

League 1895

Issue 4



England and New Zealand Ready to go again



EVERYTHING RUGBY LEAGUE



Four Nations Round 3 Previews, by Mark Dean

[@m6xmd](#)

Game 1

Saturday November 8th 0630 UK time, New Zealand aim to take a perfect winning record to the Four Nations final taking on England in Dunedin.

Getting here:

The 2014 Four Nations has certainly thrown up some close games and some talking points, the largest winning margin being inflicted on the current World Champions by the Kiwis in the opening week. Subsequently New Zealand battled past a resilient Samoa 14-12 in a game they will consider themselves fortunate to have won in the end.

England on the other hand showed some promise getting over the Samoans; who have certainly surprised me in how well they have come together; but succumbed once again to a very average looking Australian team on paper, if only games were won on paper! Although this piece is to look ahead to the final round robin fixtures, I am an Englishman so I should declare an interest BUT, looking back at this round of games: I always felt when a couple of decent chances were squandered in a good first half by England, the chance to put the game to bed was lost and felt the Aussie revival would always come, as links worked better as the game went on. Equally, I would not have given the Ryan Hall "try" either, I know this will make me unpopular! Firstly, I always try and look the other way, if England had lost the game on having that 'try' given against them, could I think that was fair? No. On the field, the official and touch judge indicated no try and requested a check to see if Hall got something on it. So for the Video Ref to overturn that, there would have to have been cast iron compelling reason to do so – which one still frame to me did not constitute. I feel the sense of injustice over that "try" is deflecting focus from the real reason England didn't win. A failure to stick to their game, continue to apply pressure and believe in each other's skills enough to get the win. End of moan and looking back!



The squads:

This week, the equation is extremely simple, Australia are going to beat Samoa, barring a complete implosion, which means England have to beat New Zealand by 10+ points. I expect New Zealand to make a couple of changes, being all but mathematically guaranteed a place in the final already, so it is certainly an interesting match up. Stephen Kearney as coach, as he was as a player will be less than keen to invite an England win. The mercurial Kiwis are beatable and capable of turning in an average shift from time to time, as well as of course champagne performances humbling any team.

For Steve McNamara, having had confirmation no action will be taken for the players on report is likely to have the same squad at his disposal it would appear at the time of writing.

I would expect to see few changes, a coach whose team have won one and been edged by the World Champions in the other unchanged probably deserve his faith. Michael Shenton seemed unlucky to have been replaced in the 13 by Dan Sarginson, either seemingly at home at this level. Personally, I felt that Watkins in the other centre wasn't at his best and arguably Shenton and Sarginson could be the right selection, particularly defensively. Although the attraction of club mates at Wing/Centre may prove too strong.

The other speculation seems to be around the hooking role and how much game time Daryl Clark will get. England have appeared at their most dangerous with Clark on the field, but a lot of that freedom is earned in the periods going set for set which Hodgson has taken care of fuss free.

On an entirely personal level, I think the Kiwis are a physical side and although he gets the 80 minutes, I would be tempted in this game to replace Joel Tomkins in the 13 with Brett Ferris getting the start and bring Mike Cooper into the 17 for size and power alone.

It is reported there are no new concerns for New Zealand, given their two from two at the moment, there is little reason to change, but I can see Kearney giving a couple of others a run out this week. I do expect that the breaker of English hearts from the World Cup, Shaun Johnson will keep his place.

Prediction

Given the game is all but dead for the Kiwis and England have to win, I can see England going hard at New Zealand early on, very much like the Australia game. New Zealand, resurgent since their veritable no show in the World Cup Final are a balanced squad and I think the belief will stop this being one sided and bring them back into it in the championship rounds.

I think England might be able to get a win, but sadly, not by the double digits required. 14-20 being my feeling, but not entirely certain in which direction, as a bet, I would be less than 12 points winning margin.

I would be delighted to be wrong, I am an English Yorkshireman so pessimism and I am comfortable bed-fellows, nothing would make me happier and prouder to be wrong and see England make the final; such is the opportunity if they do to take a lead in the psychological battle ahead of the final!

Game 2

Australia versus Samoa WIN Stadium, Wollongong 0500 Sunday 9th November brings the curtain down on the pool fixtures of the 2014 Four Nations. By kick off, virtue of England and New Zealand facing off the previous day, Australia will know exactly what they have to do to make the final.

Getting here:

Samoa have acquitted themselves extremely well during the campaign with few predicting them being so competitive against the top three teams in the world. The first game against England was a high scoring affair and swung back and forth. In week two, the Samoans felt strongly they were on the end of a bad decision which cost them an historic win over New Zealand. Samoa will not need any invitation from Matt Parish to make history and condemn Australia to missing their first major final since 1954!

Australia on the other had seemingly had all their problems pre-tournament with a reported 20+ players missing out; their campaign got off to a chastening start with a sound beating by New Zealand. In a tournament of single digit margins, their 12-30 reverse to the Kiwis will have hurt them deeply. As a squad, there may be players who are not accustomed to this level, but mediocrity is not something that sits at all well with Tim Sheens and finding a will and a way is a characteristic of the Australian teams of the past. I met Mr Sheens during the World Cup in England I found him to continually give me the impression of a simmering temper and I am fairly sure their defeat to New Zealand and the stuttering win over England will not be enough for him or this squad. I am sure he is a nice man, kind to animals and all that, but he scared me a bit!

In this tournament, I have found Australia shadows of the team's I expected. The Samoans have played with freedom and expression, England running with a decidedly new look squad and New Zealand with threat all over, Australia have seemed very stayed and workmanlike in their performances so far, probably a symptom of a number of makeshift pairings and players who possibly feel that their keeping other players shirts warm.

The squads:

I would be lying if I said that I was as acquainted with the Samoan and Australian squads as I am England and New Zealand, so I am going by what I have seen up to present. Samoa seem to have taken their momentum from the World Cup and pushed on to be more than making up the numbers in this tournament, barring a decision they could have beaten New Zealand and the England game could have gone either way for more than an hour. My own personal interest in the squad focussing on the Castleford bound Ben Roberts who has performed solidly, if not spectacularly in the halves.



In terms of this Australia team, it is a far cry from the team who decimated New Zealand in the World Cup final in Manchester, but I think they will still be getting it right enough to take care of business in this game. I anticipate a game plan much more like in the second half against England where we will see a lot more of Inglis, Cherry-Evans and the ever dependable Cooper Cronk providing the cues along with Cameron Smith. Few changes expected as the Aussies seek some continuity and consistency ahead of what will be a bigger test if my predictions come through and they face the Kiwis in the final a week on, if England fail to win by a suitable margin.



Prediction

Nothing like the closeness Samoa have enjoyed thus far in the tournament in my opinion, the combination of the opportunity to make the final and reaction to the media view they "dodged a bullet" against England will push the Aussies to take care of business easily. Particularly paired with Samoa already having achieved so much in the previous rounds but to come up with nothing on the board but new friends. The Australian discipline will see them take all their chances and put together a pretty convincing win.

Australia 22 Samoa 8, my betting head tells me a winning margin above 12.

"Have you just seen what I've just seen?"

By Andy Taylor (@tackle_7)

Those were the words of Sam Tomkins to Australian referee Gerard Sutton as the big screen illuminated with the dreaded 5 letters of NO TRY, in front of a relieved group of Aussie fans at AAMI Park last weekend.

The question we've all asked ourselves this week here in the UK and over in the Southern Hemisphere too is... So was it or wasn't it a try?

Personally, I think the officials who no doubt under intense pressure at the time got this one wrong. At such a critical moment in the game and competition the athleticism of Leeds Rhinos prolific try scorer Ryan Hall's magnificent effort to get on the end of a Liam Farrell grubber was denied. At first instance this would seem the correct judgement. But when utilising the technology available in today's game, in depth analysis would appear to throw a big spanner in the works.



At first viewing the play would suggest the giant figure of Greg Inglis just got enough of a touch on the ball to knock it clear of the dead ball line. However, upon replay the images proved a different story in that there was some kind of disturbance to the ball from Ryan Hall. The screenshot here would prove a certain try.

So why wasn't the TRY awarded?

Well, the Australian video referee Bernard Sutton determined that although the English winger got a touch to the ball his touch was as the ball was rising, no try! Controversial, very, this now meant the ball was in fact knocked over the dead ball line by the Englishman, resulting in a re-start on the 20 metre line in Australia's favour.

The Rugby League world seems split between whether this was or wasn't a try. My understanding is that, if a ball has any type of downward pressure by an attacker when it is in contact with the ground then a try must be awarded. The image here clearly proves this, the officials however on this occasion saw differently.

But, honestly, did you really think the team of Australian officials would have ever given the decision to the Englishmen, ultimately knocking their own nation out of the competition?

Heartbreak for England

By @dan_fcfaithful

The Four Nations excitement continued where it left off in New Zealand, but this time in Victoria, as England pushed their hosts all the way at Melbourne's AAMI Park, in a match they – at one stage – had total control of.

A moment of last minute controversy surrounded the post-match reaction to what was another thrilling test match, as Ryan Hall – on this morning's evidence the world's best winger – was denied his fingertip and desperate effort by the Australian video referee.

Thus England couldn't match the heights of those previous to them; along with Australia, wearing a special kit to mark the 100th anniversary of the Rorke's Drift test way back in 1914, they were toppled once again in the cruellest fashion.

Strongly – and similarly to Samoa – viewed as the better team on the day, but just like the Polynesians, suffered a painful narrow defeat. Ironic, that both fixtures had elements of similarity between them. Just like the Samoans, England led, but for one and many reason, let slip of such an advantage.

A tight forwards battle dominated the first quarter, like for like, it took the introduction of interchange hooker Daryl Clark to spice things up. Under Clark, England played a broad, dynamic, and variable brand of rugby league football, and a brand that brought two try's and an eight point lead at half time.

Good value for it, the tourists were hurting Australia all over the field. The forward pack was on top, England were working the ball, yet were guilty of bombing game clinching chances – something that always comes back to haunt you against Australia, and so it proved again.

Policing the ruck how they wished in the second half, the Aussies took seize of the field, and scored twice themselves, through their most rampant and feared stars; Cameron Smith (assist) and Greg Inglis. I guess you have to give them some credit.

To the outsider and even avid fan, the bizarre decision of selecting Aussie officials was beginning to tell, or so it felt from an English point of view. Not one penalty was awarded to them in the second half, despite the well documented persistent interference at the P.O.B by the Australian defence.

Though to add to the growing field position and penalty count going against them, England were guilty of their own errors and peculiar interchange rotations. They didn't help their cause. Playing cautious, a failure to get more points on the board and be expansive ultimately proved their downfall.

Cue the entrance of the representative rugby debate, as when under -pressure Australia thrive, and has to be partially or even heavily due to their State of Origin experience. The problem was England went hiding in the second forty; pressure was non-existent, and management poor.

Shying away from all that worked before, England went into a one-up zone, and as a result created little – but in fairness had few attacking sets to threaten.

