

# League1895

Issue 3

## Semi-Final Preview!



VS



## Castleford Tigers Season Review!



## Interview with Ryan Brierley!

## Team of the Month!



## Championship Grand Final Preview



**+MORE!**

# EVERYTHING RUGBY LEAGUE



# Semi Final Preview, by Mark Dean



## Wigan Warriors vs Warrington Wolves

Friday night in the First Utility SuperLeague takes us to the DW Stadium for the completion of the Super-League XIX grand final line up.

Current holders Wigan Warriors hosting the losing finalists in 2013 Warrington Wolves for the right to meet, at the time of writing, St Helens who must be red hot favourites to beat Catalans Dragons 24 hours earlier. But writing off the enigmatic Dragons who have nothing to prove and can express themselves has proved a dangerous assumption already in 2014!

### Form

Forget form, previous meetings and league positions for this one, Wigan may have finished 2<sup>nd</sup> compared to the Warrington 5<sup>th</sup>, but with only 2 competition points separating them, in reality this is very much a pick-em game. The psychological edge, having won both previous meetings this season, could be with Wigan however. Such is the level of anticipation for this one, even Wire coach Tony Smith has said he is expecting it could be “a classic” in his teams hunt for a 3<sup>rd</sup> successive Grand Final appearance.

### Players

Squad wise, both coaches have been forced to make, or at least consider changes. Matty Russell returns to the Wolves 19 after the shocking “collision”, it seems to now be referred to, with Macgraff Leuluai! Ben Westwood and Simon Grix both remain absent from the Wolves team sheet. For Wigan, Scott Taylor replaced Gil Dudson in the squad and on paper, Wigan do look the stronger and closer to first choice, the absence of Grix and powerhouse Westwood must be a blow to Tony Smith’s men. The big decision squad wise would have to be surrounding 21 year old Russell for Wire, albeit the option of switching Stefan Ratchford to full-back is an attractive one given his man of the match display against the 2014 ‘surprises’ Castleford Tigers.

### Assessment

Styles make games and Warrington’s more broken style and their open field game threats at first glance seem opposed to Wigan’s structured approach, but I actually think that does a disservice to the Warriors; Shaun Wane’s side are extremely methodical about their defensive and ball in hand work in poor ball, but equally, they have threats all over the field, especially the relationships of the back rowers and centres, not forgetting Matty Bowen joining the line. Personally I have been impressed with Wigan’s three-quarters this season, regardless of who makes up the run-on 13.

There is likely to be a massive coming together in the middle of the field; both teams noted for and pride their work without the ball, so the opening exchanges I would expect to be extremely tight. Assessing the squads and the run in, I have to favour Wigan slightly because of the week off and if their comprehensive dispatching of Huddersfield is anything to go by, Wire have it all to do. In contrast, Warrington went to Castleford last week and won relatively easily in the end, so they should be well set. I expect people to be debating the enigmatic effect of the “week off” effect in the build-up and, result depending claiming it to be a blessing or a curse!

### Prediction

With my bookmakers head on, Warrington would be getting an 8 point start on the basis they are missing 2 definite members of their ‘normal’ 13 and with doubts over Russell that is enough for me to lump this weeks’ housekeeping on Wigan.

Wigan Warriors 22 Warrington Wolves 12

# Championship Grand Final Preview, by @DanFowler97



The two most consistent teams in the 2014 Kingstone Press Championship face off in the Grand Final on Sunday. Leigh Centurions and Featherstone Rovers finished 1st and 2nd respectively in the league so it's a deserved Headingley Grand Final appearance for both.

Leigh Centurions booked their ticket to Leeds with a 33-22 victory over Glenn Morrison's spirited Dewsbury Rams at the Leigh Sports Village. Adam Higson notched a hat-trick for the hosts who have dominated the Championship this season, from start to finish. Higson scored the first two tries of the game on the 3rd and 14th minute respectively. Leigh have been notoriously good at coming out of the blocks fast this season and this game was no different. Dewsbury's high quality scrum half Anthony Thackeray showed why he's so highly rated at the Tetley's Stadium, he got the Rams scoreboard ticking on the 28th minute. Tom Hemingway converted for 12-6. Michael Platt stopped any Dewsbury momentum with the final try of the half. Martin Ridyard helped himself to a conversion, a field goal and a penalty goal which put Leigh 21-6 up at the break.

Ben Hellwell and Joel Farrell scored tries for Dewsbury within the first ten minutes of the second half, creating a sense of belief and hope for themselves and the good following brought by the Rams. Hemingway converted one try, 21-16 to the hosts before Gregg McNally and Adam Higson would dash any Grand Final hopes for the Rams. Tries for the full back and centre gave Paul Rowley's men a comfortable 15 point lead. Dale Morton's converted try decreased the gap to 9 points before Martin Ridyard's second penalty goal of the game confirmed Leigh's place in this year's Grand Final. Both Featherstone and Sheffield knew who the victors were as their game took place at a later time of 6:30pm.

Gareth Moore in the halves and Steve Crossley in the pack stood out for a triumphant Featherstone Rovers, who conquered Sheffield Eagles in a high intensity battle at Post Office Road. The half-time score was 21-0 to the hosts, a thoroughly deserved lead as the Eagles never really got a sniff of scoring in the first 40. Two quick tries for Sheffield in the second half got them back into the game but great Rovers defence kept out Mark Aston's men for the rest of the contest.

Ben Blackmore got the first points of the game, the former Huddersfield man finishing well in the corner. James Lockwood hustled his way over the whitewash on the 20th minute, Moore converted both tries. Then the scrum half scored the try of the game, straight after the restart the ball was flung left to Ben Blackmore who made a sixty metre break before passing to the supporting Moore who scored. The former Batley half back failed to add the extras but redeemed himself with a penalty goal and a drop goal to extend Rovers lead to 21 at the break.

Featherstone would then be under vast amounts of pressure as the back to back Grand Final winners looked to gain some confidence. Peter Green scored a rare try after he latched on to a Briggs grubber. Brambani converted, he would be doing the same again a few minutes later when Laulu-Togagae got his customary try. 21-12 after 48 minutes, a few nervous Featherstone faces around Post Office Road as memories of 2013 came flooding back. But this Featherstone team seemed to have much more steel, a fighting spirit that was easily recognised. Steve Crossley and Matt James were putting in some great shots, whilst Chris Annakin made yards with every burst. Sheffield didn't have enough in the tank to break the Rovers resistance. You have to think if Rovers put up the same kind of defensive performance as they did against Sheffield, the Centurions will have to come up with something special to win.

Can Leigh top off a super season with a Grand Final victory, their first since 2004? Or will Andy Hay's men provide a sweet end to what has been a turbulent season off the field for Featherstone? It's always a date to put in your calendar, Headingley is the only place to be this Sunday!

# Getting To Know – Ryan Brierley



**For this issue, I was lucky enough to speak to Championship's Young Player Of The Year, Leigh's Ryan Brierley. Here's the full interview!-**

First of all, I'd like to congratulate you on your semi-final win over the weekend! Next weekend is the big one. A big stadium, a big crowd. How are you feeling about the Grand Final next week? Nervous?

I'm feeling really good to be honest, it's a massive week for the club so everyone's really looking forward to it and it promises to be a great spectacle for the championship.

