



BLACKTHORN



BATH RUGBY VS NEWCASTLE FALCONS



Saturday
13 November 1999
Kick-Off 2.15pm



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Rugby vs Newcastle Falcons



Bath Rugby

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No	Player	Position	Player	No
15	Matt Perry	Full Back	Stuart Legg	15
14	Iain Balshaw	Right Wing	Jim Naylor	14
13	Phil de Glanville (Capt)	Centre	Martin Shaw	13
12	Mike Tindall	Centre	Inga Tuigamala	12
11	Kevin Maggs	Left Wing	Jamie Noon	11
10	Mike Catt	Fly Half	Dave Walder	10
9	Gareth Cooper	Scrum Half	Harley Crane	9
1	Clem Boyd	Prop	George Graham	1
2	Mark Regan	Hooker	Ross Nesdale	2
3	Chris Horsman	Prop	Marius Hurter	3
4	Warwick Waugh	Lock	Stuart Grimes	4
5	Steve Borthwick	Lock	Doddie Weir	5
6	Angus Gardiner	Flanker	Hugh Vyvyan	6
7	Ben Clarke	Flanker	Peter Walton	7
8	Ben Sturnham	No 8	Richard Arnold (Capt)	8

Replacements

16	Jon Preston			16
17	Andy Long			17
18	John Mallet			18
19	Jon Callard			19
20	Shaun Berne			20
21	Gavin Thomas			21
22	Nathan Thomas			22

Referee: Steve Lander Touch Judges: Chris Rees, John Burtenshaw



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Newcastle Falcons

By Dick Tugwell

Newcastle Falcons arrive at the Rec this afternoon still seeking their first Allied Dunbar Premiership One victory after enduring a torrid start to the season plagued by World Cup calls and a spate of injury problems.

So far, the Falcons have lost four and drawn two of their opening six matches and currently lie second from bottom in the table with just two points to their credit.

But before Bath fans start rubbing their hands with glee at the prospect of what might seem to be a fairly routine winning opportunity, they would be wise to take stock of past form and the Falcons two most recent results.

Robbed of most of their top stars for the first five weeks of the season by the Rugby World Cup and facing a daunting run of early fixtures, Newcastle were always likely to struggle and duly did so, going down 31-16 at Gloucester in their first home game and then losing 37-32 at home to Bristol, before suffering heavy defeats at London Irish 27-10 and 28-10.

Their progress was halted with a battling 19-19 draw at Wasps at the end of October and eight days ago they showed further evidence of their true potential when they took on reigning champions Leicester at the Rec and were slightly unfortunate not to clinch their first win, as the Tigers, with most of their best players back in harness, were held to a dour 12-12 draw.

At least 24 hours later Bath only just managed to scrape a 28-24 win at luckless Bedford, positioned at the foot of the table without a point, that result against the champions, in only their second game of the season suggests that Newcastle are finding their feet and could easily spring a surprise.

Under the shrewd direction of fabled Wasps and England fly half, Rob Andrew, are now leading the charge at the Rec and, in fact, have been something of a bogey side for Bath since they moved into the top flight by winning the second division title in season 1997-98. Encouraged by the considerable financial clout of former chairman Sir John Hall and the honorary appointment of Andrew as Director of Rugby launched the club's resurgence when the game embraced professionalism.

Inspired by Andrew's astute tactical acumen at fly half, Newcastle went on to win the Premiership One title at the first attempt in the 1997/98 season when they completed the double over Bath, and although they were not in the top six last season, they still managed to beat the champions twice on home territory before Bath gained some revenge by winning the return league clash at the Rec.

Newcastle Falcons, and for the 36 year old Andrew, his momentous career which yielded 71 England caps, finally came to a premature end a few weeks ago when a troublesome shoulder injury,

But fortunately for Newcastle, despite recent speculation that he might succeed Clive Woodward as England coach, Andrew has declared his avowed intention of fulfilling his new contract with the Falcons, which would keep him at the club until 2002.

If he were to move on, there is no doubt that it would represent a real setback for the club's administration, following the shock withdrawal of Sir John Hall earlier this year. New owner and club chairman David Thompson, boss of computer company Druid International, is committed to making rugby union a successful enterprise in the north-east capital, as is his chief executive Paul Mackings, but there is no doubt that Andrew is the driving force on the playing side, along with Steve Bates, the first-team coach he brought with him from Wasps three years ago.

Together they made Newcastle, merged with the renowned Gosforth club on the eve of the professional era, into one of the most feared outfits in rugby union, thanks to a formidable pack of forwards and a well organised back line that boasted the likes of Va'aininga Tuigamala, Tony Underwood, Alan Tait and Gary Armstrong.

Of the side that won the championship, Tait and influential forwards Dean Ryan and Gareth Archer, Nick Popplewell and Paul Van Zandvliet have all departed or retired. However Newcastle can still field a powerful, ball winning pack, with the likes of South African prop Marius Hurter and the Scotland quartet of prop George Graham, locks Doddie Wier and Stuart Grimes and flanker Peter Walton providing a daunting threat up front.

Injuries to Underwood, and more recently Armstrong, have hampered Newcastle's cause, but with the return of England fly half Jonny Wilkinson has helped stabilise the back line and he and Tuigamala will surely test Bath's defences to the limit this afternoon.

Intriguingly, Wilkinson is likely to pair up at half back today with Harley Crane, the scrum half who left the Rec only last week to join Newcastle and solve their number 9 crisis. New Zealander Crane, who failed to make the first team in his brief spell with Bath this season, made a highly successful debut against Leicester last week, earning him the man-of-the-match award and having what would have been a match winning try disallowed.

Doubtless, Crane will be only too intent on putting one over on his former squad mates and showing Bath supporters what they may have missed, while his new teammates will be just as desperate to secure their first win, so it looks

