

LA CUP DU MONDE V THE WORLD CUP

We have not yet finished this year's Autumn Internationals, the 2003 World Cup is still 12 months away, and yet already the big debate over where the 2007 tournament should be played is in full swing, and opinion seems to be polarised. England? or France.

The two countries are so close geographically, yet so far apart on this issue. Perhaps it is because of this that the rivalry looks set to become intense, or perhaps it is partly heightened by the fact that it is only a two horse race this time. Perhaps a bit of both.

France has put forward a very traditional bid, loyal to previous formats. England however has chosen an ambitious revamp of the make-up of the competition, a real 'Marmite' of an idea – you love it or you hate it. I love it. By introducing a two-tier idea, not only does it enable minor nations to play on a world stage, it also minimises the number of complete mismatches that we have seen in recent years that do no good to the game, the teams involved or the spectators.

The proposal would see a two tier arrangement with the 16 "best" teams playing each other in pool stages, with the quarter finals of old being replaced with another pool stage, a "Super Eight" in two pools of four, where the big guns would meet each other. This way, to be crowned champions of the world, a team would have to play five of the best eight in the world, rather than perhaps be lucky with a draw, as if that would ever happen! By the semi-final, the competition would reach knock-out stages. Technically, there would be fewer games, though those played would in theory be better and more evenly matched.

People are forever harping on about the need to help emerging rugby nations. Why not just get on and do something then? With a parallel competition running alongside, with 32 teams from lesser rugby nations, teams would get a realistic chance at good experience, development, and the funding one would expect from participating in a world event. By their quarter final stages, they would also be joined by the four teams from the main 16, giving the better 'minnows' a chance with some of the big boys. The two-tier idea is not entirely unheard of; it's been working well with Sevens for some time now.

I'm not suggesting that the French proposal is a bad one, just perhaps a little 'samey.' It's time to move on now and approach things differently. They could host a very successful tournament, I'm sure; as no doubt we'll hear once or twice in the coming months, look at the Soccer World Cup in 1998. I can't help feeling though that generating interest in the world's largest sporting event cannot be all that difficult. Could the same be said for another sport, one less main stream? The Commonwealth Games for example – in Manchester maybe? England demonstrated in the summer that they have the capability to put together a well-organised, well-supported tournament where people turned up to enjoy live sport, whatever that might have been. I would be surprised if all of those in Manchester this summer were dedicated followers of athletics, but they got behind the event and made it a great success.

England could do the same with the rugby world cup. There is no shortage of suitable grounds to hold matches in, and due to the size of the country, following a team would not prove difficult as the distances involved simply cannot be that great. I hope that by the time the decision is made in April enough unions will have overcome their fear of change and will back this idea as the only viable option for the development of the game.

England 2007; it has a certain ring to it. Who knows – by then we might be defending champions, too!

Rowen Whittle

'Time for a whole new ball game'

This was the headline to an article by Stephen Jones in the 22 September edition of The Sunday Times.

According to the article, the International Rugby Board is considering new rules to keep goal-kickers in check by restricting the aerodynamic capabilities of the football so that it does not travel so far or so accurately. Their game development officer Geoff Evans has had initial discussions with the ball makers and a decision is expected shortly on whether legislation will be introduced.

Adam Braddock of the product development department of Gilbert said: "We have made balls travel much further and more accurately by altering the weight ratios and other parts of the make-up in manufacture, but we can still make more improvements and get more distance." On a testing machine their new ball – the X-Act – has performed 27% better than previous balls in terms of distance and maintaining trajectory. The other major manufacturers Puma and Adidas forecast similar improvements from their products.

So, if ball making technology continues to advance, successful penalty goals from 80 meters could become a reality!

Should Gilbert, Adidas and Puma be prevented from improving their products or is there an alternative solution? Perhaps the answer lies in the concluding sentence of the article – a quote from Geoff Evans: "But to be able to kick goals from all over the pitch might not be right for a sport in which tries are the main aim."

I believe Geoff Evans is absolutely correct. I also believe that his objective can be achieved very easily – by altering the points awarded for different scores. Here is a possible scenario:

TRY	5 POINTS
TRY CONVERSION	1 POINT
DROP GOAL	1 POINT
PENALTY GOAL	1 POINT
PENALTY TRY	6 POINTS
WINGERS TRY	10 POINTS
WINGERS TRY CONVERSION	2 POINTS

This proposal increases the points differential between a try and goal kicks and gives a definite incentive to score tries rather than kick goals.

If a penalty try is given, no conversion is necessary – it is currently taken from directly in front of the posts and misses are rare, so why bother? The "wingers try" is awarded for a try scored by the winger on the opposite side of the pitch to a line out at the end of continuous play following the line out. I propose the line out and disregard scrums because of the fixed position of the line out.

The implementation of this proposal would achieve the International Rugby Boards wishes, allow the ball and kit makers free to apply the best technology, and make the game much more entertaining to watch (and to play).