Though there were positives; advocate for 'Rugby League Down South' and test debutant Dan Sarginson had a blinder, and was a pest throughout. James Graham was unbelievable and Matty Smith showed some classy touches.

Evidence of admirable signs, but it's the same old story. Resurrection for Australia. De-ja-vu for England. A familiar feeling of utter dejection for the tourists, as heartbreak hit them once again, and like last year's semi-final against New Zealand, once more right at the death.



Bravehearts Make Four Nations



Scotland have won the 2014 European Championship Cup, claiming a spot in the 2016 Four Nations for their first time.

Scotland Rugby League managed to surprise every rugby league fan in the 2013 Rugby League World Cup, as they managed to make it to the quarter finals, where they were defeated by New Zealand. This year, Scotland have fought off contest from Ireland, Wales and France to claim a spot in the 2016 Four Nations, which is a great step-forward for not only the team, but for Rugby League in Scotland.

Scotland managed to defeat Wales 42-18 and Ireland 25-4, before falling short in their last fixture against France, which left the door right open for Ireland to win the Championship Cup.

A poor performance from Scotland in the first half against France left Scotland in a bad way at half-time: "At half time we were disappointed at the way we had performed and with a few words from Steve [Scotland coach], we knew we had to give it our all if we were to have the chance of qualifying. Then after the game finished, we knew we had left ourselves in with the chance and thought we deserved it.," said Scotland and Leigh Centurions forward, Jonathon Walker exclusively to RLLatest.

Scotland sharpened up for the second half, and managed to finish on a respectable score-line defeat of 38-22, after trailing 38-6 at half time. "It was mixed emotions. The first half wasn't good enough but the way the lads dug in second half really showed what the Scots are about. It gave us a chance to qualify so all we could do was wait!", said Scotland forward and brother of Jonathon, Adam Walker.

And waiting they had to do.

Ireland faced Wales the next day, and this match decided who would win the 2014 European Championship Cup: Scotland, or Ireland.

Finn returned for Ireland giving them a massive boost before kick off, and they had to beat Wales by at least 40 points to win the cup and qualify for the 2016 Four Nations, and it was looking like they would after 60 minutes, as it sounded like they were scoring points for fun.

3 minutes remained and Ireland had to score just one more try in order to claim their spot for 2016, but a run by Ireland's stand-off ended up with Wales' fullback Tom Hughes with the ball from a knock-on on Wales' line, and Hughes ran 95m to score for Wales and ended Ireland's hopes of being the 2014 European Champions.

"We were still nervous waiting up to the Wales v Ireland game but after the result we were delighted and I cannot wait to play against teams such as England and Australia and New Zealand and against some of the best players in the world," said Jonathon Walker.

Talking exclusively to Steve McCormack on the whole weekend, he said: "At half time I just reminded the players of the responsibilities we had as a group of people representing Scotland. We had 2000 people watching us along with our families and the past players from the last 20 years. Our 1st half was not the Scotland way. We have a great team who work hard for each other and that's what we did second half. We reminded them that even though we may not win the game, the tournament could still be won. All credit to the players, they are a fantastic bunch to work with. Sunday was a tough day. We couldn't influence the Ireland v Wales game but so much depended on it. I followed score on Twitter. After final score came through I was immensely proud of what the players have achieved. To win a European Championship and play in Four Nations is just reward for all the years hard work they've put in and time spent away from their families. Top stuff."

No doubt Scotland deserve this after their World Cup in 2013 and this year's tournament, and I hope this can help boost the sport in Scotland and I hope they can carry on to surprise us!

Good luck Scotland!



The Walker Brothers
Picture thanks to @scotlandrl and Gavin Willacy

Super League

2014



Well, there's plenty of things that made the 2014 Super League Season an entertaining one. Castleford Tigers alone made it one of the most exciting, thrilling, unexpected season for a long time. Other things such as London's only win to Leeds, and Salford's surprisingly (maybe not for some) disappointing season contributed, too.



I honestly do believe this was the most exciting, tense season in a long time due to how close the top 8 and the bottom four were and everything else involved in every round of 2014. It wasn't until the last few weeks we finally saw who was definitely in the top 8. At one point, I was sure that Hull KR were going to make it, especially after their shock-draw with the Wigan Warriors, which ended 14-14. Hull FC finished with a disappointing season, and the double-winners last year ended 2014 with no trophies in their cabinet.

St Helens had the most successful season, winning two trophies which they were both expected to lose out on. Shows that a close team can produce anything.

So, I asked you guys to round up your teams' seasons, and in the next 12 section you'll find 2014 Season Reviews to (almost) every Super League team...

Enjoy!



St Helens 2014



By Ste Norris (@spn245)

St Helens entered into the 2014 Season looking to end a 6 year trophy drought.

Marking Nathan Browns second season,

Saints were looking to build on 2013's 5th place finish, we strengthened an already promising young squad with powerful props Mose Masoe & Kyle Amor. We also added the services of Richard Beaumont, Matty Dawson and the major coup of Luke Walsh which we hoped would solve our Half Back troubles.

Regular Rounds

Our season began on a cold Friday night at the Halliwell Jones Stadium against 2013's runners up Warrington which ended in a comprehensive 38-8 victory orchestrated by debutant Luke Walsh who took home the plaudits.

The opening night victory was the first in an 8 game unbeaten run in League and Cup; including impressive victories against Hull FC, rebranded Salford Red Devils, Hull KR & Wakefield.

The end of March during the 8 game unbeaten run Saints took on Leeds Rhinos at Langtree Park, with no fewer than 9 first team players missing Saints produced a brave and defiant performance to secure a valuable 2 points with a try at the death through Tommy Makinson which seemed to take an age to ground.

On the back of the performance against Leeds, Saints produced 2 further last gasp victories, this time against Huddersfield Giants in the Challenge Cup and away to early surprise package Castleford Tigers in Super League thanks to a late Try in the corner from Adam Swift.

Understandably Saints were confident heading into the Easter schedule after some magnificent performances, unfortunately our winning streak came to a crashing halt against arch-rivals Wigan 14-33. Another defeat on Easter Monday at Widnes ensured the Period was a time to forget seeing a relatively inexperienced and experimental side take to the field, Saints without doubt having one eye on the coming weekends Cup clash.

However this gamble did not pay off as Saints exited the Challenge Cup at Round 5 defeated by Leeds 12-32 who later went on to lift the trophy.

Saints got back to winning ways with 48-18 and 50-0 victories against London and Bradford respectively playing some exquisite Rugby League.

Saints then suffered another Magic Weekend humbling at the hands of Warrington 24-41. The defeat brought strong words from Captain Paul Wellens in the after match interview.

The Saints took Wello's Words to heart as Saints finished May on a high with impressive home victories against Huddersfield 41-22 and Salford 32-12.

Saints travelled to Perpignan to face Catalan where they suffered a humiliating 0-42 loss, the defeat was compounded by the serious knee injury suffered by Jonny Lomax which ruled the young full back out for the remainder of the season.

Forming a familiar pattern Saints bounced back from disappointment with a strong 38-16 victory over high flyers Castleford Tigers followed by a pulsating game against Wigan ending 16-12 which ensured Saints remained top of Super League thanks to a outstanding Tommy Makinson finish in the corner.

Following on from a good run of form Saints suffered another loss, this time against Hull KR 40-10 where Saints have not managed a victory since 2007.

Saints then recorded 3 straight victories against Bradford, London and Widnes; Saints were without doubt back on track. However, Saints joy was short lived as during the Widnes match they lost Scrum Half Luke Walsh to a serious leg injury. Saints had also lost Jon Wilkin in the lead up to the game meaning both joined Lomax on the long term injury list.

Following the losses of 3 key ball players Saints were forced to re-shuffle the pack. Saints rotated the likes of Paul Wellens, Lance Hohaia, Gary Wheeler and Jordan Turner in the halves looking for the perfect partnership.

Undoubtedly Saints had to change their playing style from this point forward.

Saints were brought back down to earth with a bump with a disappointing loss away to Hull FC 19-12. This defeat was to prove somewhat of a catalyst for Saints late charge.

With victories against Wakefield and a magnificent win away at Leeds, Saints were propelled into a position to win the League Leaders Shield at home against Warrington, their first since 2008.

The game against Warrington started brightly when Shannon McDonnell crossed early however Warrington proved too good for Saints on the night. Defeat to Warrington was made more painful by the televising of the League Leaders Shield exiting Langtree Park. Saints also lost the services of McDonnell for the remainder of the season with a broken jaw.

Saints travelled to Huddersfield in the final regular round game of the season knowing at least a draw would secure them the League Leaders Shield. However after losing Alex Walmsley early to a red card Saints faced an uphill struggle and eventually lost out to a Leroy Cudjoe drop goal 16-17.

All eyes in St Helens turned to Perpignan as Castleford faced Catalan in their final game of the season. Castleford knew a victory would snatch the League Leaders Shield away from Saints. However it was to be Saints day with Catalan running out the victors seeing the silverware head to Langtree Park.

St Helens finished the season on 38 points, 1 ahead of Wigan, recording 19 victories and 8 losses.

Play Offs

In Week 1 of the play offs Saints faced Castleford Tigers at Langtree Park, following the presentation of the League Leaders Shield Saints tamed The Tigers running out comprehensive 41-0 victors to send them to within 80 minutes of Old Trafford. The game saw the surprise selection of Mark Flanagan at scrum half partnering Lance Hohaia with Jordan Turner continuing his fine form playing at Loose Forward.

Next up for Saints following the final 'Club Call' was surprise package Catalan who had defeated Leeds and Huddersfield in earlier rounds. After a tight start to the match Catalan took the lead through Morgan Escare following a somewhat 'debatable' pass.

However it did not take long for Saints to click into gear as tries from Jordan Turner and Adam Swift helped Saints to a 12-6 half time lead. Following the break Saints added further tries from Willie Manu, Mose Masoe and Mark Percival to send them into a 30-6 lead. Catalan scored a consolation however Saints were heading to Old Trafford with a 30-12 victory.

Grand Final

Despite missing several key personnel for large parts of the season Saints had reached an unprecedented 10th Grand Final to face arch rivals Wigan. With Saints missing key players and Wigan in good form, Saints were facing a tough encounter. Many members of the press could only see this game going one way but to quote an age old adage "Never Write Off The Saints"



In the lead up to the game Wigan were also dealt a blow with influential hooker Michael McIlorum missing the match due to a facial injury picked up against Warrington in the Semi Final. Saints stuck with their makeshift line up seeing Mark Flanagan partnering Lance Hohaia in the halves.

The Grand Final kicked off with a bang, in more ways than one. Wigan prop Ben Flower became the first ever player to be sent off in a Grand Final following an altercation with Lance Hohaia. Saints also lost Hohaia for the remainder of the game through injury. What would have happened had Flower & Hohaia remained? I guess we'll never know...