**As every Rugby League fan will know, Leigh's year has been very successful. What do you think has been the key to Leighs' success this year?**

Probably how close we are as a team. You can't buy it and you can't teach it. You either have it or you don't. We are a young team and enjoy the banter day in day out at training. Paul Rowley has created a culture everyone enjoys and loves playing for him.

**On a scale of 1-10, how excited are you for the Grand Final?**

10. It's the first grand final I've ever been involved in and it promises to be a great occasion .

**Now for some less-serious questions!-**

**If you could only eat 1 meal for the rest of your life, what would it be?**

Dominoes BBQ chicken pizza.

**What is your all-time favourite movie?**

Home alone.



**When did you first get into Rugby League and who did you support as a kid?**

4 years old my dad took me to our local team and I've loved it ever since, my dad is a massive Salford fan so Salford was my team and still are and I love to see them do well.

**If you could say anything to the Leigh fans, what would it be?**

Thanks for the support you have gave me since I joined the club 3 years ago and it's a massive honour to play for this club week in week out and I have given 100% in doing so.

**What's the most embarrassing song on your phone/Ipod haha?**

A few Justin Bieber tracks haha.

**If you weren't a rugby league player, what do you think you would be?**

Probably a sports coach of some sort, I would like to say footballer but I don't think I would be good enough haha.

**If you were granted one super power, what would it be and why?**

Probably turn back time when ever I wanted. I've had some pretty special memories with my nana what I would love to relive.

**Away from rugby, what do you like to do in your spare time?**

Spend a lot of time with the family, that's where I feel most safe when I'm at home with the family and my dog Oscar watching television, I love X Factor!

# YOUR QUESTIONS FOR RYAN!

@SalfordFaithful asks - Who was your rugby league idol growing up and what's your best ever rugby memory and why?

Danny McGuire. Loved the way he plays and very exciting. If I achieve half the things he's achieved I will retire a happy man haha.



@ACasTigersFan asks - Who do you think is the greatest ever club captain?

Kevin Sinfield, the way he carries himself in such a professional manner is outstanding. If I was made captain I would follow the model he's set in the modern game

@WarringtonFaithful asks - Who is the best player you have ever faced?

Sam Tomkins. We played them in the challenge cup last year and he is frightening, his speed and skill is awesome and he's deceptively strong.

@DanFowler97 asks - Where do you see yourself in five years time?

Hopefully winning the Super League with Leigh Centurions and playing for England. But I know I'm way off that yet so I've got a lot of hard work to do before that.

@salfordrising asks - Are you coming to Salford Red Devils?

Haha, the interest was flattering as I'm a Salford fan but I'm contracted to Leigh Centurions until 2016.

@joshmilner 4 asks - Who is the longest in the showers?

Alex brown!

@DNaylor\_ asks - Favourite place to go on holiday with his good looking mate?

Las vegas. But my mate is very ugly its a shame for him really.

That's all the questions. Thanks again, and good luck for your Grand Final this weekend Ryan!

Thank you for reading guys and I appreciate your support.  
Cheers.



# An Alternative Dream Team, by the Numbers. *By @SuperLeaguePod*

With the season drawing to an end everyone is picking their teams of the year.

We have had the official Super League Dream Team, picked by the journalists looking back over the whole regular season:

1. Zak Hardaker (Leeds) 2. Ryan Hall (Leeds) 3. Michael Shenton (Castleford) 4. Kallum Watkins (Leeds) 5. Tommy Makinson (St Helens) 6. Kevin Brown (Widnes) 7. Matty Smith (Wigan) 8. Jamie Peacock (Leeds) 9. Daryl Clark (Castleford) 10. Chris Hill (Warrington) 11. Elliott Whitehead (Catalan) 12. Carl Ablett (Leeds) 13. Sean O'Loughlin (Wigan)

We've had the League Express Albert Goldthorpe Medal team of the year based on cumulative voting by their match reporters through the season:

1. Morgan Escaré (Catalan) 2. Josh Charnley (Wigan) 3. Michael Shenton (Castleford) 4. Kallum Watkins (Leeds) 5. Justin Carney (Castleford) 6. Kevin Brown (Widnes) 7. Danny Brough (Huddersfield) 8. Taulima Tautai (Wakefield) 9. Daryl Clark (Castleford) 10. Alex Walmsley (St Helens) 11. Brett Ferres (Huddersfield) 12. Gareth Ellis (Hull FC) 13. Joe Westerman (Hull FC)

There has also been the Opta team of the year based on their own player index:

1. Zak Hardaker (Leeds) 2. Justin Carney (Castleford) 3. Kallum Watkins (Leeds) 4. Anthony Gelling (Wigan) 5. Ryan Hall (Leeds) 6. Rangi Chase (Salford) 7. Danny McGuire (Leeds) 8. Chris Hill (Warrington) 9. James Roby (St Helens) 10. Jamie Peacock (Leeds) 11. Elliott Whitehead (Catalan) 12. Liam Farrell (Wigan) 13. Joe Westerman (Hull FC)

And here's another dream team, based on statistics that are provided by Opta but with a subjective angle on what numbers are most important to each position.

What is the criteria for the team I'm about to give you? Regular season games only. A player can only be chosen in their most frequent position played in the season. They have to have played in at least half the regular season games, so minimum 14 appearances.

With a lot of strong performances and a number of different playing styles there does inevitably have to be some subjectivity in what to look for in each position. For outside backs I would favour attacking stats. For halves I will favour kicking and creative numbers. For forwards, work rate and efficiency will be more important. However, all round contribution will be considered too as a deciding factor where there was no clear stand out across all number categories.

## Fullback - Morgan Escaré (Catalan Dragons)



Other notable players - Zak Hardaker, Matty Russell

14 players qualify for consideration at fullback. Oddly, two from Hull KR, because Ben Cockayne played most of his 16 games at fullback whilst Greg Eden qualifies for the list too.

Of those 14 players Morgan Escaré played the most games (all 27) and scored the most tries (27), his average of 1 try per game is the best for any fullback in the 2014 regular season. He was also third behind Eden and Rhys Hanbury for try assists (16).

He's midway down the list for total metres made but his average gain of 9.24 metres per carry was second only to Matty Russell.

Escaré scores a try on 10% of his carries (a try every 10.5 carries) - he leads fullbacks in this category and is second overall to only Joel Monaghan. When adding in try assists too, Escaré tops the list for all Super League players who have played at least 14 games - he either scores or creates on 15% of his carries. He also leads fullbacks (and is second overall to Daryl Clark) in terms of busts or breaks per carry - busting a tackle or breaking the line on 44% of his 284 regular season carries.

In terms of defence Escaré is middle of the pack, not the best but not the worst by any stretch. He's also midway in errors but gives away the most penalties per game of any regular fullback.

Ultimately, he is a player who makes things happen. If you don't enjoy watching him play then you're watching the wrong sport. His numbers well deserved his spot in this team.

**Wing - Joel Monaghan (Warrington Wolves) & Josh Charnley (Wigan Warriors)**



Other notables - Justin Carney, Tommy Makinson, Joe Burgess

There are more wingers to choose from. 30 met the criteria. With more players there are more different wingers who top each of the stat categories.

