

FROM THE CHAIR

As I have just taken over as the third Chairman of Rugby Oldham Supporters Trust - following Simon Winnard and Iain Taylor - I thought I should introduce myself to you. My support of Oldham RLFC began in 1968 and has been unwavering since no matter the ups and downs of following a club which has never managed to recapture the glories of the 1950's.

In 1991 my wife and I started the Roughyed fanzine in which, as well as providing some amusing asides, we tried to hold to account the then Board of Directors. I enjoyed an up and down relationship with the club, being a regular advertiser and an occasional contributor to the club programme but always in danger of overstepping the mark. Unfortunately, we were unable to influence the direction of the club and looked on in dismay as it went into liquidation.

When the 'Gang of Four' started Oldham RLFC (1997) Ltd. I volunteered my services as Programme editor, a job I did, hopefully, with some success, until 2004. This was an enjoyable task and I had a friendly working relationship with Chris Hamilton throughout. As proprietors of Saddleworth Sports and School Uniform we were pleased to support the club with sponsorship and advertising, lasting until we retired in 2007.

When Rugby Oldham was set up I became a Board member and have continued in that role since. As our members will know Rugby Oldham has held significant discussions with the professional club and with Oldham Council (in both its Labour and Lib-Dem guises) in an effort to replace the late, lamented Watersheddings.

Although we were not party to the eventual acquisition of Whitebank, we remain supportive. We recognise that Whitebank is not an ideal solution to the problem of developing a dedicated rugby league stadium but while this is the offer on the table we have committed to helping in whatever way we can. Our agreement with Chris Hamilton is ongoing but until the Chairman has positive news regarding ground development we also have no new initiatives to report.

As stated elsewhere in this newsletter, when Dr. Marwan Koukash revealed an interest in purchasing Oldham Athletic and Oldham RLFC and building a new stadium, we made contact to introduce ourselves but, with Simon Corney's unsurprising statement that Oldham Athletic would be staying at Boundary Park, such a deal would appear to be dead in the water as I always thought it would be given that preliminary work had already started on the new Broadway stand.

Given that dual use stadiums work effectively in Hull, Wigan, Leeds, Huddersfield, Halifax, Rochdale etc. it would be nice to think that such a joint venture could operate in Oldham. However, that is a personal opinion and does not appear to be a viable proposition at the moment.

Finally, I would like to thank you all for your ongoing support which enables us to carry out our work with the amateur and junior clubs reported on elsewhere in this newsletter.

I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and hope you enjoy good health and happiness. 'Wealth' may have to wait till we all get lucky!

Regards,

Geoff Cooke, Chairman

GROUND UPDATE

Given the Trust's main ground-related objective, it is important that we bring you up to date with developments in that regard. You will recall that in our last newsletter, last April, we let you know about our commitment to Chris Hamilton to 'provide financial help as and when the second stage of the proposed redevelopment [of Whitebank] occurs' ; this related to the installation of terracing to make the lot of the viewing spectator 'somewhat more attractive than it is at the moment'.

It will come as no surprise to you that our 'update' can be summarised by saying that the Trust's bank balance has not been depleted in any way! The club has made no progress yet in developing Whitebank ; Chris Hamilton has recently told us that he is currently being held up from being able to make an announcement by a third party, very frustratingly. We have therefore had no call to redeem our promise as yet, nor are we currently aware of any timescale within which we might be called upon to do so.

Members may be aware that Marwan Koukash, the new owner of Salford, made some statements a few months ago about the possibility of his also getting involved in Oldham ; indeed , there were some comments about him developing a stadium for the joint use of the town's rugby league and football clubs, which he would take over. We felt that we should not ignore this, given that the club had confirmed that some preliminary talks had taken place, so we made formal contact with Dr. Koukash, in order at least to let him know of the Trust's existence and area of interest. As we write, however, there have been no further developments in this area either.

We therefore continue to engage in our familiar amateur – and youth – RL-related activities, as the newsletter details elsewhere, whilst continuing to maintain what might best be described as a 'watching brief' over the professional club's progress with regard to ground development. It might be over-optimistic, perhaps, to conclude by suggesting that you 'watch this space'!

Ian Wilson , Secretary

Left hand photo: Matty Fletcher is presented with his u13 MOM award by Rugby Oldham Chairman, Geoff Cooke

Right hand photo: Patrick Casey is presented with his u15 MOM award by Rugby Oldham official, Mike Kivlin

JUNIOR FINALS DAY

Watched by a good crowd of parents, relatives, friends and supporters, Junior Finals Day, held under the auspices of Saddleworth Rangers at Churchill playing fields, was a great success with some excellent rugby on view.