Following the loss of Hohaia, Saints were forced into several positional changes, one of which saw Louie McCarthy Scarsbrook covering in the Centres. However, despite losing a man early on Wigan still looked the more dangerous side. Matty Smith and Mark Percival exchanged penalties to see the game locked at 2-2 heading into half time. The game was not to reach half time without a try as Wigan broke the deadlock through exciting young winger Joe Burgess. Matty Smith missed the resulting conversion from out on the touchline meaning Wigan lead 6-2 at half time.

Saints came out in the second half refreshed, missing ball players Saints resulted to power down the middle. After 50 minutes Saints got their first Try through departing fans favourite Sia Soliola after he powered through the Wigan defence. Mark Percival added the conversion to send Saints into an 8-6 lead.

A magnificent tackle from Tommy Makinson on Liam Farrell prevented Wigan from replying immediately. Matty Smith then missed the opportunity to draw the sides level putting his penalty attempt wide.

Wigan despite missing a man always looked strong but Saints remained resilient and determined. Following more intense Rugby Saints added a 2nd try through Tommy Makinson coming from a sublime reverse chip from the evergreen Paul Wellens.

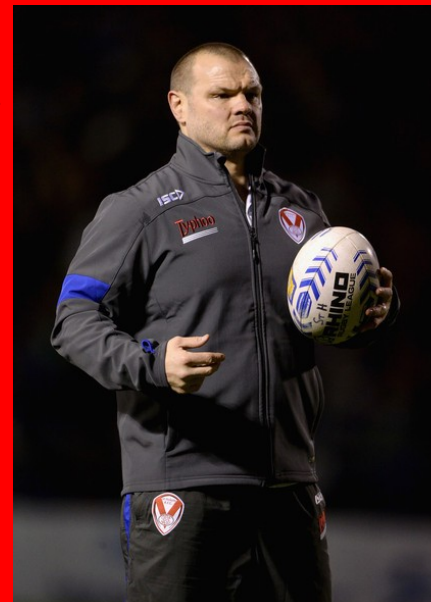
After some more hairy moments Saints remained defiant and were victorious 14-6.

We Are The Champions.

The victory was the farewell for Coach Nathan Brown who had announced his return to Australia. Alongside Brown Saints also waved farewell to Willie Manu, Anthony Laffranchi, Gary Wheeler, Paul Clough, Richard Beaumont, Carl Forster, James Tilley, Shannon McDonnell, Alex Clare, Connor Dwyer and last but by no means least Sia Soliola.

The Grand Final Victory was deserved by fans, players, coaches and board alike.

Looking towards 2015 Saints have added half back Travis Burns and forward Atelea Vea and they face South Sydney Rabbitohs in the 2015 World Club Challenge with new Head Coach Keiron Cunningham.



Now for MY awards, some of you may disagree

Player of the Season – James Roby, what can you say about this man? He's just a machine, some appear to have become used to his high standards week in week out and don't give him the credit he deserves. Also mentions for Sia Soliola, Tommy Makinson and Paul Wellens who wound back the years. Luke Walsh would no doubt have been up there had his season not been tragically cut short.



Young Player of the Season – Mark Percival, you could be forgiven for forgetting Mark is only 20 years of age, this kid looks like he has been in the Saints team for many a year. Strong in defence and quick in attack Mark has the makings of a Saints great. Mark has also filled in goal kicking at the end of the season following coaching from Luke Walsh, Mark returned with 34 goals, only missing 11. Mark ran very close by Luke Thompson who has been magnificent in the pack, 2015 could be his year.



Try of the Season – Any from Tommy Makinson, take your pick, what a finisher! Castleford Away at the corner is one of my favourites, also the footwork for the Try away at Wigan. However 1 try not from Mr. Makinson was Mark Percival's effort at Salford, a break from Soliola, long run, dummy, out to Percival, to Swift, back to Percival and its T R Y time. Also a admirable mention for Sia Soliolas 90 yard 'dash' away at London Broncos.



Game of the Season – For me, again in my opinion, Leeds at home, many players missing, Leeds at full strength and strong, Saints found a way to battle out and find the win. Saints young players Anthony Walker, Luke Thompson, Greg Richards and Andre Savelio lead from the front.

Thanks for reading, enjoy the 2015 season.





Wigan Warriors 2014

By @WiganLockerRoom

In the dark depths of winter the Wigan Warriors made preparations for the new Super League season.

The double winners set out to defend on two fronts, having lifted both the challenge cup and Super League the previous season.

Optimism soon turned to despair as the almost inevitable news broke of Starlet Sam Tomkins departure to the NRL.



The Wigan faithful had barely time to digest the news of the loss of their mercurial talisman when they were hit with a further thunderbolt of Lee Mossop heading out of a seemingly revolving DW door.

Coupled with the already confirmed departure of goal kicking machine and man of steel winner, Pat Richards, fans feared a hard season.

Wigan replaced Tomkins with a man of considerable experience and talent in Matty Bowen. Bowen, an NRL star and fans favourite with The Cowboys. He was leading try scorer in both 2005 and 2007 respectively.

Much was made of the signing and the obvious comparisons to the departing Sam Tomkins. However, Matty Bowen isn't Sam Tomkins. Bowen made it clear that he had much to offer the Wigan club, even at the twilight of a glittering career. He was here to win things, not to pick up a pay cheque.

Wigan's reward for winning the Super League came in the form of an away trip to Australia to face South Sydney Roosters in the world club challenge. The question was, with all of Wigan's departures and lack of replacements

Could they seriously challenge the NRL's top side?



The game was billed as a return to the heady days of World Club Challenge wins gone by. Fans talked about 1987, and the 8-2 victory over Brisbane. But this wasn't the glory days of the 1980s, and as good as the nostalgic reminiscence was for fans, Wigan faced a huge task.

The travelling cherry and white army filled the Allianz Stadium in Sydney.

Wigan gave their all but the speed and skill of the roosters was too much to live with. Charnley's brace of tries on 52 and 59 mins threatened a comeback but the Roosters stepped up a gear and eventually ran out comfortable winners by 36-14. Matty Bowen's first Wigan game was a bit of a wake up call. The team had a long way to go before they could be considered serious challengers for major honours. But what we learned from Australia was that the club did have big performances in them if they could put it all together for the full 80 mins.



Although the score line was disappointing, fans saw enough in the team to regain some of the optimism from the double winning side.



Wigan continued their Super League season on their return from Australia, searching for their first win of the season having been defeated by both Huddersfield and Sydney. That moral boosting victory came on the 2nd of March at the DW, in a comprehensive dismantling of Wakefield. Although the Wigan side didn't have it all their own way, the wildcats running in 24 points of their own in a 46-24 victory for Wigan. The game highlighted defensive frailties, something manager

Wane would want to address and fix quickly. A further demoralising defeat came at the hands of a rejuvenated Castleford side under the guidance of Daryl Powell. In a tightly contested game Wigan eventually fell to a 36-31 defeat. A result which left fans thinking of what if, and the purists pulling apart Wigan's inability to hold on to a lead. Wigan led 24-22 at half time and Matty Smith's drop goal on 79 minutes looked to have snatched a victory back to the DW. But it wasn't to be as Dorn dummied his way over the line in the final second.

That defeat seemed to galvanise the warriors who then went on an 8 game unbeaten run. Games within that period included victories over Catalan Dragons, Hull KR, London Broncos, Dewsbury Rams, as well as fine wins over arch rivals St Helens and Warrington Wolves. The final Super League game of the 8 came against under strength Bradford Bulls. Bradford failed to challenge a rampant Wigan side who eventually ran out 84-6 winners. Wigan's dominance in both attack and defence had returned. Although it was against weaker opposition Wigan had two confidence boosting wins when they overpowered a spirited Hunslet side in the Challenge Cup.

Wigan's run of wins came to an abrupt end away to Leeds Rhinos who ran out 28-12 winners. Wigan would later gain their revenge 15 days later in a pulsating match at the DW, running out 18-14 victors.

Wigan's form in the league continued to be stuttering. Two strong away wins to Salford and Hull FC respectfully were distant memories following defeats to both Huddersfield and arch rivals St Helens. Saints avenged their 14-33 Langtree Park defeat earlier in the season with a 12-16 reverse at the DW in front of a packed partisan crowd. A game which could easily have gone the other way.

By the end of June, Wigan fans were left scratching their heads, some powerful displays at the DW resulted in two 40+ wins, nothing but faint consolation after a heart breaking defeat in the Challenge Cup 1/4, another defeat at the hands of a Cas side who would later contest the final at Wembley.

July saw 4 out of 5, as Wigan began to display the same form that had witnessed an historic double win in the previous season. A surprise defeat away to Bradford Bulls showed that against any side, if you don't show up a defeat is possible.

In August, with Wigan fans watching the Wembley final with envious cherry and white eyes, the club stuttered to a scrappy 14-14 draw away to KR followed by a humiliating away defeat to Denis Bett's Widnes side.

Wigan put the doubters to bed with excellent performances and results against both Leeds and Warrington to end the regular season on a high. Wigan got sweet revenge for Mays defeat at Headingley with a convincing 21-6 victory over a tired looking rhinos side.

Wigan fans had renewed hope when the club entered the playoff fixtures, at home to Huddersfield. The giants had showed good form all season with some solid displays, surprising many. Wigan put in a dominant display running in 57 points with a solitary reply from Huddersfield. The warriors marched on and gave themselves a week off.

Wigan's reward for dismantling the giants was a home semi final game against Warrington. Wigan were just 80 minutes away from a return to the theatre of dreams, and a chance to defend their crown.

The game had everything from the sublime to the pathetic. Monaghan grabbing a try which was dubiously awarded following a contested ball bouncing off the head of Ben Currie. Wigan's defence needed something extra special or fluky to break it. The latter prevailing. Wigan were not to be denied a second successive final appearance as Joe Burgess squeezed over the line from an O'Loughlin pass out wide to shatter the Warrington dreams for another season at least.

Wigan were awarded a penalty deep into Warrington territory and looked to be taking the two points to take the game into golden point extra time. However, Wigan's inspirational leader had other ideas getting a pass out to the Wigan, Burgess evading the wolves cover defence to send the fans into ecstasy.

So Wigan faced arch rivals St Helens once again. This time to contest the biggest prize in British RL.

The fans were ready. The stage was set. James asked fans to "**sit down,**" and buckle in for a frantic 80 minutes at the home of champions.



And then it happened.

Ben Flower responded to a high elbow from Lance Hohaia, first landing a blow which rendered the St Helens man horizontal then disturbingly following through with a second blow. There was only 2 minutes on the clock but the Wigan faithful knew that even with a strong side to play a final with only 12 men was an uphill task.

The valiant 12 warriors battled through the first half ending it ahead 2-6 up after arguably being the better side for 38 pulsating minutes.

At half time the fans sang and started to believe it was their day, despite that moment of madness.

All thoughts of retaining the Super League crown were dashed in the second period as St Helens made their empirical advantage count outscoring Wigan 12-0 and with it lifting a Super League title after 5 devastating losses on the biggest night of them all.