Bringing all this close to home, I have been thankful for the composure and skill of Olly Barkley and Chris Malone. After five matches Bath Rugby had amassed 78 points – the lowest total in the Zurich Premiership. Just 10 of those points have come from tries, in spite of the talent in our threequarter line. From my seat in the East Stand I feel desperately sorry for the likes of Tom Voyce and Simon Danielli as they wait in vain for the pass that never comes. Yet, if by some miraculous fluke they do receive the ball with an iota of space around them, what havoc can they cause to the opposition! Remember Tom's run late in the match against London Wasps?

So, my message to the IRB and Bath Rugby is simple. Remove the emphasis on goal kicking and create the incentive for players to run and pass and score tries – that is what Rugby is really all about. It is not, and must not be allowed to become, a lottery decided by which team's penalty taker has his kicking boots on. I, for one, am not prepared to spend time and money watching a never ending penalty shoot-out, like the finale to a dreadful game of soccer. Not when the game of Rugby has so much more to offer.

Bob Dolby



MEMBERSHIP FOR 2002/2003

Prices will remain the same as last year, with many of the benefits also continuing. Full details can be found on the website

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November 2002

'TURNING THE CORNER'

	P	W	L	D	FOR	AGAINST	TB	LB	Pts	Pos
19 Nov 2001	8	2	6	0	106	185	0	3	11	Last
18 Nov 2002	10	3	5	2	175	222	0	2	18	9 th

JC - Out Of Sight Maybe But Not Out Of Mind

It's been a tough few months for Bath Rugby and their supporters. 'Partisan' has been used more than once about the fans at the Rec but we turn out every week out of a love of the game and the club, pure and simple. Still, it's always nice to get some recognition. You may recall this chap who wrote to the Supporters Club recently:

"Please would you pass on this message to the fans that gave the Leeds team and me such a warm welcome last Saturday. It was stunning and it will remain with me for a very, very long time. Personally, it was a big day. I know we got the result, but I hope that it will not overshadow the warmth and kindness showed by the Bath fans."



They are special people for a special club and I know that other rugby establishments around the country recognise that!

Good luck for the rest of the season and hopefully, if I am still in a job, look forward to seeing the Bath faithful up in Leeds in January."

Yours,

JC

Quiz Night

Many thanks to Dave Stock for putting together another successful set of questions, and to June Clough for organizing the event. On behalf of Mike

Tremlett's team, I'd like to point out

that **"we was robbed!"** on the women's 400m question and say that there is a vast difference between that and 400m hurdles, but we'll let it lie this time!

Thanks also to Gareth Delve and Iain Balshaw for coming along.



JUNE CLOUGH PRESENTS THE SHIELD TO THE WINNING TEAM

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For the record then, Richard Graham's hat is not stuck to his head though we can expect it to be replaced with a beanie in the coming weeks as the weather worsens. This does not mean someone can burn the summer version!

Much of the Fans Forum concentrated on the dynamics of the squad both as a squad and highlighting individuals with questions from the floor.

The squad is being built around a specific set of values, building a structured environment that will enable all players to perform and grow, though already Brian Smith tells us that the coaches are, "very happy with what we've got at the moment."

He added: "There is an abundance of courage but at the moment self-confidence is lacking."

The confidence will return, but as with most things it will take time.

There is still anxiety in the team which has been evident in the first half of some games to date as memories of last season are difficult to forget; it's not until the players relax that they will start playing like they can; once they start getting rapid ball they can play expansive rugby.

The coaches tried to give us a clear idea of what they're trying to achieve, and how they intend to get there. Again, the idea of structure came through.

FANSFORUM OCTOBER



Smith said: "A *laissez-faire attitude has its limits. Against a structured defence, you've got to be more organised in attack.*"

Fair enough. They are spending some time with the Under 21 squad and have regular consultations with the coaches in an attempt to both teach them and learn from them. Efforts are being made to tie everything in together and build for the future.

With the Forum taking place in the run up to the Autumn Internationals, the coaches explained how they felt that the hard times of last season would benefit the club in the coming weeks; the younger players who were thrust into the spotlight last year due to injury now have experience of premiership rugby that they may well have to draw on, depending on how many players are called away.

And so what of the plans for next season? They are some way towards their "ideal" squad though evidently there are names

on a top secret shopping list. Names that are penciled in at any rate, depending on how the rest of this season goes. Some names from the current squad already shining were mentioned in a 'stars of the future' way.

Andy Beattie has a big future in the back row and also at 6 which could definitely be a position for the future.

Olly Barkley, having been a revelation to date this season, will probably be used at 10 or 12 and is seen already as an integral part of the squad. The coaches recognise what a talent he is and are keen to use that to the best advantage. With so much resting on his shoulders this year, and with goal-kicking responsibility as well, what happens if anything happens to Olly? Panic not, the kicking duties will be taken over by one of several back-ups we have; Matt Perry, Mike Catt, Chris Malone or Mike Tindall.