With wingers though the most important job is scoring tries. Ultimately that's why Joel Monaghan and Josh Charnley made the cut - they were 2nd and 1st respectively in tries per game, the only two eligible wingers to score at a better rate than a try per game.

Monaghan was outright top scorer, getting 28 tries in 24 games at 1.17 tries per game. Actually he had a better strike rate in his fewer games at centre than on the wing, but he qualifies for this team as a winger and I couldn't leave the top try scorer out of the stats dream team. He also leads the way with a league leading number of a try every 9 carries (a try in 11% of his carries). His defensive numbers are also decent, being highly ranked in tackles per game and tackle success percent.

Charnley hasn't played a full season, only making 16 Super League outings. He still however managed to score 19 tries at a league leading 1.19 tries per game. Again, with a wingers job being to score tries, how can you leave out the most prolific winger this season. He also ranks top ten in metres, average gain and clean breaks amongst wingers, as well as making top ten in tackle success.



**Centre - Michael Shenton (Castleford Tigers) & Kallum Watkins (Leeds Rhinos)**

Other notables - Chris Bridge, Dan Sarginson, Joel Moon, Joe Wardle, Leroy Cudjoe, Vincent Dupont, Mark Percival, Anthony Gelling

32 players met the criteria of playing at least 14 games and their most common position being centre. Its a very hard position to pick as although all the players mostly played centre, quite a few that lead different categories do so because of the other positions they spent some time in.

The first one picks himself however. Michael Shenton is joint top for centres in try scoring with Joe Wardle (17) and joint top in assists with Chris Bridge (17). He has kept this up regardless of whether it was Justin Carney or James Clare outside him as well as shouldering the captaincy responsibility. He scored or assisted on 12% of all carries, best amongst centres. He also ranks well amongst centres in metres per game (6th), average gain (4th) and clean breaks (3rd). In addition he is 2nd in tackles per game for a regular centre and top in tackle success rate. In terms of getting scores for his team, there has been none better and all around he has also been the best. A nailed on pick in every team of the year for certain.

Kallum Watkins got the second spot based on all around being the strongest when the attack is complemented by defence and discipline considerations. Watkins is top ten amongst centres in almost all categories, top five in most of those. He doesn't lead many categories, modestly ranked in try scoring in particular, but he more than makes up for it with overall contribution. He is one of only three centres contributing at better than 1 in every 2 games for both scoring and assisting tries (others are Shenton and Gelling). In carries and metres per game only the two Wigan centres in the list do more, but then Wigan's game plan involves more centre play than anyone else. He features high in busts and breaks and is best in the group picked out above for penalties and missed tackles. In the end, it was this all round role that would contribute best to a team's success that got him the nod, although I could have argued a case for a number of centres to go alongside Shenton.

**Stand off - Danny Brough (Huddersfield Giants)**



Other notables - Kevin Brown, Rangī Chase, Blake Green, Gareth O'Brien, Marc Sneyd

17 players were eligible for consideration, but only 6 deserved serious thought - Danny Brough, Kevin Brown, Rangī Chase, Blake Green, Gareth O'Brien and Marc Sneyd. This is because they all averaged at least 1 try assist per game, no other regular stand off did, and creating tries is a key part of their job.

Brough created the most tries (31) and had most assists per game also (1.24). He was lower in tries scored than the others in the select six but he made more attacking kicks and his 9 40/20s put him comfortably ahead of the rest of the league in this momentum changing skill.

**Scrum half - Matty Smith (Wigan Warriors)**



Other notables - Richie Myler, Danny McGuire, Theo Fages, Luke Walsh

14 players were up for consideration for the number 7 shirt in this team. Most of the categories are topped by different players actually.

It was however two key half back stats that won Matty Smith the place - try assists and 40/20s. Smith led both, 25 assists (1 per game) and 4 40/20s. His 1.16 tries or assists combined per game also led the eligible group. His influence in helping his team get scores to win games was simply the highest, which earned him the place in this side.

### Prop - Chris Hill (Warrington Wolves) & Jamie Peacock (Leeds Rhinos)

Other notables - Andy Lynch, Eorl Crabtree, Taulima Tautai, Alex Walmsley



A massive 67 players could be considered in this position based on the criteria set. So many players could stake a claim for so many reasons so I had to start from a basic position of work rate and efficiency. In the end that left me with four players to pick from.

Jamie Peacock has just been a work horse week in week out, reflected in how many times his name has been called in our weekly round ups on the show. He leads all props in tackles (778 - 10th overall in Super League) and carries (519 - 1st overall in Super League). Unsurprisingly, he leads props in both areas on a per game basis too (37.05 tackles and 24.71 carries). He also leads props in metres per game (154.67m). He also tops the eligible props in successful offloads, with 2.33 per game. His efficiency in terms of tackle success and metres per carry are a bit down on other genuine contenders for the team but given his work rate you have to forgive him that really. His effort this year was phenomenal.

Chris Hill has been outstanding and with plenty of end product too. He tops all regular props in tackle success (98.14%) and total metres (3258m - 2nd overall in Super League), and he is second in total tackles (740), total carries (432) and metres per game (125.31m). If that wasn't impressive enough, he had 5 tries and 5 try assists in the regular season as well as leading eligible props in the tries or assists combined per game with 0.38 and in clean breaks also with 0.38 per game.

### Hooker - James Roby (St Helens)

Other notables - Daryl Clark, Shaun Lunt, Josh Hodgson, Danny Houghton



With most teams playing two hookers per game (actually, I prefer to call them dummy halves these days) we have 28 eligible for this side, but I am only picking one. Based on the stats James Roby has to be that one.

Roby's stats blow the rest away. He isn't as explosive carrying the ball as Clark, but other than that he is pretty much peerless amongst Super League dummy halves this regular season. He leads in try assists (20 / 0.77 per game). He leads in tackles (1054 / 40.54 per game - leads entire league) and marker tackles (210 / 8.08 per game). He leads tackle success (97%). He leads carries (513 / 19.73 per game) and dummy half runs (424 / 16.31 per game). He leads total metres (2985). In short, he leads all other regular dummy halves in the stats.

### Second row - Liam Farrell (Wigan Warriors) & Gareth Ellis (Hull FC)

Other notables - Elliott Whitehead, Zeb Taia, John Bateman, Brett Ferres, Carl Ablett

A total of 36 players played at least 14 games and predominantly started in the second row when they played. Only one had numbers that stood out on both sides of the ball - Liam Farrell. Picking a second was harder as finding a second player who performed equally well in attack and defence stats wasn't so obvious.

I will start with Farrell then. He was in the top 10 for all eligible second rowers in the following categories:

Tries (2nd with 12), tries per game (2nd / 0.57), assists (7th / 4), assists per game (9th / 0.19), missed tackles (1st / 12), missed tackles per game (1st / 0.57), tackle success (1st / 98%), tackle busts (8th / 53), busts per game (4th / 2.52), carries (3rd / 350), carries per game (1st / 16.67), metres (2nd / 2608), metres per game (1st / 124.19), average gain (7th / 7.45mpc), clean breaks (1st / 17), breaks per game (1st / 0.81). His only weakness was penalties, where he gave away second most in the group. Given that he ranks first or second in a number of attack and defence categories, his place in the stat dream team can be considered as nailed on.