Most of the talk post match was predictably about Ben Flower and his actions. The social media experts vilified the man, many of whom hadn't even watched a Rugby League game before.

When Wigan look back at the season they will see it as a "what if" year. The 12-men showed great courage to hold a rejuvenated St Helens side to just 14 points. The agony of defeat will help the young crop of future Wigan stars dream of final victories in the years to come.



Huddersfield Giants 2014



By @tonia_kate

I can honestly say that 2014 hasn't been the best year to be a Giants fan, but we still finished 3rd in the league! The season has been a rollercoaster ride, full of ups and downs which are part of being a rugby league fan.

The season started off well with a win at Wigan, with many people saying it was because Wigan had their eye on the World Club Challenge in Australia. The regular season ended with a win against St Helens before a disastrous 2 games in the play offs. Between the Wigan and St Helens games, we never really got going. There was some under par performances but still got the wins.

The best player for us has been Joe Wardle. He looked like a man on a mission when he was charging out the line and producing some massive hits and great tackles on the opposition. When Joe wasn't tackling like a machine, he was causing havoc with his attacking skills by running onto the ball and finding the gaps in the defence to set up a try.

The best try of the season in my opinion was Jodie Broughton at Magic Weekend against Bradford. The way he charged down the wing, slowed down to tease Luke Gale and then sped up to get over the try line was amazing to watch. This for me was the best match of the season as it was great to be involved in the non-stop chanting, including in the half time break! Many people criticise us for not being very vocal but we are loud and its quality not quantity that matters.



There were a few unsung players this season. When played, Anthony Mullally was a stand-out player who didn't get the recognition he deserved. He always made metres when he ran the ball in. Aaron Murphy was another player always doing the unseen hard work, as well as Chris Bailey. Luke Robinson has been the bravest player for a while as he spends most matches being knocked out by late and high challenges.

Next season, I hope we win one of the major trophies, I believe this will bring in the people of the town to come and support the great team. Craig Huby and Jamie Ellis will be great additions to the side, with Huby bringing some much needed power in the forwards.

By Tonia Ellis



Warrington Wolves 2014

By @WolvesFaithful



After a fantastic 2013 season ending in heartbreak at Old Trafford against Wigan, you could feel the tides turning. It wasn't just the defeat that hurt, but that the departing players didn't get the rewarding send off they deserved. Mr Warrington Wolves Lee Briers departed, but also key experience such as Brett Hodgson, Adrian Morley, Mike Cooper and Tyrone McCarthy.

2014 wasn't 'our year'. It wasn't expected to be. Tony Smith described it as a 'season of transition', and that basically described our season too.

We started off sluggish. Embarrassed on our own patch by St Helens 38-8, followed by poor performances against Leeds, Hull and London.

If you had said to the Warrington fans after the first 4 games 'you'll be 3 minutes off the Grand Final' they probably would have laughed.

A enormous transition occurred. The shining U19s of 2013 brought us in some fresh faces and gave the place a buzz. Rhys Evans became a regular, scoring 20 tries in the process; Gene Ormsby put a smile on the faces of fans, impressively crossing 14 times in his debut season and youngsters such as Toby King, George King and Joe Philbin made their debuts. Laithwaite, Currie, Ben Evans and Dywer all continued to improved during the season, offering great promise for the future.

Finishing 5th was a exciting prospect for the fans, a chance to do a 'Leeds'. Obviously it didn't happen, but we didn't deserve to reach the final.

A 10 game winning streak from May-July set the tone for the playoffs, with great wins at Hull, Hull KR and Catalan, places we've been known to slip up at in the past.

Wins at St Helens and Castleford in the back end of the season had the fans on a huge high going into the best two games of Super League 2014 against Wigan, just a shame we lost both!



To the fans, wow! How anyone can argue against us as the best fans in the league is beyond me! From being the loudest at the Magic Weekend (again) to bringing the most to Catalan and out singing Leeds and Wigan who both had just beaten us to a final spot! (And having half of super league copy one of our recreated songs! Get your 2015 season ticket and let's do it again!

Now that the seasons over, the players deserve recognition. They nearly made our dream come true.

From the outstanding metres of Matty Russell at fullback, to the 34 tries from Joel Monaghan, to the 5 different combinations of halfback, to the leadership of Michael and Micky, to the metres made by Chris Hill and Co, it was truly unbelievable.

It won't be the same without Michael Monaghan and Trent Waterhouse at the club next year. Both great examples of positive imports from Australia. Michael Monaghan is still to this day the best player I've ever seen in a Warrington top, a true SL great.

Also special mention to the Wakefield bound Chris Riley for his fantastic dedication to the club, harshly treated and all the best.

My top 5 from 2014 (in order) : Chris Hill, Joel Monaghan, Chris Bridge, Ben Harrison, Matty Russell

Has to be Hilly, Man of Steel contention! Great season by Chris Bridge too!

My young player: Gareth O'Brien

Scary our best halfback in only 21, but even scarier that he had agreed to join Bradford! Thank god he's staying!

Try of the season: Gareth O'Brien vs Castleford

Kevin Penny's was in with a shout, but I think the passing in combination with the moment to take us to the semis wins this one!

Moment of the season: a few(!)

- 1) Creation of Allez Allez Allez Oh at Leeds
- 2) Concourse at the Magic Weekend
- 3) Fans turning up in the 70th minute at Hull and silencing the entire ground
- 4) Beating Saints and seeing the trophy being put away :D
- 5) Coming from 18-0 down to beat the local rivals!

Been a better than expected season, here's for 2015!



Leeds Rhinos 2014



By @markstevo72

The best way to review the 2014 season for the Blue'n'Amber is to break it down into 3 parts!

PT.1.

The first 13 rounds of SL were very promising for the Rhinos. We were playing a good brand of RL and had found a defence that was desperate to prevent tries against.

Although our line was breached we had pace and desire to scramble back/hold up the ball carrier which resulted in numerous scores being prevented and in Zak Hardaker we easily had the best FB in SL.

On the attacking front although there was room for improvement we had "on paper" the best back line in SL and they were scoring some cracking tries from all over the paddock.

We were easily on course for a top 2 slot and the confidence was flowing throughout the Club.

PT.2 (Challenge Cup).

The CC was the "holy grail" for a lot of our Golden generation the likes of Sinfield, Mcguire , Burrow who had lost as many Cup finals as they had won GF's so once again the desperation for a Wembley win was apparent.

The Cup run was (a scare against Leigh aside) text book we took our chances defended like our lives depended on it and were worthy winners against the fancied ST's and Wire along the way.

Now history shows getting to the CC final hasn't been a real problem for the Team it's the stage fright that's hit us when we have got there that's been the glaring problem.

So although slight favourites against the most improved Team of 2014 Cas in the final, us regulars weren't counting any chickens whatsoever indeed you could taste the nervous tension in the ground when K.O. came.



Fortunately the "Rugby Gods" smiled and as with the knock out rounds we executed the perfect game plan ,took our chances and strangled the opposition finally the curse had been broken & the "Double" was on...or was it?

PT.3.

The second half of the season was everything the first half wasn't our defence wasn't as sharp ,we had zero attacking shape ,the injuries kicked in ,we had a ban for the in-form Hardaker for a stupid outburst and the "Solo" Coach with his P/T assistants ran out of ideas.

The older squad members and cornerstones of the squad looked their ages and the "next gear" wasn't there when required.

Saying that this squad had the "nous" and "medals" to turn it around come the play-offs so surely there was nothing to worry about unfortunately it never materialised and we exited the play series in RD1 with a whimper against a resurgent Catalan Dragons outfit.

Overall the CC win was excellent but in terms of SL it wasn't good enough losing 10 games which included defeats against the 2 relegated teams just isn't acceptable for this Club that's not a fans naïve over-reaction any squad or staff member at the Club will say the same.

Changes are needed for 2015 both in & out also this "solo" Coach situation with part time help needs sorting ASAP. It's not good enough and despite his record McDermott isn't good enough to go it alone.

We still have some real quality players and potential amongst the youngsters but it's the end of an era as the Club Legends/Immortals reach the end so the transition needs to start now!

Catalan Dragons 2014



By Mark Dean (@m6xmd)

Everyone's favourite away trip, let's have a wee recap of a season of ups, downs, trials and tribulations for the Catalans, not to mention some superb achievements.

Early on:

Spring 2014 brought high hopes to Perpignan and for Laurent Frayssinous, that excitement at the start of the new campaign was very quickly tempered by losing the first five on the bounce; As with a lot of teams the margin was small, had they got over the line against Hull in their Valentine's Day opener, which they lost 36-34, then the tone would have definitely been set better!

The dreadful run early season included chastening defeats at the hands of West Yorkshire neighbours Cas and Wakey 32-6 and 56-14 respectively. It should be said as well, that the Dragons did endure 5 of their first 7 games on the road, which clearly affects them, given they only notched up 4 wins on the road all regular season, with two of them at the beleaguered Broncos. Results early on also compounded by injuries, absences amongst others of Dureau, Webb, Anderson and the early season suspension of Oli Elima,

Adding to the poor start and darkening mood was almost endless media speculation about the position of and "pressure on" the head coach. The stability of the group again tested when one of the poster boys of French Rugby League in recent times, Jamal Fakir was released in March.

The Dragons finally collected their first two points entertaining Huddersfield on March 22nd.

Mid-term:

In the league, the period April to the end of June was golden, notching up 10 wins, 1 loss and 1 draw against Widnes, this period really transformed the season for Catalan, the single reverse coming at the hands of Warrington.

That improvement was recognised in July, Frayssinous was rewarded for his efforts to date and not least for what he was building on and off the field with a new contract; Personally, I was delighted to see a club who had certainly had some mixed results back their man for the long term, it was a good day for the game in France.

Challenge Cup:

An inauspicious campaign really, the Dragons took care of London in Rd 4, but fell to lowly Bradford in the next round.

Undoubtedly at the time, there was not much between Bradford and Catalan in league terms, but it would prove a blessing in disguise for the Dragons in my opinion and their late season form, without the distractions of a cup run had its benefits for the 2007 Challenge Cup runners-up.

The run in:

With bodies back and throughout the season Morgan Escaré catching the eye, the Dragons finished their league campaign with three straight wins, including downing the League Leaders Shield hopes of Castleford on their last appearance in Perpignan for 2014.

The Dragons finished the season in 7th I am sure the club were aiming slightly higher, but after their start to the season, the play offs were a good finish.

The play-offs:

The post season for Catalan was tipped by many to start and end with the perennial end of season achievers Leeds, few would fancy Leeds at Headingley in the play-offs, with good reason. Although the Dragons were in decent form and Leeds had been accused of some cup hangover, after finally taking the Challenge Cup home in August, I don't think many people truly expected a Dragons win. But, win they did in the most dramatic fashion, with Leeds passing from the play of the ball on their own line only in the dying seconds to be dropped by Tom Briscoe which came loose to Sam Powell to send the French players and supporters into raptures. The game finishing 20-24.