Highlight of the day was the U14 game between St. Annes and Waterhead which proved that you don't have to score a lot of points to enjoy a fantastic game as Waterhead ran out winners against their higher Division opponents 1-0. Neither side was prepared to give an inch, each determined their rivals would not score a try. In the end the game was settled by a drop goal scored midway through the first half by Waterhead's Man of the Match Liam Aspin who was selected by sponsors Oldham Past Players Association.

The U12s also turned in an entertaining game with St. Annes defeating Saddleworth Rangers 28-6. St. Anne's Ethan Chiappe was named Man of the Match in a game sponsored by the Oldham Amateur League.

The U13 game was sponsored by Rugby Oldham. In a one sided contest Waterhead overwhelmed Saddleworth Rangers 44-0 with Matty Fletcher of Waterhead chosen as Man of the Match.

The concluding U15 match was also sponsored by Rugby Oldham with Waterhead defeating Saddleworth Rangers 40-0. Rangers play two divisions below Waterhead and put up a spirited show not fully reflected in the scoreline. Patrick Casey was selected as Man of the Match.

Thanks go to Garry Hepworth of the now defunct Oldham Service Area for organising the day. Recent RFL inspired reorganisation of the junior game puts the whole day in jeopardy for the future and someone needs to step into the breach to ensure the Junior Finals continue particularly when there are willing sponsors on hand to help defray costs.



RUGBY OLDHAM AMATEUR CLUB CHALLENGE

Rugby Oldham Amateur Club Challenge									
Team	P	W	D	L	L (u12)	ABP	DBP	Tot	%
Higginshaw	15	11	1	3	-	31	20	86	5.7%
St Annes	19	9	-	10	5	43	22	97	5.1%
Hollinwood	20	6	2	12	5	40	19	86	4.3%
Fitton Hill	24	12	-	11	5	36	14	91	3.8%
Waterhead	24	6	-	18	4	38	14	74	3.1%
Saddleworth Rangers	24	6	-	18	6	28	19	71	3.0%

ABP = Attacking Bonus Points
DBP = Defensive Bonus Points

FINAL TABLE

NB: St Annes record includes a game played but later expunged from official records

2012-13 Was an undistinguished season for the majority of our local amateur clubs. After a bright start Waterhead fell away drastically and finished, together with Saddleworth Rangers, propping up the National Conference League Division One.

At the time of writing it has emerged that Waterhead will be relegated but Saddleworth Rangers have been reprieved. While relegation is a blow for Waterhead in my experience it is no use playing at too high a level for your playing strength: better to play a division lower and regroup with the prospect of winning your share of matches than go through another year of struggle when this can be demoralising. Of course, if you can recruit new and better players this might not apply but there is nothing like winning matches to produce a feelgood factor.

St. Annes fared better in Division Two, but knowing the ambition in the club, that will be no consolation for an, at best, average season. Hollinwood suffer from inconsistency and struggle to raise a side sometimes, especially for some of the away fixtures. So, again, they had to be content with a pretty average campaign.

Fitton Hill & Hathershaw may not be world beaters but there is definite progress and the club's work in its community is to be commended.

This left the way open for Higginshaw to steal a march on our other clubs by enjoying a terrific season of 11 wins from 13 games played. The North West Counties Winter League is not without difficulties as clubs often struggle to raise sides after so many chose to opt for 'summer' rugby and too often advertised matches do not go ahead for this reason. Nevertheless when Higginshaw did play they enjoyed great success which is reflected in the final Amateur Club Challenge table above.

RUGBY OLDHAM JUNIOR CLUB CHALLENGE

Rugby Oldham Junior Club Challenge									
Team	P	W	D	L	L (u12)	ABP	DBP	Tot	%
Waterhead	36	20	2	14	8	71	52	195	5.4%
Saddleworth	31	16	-	15	2	48	38	136	4.4%
St Annes	60	26	1	33	16	94	58	248	4.1%

ABP = Attacking Bonus Points
DBP = Defensive Bonus Points

FINAL TABLE

St. Annes surrendered their title to Waterhead this year as the age groups altered. Almost from the outset Waterhead were the dominant force as the U13's and U14's embarked on largely successful seasons.

St. Annes continued to be the only club to field sides at each of U13, U14 and U15 levels for which they are to be commended. But far more important is the fact that each of our National Conference clubs continues to nurture and develop junior talent.

The clubs and their coaches deserve the highest praise. Long may it continue.