Michel Foley correctly predicted that Bridgend would overcome the points deficit against Pau to make them our next opposition in the Parker Pen Challenge Cup. So, no jolly to France but Wales is nice at that time of year, allegedly!

Oh, and somebody asked them whether they'd be supporting England or Australia on 16 November. ???

Rowen Whittle

European Travels - Parma - October 2002

2 o'clock (and a bit) on Thursday morning and we departed Bath for the open road of the M4 and the roadworks of the M25 and M11 to arrive at that most joyous of places, Stansted Airport, in time for a 6.40 (and a bit) take-off.

We flew to Brescia, which is close to Verona, where we hired a car and put foot down for Parma; an experience in itself in a left-hand drive car (therefore with a right hand gear stick) on roads that might have been signposted in the UK during the blackout. We arrived in Parma in the most horrendous downpour and booked into our fiendishly expensive hotel, which was hosting a corporate conference for a Swiss pharmaceutical company. Needless to say, jeans and Bath Rugby jackets did not mix so well with the cosmopolitan business suits - but did we care? We were here to cheer our boys as only Bath's away supporters can.

The weather deterred any exploration other than to the supermarket over the road for a bottle of Johnny Walker (for the equivalent of £5.50 a bottle) and a picnic comprising the ubiquitous Parma ham, fresh anchovies, rolls and salad. "Billy Elliott" in English sent us to sleep and we awoke the following morning to the same downpour and leaden skies. Nothing daunted, we donned waterproofs and were about to yomp across the park into town when who should we bump into at reception but none other than that rugby correspondent chappie from the Chronic! We took the liberty of sharing his taxi into town and set about finding a coffee first and a beer (and a bit) afterwards.

Gradually the rain eased and the Bath shirts began to appear. The Piano Bar in the Piazza Garibaldi fast became the focal point for many of our fellow travellers and was not somewhere from which we strayed far. We were fortunate in that our hotel was only an Olly Barkley kick from the stadium. We had intended to walk the pitch but had been pre-empted by others who declared that, despite a couple of inches of lying water, the ground beneath was firm. (Thank goodness for that, there had been a real fear that the pitch would be waterlogged and the match abandoned - Parma is even further to travel than Newcastle.)

By the time we made our way to the ground, the rain had stopped, the marquee was up, the bar was open and the place was awash with Bath supporters. We did find three supporters from Parma but one was the photographer and the other two were his sons. Vanloads of police adorned in helmets and sporting guns and rubber truncheons were disgorging from their vehicles. (For goodness sake, what were they anticipating - a soccer match?)

So to the concrete stands and the noise when Bath took to the pitch was deafening. The first half was played (according to the coach - allegedly) with "a bar of ***** Palmolive" and, at the break, Bath were only two converted tries to a penalty up on a spirited Parma side.

However, the second half was played with much more verve and the biggest cheer was saved for Pezza when he came on for Voyce after 15 minutes. This was swiftly followed by a gasp when he took his first tackle but then an even bigger cheer when he scored his try. The match, as you will know by now, ended with a final score of 40 points (from 5 converted tries and 1 unconverted) to 3 points from a penalty for G.R.A.N. Parma. A thoroughly satisfactory day.

Later that evening (like after midnight), the players appeared in the Piazza Garibaldi and, not being groupies, we gave them a few minutes before we tracked them down to a little bar in a side street which was evidently the "in" place for the young and trendy. Who should have steered them there but none other, in all his sartorial elegance, than Ade! This was like old times.

Wasps' game was also an evening kick-off and we had debated fiercely beforehand as to whom we were going to support. Wasps? Should do. Parma? Shouldn't do. The ref? Yes! However, true to form, our resolve did not last long following some dodgy decisions and, by the time Leota had put in his third, thoroughly illegal shoulder tackle and was eventually only yellow-carded, Parma were the ones for us.

We had been planning our trip to Pau but, sadly, that's not to be and it's the delights of Bridgend that are the next stop for us. Never mind, we'll be back in Europe proper next season - keep the faith.

Penny Brunton

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For any queries that you may have about Supporters' Club travel, please contact Jan & Mike Warrington on 01305 779336 or see them on the Supporters' Club Table before home games.

KNOW SOMEONE IN NEED OF CHEERING UP?

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RUGBY WORLD CUP AUSTRALIA 2003

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Keep an eye out for further information. Details will be posted on the Supporters' Club website, www.allez-bath.co.uk.



WEDNESDAY 29TH JANUARY
FEBRUARY
MARCH
MARCH
APRIL
JUNE
SEPTEMBER
DECEMBER

SIX NATIONS DINNER, LONDON
BENEFIT GAME, BATH
CURRY & CIDER NIGHT, BATH
CURRY & CIDER NIGHT, LONDON
LONDON IRISH MARQUEE EVENT, BATH
GOLF DAY, BATH
WORLD CUP SEND OFF DINNER, BATH
PARTY IN THE PAVILION, BATH