Job done, thought the wise heads of the SuperLeague watchers, with a fortunate win against the Rhinos chalked up, Huddersfield were strong favourites a week later, the Dragons once again finding their feet away from home had other ideas. Additional drama of floodlight failure and some concerns the game may not actually go ahead prior to kick off dismissed; this game was tight as a submarine door as Barrie Mac is prone to saying, mistakes on both sides, no lack of ambition and the Video Ref having a busy night. Jodie Broughton having an eye catching length of the field effort ruled out for an obstruction 80 metres back for the Giants.

But, the Dragons prevailed in spite of talk regarding the fitness of superstar Escaré who looked jaded, if not injured. The band wagon rolled on.

The fairy-tale was ended by eventual champions and league leaders Saint Helens at Langtree Park on October 2nd, 80 minutes away from an unlikely showpiece appearance for the French side. Despite taking the lead and the game's opening being a fairly even nervy affair, Saints took a 12-6 advantage to half time and that was as close as matters got, the Dragons toiled hard and kept Saint Helens honest, but the end result rarely felt threatened and the Catalan club bowed out in touching distance of the Grand Final.

Season highlight:

Easiest part of the whole piece to write! Who could question the elation of the Dragons when Sam Powell picked up the spilled ball to score at the death and end Leeds' title hopes? The 20-24, last gasp victory at Headingley was an amazing punctuation point in the campaign and so emotionally charged for all concerned, few neutrals will forget that in a hurry, much as the Rhinos will be trying to.



Leeds, albeit not the team that won back to back titles, beaten in such heart-breaking fashion was mirrored by the elation in the Dragons camp.

In Summary:

As the players headed home; metaphorically, to their own countries, or to Mad Monday I am sure the Catalans group will have had big smiles on their faces in the way their campaign turned out. Sure, they finished 7th and left the season empty handed, but they provided one of the SuperLeague highlights in knocking out Leeds and the second half of the season was very productive for them. If you look at the talent they were without for large parts of the season and those who barely made it on the park, with more luck, who knows what they could have achieved?

New and old faces next season, the interest in how new French stars will grow and perform, especially Morgan Escaré starting the year as understudy and ending it as a superstar.

Much to celebrate and a lot more to look forward to, a young French coach in charge long term, a greater percentage of French players on the roster as each season passes. David Waite deserves a mention, the New South Welshman may have ended his association with the club, but the work he and Laurent Frayssinous have put in to the foundations surely likely to bring greater rewards as we enter a new league structure and brand new competition format..... Allez and still my favourite away trip!

Getting To Know Tyrone McCarthy—



How did you find your year out in Australia and your time with the Northern Pride, and especially winning the Grand Final?

I loved every minute of it, I got see a new part of the world whilst doing something I enjoy. The club and everyone involved were great with me so I am really proud to have been involved in such a successful season.

What attracted you to join Hull KR in the Super League? Were there other options, too?

Yes there were a few options here and a couple of opportunities back in Australia, but I think its the desire in which Chris spoke about changing the club culture and giving the fans a successful team that they deserve .

What do you think you'll bring to the Hull KR squad that will boost the side?

Hopefully a bit of experience from playing in successful sides to help build that environment and hopefully inspire the boys through my own performances too.



Time for the less-serious questions! -

What was your first ever car?

VW Polo.

What was your first job?

My dad took me on the building site when I was 16 straight out of school, and its fair to say that it wasn't what I would call my dream job.

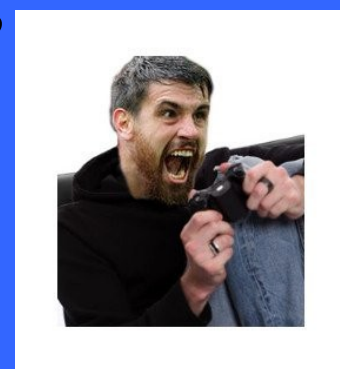
What's your all-time favourite movie?

Hard to single one out, love Will Ferrell films but 'Hot Rod' one he directed is up there!



Do you have any hidden talents/hobbies?

I have never really taken anything up, fancy myself as a decent footballer but I think everyone does don't they? Saying that I am awesome on FIFA!



Thanks to Andy for the photo!

When did you decide it was time for the beard to go?

It has been off and on throughout the year but it tends to go for special occasions, like my brothers wedding.

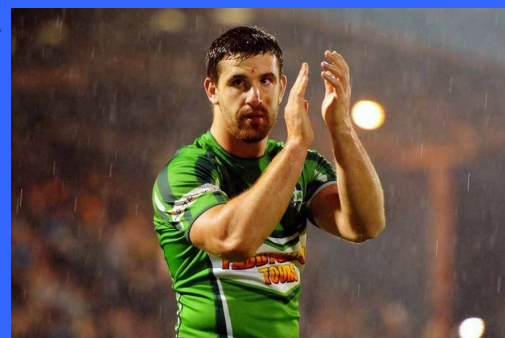
If you weren't a rugby player, what do you think you'd be doing instead?

I'd probably be a teacher/ it's what I did in Australia last year alongside my rugby.

YOUR QUESTIONS!

@jippo90 - What's your career highlight to date, the wins in Aus or the challenge cup wins and scoring in 2012 final?

Difficult to put one over the other, 2012 was special as I played the majority of that season and to score a try at Wembley for your home town is a dream come true and its similar to this year with Northern Pride the club made me feel like one of their own so achieve the success with the boys was very special. Also I put being asked to be vice captain for Ireland last year is something I am immensely proud of and can't wait to get the chance to play in green next year having missed this Euro Champs.



@alfiewolf - How did you find the bedding in period in Australia and how long until you were fully accepted?

The club and boys made me feel welcome from day one, looking after me and my partner, so I'd say after the pre-season training camp I felt I was totally comfortable over there.

@HKR_Analysis - What are you most looking forward to while playing for Hull KR?

Really looking forward to play in a Hull derby but just to play with the great crowd supporting you will be something I am excited to do.

@HFC_news - In your opinion, whats the biggest derby in RL?

Its got to be the Hull derby, everyone enjoys watching them even if you're a neutral.



@the18thman - How did the move to the Pride come about and did you know any of the lads before you signed?

I was looking at opportunities and Jason Demetriou got back to be me about playing over there having spoken to Dave Solomona and it had been something I always wanted to do.

@wolvesfaithful - Looking forward to playing at the HJ in 2015?

It's the first fixture I looked for, the club will always be special to me and loved playing at the HJ and can't wait to do it again.

Thanks again to Tyrone McCarthy for letting us get to know him! Give him a follow on Twitter—@TykeMc

Widnes Vikings 2014



By Sean Hayes (@SHayesNBL)

Challenge Cup semi-final and eighth place in the Super League? No chance!

Bar the odd expletive that would have been the reaction of most Widnes Vikings fans if you had told them at the beginning of 2014 that they would reach their first Challenge Cup semi-final for 18 years and would secure their first ever play-off appearance with an eighth placed finish.



Three years after they were granted a Super League license at the second time of asking the Vikings have proved that licensing wasn't a total failure, with the Chemics progressing from bottom in their first season back in the top division to eighth in their third.

Widnes' 'final year' of their license also proved to be the final year of the current system which we now know will be scrapped for the new improved 'Super 8's' from 2015 onwards. Judging on performances this year Dennis' men will be competing in the top eight, but it won't be that simple with teams around them already strengthening for next season.

Dennis deserves a lot of praise for his side's successful season as some fans have called for his head in the past, yet the club stood by him and this year was reward for the board's loyalty in sticking with the former Great Britain international.

He has built a squad over the past three years which isn't the best in terms of ability but battles with the best and works hard as a unit to progress. Wins over Warrington, St Helens, Wigan, and Huddersfield are proof that they can mix it with the bigger names in Super League and with the work ethic instilled by Betts they can turn them over too.

Players like Willie Isa, Macgraff Leuluai and Paddy Flynn may not be world beaters however they are integral members of the Vikings squad. Willie has moved from centre into the forwards and looks anything but out of place as he lights up the middle of the park with powerful hit-ups and the occasional bone-rattling tackle. Leuluai is tough and never takes a backward step despite being a small forward with his determination in defence and attack at times epitomising what the Vikings are all about. Paddy bagged 18 tries for the Vikings in 2014 which has helped him become a solid Super League winger who knows his way to the try line and has now deservedly cemented his place in side after battling with Owens and Ah Van for one of the two wing spots.



It was a brilliant year for the Vikings which had its ups and downs. The most notable down of the season was the brainless pitch invasion after their semi-final defeat to Castleford which tarnished the club and its reputation however they dealt with the incident in the perfect manner which the club deserve credit for. Along with that they continued their run of defeats at the hands of Wakefield, with the Wildcats recording a double over Widnes and their 6-56 defeat at home to Hull FC was typical of the Widnes of old.

The home record, bar that mauling by FC, was brilliant as they won eight out of thirteen at the Select Security Stadium and out of the top eight teams only Castleford and Leeds Rhinos came to Widnes and picked up two points.

Kevin Brown was in irresistible form, so much so that he was rewarded with his and the club's first ever Dream Team appearance, partnering Matty Smith in the halves. The former Huddersfield half-back led Widnes around the field and was unstoppable when he was at the height of his powers.

Looking ahead for the Vikings they need to recruit well to ensure they are competing in the top eight and don't drop into the middle eight fighting for a place in Super League. To do so they need to beef up the forward pack and add some size to the squad so they can handle the bigger sides and add a strike centre who can come up with that game winning moment in crucial games.

Story of the Season

A fast paced start which saw them win five of their first six gave the Vikings the perfect platform to build their season upon. They had a tough April with trips to Catalan and Warrington proving too much for Betts' side but an Easter victory at home to St Helens was a great end to the month.

A mid-season blip possibly cost them a top six finish as they picked up only seven points in their next eleven games with seven defeats, including a disappointing double defeat at the hands of Wakefield, leaving their chances of finishing in the top eight hanging in the balance.

They needed a big performance to turn things around as they went into their home fixture against fierce rivals Warrington on the back of two defeats. Written off before a ball had been kicked they were up against it and managed to pull off a brilliant 28-14 victory in memory of the late Pat Price who would have been looking down on her beloved team that night. They went on to win their two remaining home fixtures against Hull KR and Wigan, who they added to their long list of scalps, but tough away defeats to St Helens and Huddersfield sent the chase for the eight down to the wire.

A victory in Bradford was enough to secure eighth place for Widnes as they sent an under strength side to Salford with the Red Devils signing off their season with a victory over the Vikings at the fourth attempt. They faced local rivals Warrington in their first ever play-off match and led 18-0 before a second half comeback from the Wolves condemned them to a 22-19 defeat. It was a performance everyone at the club was proud of as they ended the season with a defeat but with the full backing of the fans who had witnessed a brilliant season.





Hull KR 2014

By @HKR_Analysis



Hull KR looked solid going into round 1 of the Super League, despite narrowly losing to rivals Hull FC and Huddersfield Giants. Several additions were made to the squad during the off-season. Rovers' new half back Kris Keating was hoping to fill the gap of Michael Dobson, who had moved on to Newcastle Knights in the NRL.