Pairing him could have been a number of players. In the end it was a player who was consistently above average in most areas without being best in any. From the 36 players to pick from, Gareth Ellis was 3rd in tries per game, 7th in assists per game, 11th in tackle success (but ahead of all the players listed above), 10th in busts per game, 6th in carries per game, 5th in metres per game, 8th in metres per carry and 10th in breaks. Overall it was that 95% tackle success combined with the all around strong involvement that edged it.





## **Loose forward - Joe Westerman (Hull FC)**

Other notables - Sean O'Loughlin, Grant Millington

There are 15 criteria meeting loose forwards and a few can have a case made for inclusion based on their regular season stats.

So it is that Joe Westerman completes the inaugural SLP Dream Team by Numbers. Top ranked in total try assists (9) and second ranked in tries/assists combined (0.44 per game) behind O'Loughlin, he showed enough scoring involvement to satisfy that facet of the loose forward role. In defence his 93% tackle success was not top drawer but his effort of 916 tackles (rank 1) and 33.93 per game (rank 4) make up for that somewhat. He leads loose forwards in carries, both total (488) and per game (18.07). He has the most metres (2760) by some way and is second ranked with his 102.22 metres per game. He is top in total busts and total breaks, first in busts per game and second in breaks per game.



**1. Morgan Escaré**

**2. Josh Charnley 3. Kallum Watkins 4. Michael Shenton 5. Joel Monaghan**

**6. Danny Brough 7. Matty Smith**

**8. Chris Hill 9. James Roby 10. Jamie Peacock**

**11. Gareth Ellis 12. Liam Farrel**

**13. Joe Westerman**

I'm sure there are players you agree with the numbers on, and players you don't - there are some I would have in my own team of the year, and some I wouldn't.

Thanks for reading. If you've enjoyed this piece please search Facebook, Twitter and iTunes for Super League Pod for a weekly podcast you're bound to enjoy.



# Rumours

Just like in issue 2, here's another round-up of all the latest, juicy gossip in the Rugby League world—

***FuiFui MoiMoi is expected to move to England to join a Super League club, after refusing to join another NRL club and have to face his side, the Parramatta Eels. He is reportedly going to sign with Warrington Wolves...***

***Adam Reynolds and the South Sydney Rabbitohs have reportedly opened talks on a contract extension past the 2015 season, however it seems likely that he'll be a free agent VERY soon...***

***Shaun Lunt and Luke Robinson are both rumoured to be moving to the Hull Kingston Rovers for next season...***

***Hull FC are reportedly announcing another signing VERY soon, and it's looking like it could be a centre/second-rower. Insiders suggest it could be Tahu from the Newcastle Knights over in the NRL...***

***Reports that Hull KR are after Terry Campese, with both their play-makers leaving just weeks ago.***

***Reports that Josh Hoffman has been allowed by his club to talk to other clubs. Raiders have reportedly offered him a \$1 million contract...***

***The New Zealand Warriors and the Canterbury Bulldogs are too both interested in Josh Hoffmans' services...***

# 2014 from a Cas fan's Perspective.

## By @ACasTigerFan

I can pinpoint the exact date and time that I became a Cas fan. Exact. No word of a lie. It was the 24<sup>th</sup> September 1999 at 8:15pm; or, to be more vague: 'the last time we were good'. It was a playoff match between the Leeds Rhinos and Cas which was 15 minutes in, and that was the moment I decided to support the opposite team to my Rhinos-fan Dad in order to annoy him. The remaining 15 years, as they say, is history.

Of course, the near-enough 15 year anniversary of my support for the Tigers didn't end particularly well; as they slumped to their 3<sup>rd</sup> successive defeat for the first time this season, getting roundly beaten for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in that run. It was an almost gruesome end to a spectacular season, after which we are all able to say quite confidently that we are, indeed, good. More than that; in fact we were very, very good. We were exciting. We were strong. We were classy. On more than one occasion silverware was within our grasp and yet we exit the stage beaten and tired and, most importantly, empty-handed. Most top-four sides would consider that something of a failure.

Except we're not a top-four side. We're a plucky little town in Wakefield that decided to ruffle a few feathers for a change. I can think of a few seasons where 24-18 down to Leeds with 15 minutes to go we wouldn't have been tough enough to create the spectacular chain of events which ended that game. We would have crumbled to Wigan in the Challenge Cup quarters. We would have never scored an eight-hundredth (depending on who you believe) minute winner against Salford at home. We wouldn't have been favourites for the top-spot with one game to go. Making sense out of this season in so-few paragraphs is a task almost as big as our 18-month turnaround, but what's life without a challenge?

First off we won five in a row to start the season. "So what?" cry Wigan, Saints and Leeds fans. If you want to get your head around that: last season we managed 20 points in 27 games. We managed half that in our first 5 games. Winning kept happening and in April we should have gone top. 28-14 up against Saints with 12 minutes left and we managed to royally f\*\*k it up and lose 28-30. Ultimately, this cost us the League Leaders Shield and at the time I was distraught. It was the hardest defeat I'd had to take in years. However, that's only because it had been years since we'd had a game anything like that, and losing it felt like a kick in the balls from the bigger team. I was worried we'd break and this season would come crashing down before my very eyes.

We bent, but we didn't break. Another loss straight after the Saints collapse was followed by another impressive run; halted by Leeds – our second-biggest nemeses this season. Again, our bubble refused to burst and we powered on from there. We beat Wigan at home in the Challenge Cup: no-one does that, except for Cas it seems (just 28 years apart). We dipped a little after that performance, but again we picked it up again and then one-thing lead to another and before we knew it 2/3rds of the town were flocking to London to pack out Wembley.

What a day. What a fantastic day. Forget that we lost, for a moment (yes, I'm talking to you Rhinos out there). For one day we were in the stratosphere. Everyone in the world, it seemed, cared about our little Castleford Tigers. I'm not usually a crying kind of guy (I cried upon relegation in 06 and promotion in 07) but I was choked up as Jack Fulton led the boys out that day. They made me proud. Leeds played amazingly that day, hats off to them, but the boys, with their fight and effort, showed me that they were proud to be Cas too. As the coach pulled away that evening I remember thinking that I wasn't so-much disappointed at the defeat, I was sad that it could be a while before I got to experience a day as great as that again in rugby league. Here's to next season's cup overflowing too.

We seemed to be picking ourselves up again after that, but in truth we were lucky to get two relatively poor teams at home straight after Wembley in Wakefield and Bradford. Playoff rugby was too much for us after that day, it drained us completely. We got solidly beaten by Catalans to block our second chance at silverware after Saints tried to hand the League Leader's Shield to us. Saints mauled us the week after then Warrington finished us off, but in fairness we were already dead on our feet. That's not to say I'm disappointed in the guys for their end of season efforts: they gave everything. Every one of them radiated pride in the shirt every time they put it on, and that's something we've been sorely lacking these past few years.

So what did we get, if not silverware, that shows how fantastic a season this has been? We got a team, firstly. We got noticed, this time for the right reasons – undoubtedly being the team of the year. We could have another Steve Prescott Man of Steel, and young player of the year, in Daryl Clark. We should also have the coach of the year in Daryl Powell. We rediscovered our pride. We got 'big-game-experience'. We pissed off Salford fans on Twitter endlessly. We got our Classy Cas back. Not since that day almost 15 years ago has it been so good to be a Cas fan.

