

# BATH RUGBY

V NEC HARLEQUINS • SATURDAY 27TH JANUARY 2007 • KICK-OFF 2.15PM



## HARLEQUINS

An overview

## SUPER 14s

A preview

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## MICHAEL LIPMAN

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WORDS | WILL THOMAS PICTURES | CWSPO RTS & GETTYIMAGES

**N**EC Harlequins put the ignominy of relegation to National Division One in 2004/05 behind them by bouncing straight back into the Premiership at the first attempt.

They then bolstered their squad with an exciting blend of youth and experience. England centre Stuart Abbott, a member of the 2003 World Cup-winning squad, made the switch from local rivals London Wasps and has formed an exciting centre partnership with Welsh international Hal Luscombe, who joined from the Dragons. Youngsters such as Danny Care, Adrian Jarvis, Jordan Turner-Hall and Mike Brown have also impressed this season after making the most of their opportunities in the first team.

Since the season began Quins have also signed Craig McMullen and scrum-half Andy Gomarsall, who has rejuvenated his playing career at Quins with a string of

their first four Guinness Premiership encounters by defeats to both Llanelli Scarlets and Sale Sharks to end their interest in the EDF Energy Cup. The Premiership action in October saw Quins' losing streak continue, as they went down to league-leaders Bristol 33-20 at the Memorial Stadium.

Next stop was Connacht in Galway, Ireland, for round one of the European Challenge Cup. An injury-time penalty from Adrian Jarvis broke the duck as Quins impressively beat the Irish province on their own patch 19-18. Quins then treated their fans to an eight-try mauling, including a hat-trick for Mike Brown, in a comprehensive victory over Montpellier 57-10 in round two of European action.

In November Quins secured their first Guinness Premiership victory of the season at the sixth attempt, with an impressive 34-19 home win over Northampton Saints. A first away league victory at Newcastle (44-21) followed, with a first away

of results, Dean Richards received the Director of Rugby of the Month award for November.

However, those five victories were followed by five losses, including back-to-back defeats against today's opponents in the European Challenge Cup, two results that effectively prevented Quins from qualifying for the knockout stages when the pool stages reached their conclusion last weekend.

After a disappointing defeat at home to Saracens (16-20), Quins completed the tough Christmas and New Year period with crucial victories away at Worcester (27-20) and at home against Newcastle (42-15), before getting the better of Bath in a low-scoring affair (9-3) at a rain-soaked Stoop three weeks ago.

With Quins out of both cup competitions, they can now focus all their energies on their remaining Guinness Premiership fixtures this season. They go into today's clash looking to extend their five-match unbeaten run and continue their