Round 1 - Hull KR 6-34 Leeds Rhinos:

KR fell to an opening day defeat in front of a record attendance crowd as six unanswered second half tries saw Leeds Rhinos run out 34-6 winners at the KC Lightstream Stadium. Kris Keating on debut with the only try for Rovers. After an opening 40 minutes which saw both sides go toe to toe, the visitors cut loose in the second half with a Tom Briscoe hat-trick and further tries from Zak Hardaker, Danny McGuire and Kallum Watkins sealing the points for the Rhinos. Craig Sandercock handed debuts to all eight of his close-season signings with seven of them making the starting thirteen.

Round 2 - Huddersfield 24-24 Hull KR

Travis Burns secured a 24-24 draw with the last kick of the game, as KR battled back from 24-6 down at the John Smiths Stadium. Omari Caro, Josh Hodgson and Jordan Cox got the Rovers back into the game, before Omari Caro raced 50m down the wing when the full time hooter had sounded and scored in the corner, leaving the score at 24-22 in favour of the Giants with the KTC. Travis Burns coolly slotted the touchline conversion meaning that Rovers secured their first point of the Super League campaign.



Round 3 – Hull KR 10-30 Castleford

Tries from James Green and Omari Caro were not enough to prevent a disjointed Rovers team from being defeated by table-topping Castleford at the KC Lightstream Stadium. Castleford were dominant and proved why they were sat on top of the Super League ladder.

Round 4- St Helens 38-18 Hull KR

After beating St Helens three times out of four in 2013, Rovers were looking to come away with another win against a strong St Helens team. Despite battling back from a slow start with tries through Kevin Larroyer, Greg Eden and Josh Hodgson, the Robins were unable to upset an in-form St Helens at Langtree Park, going down to a 38-18 defeat.

Round 5 – Wigan 34-20 Hull KR

Despite leading at the break, a valiant Rovers side were undone by two late Wigan tries at the DW Stadium as they went down 34-20. Rovers with a growing injury list did very well to handle an impressive Wigan side, although in the end too many errors cost the Robins, who were still looking for their first win on 2014.

Round 6 – Hull KR 16-0 Bradford

Rovers were hoping to end their disappointing start to the season with their first win of the 2014 campaign; The Robins did just that and produced a gritty 80-minute performance to register the win they needed over the Bradford Bulls at the KC Lightstream Stadium. Omari Caro, Kevin Larroyer and Kris Keating all scored in a one-sided game and gave the Rovers their first two points of the 2014 season.

Round 7 - Hull KR 44-6 Wakefield

Doubles from Omari Caro, Kris Welham and Josh Hodgson and tries from Costigan and Keating helped the Robins to an emphatic 44-6 victory over Wakefield at the KC Lightstream Stadium. Rovers were dominant throughout the game and the only lapse in concentration from the home team was a ball which was intercepted by Godinet who scored the visitors only points of the game.

Challenge Cup – Hull KR 24-28 Warrington

Despite a brave effort from Rovers, their hopes of a Challenge Cup run were ended by Warrington at the KC Lightstream Stadium. The Robins kept faith with the same 17 who demolished Wakefield the week before, with Ade Gardner continuing on the wing after extending his loan spell in East Hull until the end of the season. Tries coming from Caro, Gardner, Walker and Cockayne were not enough to produce an upset against the Wolves, who they travelled to the next week

Round 8 – Warrington 12-25 Hull KR

Mick Weyman's brace saw the Robins defeat Warrington and claim revenge for their Challenge Cup defeat the week before. Rovers travelled to the Halliwell Jones Stadium in confident mood having pushed the Wolves all the way in the Cup the week before. Rovers stunned the Wolves through Weyman (2), Keating and Burns' tries, which put them in a confident mood for the upcoming derby against rivals Hull FC.



Round 9 – Hull KR 21-20 Hull FC

Craig Hall's last minute drop-goal sealed a pulsating 21-20 derby win for the Robins at the KC Lightstream Stadium. Rovers went into the first derby of Super League XIX with three consecutive league victories behind them. Tries from Horne (2), Weyman and Larroyer meant it was 20-20 until Craig Hall blasted the ball over from 15 metres to ensure a Rovers victory.

Round 10 – Catalans 37-24 Hull KR

Rovers went into this game confident, after winning their previous 4 league games. Despite brave resistance, the Robins went down to a 37-24 defeat in the South of France. Having put in a big effort to take the derby spoils, the Robins were presented with the tough task of travelling to the South of France to back up against the Catalan Dragons. Tries through Caro (2), Cox and Eden was not enough to secure the two points for KR.

Round 11 – Hull KR 29-34 Widnes

Two tries in the final five minutes saw the Robins defeated by Widnes at the KC Lightstream Stadium. Tries from Gardner, Cockayne, Lovegrove, Welham, Weyman and a drop goal from Burns looked enough to seal the two points, but Widnes scored twice within five minutes which allowed the visitors to snatch two points from the Rovers.

Round 12 – Salford 16-16 Hull KR

A battling performance from Rovers saw them draw 16-all against Salford. After the disappointing defeat to Widnes, the Robins travelled to the AJ Bell Stadium looking to bounce straight back to winning ways. Rovers looked to have taken two points, however a controversial try from Meli, who's foot was in touch as he dived over in the corner, ensured that Salford gained a point from the game.



Round 13 - Hull FC 24-38 Hull KR

Rovers travelled to Manchester to face Hull FC, who were looking for revenge after the 21-20 defeat they suffered at the KC Lightstream Stadium. The Rovers took both points as they were dominant against a poor Hull FC side, who were reduced to 12-men after Jason Crookes' high shot on Liam Salter. Rovers scored through Salter (2), Gardner (2), Larroyer and J Hodgson which sent the Rovers fans back to Hull happy.

Round 14 – Hull KR 48-16 London

Josh Hodgson, Ade Gardner and Craig Hall all scored two tries and Costigan, Walker and Larroyer scored one each as Hull KR hammered bottom side London Broncos. The Rovers were dominant throughout and never gave London a chance of winning.

Round 15 – Castleford 54 – 12 Hull KR

Rovers were demolished by the Tigers in a disappointing performance which saw Castleford run in 11 tries. Burns and Ulugia the scorers for Hull KR. Rovers also lost both Kevin Larroyer and Jordan Cox to broken ankle injuries and also lost Weyman, being shown the red card for dissent.

Round 16 – Hull KR 4-34 Warrington

Rovers' poor form continued as they went down to a 34-4 defeat to Warrington at the KC Lightstream Stadium. Rovers returned to East Hull still stinging from a painful loss at the hands of Castleford a fortnight earlier. Graeme Horne with the only try for Rovers.

Round 17 – Bradford 18 – 44 Hull KR

Rovers got off to a slow start but made the Bulls pay as they went on to score 8 tries through Eden (2), Hall (2), Burns, J Hodgson, Welham and Walker. After the Bulls had sacked their coach Francis Cummins after 21 months dominated by financial difficulties and were hoping to prove a point that they weren't going to be relegated without a fight, however Hull KR ensured that two points comfortably.



Round 18 - Hull KR 22 – 26 Huddersfield

Huddersfield clung on at the death against Hull KR who had fought hard for the two points. Rovers, who were playing in their limited edition military shirts, scored through D Hodgson (2), Welham and Ade Gardner, but it was not enough to snatch the points.

Round 19 – Hull KR 40-10 St Helens

Craig Hall and Omari Caro bagged hat-tricks as Rovers thumped table-topping St Helens 40-10 at the KC Lightstream Stadium. Three days after Craig Sandercock lost his job, the Robins welcomed league leaders St Helens to East Hull. Kevin Larroyer was passed fit to make his comeback from a broken ankle, while Ade Gardner was ineligible to play against his parent club so Omari Caro made his first appearance since scoring two tries against Catalan back in April. Omari went on to score a hat-trick and Craig Hall, who announced he was joining Wakefield earlier that week, also scored a hat-trick, other tries coming from Eden and Horne.

Round 20 – Leeds 30 – 6 Hull KR

A humungous defensive effort from the Robins was not enough to prevent Leeds taking the spoils 30-6 at the Headingley Carnegie Stadium. Rovers travelled to West Yorkshire looking to build on their 40-point demolition of league leaders St Helens. Leeds ran away with it in the end but the score line did not reflect the effort that the Robins put in to stop the strong Rhinos team.

Round 21 – Hull KR 18-38 Salford

A scrappy second half saw Rovers let a winning position slip through their fingers against Salford at the KC Lightstream Stadium. The Robins welcomed the Red Devils to East Hull as they looked to keep up the pressure on Super League's top eight. Coach Chris Chester handed a debut to on-loan Huddersfield forward Jason Chan. Weyman, Hall and Hodgson scored the tries for Rovers but were not able to defeat the Red Devils who were impressive from the start.

Round 22 – London 10 - 62 Hull KR

Greg Eden bagged a hat-trick as the Robins ran in 11-tries in a 62-10 rout of the London Broncos. Rovers made the trip to London still sore from an error-strewn second half which cost them a win over Salford. Coach Chris Chester rang the changes, dropping scrum-half Kris Keating in favour of Craig Hall while under-19s captain Connor Robinson came in on the bench and made an impressive debut for the first team. The Rovers' tries coming from Eden (3), Weyman (2), Salter (2), Walker, Gardner, Larroyer and J Hodgson.



Round 23 – Widnes 28 - 10 Hull KR

Missed first half chances cost the Robins as they slumped to a 28-10 defeat at Widnes. Rovers made the trip to the Select Security Stadium in search of a vital two points in the race for a playoff finish, but were unable to despite tries from Chan and Keating. This pretty much was the end of the Robins' chase for the playoffs, with Widnes now racing 4 points ahead of Hull KR, who sat in 9th.

Round 24 – Hull KR 14-14 Wigan

The Robins suffered last-minute heartbreak as Wigan escaped the KC Lightstream Stadium with a 14-all draw tonight. Tries from Cockayne, Chan and Hall looked enough to secure the two points against second-placed Wigan, however, right on the full-time siren, Wigan scored and snatched a point from the jaws of defeat against a Rovers side who deserved both points.

Round 25 – Hull FC 28-0 Hull KR

An embarrassing performance saw Rovers kept scoreless in a derby for the first time in 57 years. Rovers were unable to break a strong Hull FC defence, who won their first derby over Hull KR in 2014 emphatically.

Round 26 – Hull KR 14-32 Catalans

A debut try and strong performance from Macauley Hallett wasn't enough to prevent the Robins' faint play-off hopes from being ended by Catalan at the KC Lightstream Stadium. The Red and Whites welcomed the Dragons to East Hull for the final home game of the season, with a response from their derby nightmare top of their list of priorities. They were unable to gain two points, despite tries through Hallett, Chan and Salter.

