool Panthers	15:00
Oldham v Swinton Lions	15:00

THURSDAY, APRIL 30

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Featherstone Rovers v Halifax RLFC	19:30

FRIDAY, MAY 1

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Widnes Vikings v Barrow Raiders	20:00
Gateshead Thunder v Doncaster RLFC	19:30

SUNDAY, MAY 3

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Toulouse Olympique v Whitehaven	19:00

MONDAY, MAY 4

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Batley Bulldogs v Leigh Centurions	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Swinton Lions v Dewsbury Rams	15:00
York City Knights v Keighley Cougars	15:00
Blackpool Panthers v Rochdale Hornets	15:00
Hunslet Hawks v Workington Town	15:00
London Skolars v Oldham	15:00

THURSDAY, MAY 7

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Whitehaven v Widnes Vikings	15:00

FRIDAY, MAY 8

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Sheffield Eagles v Featherstone Rovers	20:00

SATURDAY, MAY 9

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Barrow Raiders v Gateshead Thunder	18:30

SUNDAY, MAY 10

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Doncaster RLFC v Batley Bulldogs	15:00
Leigh Centurions v Halifax RLFC	15:00

THURSDAY, MAY 14

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Leigh Centurions v Widnes Vikings	19:30

SATURDAY, MAY 16

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Toulouse Olympique v Barrow Raiders	19:00

SUNDAY, MAY 17

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Featherstone Rovers v Doncaster RLFC	15:00

Gateshead Thunder v Whitehaven	15:00
Halifax RLFC v Sheffield Eagles	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Rochdale Hornets v York City Knights	15:00
Dewsbury Rams v Blackpool Panthers	15:00
Keighley Cougars v Swinton Lions	15:00
Workington Town v London Skolars	14:00
Oldham v Hunslet Hawks	15:00

THURSDAY, MAY 21

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Doncaster RLFC v Halifax RLFC	19:30

SATURDAY, MAY 23

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Sheffield Eagles v Toulouse Olympique	18:00
Barrow Raiders v Featherstone Rovers	18:30
Widnes Vikings v Gateshead Thunder	18:00

SUNDAY, MAY 24

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Batley Bulldogs v Whitehaven	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Swinton Lions v Oldham	15:00
Workington Town v Dewsbury Rams	15:00
Blackpool Panthers v Keighley Cougars	15:00
Hunslet Hawks v Rochdale Hornets	15:00
London Skolars v York City Knights	15:00

THURSDAY, MAY 28

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Featherstone Rovers v Leigh Centurions	19:30

SATURDAY, MAY 30

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Gateshead Thunder v Toulouse Olympique	18:00
Barrow Raiders v Sheffield Eagles	18:30

SUNDAY, MAY 31

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Batley Bulldogs v Widnes Vikings	15:00
Whitehaven v Doncaster RLFC	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Swinton Lions v Rochdale Hornets	15:00
York City Knights v Dewsbury Rams	15:00
Keighley Cougars v Workington Town	15:00
London Skolars v Hunslet Hawks	15:00

SATURDAY, JUNE 6

NORTHERN RAIL CUP QUARTER-FINALS	
London Skolars v Hunslet Hawks	15:00

SUNDAY, JUNE 7

NORTHERN RAIL CUP QUARTER-FINALS	
Swinton Lions v Dewsbury Rams	15:00
York City Knights v Keighley Cougars	19:30

THURSDAY, JUNE 11

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE (TV)	
Dewsbury Rams v Keighley Cougars	19:30

SATURDAY, JUNE 13

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Widnes Vikings v Featherstone Rovers	18:00
Toulouse Olympique v Batley Bulldogs	20:00

SUNDAY, JUNE 14

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Halifax RLFC v Barrow Raiders	15:00
Leigh Centurions v Gateshead Thunder	15:00
Sheffield Eagles v Whitehaven	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Rochdale Hornets v Blackpool Panthers	15:00
Workington Town v Swinton Lions	15:00
Hunslet Hawks v York City Knights	15:00

SATURDAY, JUNE 20

NORTHERN RAIL CUP SEMI-FINAL	
York City Knights v Hunslet Hawks	15:00

SUNDAY, JUNE 21

NORTHERN RAIL CUP SEMI-FINAL	
Swinton Lions v Dewsbury Rams	15:00

THURSDAY, JUNE 25

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE (TV)	
York City Knights v Oldham	19:30

