

Leicester Programme Notes: Sept 7, 2008

I've just been reading that rather excellent article by Stephen Jones in what is now last Sunday's Sunday Times, the one where he waxes lyrical about how much better Rugby Union is when left untouched by the daft ELVs and is not allowed to turn into the tap and rush rugby league variant that is now played in the Tri-Nations.

How right is he – if you haven't read it already I cannot urge you strongly enough to go and take a look at it on the Times website. Not least for his stinging slap across Rob Andrew's £400 grand chops for his less than helpful comments in a newspaper article a few days previously.

As he says, we have had a look at the several hundred changes, and taken the few best ones for ourselves. Having said that there is one law that I would happily wave goodbye to – isn't it time to do away with the 'Mark' when the ball is caught cleanly in the 22? Just a personal grumble (probably based on a life-long inability to catch a ball dropping from the heavens) but the game is not broken up here, why try to fix it?

Anyway, after what seems a lifetime we all re-assembled at Kingsholm for the pre-season friendly last week. Was it just me or did time seem to stand still through what, on paper anyway, was the summer. I mentioned this to a fellow shedhead the other day, he suggested that it was because we had missed out on our annual (and so-far fruitless) trip to Twickenham for the play off final. He has a point, I suppose.

The summer break provided us with a chance for endless speculation about comings and goings, not something I tend to get into – well not after getting my wallet severely lightened after paying out on a bet that Carlos Spencer would one day run out in a cherry and white shirt, anyway – but by my reckoning we have released just about everyone and signed just about everyone else. Not bad going really.

We do get to welcome back Adam Eustace– even though it's fair to say that the news of his signing was met with somewhat mixed feelings around the stands and terraces. Personally I think Adam is a more than useful player who will always do a job for us. If the great Ian Jones can pick him, as he did a few years back, as a player who he thought could make it to the very top, then that is good enough for me.

I had the misfortune to follow Adam around a gym (not in a stalking sort of way, I hasten to add) a few weeks ago, I was kind of hoping that he didn't notice me knocking several tens of kilos off all the weights machines – talk about giving someone an inferiority complex...

But last weekend we were back, on about the only bright Saturday since May to watch an err... interesting encounter. I know you can't read too much into these pre-season run-outs, but to say we were less than inspiring on the day may be a bit of an understatement. Yes we won in the end, and perhaps the plan was to lull any watching scouts from Leicester into a false sense of security.

That may well have worked but given the next few fixtures it propelled me into a total state of high anxiety. I can't go into the first game of the season with shredded nerves. I'll be in deep therapy by mid November at that rate.

Talking of the first few fixtures, do you think whoever put them together was having a bit of a laugh – Leicester and Bath back to back, then Harlequins and Sale, you only had to throw Wasps into that mix and that would be about as tough as it can get. Still if you want to be the best you have to beat the best, so we may as well get them all out of the way early.

Leicester are going to present a heck of a challenge today though. With a new coach desperate to get off to the best of starts where better could he do it than away at Kingsholm. They do have a fair few injury concerns at the time of writing, but I for one am not ruling out several Lazarus-esque returns to form before kick off on Saturday afternoon.

One thing that both sets of supporters can do this afternoon though, is to pay tribute to Leon Lloyd, whose career came to an end over the summer – forced to quit through injury. I don't know how many games he played for the Tigers, but I'm guessing it was well into three figures, we only got to see him on a handful of occasions.

Because of his short career we never really saw the best of him, but five league tries in seven appearances shows that he was one of the best, and was probably worth more than his five England caps. Of course one of his best games for us was against Leicester, when he picked off a Andy Goode pass and ran in to score "Best pass I ever had from him," he said after the game.

Hopefully he will be here today, there will be many old friends on and off the pitch who will want to wish him well for whatever his future holds.