Round 27 – Wakefield 18-42 Hull KR

Rovers ran riot against Wakefield, scoring eight tries to end their 2014 season on a winning note. Omari Caro was impressive in his final game and scored 3 tries. Macauley Hallett continued his impressive form and scored twice, Greg Eden also scored twice in his final game for the club. Keal Carlile scored his first try for the club in a game where Rovers were dominant, which saw them finish 9th, above rivals Hull FC.

A look forward to 2015...

With many key players leaving the club in 2014, it was important that KR recruited well. I look forward to seeing what our 2015 recruits can bring to the club, expect to see a completely new look to our backs, with lots of pace coming from Ken Sio, and exciting winger/fullback Kieran Dixon. With the search for a replacement for Josh Hodgson and Shaun Lunt looking unlikely to sign, I expect us to look overseas for a new Hooker.





Salford Red Devils 2014

By @Lucyy_Nicole

Salford fans were itching to go at the start of their Super League season, after being promised brilliant results, a place in the playoffs and an overall improved season. Taking confidence from their owner's words 'I would be disappointed if we're not in the top six', the fans were looking excitedly towards the new season. However even with a change of coach it didn't go exactly the way they were told it would. In fact, Paul McNally compared Salford to London Broncos saying 'in many ways our two seasons have been poles apart even though both have ended in relative disappointment.'

Overall Salford played 27 games and after winning 11, drawing 1 and losing 15 managed to find them in tenth position at the start of the playoffs, effectively losing their chance to make it to Old Trafford. It was disappointing, yes, but also embarrassing as the fans had been told so confidently that they would be in a much better position this season and it had failed to happen.

Salford had a run of about eight weeks between April and May with no wins which greatly affected their confidence and attitudes however their worst loss in terms of points would have been the 45-4 loss to Wigan Warriors in Round 25. Salford were probably not helped this season by the amount of negative media attention their club and their owner received. In a way, Salford's season was predetermined due to the number of 'superstar players' that had been brought in to take Salford up the table. Due to this pressure on the team from the very start, it is no wonder they didn't do as well as was probably expected.



Salford started the season hopefully, with 7,102 being in attendance to watch Salford beat Wakefield 18-14, however fairly soon Salford showed holes in their game play, losing 38-0 to Saint Helen's on Sky Sports. Salford's biggest positive from the season was probably the signing of a very talented player in Kevin Locke, who in 9 games was able to score 3 tries and 10 goals. In addition, mid-season, Salford were able to grab the 21 year old Mason Caton-Brown from London Broncos, who scored 4 tries in the games he played towards the end of last season. Salford's biggest scoring game was coincidentally against London Broncos, 2 months after Caton-Brown left. Salford managed to win 58-26 against the London Broncos.

Overall, Salford didn't have such a good season as they told everyone they were going to have and showed that spending a load of money doesn't always equal a place in the final. **Bring on 2015!**



By @HFC_NEWS

2014 for the 'Black & Whites' has been a familiar tale of frustration, disappointment and ultimately deflation. Rather than anger from the fans, there was more of a sense of "Ah well, same old same old" around the KC. A squad capable of bringing silverware back to the west of the city, possibly deceived as the strongest group since the 2005 Challenge Cup Winners, failed to find the dreaded C word throughout- CONSISTENCY. Adam Pearson knew it was a gamble placing an untried assistant coach in Lee Radford, at the helm of such a well supported club, but it's impossible to say if AP's master plan has paid off just a season in. As with Peter Gentle, it'll be the second season that Radders can hopefully prove his worth. With preparations already underway for next season, hope springs eternal. Not only is Radford stronger and wiser for the ups and downs of this year, but so too are his youthful squad. Finishing outside the play-offs will most definitely not be an option in 2015 given so much more is at stake. Onwards and upwards you might be forgiven to say...

It's fair to say worry set into the minds of the fans even in pre-season. An away draw at partner club Doncaster was followed by defeat at Bradford and a 54-6 demolishing at Featherstone in Richard 'Superman' Whiting's testimonial match. Despite this, Hull FC claimed the season's early bragging rights winning the pre-season 'friendly' derby. Inconsistent results even in January set the tone for the rest of the year, with the palms of many supporters planted into their glum faces.

An inspiring start to the Super League season it may have been, but 2 wins out of the first 5 matches wouldn't suggest this on paper. A nail-biting opener against the Dragons on a cold February night at the KC gave debuts to 5 players plus a somewhat cameo return for a certain Garreth Carvell. 2 tries from Kirk Yeaman and a stunning 70m try from Jordan Rankin got the season off to a flyer, with the assistance of a conversion miss by Thomas Bosc after the final hooter which would have brought the teams level. Round 2 and 3 saw the boys travel across the Pennines to St Helens and Warrington respectively. Two tight matches, but on neither journey back down the M62 was the bacon brought back home (or the first leg of the Steve Prescott cup for that matter). Victory at home to the troubled Bradford Bulls and defeat away at the *'Wheldon Probiz Mend-A-Hose Collesium Road Jungle'* saw us sitting on 4 points out of a possible 10. Below par.

The 7-0 defeat at home Widnes on that painfully cold and wet day was possibly the worst, most horrific performance on a sporting field I have seen since...well not that long actually. Huddersfield in the 2013 play-offs was pretty darn disgusting. That is all that shall be said about that. The league-cup double header against Koukash's already stumbling 'Deviloution' gave the Airlie Bird's two convincing points in 30-8 win but also saw the 2013 runners-up dumped out of the Challenge Cup courtesy of a Rangi Chase golden point drop-goal. Hull FC were able to put on a dominant show for Sky's Thursday night viewers against the holders of the League Leaders Shield in a warm up for a busy Easter period, coming out 30-8 winners over Nathan Brown's Giants.

A late drop goal from old boy Craig Hall in the final minute decided a thrilling derby as Hull FC lost 21-20 to Hull KR at the KC Lightstream Stadium in the Thursday 'Good FRIDAY' Derby whereas Easter Monday brought the annual home walkover over the London Broncos, 40-4. 11 rounds in with only 4 victories. All 7 games lost were by 12 points or less, proving our failings to find that crucial winning try, week in, week out.

May through to July saw the Black & Whites travel on the road for 8 of their 12 games due to pitch resurfacing at the KC, and what a factor this was... FC picked up just 6 points out of a possible 24, including a run of 4 consecutive losses and a run of 6 games without a win. A classic Magic Weekend clash at the Ethihad would see the Robins take a '2-0 lead' in terms of the 2014 derby clashes. Highlights, if you wish to call them that, include scoring 106 points in two games away at London and Widnes, their only consecutive wins in 2014, and dramatic draws against Wakefield and high-flying 'Classy Cas'.

Round 23 through to 27 ended the season somewhat positively. Loses away at Bradford and Huddersfield aside, memorable wins at the KC against St Helens, Hull KR and Leeds sent supporters into raptures as if they'd achieved something substantial. Truth be told, they'd achieved an 11th placed finish. A lucrative Joe Westerman drop-goal was enough to secure victory over eventual champions Saints (but lose the inaugural Steve Prescott Cup) and a late Jack Logan try in the corner along with a Jordan Rankin touchline conversion 3 minutes from time was enough to see off West Yorkshire rivals, the struggling Leeds Rhinos. Saving the best of the trio of matches until last, the 28-0 victory against Hull KR will no doubt be a derby that goes down in derby history.

Hull FC nilled city rivals Hull KR for the first time since 1957 in front of a raucous home crowd at the KC Stadium by putting in a masterful display which saw them dominate throughout in every department. It may have been two derbies to one in favor of the Robins, but I'm sure when the topic of the cross city match comes into question during pre-season, Hull KR fans will be firmly reminded of that fantastic evening back in August. The 3 great results by the Airlie Birds somewhat softened the blow of an 11th placed finish, 5 points away from an 8th place birth place in the play-offs and a tough trip to the Warrington Wolves.

Many players in the squad had absolutely outstanding seasons. I could name half the squad if I had to. So why did we finish 11th you may ask. The somewhat controversial tactics of Radford by chopping and changing the squad means that a complete unchanged 13 from the previous game was never played during 2014. Getting the right half-backs has been a problem for Hull FC ever since Brough and Cooke left the club, but this didn't seem to be the main pain in the backside this year. Rankin, Horne, Here-maia and Abdull all had decent seasons but the lack of creativity elsewhere in the field seemed to be our downfall. Desire was unquestionable, belief too appeared intact. And yet, for all the positive thinking, it was a failure to put back-to-back victories together more than once which proved Hull's downfall.



When it comes to consistency, Gareth Ellis has been peerless at Hull, and while others, most notably Joe Westerman, have done well, the captain has very rarely missed a beat. It is no exaggeration to say some of his displays have been world class. And to do that in a side which has struggled is even more impressive.

Many rugby league fans away from the city of Hull may have been wondering, "What on earth happened to Hull FC's dream team pairing from 2013?" The future stars that never were? Well, to be fair to Tom Lineham, a devastating leg break left him out for almost half of 2014, denying him the ability to hit top form like the year previous. But as for Ben Crooks, he's never been the same since the injury-effected poor performance in the 2013 cup final. The 21 year old was never able to replicate the outstanding effort he put in to score 20 tries last season, 7 of them coming in 2 consecutive games. Having the likes of Callum Lancaster, Jack Logan and Setamata Sa picked over him, his career will now take him down under for the foreseeable future with Parramatta, with the hope of returning to Super League one day with Hull FC having official 'first-dibs'.

Top 5 Players of 2014

5. Liam Watts- Gone quietly in 2014, but in my opinion one of the most underrated players not just in the Hull FC squad, but in the whole of Super League. A massive workhorse with the ability to make the transition from the England Knights squad to the national team within the next few years.

4. Jordan Rankin- Easily our best half-back in 2014, making the transition from the sun and sand of the Gold Coast, to the pattie butties and dark skies of the East Coast, bagging 9 tries in the process.

3. Gareth Ellis- Mr Reliable in 2014. The ridiculing from the East half of the City of 'the old man is looking for a final pay-off' has quietly dispersed. Indefinitely the most consistent player was also our joint second top try scorer along with our number 2.

2. Fetuli Talanoa- From pneumonia to binman to one of the best wingers in Super League. Talanoa's return to the game he loves after a close call with death has been an absolute treat to watch. After he himself declared interest in joining the club, an eyebrow was raised by many. But he proved them wrong in absolutely fanatic style scoring 10 tries in 2014. The Tongan international has been Hull's best back all season, he's played every second of every game and the good news for Hull fans is he will only get better in 2015 with a first pre-season in years behind him.

1. Joe Westerman- Changing Hull's system, Radford employed Westerman as a ball-playing loose-forward, tasking him with getting his hands on the ball as an extra pivot. It brought the 24-year-old to life in attack, with his size, strength and skill giving the Black and Whites an extra option. England recognition followed being selected to play against both Samoa and the Aussies. Rightfully the Player of the Year 2014.