SATURDAY, JUNE 27

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Toulouse Olympique v Featherstone Rovers	20:00

SUNDAY, JUNE 28

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Batley Bulldogs v Barrow Raiders	15:00
Doncaster RLFC v Sheffield Eagles	15:00

Gateshead Thunder v Halifax RLFC	15:00
Whitehaven v Leigh Centurions	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Swinton Lions v Hunslet Hawks	15:00
Blackpool Panthers v Workington Town	15:00
Keighley Cougars v Rochdale Hornets	15:00
London Skolars v Dewsbury Rams	15:00

THURSDAY, JULY 2

CHAMPIONSHIP (TV)	
Barrow Raiders v Toulouse Olympique	19:30

FRIDAY, JULY 3

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Sheffield Eagles v Batley Bulldogs	20:00
Halifax RLFC v Leigh Centurions	20:00

SATURDAY, JULY 4

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Widnes Vikings v Doncaster RLFC	18:00

SUNDAY, JULY 5

CHAMPIONSHIP	
Featherstone Rovers v Gateshead Thunder	15:00

CHAMPIONSHIP ONE

Rochdale Hornets v Hunslet Hawks	15:00
Workington Town v Oldham	15:00
Black	

WHAT A RESULT!



NORTHERN RAIL CUP 2008

GROUP GAMES

FEBRUARY 1:

Doncaster (12) 32, Skolars (6) 10; Sheffield (4) 12, Crusaders (12) 22; Oldham (16) 22; Swinton (6) 20.

FEBRUARY 3:

Workington (2) 8, Halifax (8) 30; Rochdale (6) 12, Salford (24) 54; Leigh (20) 38, Barrow (10) 20; Whitehaven (12) 32, Keighley (6) 10; York (10) 16, Gateshead (12) 24; Dewsbury (36) 56, F'stone (10) 24; Hunslet (0) 12, Batley (26) 62; Blackpool (0) 4, Widnes (26) 38.

FEBRUARY 8:

Salford (18) 40, Oldham (12) 12; Doncaster (0) 6, Sheffield (16) 16.

FEBRUARY 10:

Workington (2) 18, W'haven (10) 26; Swinton (24) 34, Rochdale (10) 36; Featherstone (22) 40, York (6) 12; Widnes (2) 8, Leigh (2) 15; Skolars (4) 10, Crusaders (16) 26; Gateshead (24) 58, Hunslet (6) 6; Keighley (12) 40, Halifax (40) 64; Barrow (10) 28, Blackpool (12) 20; Batley (6) 19, Dewsbury (4) 18.

FEBRUARY 16:

Crusaders (26) 34, Sheffield (0) 14.

FEBRUARY 17:

Halifax (20) 48, Whitehaven (6) 16; Workington (6) 18, Keighley (18) 22; Swinton (4) 8, Salford (18) 48; F'stone (22) 48, Gateshead (0) 6; Hunslet (4) 16, Dewsbury (12) 30; Skolars (4) 22, Doncaster (18) 36; Blackpool (10) 16, Leigh (18) 36.

FEBRUARY 22:

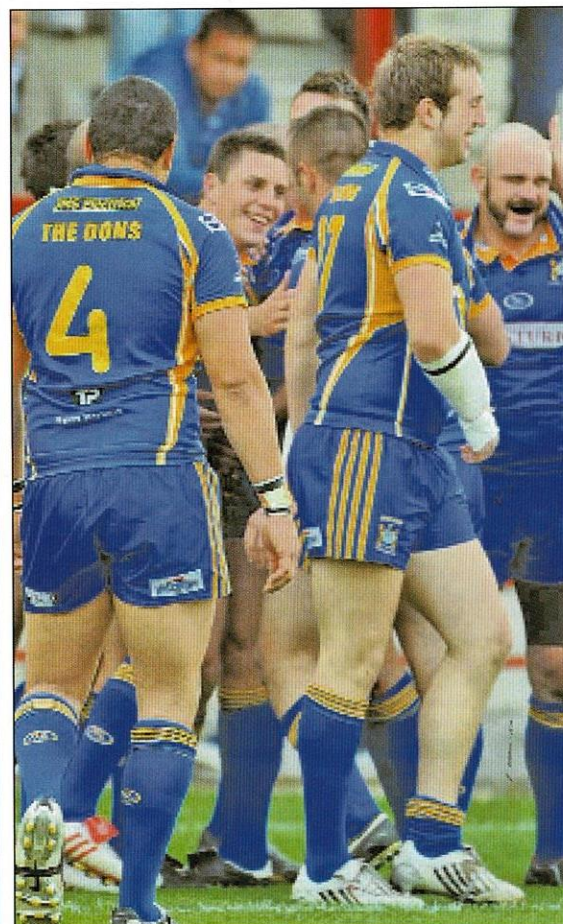
Oldham (12) 18, Salford (10) 14; D'caster (14) 22, Crusaders (12) 30; Sheffield (22) 32, Skolars (22) 50.