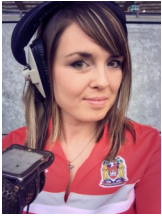
Here's to the next 15 years. If we got anything, we got our optimism back.



# YOUR SAY!

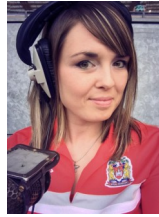
***This issue's edition of 'YOUR SAY' features Alex Hall, Clare Northall, SL Clubs and Henry Taylor. Thanks for getting involved, guys!***

## **Who do we think will win the two semi-finals this weekend?**



**Clare**

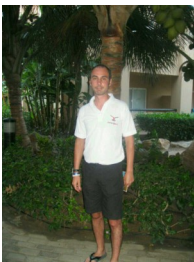
I hate predicting winners, especially when my team is involved. Heart Wigan, head Wire. I hope Catalans can pull off a huge shock, but it will be a tough ask.



**Clare**

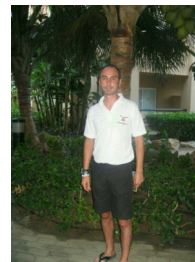
## **What do you think of these nominations? Do you think anyone else has been unlucky not to be included?**

I think the system is much fairer now than what it used to be, when the media voted for the winner. What a farce that was! I don't agree with Roby being in the nominees this year, and I think SOL is unlucky to not get a nod. Injuries at the start of the year will have affected this. However, can't overly complain as the players peers have put these nominations forward in the main. I think Daz Clark, whilst he has had a great year, has gone missing in the 4 crucial games that he should have shone.



**Alex**

Warrington v St. Helens grand final. You heard it here first. I know Wigan have home advantage, but I just have a sneaky feeling that Warrington are coming good. They've shown some serious resilience in recent matches, and won at Castleford far more comfortably than people thought. I fear that the other semi will be a game too far for the Catalan Dragons. Much as I'd like to see them make the final, I think Saints will have just that that bit too much quality for them.



**Alex**

Firstly, I'd like to say that the naming of the award after a true man of steel, is a superb gesture and ensures Steve Prescott's legacy lives on. As for this years nominees, I agree with all four. They have all been stand out players in their respective teams, all of them seemingly carrying their teams single handedly at times! Sean O'Loughlin at Wigan may consider himself a little unlucky not to have been included, but apart from him, I think the panel have got it right. As for a winner, to be a man of steel a player has to not only perform consistently at the highest standards, but persevere and show a willingness to go that extra inch when those around are falling away. To me, there is only one winner, and that has to be Jamie Peacock. He runs his blood to water every week, producing stats that any player in the world would be proud of, and Leeds are a different beast when he is on/off the field.

## **Henry**

I think St Helens will edge out surprise playoff package Catalans and Wigan to beat Warrington by a Stevo favourite one-pointer.

## **Henry**

I think all 4 nominees for the 2014 Steve Prescott Man of Steel award are equally worthy winners who have impressed the nation this year in what in my opinion has been the best ever Super League season. I can't think of any more players who are more worthy of winning the title of the best rugby league player in the northern hemisphere than these 4 players.

I think Jamie Peacock will win the award this year because his workload and eagerness to never get off the pitch is phenomenal.

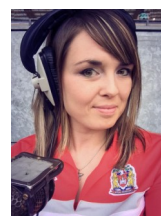


**SLClubs**

Two big semi final games this week! The first being on Thursday which sees St Helens take on Catalan Dragons at Langtree, personally I think Catalan Dragons will take it.

The other semi final game which is on Friday see Wigan Warriors take on Warrington Wolves at DW Stadium. For me I think Wigan Warriors will win.

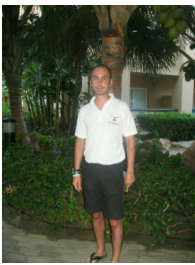
## **Who has been your favourite player to watch this season and why?**



**Clare**

From my own club, Joe Burgess. It's amazing to see a kid bloom and mature in a season right before your eyes. If he hadn't been injured he would have been up there with top try scorer and should definitely have got a YPOTY nod. I like Sarge but I think next season is when we will see his true potential, this year he has still sometimes played like he was playing with London!

Across the comp, Morgan Escare has been electric, and should have been in the Dream Team for me.



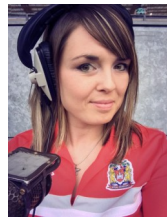
Alex

Although I've picked Jamie Peacock as man of steel, Daryl Clark has been on of my favourite players to watch. He has shown a brilliant attacking brain, and I think his move to Warrington will strengthen them no end. Ryan Hall is another player I could watch all day. The man is a machine, a prop forward in a wingers kit, and his two Wembley tries were simply incredible. I struggle to think of any other player who could have scored them.

## Henry

My favourite players (not one because I couldn't decide between the players) to watch this season have been Morgan Escare with his dazzling tries from fullback, Joel Monaghan with his prolific try scoring record and Daryl Clark with his superb performances from dummy half (I think we shouldn't use the word hooker anymore in RL).

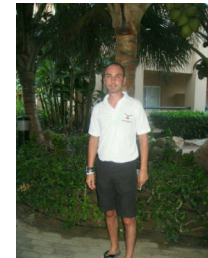
## What has been your favourite moment of the season so far?



Clare

From a club POV, beating Leeds at Magic weekend and the way the club announced Joel Tomkin's return.

From a comp POV, Castleford's fantastic season, which I hope continues next year. Salford bigging themselves up only to flounder was also rather amusing. Don't get me wrong, I want Salford to do well, but sometimes the good Doctor does himself no favours, even with his own fans. He should know when to close down the Twitter app...



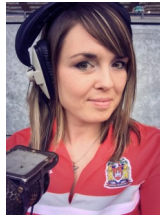
Alex

As a life long Leeds fan, it has to be the Challenge Cup Final. So many years of coming second best finally were put to rest with a dominant display over a Castleford team that have produced so much quality this season. It seems as though the efforts of winning the famous trophy were at a cost of losing the league form, but I think any Leeds fan will tell you that the Challenge Cup finally being in the Headingley trophy cabinets something that we had all been waiting for.

## Henry

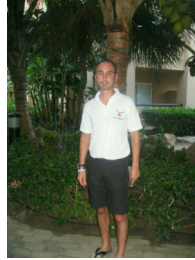
My favourite moment as a London Broncos fan (these moments have been quite rare) has to be our shock win against the Leeds Rhinos with that win spreading all the way to the USA causing the New York Times to fly a journalist over to Underhill (the training ground) to write an article on the club and the game.

## Finally, who will win the Grand Final?



Clare

Until I know who is in the final I'm not committing!



Alex

This match has all the makings of a classic this season. Having gone for a Warrington / Saints final, I'm going to stick my neck out and predict that the league leaders will come up short once again and Warrington will have the title they've been close to in recent seasons. They have the experience of losing in the last 2 seasons to spur them on, added to a quality team, and a top top player, Michael Monaghan, who will be desperate to go out on a high.

## Henry

This is a very tricky question. All 4 semi-finalists are in great form especially Catalan Dragons. It's a tough one to call but I think St Helens will edge it at The Theatre of Dreams. They have had a great year finishing 1st (meaning they are the most consistent team in the league) despite many injuries to cope with (especially main man Walsh) and they managed to hang in there and reach the semis and finish 1st.

