

## vs NORTHAMPTON SAINTS



POWERGEN CUP QUARTER-FINAL SATURDAY 25 JANUARY 2003 KICK-OFF 2.15\*\*\*

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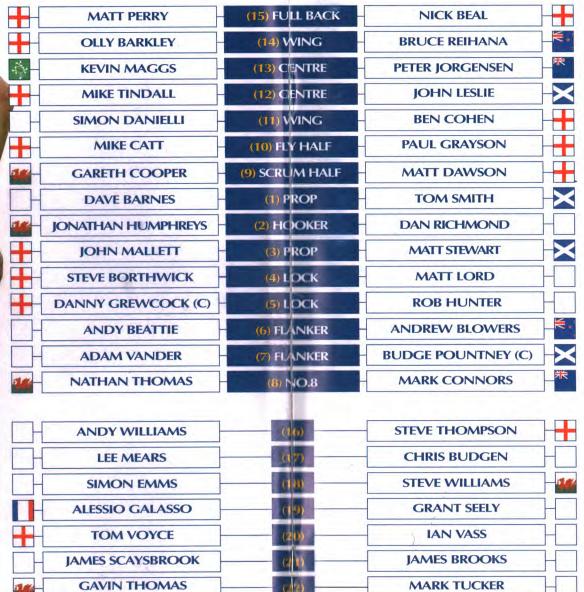
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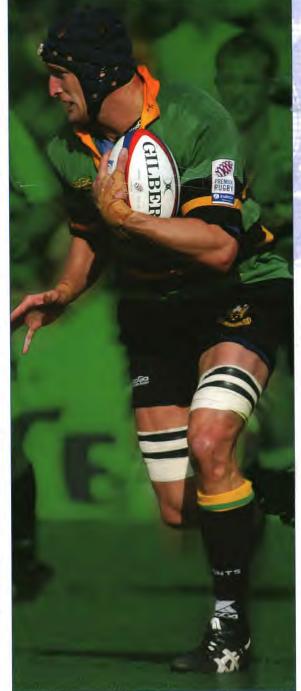




## TEAMS













REFEREE STEVE LANDER
TOUCH JUDGES STEVE LEYSHON
STEVE SAVAGE







## **Northampton Saints**



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or one club the final whistle this afternoon will mark the end of the road in the

Powergen Cup this season. Northampton Saints have already survived one scare in the competition and will arrive at the Rec this afternoon determined not to experience the same palpitations in booking a place in the semi-finals.

The Saints were taken all the way to extra time by a resilient Orrell side at Edge Hall Road, prompting coach Wayne Smith to demand more commitment from his side of stars. Shortly afterwards, the Saints were pipped by title contenders Gloucester and then suffered a defeat at home to London Irish. But since then a gutsy victory over French champions Biarritz in the Heineken Cup has shown that the December woes were perhaps a temporary blip from a Saints side full of promise.

Against Biarritz at a packed Franklin's Gardens, the Saints' season marched the biggest game of the season to date for Smith's side, they produced a performance that was brimming with both commitment and desire.

And so on to today - the Saints will be looking to continue their revival against Bath this afternoon in a competition that they have prospered in over the past couple of seasons. They reached the final at Twickenham last season, only to It will be a memory that will inspire the side to go all the way in the competition this season.

There are no notable chinks in what is an extremely strong Northampton armour. Competition for places is high, and when you have players like talented former All Black Bruce Reihana playing for the club's second string, you know

that Wayne Smith has a glut of very good players to select from.

The Saints mix a very strong pack with a rapier back line. However, it is their excellent work in the set pieces that is Northampton's real strength. The front row triumvirate of Steve Thompson, Mattie Stewart and Tom Smith is possibly the best in England, whilst Mark Connors, Steve Williams and Rob Hunte will ensure that Northampton secure plenty of lineout ball this afternoon. Behind the scrum there is plenty of gas. Matt Dawson has just returned from injury, and take it as no coincidence that the Saints suffered a slump without the sniping runs and big-game experience will ensure that the Saints are able to launch a powerful back line that is brimming with pace.

In the autumn of his career, Nick Beal is playing some of his best rugby, and despite continued rumours of his pending retirement, the full back could well find himself on the plane to Australia in the autumn. Another man who has already secured a place on that flight is Ben Cohen. The prolific winger was a revelation in England's autumn international victories over New Zealand, Australia and South Africa and

Finally, it would not be fair to complete this piece without mentioning Paul Grayson. Once the forgotten man of England rugby, Paul is back to playing his best rugby. A player who is extremely comfortable playing a flat game, Paul has been getting his back line to fire this season with wonderful effect. Despite leaving his kicking boots at home when the Saints played Biarritz a fortnight ago, the marksman will be ready to punish Bath for any indiscretions this afternoon.