FEBRUARY 24:

York (18) 24, Featherstone (16) 24; Dewsbury (14) 32, Batley (10) 16; Leigh (16) 20, Widnes (4) 10; Hunslet (6) 22, Gateshead (12) 30; Rochdale (18) 34, Swinton (8) 38; W'haven (0) 26, W'kington (10) 10; Blackpool (4) 10, Barrow (24) 40.

FEBRUARY 26:

Halifax (38) 50, Keighley (6) 16.



Doncaster celebrate a try in last year's semi-final against Batley. The then National Two outfit could not upset Salford in the final

FEBRUARY 27:

Widnes (42) 78, Barrow (0) 0

FEBRUARY 29:

Oldham (22) 38, Rochdale (4) 8; Salford (46) 70, Swinton (0) 6.

MARCH 1:

Crusaders (14) 14, Skolars (8) 18.

MARCH 2:

Sheffield (16) 36, Doncaster (10) 16; Keighley (12) 16, W'haven (12) 32; Halifax (46) 88, W'ngton (6) 6; F'stone (14) 34; Dewsbury (4) 14; Gateshead (0) 26, York (10) 18; Widnes (34) 60, Blackpool (6) 12; Barrow (14) 14, Leigh (12) 26; Batley (20) 32, Hunslet (8) 14.

MARCH 5:

Batley (18) 40, York (6) 22; Rochdale (20) 32, Oldham (4) 22.

MARCH 14:

Salford (20) 68, Rochdale (0) 0

MARCH 15:

Skolars (6) 14, Sheffield (10) 34.

MARCH 16:

Bramley (0) 20, Warrington W (0) 6; Swinton (6) 10, Oldham (26) 52; Keighley (10) 26, W'k'ton (16) 22; Dewsbury (12) 18, Hunslet (14) 16; Whitehaven (22) 38, Halifax (0) 16; Gateshead (12) 24, F'stone (30) 48; Leigh (10) 26, Blackpool (0) 6; York (4) 18, Batley (8) 18;

Barrow (18) 24, Widnes (4) 16.

MARCH 22:

W'ngton W (0) 30, Bramley (0) 24.

ROUND TWO

APRIL 2:

Barrow (14) 20, Batley (12) 24.

APRIL 3:

Salford (34) 62, Bramley (6) 6; G'head (6) 26, Doncaster (22) 31.

APRIL 5:

Halifax (0) 24, Crusaders (12) 30; Featherstone (20) 36, Leigh (0) 10; Widnes (12) 44, Sheffield (0) 8; R'dale (18) 38, Dewsbury (12) 36; Oldham (16) 16, Whitehaven (6) 6.

QUARTER-FINALS

MAY 21:

Featherstone (8) 12, Salford (12) 30

MAY 22:

Rochdale (8) 30, Doncaster (28) 42.

MAY 23:

Crusaders (16) 50, Widnes (6) 18.

MAY 24:

Batley (14) 24, Oldham (6) 16.

SEMI-FINALS

JUNE 11:

Batley (8) 12, Doncaster (14) 21.

JUNE 13:

Crusaders (10) 20, Salford (18) 36.

FINAL

JULY 5:

Doncaster (0) 0, Salford (24) 60.