# Thanks again guys for getting involved!

# If you would like to feature in League1895's Issue 4 of 'YOUR SAY' be sure to get in touch @League1895!

# Bring Out The Big Guns, *by @alexhall79*

As the RL season draws to a close, thoughts begin to turn towards 2015, when our sport will enter a new era. The RFL has gambled that a new format of leagues will not only maintain the interest of current spectators, but also attract the new spectators needed to keep rugby league growing.

We keep being told that rugby league has the 'ultimate product', a mixture of skill, power and entertainment that few other sports can rival, but there is one thing vitally missing that is holding back that growth, and that is a truly national identity.

With the rugby union World Cup just around the corner, I think it's time that the RFL comes out fighting so that our sport isn't put any further into the background.

Sky's millions have changed the game beyond recognition over the years, and now that BT have the rights to premiership rugby union, it's in Sky's interests to ensure that RL reaches the widest possible audience. The time is right for a huge advertising campaign, making it impossible for the national public to forget about rugby league. It's time to bring out the big guns....

The RFU has begun its World Cup advertising with huge billboards 'Too big to miss'. We need to go go further and use our sizeable national assets that have thus far been underused - our high profile supporters. Sir Bradley Wiggins was employed by Sky for a sensational advert along side Sam Tomkins a couple of years ago. This is where I believe our marketeers need to be heading more. Imagine if you will, not single stars in adverts, but all of them together. Sir Bradley, Lee Westwood hot off the back of the Ryder cup, Paul Scholes and Ryan Giggs, Russell Crowe (through association I know), Hugh Jackman, Mark Webber, Dynamo all with RL connections, and all appealing to the mass public.

So here it is. Sky, and the RFL, it's over to you. Get these people on board and put together a campaign that no one can ignore, and make sure it's our sport that is 'Too big to miss!'.

By Alex Hall

# Team Of The Month -



**MATTY RUSSELL**



**JOEL MONAGAHAN**



**VINCENT DUPORT**



**MARK PERCIVAL**



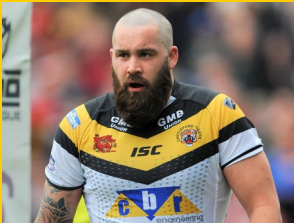
**JOE BURGESS**



**MATTY SMITH**



**SAM WILLIAMS**



**CRAIG HUBY**



**JAMES ROBY**



**CHRIS HILL**



**ZEB TAIA**



**ELLIOT WHITEHEAD**



**HEP CAHILL**

# AN END TO AN ERA BUT NOT THE END OF BULLS, *BY @Greenwoodd*

I know what you're thinking; "Why is she starting a blog now? At the end of the season, there's no point". Well, you have to start from somewhere, right? After "An Evening with the Bulls" I thought it may be a good time to start my blog, almost a review of the season and of what's to come in the future and a final word on Super League before we head into the Championship.

Although we may be relegated to Super League the team at the Bulls has come up with an immense squad. Given that our squad has stayed reasonably the same for 2-3 years now it was clear that we had to revamp it, give it a bit more "oomph" and that's exactly what they've gone and done with announcing 5 new signings at the event and our final signing a few days after. Now, I'm not saying that we need to refresh the whole squad and get rid of everyone; we have some key players that make Bradford Bulls the team we are. O'Brien, for example; A brilliant player, he may not be the star nor stand out but when he plays he makes his mark and makes a big difference. He's showing that he's entering his glory days with how good his performances are getting every week. However, with new signings brings new talent such as Lucas Walshaw and Samir Tahraoui who's 6'6 and weighing about 18-19 stone, the lad is practically a beast. With new players means new skills and new techniques that we can use to gain the wins we want in the Championship. With the combination of old and new players it's clear to see that Bulls will be as strong as ever next season.

Of course, we cannot miss out the main reason Bulls managed to turn the season around, that being our Head Coach, the legend himself, James Lowes. I'm not one to judge and I did like Francis Cummins but once you've lost it in the dressing room you've lost it on the field. I know you need the players to listen and perform too but after constant comments such as "We know our mistakes and will change them around for the next game" week after week and us fans still not seeing any improvements it was clear that Cummins had to go. Now, Lowes wasn't going to get a win straight away but with only 3 weeks in we bagged our first win and from there the only way was up. Bulls managed to bag wins against Leeds and Wigan who are strong teams this season, it's evident that Lowes' hard work has paid off.

We've gone from a bunch of lads who didn't seem to want to play, who never seemed to get near the line and were forever making mistakes to a strong team who play together and work so hard for a full 80 minutes and never want to give up. Sure, we're going to have our off weeks but I'd rather see my team fight for the win even if we don't succeed rather than go into a game with thoughts of "Yeah, we're going to lose, let's just take it steady", which is the kind of attitude they showed towards the start of the season obviously taking into account what was going on off the field, which brings me onto the next main man; Marc Green.

The man: Marc Green. As he stated at the event he doesn't want to hide anything from us, he wants everything to be "transparent and clear". This is exactly what he did. The man has nothing but good intentions for the club even though he'd never set foot on our ground until April. Within the 6 months of him being involved with our club he's become one of us. He interacts with the fans, never mind him being funny and an overall good bloke. His heart is set within the club but also looks at it from a business point of view which is a massive point. Not only are we a sports club but also a business and we need to keep that in mind. We as the fans not only need to get behind the boys and sing our hearts out at every game but also get behind Marc Green and everyone else who play their part in our club.

The Championship will be a breeze for the Bulls and I'm sure we'll be on the minds of every Championship and Super League club. Next year is our year and our turn to make an impact and recreate the years where we went down in history. This is our Bulls, our year and our season; The Championship won't know what's hit them.





# London's New Boys Fact Files, *by @LondonFaithful*

Name: Wes Naiqama  
DOB: 19th October 1982 (31 yrs)  
Place of Birth: Sutherland, NSW  
Current club: London Broncos (from November)  
Junior club: Arncliffe Scots  
International team: Fiji  
NRL debut: 2005 for St George Illawarra  
Positions: CE, FB, WG, 5/8, SR

Clubs:  
St George Illawarra: 2005-07  
Newcastle Knights: 2008-12  
Penrith Panthers: 2013-2014  
London Broncos: 2015-

NRL:  
Games: 121  
Tries: 33  
Goals: 109  
Points: 350

Fiji:  
Games: 15 (4)  
Tries: 5 (1)  
Goals: 46 (11)  
Points: 112 (26)  
( ) = 2013 RLWC

Wes Naiqama (brother of Kevin Naiqama) is currently contracted with the London Broncos in the Kingstone Press Championship until the end of the 2016 season.

Name: Josh Cordoba  
DOB: 29th January 1984 (3, yrs)  
Place of Birth: Wollongong, NSW  
Current club: London Broncos (from November)  
NRL debut: 2006 for Parramatta  
Positions: Prop

Clubs:  
Parramatta Eels: 2006-09  
Hull FC: 2009  
Cronulla Sharks : 2010-2012  
London Broncos: 2015-

NRL:  
Games: 96  
Tries: 4  
Goals: 0  
Points: 16

Josh Cordoba is currently contracted with the London Broncos in the Kingstone Press Championship until the end of the 2016 season after spending 2013 and 2014 in retirement.

