

Harlequins Programme Notes: Sept 20, 2008

When I sat down to write this programme piece I thought about giving the club a ring to ask them if they could just print one word over the two pages. The word in question: 'YES!' Nothing more would be needed, everyone would know exactly what I meant.

Last weekend's win down at the Wreck kicked the blues from the Leicester defeat so far into touch that they don't even figure on the radar. A monumental performance from all the players to finally crack the last nut in the bag, the Bath jinx is now officially consigned to history.

Of course there is a downside. I have to accept that all the previous defeats were, in fact, my fault. For years I have been travelling to Bath only to see the inevitable defeat. Leads were thrown away on a fairly regular basis, we came close and we almost scrapped home. Just never made it over the line.

Then this season... Twice I was offered tickets and twice I had to decline as family matters meant that I could not go. So it's clear – I was the bad omen. I was the reason that we hadn't managed to win a game down there since way back when. Now I daren't go back in the future just in case I screw the whole thing up again.

Sometimes it's really hard being a supporter.

The turn-around achieved in two weeks was incredible though. Yes we were a little lucky that Butch James had one of those days when he couldn't hit a barn door with a cannon, but we looked the part. Our forwards gave Bath no quarter and deprived them of any kind of a platform to work from.

In fact rather like our performance against Leicester.

Some of the outpourings after the Leicester game were a bit harsh to say the least. Reading some of the comments you could have been forgiven for thinking that the season was as good as over already.

The simple facts were that had a couple of players made slightly different decisions we could have put that game away. They know that, and they will have felt the defeat far harder than anyone else. And I reckon that a blasting from Dean Ryan is probably enough to focus anyone's mind.

Alex Fergusson may be renowned for his 'hairdryer' but if Deano were ever to conduct himself Fergie-style in the changing rooms in the way he did as a player, it would be akin to standing in front of a flame thrower!

Of course it's disappointing when we lose, particularly when it's the first game of the season, but to quote the bloke who makes exceedingly fine cakes: 'If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster; and treat those two impostors just the same... etc etc.' There's a lesson in there somewhere.

Looking ahead to today's game, it used to be that the visit of Harlequins was regarded as a home banker, the only question was whether it would be a four or five point victory. Not anymore. Dean Richards has moulded them into a formidable outfit more than capable of standing up to anyone in the Premiership.

Last season they ran us very close, if I recall correctly they had a bonus point for four tries in the bag well before half time. They're off to a good start this term with two wins out of two, but the loss of Nick Evans may hurt them – he's a quality player.

In David Strettle (no cheap Duracel jokes here, you'll note) they have an out and out match winner. He ripped us apart at times last season, so we'll need to keep a careful eye on him. But, as ever, I am confident, after last weekend I reckon a hard fought win is on the cards but no room for complacency!

So as things look a bit brighter on the pitch, we were treated to some good news that, planning permission and all the other factors allowing, we could soon be standing in a nice new shed. More room to breathe and – heaping delight upon delight – bars at the back so no more having to fight your way in and out to the back of the High Tec stand for a half time pint.

Who knows perhaps we'll even get new toilet facilities to replace the ones that have been there since the Romans were tearing up the Premiership at Glevum several centuries ago.

Having hospitality boxes over our heads could be a bit of a double edged sword though. We heard at the last home game how some of the reckless people in these corporate boxes were – heaven forefend – taking glasses out onto the balconies.

Well I can tell you I will not be pleased if someone drops a glass on my head, or empties the contents of his glass down the back of my neck.

On the plus side, we could all stand there in best 'Oliver' tradition and beg for a few scraps from the table.

It'll make a change from pasty and chips!