STATS SERVICE



NORTHERN RAIL CUP 2008 TABLES

3 pts for win, 2 for draw, 1 for Bonus Point for losing by 12pts or less

GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	B	F	A	D	Pts
Halifax RLFC (q)	6	5	0	1	0	296	124	172	15
Whitehaven (q)	6	5	0	1	0	170	118	52	15
Keighley Cougars	6	2	0	4	0	130	218	-88	6
Workington Town	6	0	0	6	3	82	218	-136	3

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	B	F	A	D	Pts
Featherstone Rovers (q)	6	4	1	1	0	208	136	62	14
Gateshead Thunder (q)	6	4	0	2	0	168	158	10	12
York City Knights	6	0	2	4	2	110	182	-72	6

GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	B	F	A	D	Pts
Celtic Crusaders (q)	5	4	0	1	1	126	76	50	13
Sheffield Eagles (q)	6	3	0	3	1	144	142	2	10
Doncaster (q)	5	2	0	3	2	112	114	-2	8
London Skolars	6	2	0	4	0	124	174	-50	6

NATIONAL LEAGUE ONE 2008

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Dif	Pts
Salford City Reds	18	12	3	3	614	302	312	45
Celtic Crusaders	18	12	0	6	511	391	120	40
Halifax RLFC	18	11	1	6	634	514	120	38
Leigh Centurions	18	10	0	8	448	448	0	34
Whitehaven	18	10	0	8	420	399	21	32
Widnes Vikings*	18	10	2	6	453	410	43	30
Sheffield Eagles	18	8	1	9	425	530	-105	29
Featherstone R	18	6	1	11	452	515	-63	26
Batley Bulldogs	18	5	0	13	387	538	-151	23
Dewsbury Rams (R)	18	2	0	16	315	612	-297	13

*Widnes deducted nine points for going into administration

NATIONAL LEAGUE TWO 2008

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Dif	Pts
Gateshead Thunder (P)	22	19	0	3	767	415	352	59
Barrow Raiders (P)	22	16	0	6	703	375	328	52
Oldham	22	17	0	5	716	456	260	52
Doncaster (P)	22	15	0	7	672	426	246	48
Keighley Cougars	22	15	0	7	611	519	92	48
York City Knights	22	11	1	10	740	540	200	42
Rochdale Hornets	22	10	1	11	715	610	105	36
Workington Town	22	6	0	16	512	628	-116	28
Blackpool Panthers	22	7	1	14	472	828	-356	25
Swinton Lions	22	6	0	16	482	777	-295	22
London Skolars	22	4	1	17	449	823	-374	20
Hunslet Hawks	22	4	0	18	336	778	-442	17

This year in the Championship there are 11 clubs, each playing 20 games. In Championship One there are ten teams, each playing 18 games. The top six from each division will contest the end-of-season play-offs.

TOP NRC TRY SCORERS 2008

Paul White (Salford)	12
Richie Myler (Salford)	11
Karl Fitzpatrick (Salford)	9
Jordan Turner (Salford)	8
Shad Royston (Halifax)	8
Martin Ainscough (Rochdale)	7
Gavin Dodd (Widnes)	7
Danny Hill (Widnes)	7
Mat Gardner (Salford)	7
John Wilshere (Salford)	6
Luke Gale (Doncaster)	6
Waine Pryce (Featherstone)	6
Sean Penkyciwicz (Halifax)	6
Mike Roby (Sheffield)	6
Danny Mills (Sheffield)	6
Toa Kohe-Love (Leigh)	6
Mick Nanyin (Oldham)	6
James Coyle (Oldham)	6
Lee Patterson (Halifax)	6
Stewart Sanderson (Gateshead)	6

NL TOP SCORERS 2008

TRIES (All matches)

James Nixon (Barrow - pictured)	35
Paul White (Salford)	28
Martin Ainscough (Rochdale)	28
Luke Gale (Doncaster)	27
Richard Myler (Salford)	25
Shad Royston (Halifax)	23
Matt Gardner (Salford)	23

GOALS (All matches)

Graham Holroyd (Halifax - pictured)	156
Mick Nanyin (Oldham)	139
Dan Russell (Gateshead)	129 (1)
Carl Sneyd (Rochdale)	110
Darren Holt (Barrow)	106 (6)
Carl Forber (Workington)	101 (1)

(1) Drop goals included in total

POINTS (All matches)

Mick Nanyin (Oldham - pictured)	362
Graham Holroyd (Halifax)	340
Dan Russell (Gateshead)	293
Carl Sneyd (Rochdale)	268
John Wilshere (Salford)	252
Carl Forber (Workington)	243
Johnny Woodcock (Sheffield)	232
Darren Holt (Barrow)	230
Mark Lennon (Celtic Crusaders)	225
Stuart Dickens (Featherstone)	210