Name: Liam Foran  
DOB: 25th April 1988 (26 yrs)  
Place of Birth: Auckland, New Zealand  
Current club: London Broncos (from November)  
Junior club: Eilerslie Eagles  
NRL debut: 2008 for Melbourne  
Positions: HB, 5/8, HK

Clubs:  
Melbourne: 2008  
NZ Warriors and Auckland Vulcans: 2009  
Newtown Jets and Sydney Roosters: 2010  
Manly: 2011-12  
Salford: 2013  
Parramatta: 2014  
London Broncos: 2015-

NRL and SL:  
Games: 21  
Tries: 1  
Goals: 0  
Drop goals: 1  
Points: 5

Liam Foran is currently contracted with the London Broncos in the Kingstone Press Championship until the end of the 2016 season.

# London Skolars 2014 season review by Richard Griffin (@richardpgriffi1)

The season started with high expectations at New River and ended two points shy of a play off place at Enfield. No excuses, Skolars across the whole season just weren't good enough. One or two games aside, they weren't awful, as their impressive tally of bonus points show, but game after game lack of concentration and organisation resulted in far too many unforced errors and easy opposition tries. Frequently the team did not seem to know each other. The good news is that the later part of the season saw marked improvements in performance particularly in defence, but also in attitude. The first half of the last home game against Hunslet for example threatened to be a rout but second half London lifted themselves to put in a credible performance. The final match away at York also saw an impressive team display. That bodes well for next year.

Time now though for the inaugural London Skolars awards for 2014.

- The first award is for the best match (or more accurately the best match I watched) which goes to .... the local derby against Hemel. It is great to have a regular derby and the away win was good but the home fixture was a close, physical and compelling performance. Some great refereeing too which I am afraid to say has been as rare this season as the sight of a member of the RFL's staff south of Castleford.

- Award number 2: the best non Skolars moment. Actually it did involve Skolars and was the game against South Wales at Cardiff. We lost. The Scorpions did the double over us but the reaction of their players, staff and fans almost made it bearable, well nearly - a five hour trip each way made it a tad hard to bear. Scorpions are a club that invests in local talent, rejects DR players, have a great coach in Mike Grady and waves the baton for RL in South Wales. You would have thought they had won the Challenge Cup when they beat us - fair dues given the commitment of the club and the challenges they face.

- Award Number Three is for the best party. Well, the London Broncos v Bradford game a couple of weeks ago nearly won this prestigious category. This was the first time I have been to the Hive. The positive attitude of both sets of fans was incredible. Good game too. The winner though is...Friday Night-Lights. No contest really. FNL was a cracking night with a record 1300 people packing into Enfield. The club chairman hinted to me a couple of weeks ago that there is a strong possibility that FNL will return to Enfield next year. Whatever there is a commitment to play at least one game at Donkey Lane next season.

- The 'best away fans' is the next category. Frankly anyone who takes the time and spends the money to follow a C1 team has my admiration (and sympathy). Oldham provided their normally impressive following but the mini bus worth of Gateshead fans who had probably been travelling down from Tyne and Wear since 2012 were a great bunch. (The less said about the Hemel play off game switch by Gateshead though the better). An award though will also be given to Skolars fans who continued to follow the club in no diminished numbers to Enfield (...who would have thought the pitch replacement at New River would take longer than originally planned? Well every one actually). Gates averaged around 400-consistently one of the best supported teams in C1. Outside FNL, only York got a gate over a thousand all season (against Oldham in the league).

- Next award is the 'best thing about having to move to Enfield award'. The welcome. The footie club, which is fan owned, made Skolars feel really welcome, to the point where by the end of the first game there (against All Golds) it already felt like home from home.

- And next... 'The most positive club development of the year'. The winner is ... Setting up the fans forum. Following RL in London is more a vocation (or punishment) than a past time. Ok, the September meeting was marred by the non appearance of the club official who had apparently resigned, (shame no one told the fans), but actively engaging with fans has been really positive. Goodness knows we are keen (obsessed?). From next season the fans forum will be self organised. Moreover, the clubs and volunteers support for its various youth teams and community contacts remains fantastic.

- Award Seven: 'the least positive development by the club'. The lack of a social media coverage. More Tweets next year please, particularly at away games.

- Player and try of the year award goes to leading try scorer (with 9 tries) Martyn Smith. A discussion amongst Skolar fans also voted Smith's tries a yard out from dummy half, including at York, amongst the best this season.

- and finally the RugbyAM 'best beard' award. No contest - captain Dave Williams. Seriously though we need a better team performance here. The club is based a flat white coffee, craft beer throw away from hipster east London. More and better beards next season please, lads!

Right I am off to hibernate until the Capital Challenge match against Wigan in January (16th) and then it will be the start of Skolars twentieth year of playing rugby league in London. The new League One will have fourteen teams including newbies Coventry Bears. Its good news that we won't have gaps between matches. I can't wait. I have already purchased my season ticket. There is a lot of doom and gloom amongst some RL fans. You know what, this is a great game and with players, officials, volunteers and fans like Skolars I am optimistic.

# Mascots Make Game Days, *by* *@RLLatest*

During September, I ran a competition over on Twitter, Facebook and my website for one week. Little did I know how big this was going to be...

Every Super League mascot over on Twitter got involved, along with Wakefield Chairman, Michael Carter and Salford's Martin Vickers. And of course, the thousands of you fans who tweeted in, liked, shared and voted in the 2014 Best Super League Mascot Award.

It was something that all the Super League mascots on Twitter got involved with and promoted it best they could, with Tigerman and JT from Castleford, Daddy Cool from Wakefield, Rufus the Robin from Hull KR, Buck and Dusty from London Broncos, Wolfie from Warrington and all the rest. Even Hull KR's and Castleford's official Twitter accounts were 'tweeting' about it and discussing who should win the award. It was absolutely fantastic.

This made me realise that Rugby League is one of the few sports that really appreciates and uses their mascots to create game days. I believe that the people behind the masks deserve credit. And boy, they certainly got that during the voting.

People shared their memories and photos on social media of them and their team's mascots and many people managed to fit in 140 characters on Twitter just how good and special their mascots are. Not only this, but the voting itself received over 100 positive comments on their mascots.

It's probably strange to think about this if you're looking from an outsider's perspective: "Eh, there just some people in a costume who turn up to games and get paid for it," but that's completely wrong! During the process, I learnt that not all mascots get paid and some simply do it for the love of their team. Now, for people to turn up and give everyone, from young people to old, a smile on their face is simply a gift. Yes, you may think of it as at the end of the day they're just in a costume, but for the 80 minutes on a game-day, or that 2 hours of an activity, they ARE those mascots and they ARE real!

I might be getting a little carried away, but mascots truly are special, and this whole process made me realise this. Everyone will remember The Challenge Cup semi-final between Castleford and Widnes and what happened to poor Tigerman and JT, but the support they got was incredible. They didn't deserve it, definitely not, but to see the Rugby League community stand up together and look out for one another was simply a great thing to see. There's no other sport quite like it.