MAN OF STEEL

As ever the Man of Steel competition which is kindly sponsored to the tune of £500 by Joseph Parr (Alco Ltd.) was closely contested.

Players from Higginshaw were handicapped by playing many fewer games than the other clubs while Hollinwood shared their outstanding performances among the usual suspects, namely Andy Gorey, Pete Jackson and Pete Davies.

For Saddleworth Rangers Ryan Moore and Michael Coates earn honourable mentions.

However, the contest in the end came down to one representative from each of the National Conference sides, the top three placings going to 3) Kiel Lancashire of St. Annes 2) Eric Johnson of Saddleworth Rangers and the winner for the second year 1) Dale Lowe of Waterhead.

Competitions administered by Geoff Cooke

NEW OLDHAM RUGBY LEAGUE BOOK NOW AVAILABLE

In the summer of 1957 Oldham were rugby league champions. They had seen off the mighty Hull club in that season's Championship final at Odsal before 62,217 paying customers, having already bagged the Lancashire Cup and Lancashire League championship.

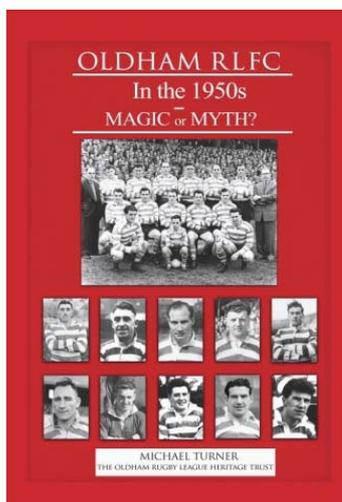
Bill Doran, the Oldham Chronicle's match reporter of the time wrote:

"Not for a long time on the field of rugby have so few brought so much colour into the grimy Oldham life. Off the field, too, Oldham have managed to keep things heated up in the world of controversy. Whichever way you look at it – Oldham's rugby team has given Oldham plenty to talk about. Honestly, I tremble when I think of the disasters Oldham have managed to avert this season. Retirements, transfer requests and revolts have all helped Oldham to be the most talked-about team this century. But Oldham will be best remembered for its rugby – its charming, hair-raising, spine tingling, heart-straining, honest-to-goodness fan-winning rugby."

Twelve months later Sunday People correspondent Phil King wrote an article from his hotel in Sydney about the Oldham contingent on the 1958 Tour, scrum-half Frank Pitchford, prop-forward Ken Jackson and in King's own words the walkie-talkie champion of this or any team Alan Davies. In it he admitted as to how he had rollocked an Australian taxi driver, who, whilst ferrying him to the Sydney Cricket Ground, had suggested that Australia's crack club St George might beat Great Britain if pitted against us en-bloc in a Test. His rejoinder was "Aye, and Oldham would, not might, slaughter St George!" admitting that he was drooling of that sweet moving Oldham passing machine which has thrilled so many North of England rugby leaguers in the last few seasons.

On December 31st 1949 Oldham made the short trip to Belle Vue Rangers and returned having suffered a defeat by nineteen points to six. Likewise, on January 2nd 1960 they had their colours lowered with an unlikely seventeen points to six reverse in the match at Liverpool City.

In between these two defeats was the 1950s; the period in history of Oldham R.L.F.C. which is still the most talked about and, it would appear, the most fondly remembered. Why?



To discover the answer take a trip back to the 1950s, to Watersheddings when Oldham were a team loved by their many supporters, feared by the opposition and appreciated by many.

OLDHAM R.L.F.C. IN THE 1950's MAGIC OR MYTH? Author: Michael Turner

This latest offering from Oldham Rugby League Heritage Trust is a review of every match the club played in that fondly remembered decade, spread over 300 x A4 pages and brought to life with a fantastic array of images, many seen for the first time.

This hard backed book is priced at £20 and available from the Oldham Evening Chronicle, Oldham Rugby League Club, Waterstones, W.H.Smith, Asda Chadderton, and Shaw and Asda Living Oldham.

Readers can also buy the book direct. If you have an Oldham postcode send a cheque for £20 made payable to the Oldham Rugby League Heritage Trust to: The Oldham Rugby League Heritage Trust, 9, Dumfries Drive, Denshaw, Oldham OL3 5SG. Please add £5 for P&P for addresses outside the Oldham area.

XMAS STOCKING FILLERS

Limited stock of Rugby Oldham Sweatshirts, Polos, Umbrellas and Ties all at £10
Orders can be placed by contacting the following: 0161 652 5794 or 01457 875084



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