In the end, Rufus the Robin won the competition, with just a 0.5% difference in votes between them and second placed Tigerman and JT. And, if you didn't know, Rufus has received his trophy and hopefully he'll be hanging that somewhere where he can go "Yeah, I'm definitely proud of that"

Mascots truly do make game days...



# JACK LOGAN: PAVING THE WAY FOR FC'S FUTURE, *BY @HULLFCFAITHFUL*



Last year Hull FC were all about change, in both personae, philosophy and goals. Departures followed, and arrivals came in. Now at the highest point of the aspirations of this East Yorkshire club is youth. After all youth is the future, the key, and the backbone.

Owner Adam Pearson has hyped it up for virtually the past twelve months, and now with his investment Hull FC are starting to see the results. Four U19 players have made their debuts in 2014, and five have been signed up on professional contracts.

One of those is Jack Logan, and having had the pleasure and opportunity to chat with him, I see a level headed, well respected young man, who has the upmost joy in representing his hometown club.

*Below is his full interview:*

**Evening Jack, first of all congratulations on a good personal showing at Huddersfield, any thoughts on your own performance?**

Evening, and thank you very much, I really enjoyed the match, it was a great taster of what to expect week in week out as a regular in the first team. I think I could have done a little more work in yardage and muscled up more in defence but all in all I'm pleased with my second Super league game.

**What does it mean to you to put on the Hull FC jersey?**

Well every lad that puts on a West Hull, Cottingham Tigers, or any other amateur teams shirt in Hull has that one dream of playing for the team they have supported all their life and I am no exception. It was a great feeling to represent Hull FC in a top flight game and I hope to do plenty more times in the near future. I still get a lump in my throat every time I walk into the changing room before a game.

**Now your debut for the club was against Wigan, one to forget as far as results go, what were your emotions before stepping out at the DW?**

Well Wigan is and always has been a tough place to travel to, from being an amateur to playing Super League. That game was full of mixed emotions for me. On one hand I made my dream come true by representing Hull FC and that is still the only feeling I've taken out that game. On the other hand it was a reality check that even with my few successes and how close I am to the first team, I am still far away physically. Lee (Radford) is really pushing and helping me increase my size and strength with the rest of them and I have a strict season plan to do so.

**Facing all the stars of Wigan must have been a great experience though?**

It was a great experience playing on the same field as the Wigan team, mainly because a few seasons ago I was paying to watch them as a supporter; against the likes of Sean O'Loughlin and Josh Charnley, whereas in that game we had fans paying to watch me play for the Hull FC team.

**Your form for the 19s has been nothing short of sensational this year, what do you put that down to?**

Well thanks for that! I put it down to Danny Wilson, Nathan Freer, and Rob Wilson, all three have helped me progress massively with my one on one skills. I think it also has a lot to do with the AASE program at Bishop Burton College, training in a full-time environment really helps the coaches get more time to plan sessions around each single player's needs. Andy Last had great ambitions last year for the youth and I think Danny and the rest of the staff have helped in making them ambitions a reality. As you know Andy has gone on to the first team now, but him and Radders have had their say and kept in contact with Danny to keep an eye on the youth which has shown with myself, Callum, Jordan and Harry all making debuts this season.

**What you would you describe as your main strengths in the sport of rugby league?**

Well I love having the ball in my hands. I think one of my strengths is my footwork to beat my opposite centre. I also try and win every ruck I'm in whether I'm playing the ball fast or trying to get my opponent on his back to give us more time to set our defensive line.

**Anything you'd like to work on?**

I have a bad habit of throwing the ball away, trying to make a miracle pass. It's something me and the coaching staff have been working on – to stop my little "brain farts!", I would also like to work on my defence a bit to stop getting a bit too far in field and leaving my winger on his own. I would also like to work on my strength and size in the upcoming pre-season.

**The 19s are on a bit of a role, winning the past five games, there must be a strong team bond at the moment?**

There's a word that gets thrown about a lot at Hull and it is 'banter'. There is a lot of it about and it's made us a stronger team. We have team days out with the club and even just going into the city centre for a jolly. The bond in the under 19s is in breakable. We are like a family and as all siblings do we have our tiffs but we soon forgive and forget.

**How far do you think the 19s can go in the play-offs?**

If we keep playing like we have been I think we are unstoppable. We have the team and players to go the Grand Final and win.

**Just like many other members of the academy, you played your junior rugby at Skirlaugh, how much of an influence have they had on your career?**

Skirlaugh helped me play to the best of my ability at the end of my amateur career, but my loyalty lies with Cottingham Tigers. I played most of my junior years at Cott and they helped me play well enough to get on England Youth two years running. I had to move at the age of fifteen as my age group folded.

**So it all started at Cott Tigers, how did you first get involved in playing rugby league?**

Well my inspiration to keep going was in my granddad. He always loved the sport and even though he was a supporter of the other side of the city, he still loved to see the Hull FC we know and love do well. He never missed a game even when he was ill until he sadly passed away. He gathered the strength to get out of bed and watch every DVD of my games. If it wasn't for him I don't think I would be where I am today. He was and always will be that thing in the back of my mind to dig deep and get through anything no matter how hard it gets.

**A 19s star of the past couple of years, you've recently signed your initial first team contract for Hull FC, what did it mean to you to get the deal done?**

It meant the world to me I was like a kid in a candy store! I couldn't believe that my dream was coming true. However, this is only the beginning and I won't ever have to work as hard as I will for the next few seasons coming up. The game is getting harder and a lot more young lads are coming into the game so I will always have to keep looking over my shoulder to keep one step ahead of the younger lads.

**Alongside Janno, Brad, Jordan and Jack (Downs), do you believe your success paves the way for others to follow in your footsteps?**

I do believe that yes but I think that the younger lads need to look beyond us five and look at the likes of Horne and Yeamo. I know when I first got introduced to them I was scared to talk but as a youngster I think if you have a question ask them. They have been through it all and I know Yeamo has helped me come on leaps and bounds since I asked the questions that only a man with his experience could answer.

**With local talent at the forefront for Hull FC's future aspirations, it must be an exciting time to be part of the academy?**

It is really exciting seeing what the U16s (that are stepping up next year) can do; there are some real characters and some lads with huge talent. I think that they can offer us a lot in 2015, and hopefully improve on what the coaching staff have created this year.

**Young Brad Clavering certainly comes to mind. What are your personal goals for the next two years?**

Brad is an outstanding player on the field I think if he knuckles down next year he will have a big future in the sport. I don't want to think too far ahead at the minute, just one step at a time, but I am looking forward to seeing what Radders and the rest of the team have in mind for me for the 2015 season.

**Now the question the fans are all asking, how far do you believe Hull FC can go in 2015?**

My honest opinion is that Hull will have a good season next year. I think we have a great chance in making the top eight – With the talent at the club and the talent coming to the club we will have no problems in competing with the likes of Wigan, Leeds and St Helens, and if we do have an unlucky injury spell down the line we have more than capable young players to replace them.

**Hopefully you'll be a part of that. Thanks for your time Jack and all the best for your future at Hull FC.**

Well thank you for your interest and I hope this helps the fans understand me as a person and a player!

**GET IN TOUCH!-**

**BE SURE TO FOLLOW  
US ON TWITTER-**

**@LEAGUE1895**

**@LONDONFAITHFUL**

**@RLLATEST**