So, what can Hull FC fans expect in 2015? Well AP has already dismissed the "it's our year" talk. Much like Louis Van Gaal of Manchester United, Lee Radford has a rebuilding process on his hands. With the incoming half-back pair of goal-kicking sensation Marc Sneyd and pal of the coach Leon Pryce confirmed months ago, it seems like the planning for 2015 is already well underway. Much like Jordan Rankin a year previous, Steve Michaels and Mark Minichiello will depart the sunny beaches of the Gold Coast for the KC and ex-Bradford youngster Curtis Naughton will leave 2013 NRL winners South Sydney. With a sixth signing around the corner according to Radford, Hull FC fans can definitely expect improvements on the field- anything similar to this year and it's going to be a year of endless moaning calling for the coach's head. Let's not get too excited and let's not be expecting any silverware, but let's hope 2015, our 150th year is a darn bit better than 2014.

Prediction: 7th / Challenge Cup Semi-Final



Bradford Bulls 2014

By @wobblyhead

We beat Wigan, and Leeds, back to back, and it was great. The end.

If I could afford a therapist, or even a hypnotist, I'm fairly confident that's exactly how I would remember Bradford Bulls' 2014 campaign. Tragically, such luxuries are beyond my current means, so writing this summary is going to be a much more drawn out and painful process.



I've poured myself a fresh cup of tea, opened up a box of pound-shop pralines, and together we'll get through it.

After watching the Bulls almost assemble a squad in the off-season, finishing up with nowhere near enough depth to be realistically competitive, Bradford fans approached their pre-season friendlies with as much optimism as those tethered to a club which had spent the past eighteen months in such an unholy mess could possibly dare.

This was to be amongst the high points of the season - a time of naivety, to be cherished. It didn't last.

After an ongoing off-season saga of ownership uncertainty and inconsistent payroll, the Bulls were four players down from the offset. Winterstein never arrived in England at all, Carvell and Sammut left before a single competitive ball was played and, to help matters along, Ferguson showed up with what turned out to be pretty much a season long injury.

After just two Super League rounds the club were docked six league points for entering administration, had their current ownership team declare relegation now to be 'almost a certainty' and wash their hands of the whole thing and lost two more key players. Scruton finally lost patience and headed for Wakefield, and new hope Gaskell suffered an injury which would leave him out for the next five rounds. Even then he was only rushed back through desperation, never really looking fully fit until the back end of the season.

It was a lot to take, many clubs might have easily capitulated at this point, losing faith, hope and confidence.

The Bulls, after their obligatory home win against London Broncos, did exactly that.

There was to be no fairy-tale underdog miracle in this story, no against-all-odds galvanisation of bulldog spirit, The next four and a half months of the season were a weary matter of wading through week after week of under-performance, misery, and embarrassment. In eighteen Super League rounds and an entire Challenge Cup campaign, the club registered just four more victories, one of those against Championship One opposition.

New owner Marc Green officially took over at the end of March, but there was to be no quick release of funds, no opportunity to strengthen before it was too late. Loyal-to-a-fault coach Francis Cummins desperately tried to keep things afloat as he begged and borrowed talent from across the league. Simply hoping to be able to field a full team each week, and keep enough belief within that team that their heads were still raised as they ran from the changing rooms, even if they had fallen again by the end of the first set.

It wouldn't be anything of an exaggeration to say that the time from Easter weekend, and the absolute surrender at the DW Stadium, to the mid-summer massacres at the hands of the Devils and the Robins, represented a low point for Bradford Bulls as a club, on and off the field. Week on week of hidings, all whilst the new board maintained a well meaning but hopeless - and in places cringe-worthy - campaign to have their points reinstated. A path which earned them few friends from a league of peers who had so far been, in general, both sympathetic and supportive of the club's plight. Not counting that time they voted to share out the Bulls' confiscated TV money amongst themselves of course, but then, who wouldn't put their own club first in that situation?



Things were bleak, and just when you couldn't see a way for them to become any bleaker - only a week after it was confirmed that those six league points would not be reinstated - Francis Cummins was sacked.

This was a big moment, by now Bradford Bulls had very little to feel proud about on any level, and the fans had very little to hang what was left of their loyalty on. Cummins, who had worked for free during the initial collapse and without complaint through the months of chaos and hopelessness which followed, represented one of the very few aspects of the whole sorry mess which still commanded respect. If his head was going to be taken, then - absolutely no question - it must be because the club had a new solution, and one that would turn things around fast. If he turned out to be purposeless victim, rather than a necessary sacrifice, then the hole into which the club had dug itself may, inescapably, become its grave.

After two weeks, as the end of June approached, Jimmy Lowes was appointed new head coach. He was announced, amid great excitement, to be the new dawn, and perhaps even the saviour, of this fast collapsing club.

Within a month the Bradford Bulls had been relegated.

Something had happened though, the results hadn't changed but the team had, a little. There was a confidence building on the pitch, almost a sense of belief. It wouldn't make any difference to the Bulls' fate, but it did make a difference to the fans.

Then it happened.

On the 27th July Bradford hosted Wigan and beat them, six days later they travelled to Leeds and did the same to them. Without contention they were playing less than first choice teams, but that didn't matter, a month or so before they'd have struggled to beat shadows. To take down those two giants, even weakened as they were, in the same week - in the hearts and minds of thousands of Bulls fans - saved the season. It gave hope that this crumbling wreck might just be kept afloat after all - even if it was to be in the Championship.

After that it was two more wins, and two more losses to complete the year, but almost everyone had stopped caring by then. 2014 was over, it was all about rebuilding for 2015. Something which seems to have been done with gusto, and even a splash of intelligence. We hope.

The Bradford Bulls' 2014 season was not an easy one to suffer, but the club did eventually get through it. Scarred and diminished the once mighty Bulls may now be, but at least they're still alive.

**Their supporters may also take consolation in the fact they'll have no shortage of ammunition for convincing their grand-kids that things were 'so much worse on our day...'.
They won't know they're born, I tell you.**

London Broncos 2014

By @Lucyy_Nicole



London Broncos have come under much scrutiny from fans and Rugby League characters ever since the team first came into the Super League. Now we have come to the end of another season and the last in a long run to be played in Super League for London. So how did we do? Overall, not brilliant, with only one win out of all the League and Cup games, it ended in relegation and a sigh of relief for the supporters who could finally wake up from - what was at times called a - nightmare. However not once did any of us ever feel like giving up

The club has faced many drawbacks all season with one of the biggest lows being the amount of losses we suffered in League and Cup games. It is obviously a dispiriting time losing a game, but turning up week after week, not allowing yourself to hope for a win or even a draw, gets tiring and to an extent embarrassing. For both supporters and members of the team alike. One of the hardest parts of the season, for me (being an emotional teenage girl) was watching the players steadily lose confidence throughout the season. As fans, it's very easy for us to get lost in the game and we can easily become frustrated when we see a tiny thing change the entire outlook of the game. However what we sometimes forget is that the players have a different vantage point and the losses effected them emotionally as well. In fact another low of this season, was the loss of Mason Caton-Brown, who had started to become a favourite player of mine. His exit caused a stir among the supporters as we felt let down by how easily he was able to leave and pick up a new position elsewhere, looking back I can understand why he felt the need to leave but I think he could have handled it a lot better than he did.



Personally, I feel when you look back at a season, it is easy to pick apart every game, every week and find the highs and lows but that would take way too long and doesn't help anyone in the long run.

In no way was there no positives taken from this season. Of course the main one would be our one and only win over Leeds Rhinos, the week before they were due to take on the Castleford Tigers at Wembley Stadium. Other fan bases may feel we went very over the top with celebrations and the DVD that the club put on sale, but please before you stand there and laugh, put yourself in our position, for the team and for us it seemed like a turning point. We hadn't had a win since the September before and yes, we did want to remember it. Every person involved with the club needed that win, no one more so that Joey Grima and the team, who had to prove to themselves that they could win. Another high of the season would be the amount of players coming through from the Under 19's. They have amazing talent and definitely fitted in well with the team. A personal high point for me, would be the re-signing of Oscar Thomas as I felt it was only fair for him to get his own chance in Super League, which he hadn't got the year before.

At the end of the day, from looking at the table, London didn't have a good run this season and as a result we have been relegated to the Kingstone Press Championship. Although this is a sad ending to a long term in the top level competition, it is well needed, to allow London Broncos to improve as a team and hopefully improve the recognition of the sport in the South. I am sure many London fans will be of similar opinion and we will start to draw a line underneath a very long season and look forward to a fresh start. We're sure this will not be the end for the London Broncos and therefore in the words of Frank Sinatra "[we]'ll be seeing you."



The Championship 2014



By Daniel Fowler (@DanFowler97)

It's getting to that stage again. The winter months draw in, with that comes the Championship withdrawal symptoms. The entertainment, drama, and top tries are at an end for 2014, so it's time to sit back, relax, and take a look at the season gone. This is the 2014 Championship round-up, we'll start at the summit.

Leigh Centurions (1st) – Wow. That'd be the perfect way to describe a record breaking season for Leigh Centurions. One loss throughout the regular season campaign resulting in the League Leaders Shield, nearly triumphing against the would-be winners of the Challenge Cup, and the cherry on top of a very successful cake, the Grand Final win over Featherstone. Some of the signings Leigh made pre-2014 really raised eyebrows, and with good reason. Tom Armstrong and Sam Barlow, from Sheffield and Halifax respectively, were just two of the acquisitions that made the other clubs sit up and take notice. Both Armstrong and Barlow were ever-presents in the champion Centurions team, the latter even gaining interest from Leeds Rhinos before penning a humongous five year deal at Leigh. When the going got tough for the Centurions, the solidity within defence saw them through. Best example of this was the Grand Final. Featherstone scored first in the second half and were really giving it a go. But that little bit of brute force in defence and x-factor in attack really set them apart from the others in 2014.

2014 Star Player – Ryan Brierley: Many could have guessed the half-back would be the star player but Brierley is one hell of a talent, a talent that finally came to the fore in 2014. 43 tries in 2014, a massive achievement for the 22 year old scrum half that's rejected offers from Super League clubs to stay with the Centurions. 2015 should be a very exciting one for Leigh, and Brierley, who get to face the recently relegated Bradford and London, with the chance to face Super League clubs when the league splits into the 'Super 8's'.



Featherstone Rovers (2nd) – An interesting season for the Flatcappers from Featherstone. There was the Feisal Nahaboo debacle, with all his, supposed, cash. John Bastian didn't really settle in well at 'Fev' and was axed on 5th May, after a second loss to Leigh in as many weeks. Nahaboo's ship sailed a month later, and the laughter from other clubs then subsided. A 'lucrative' offer for Leon Pryce, as well as public interest in Eorl Crabtree and Danny Brough made Featherstone a laughing stock under Nahaboo. Andy Hay was at the reigns when Nahaboo left, a few dodgy results here and there but the general consensus was that Hay was the right man for the job. When stability came off the field through Mark Campbell, stability on the field also came as Hay's men sealed a second place finish and reached the Grand Final. A brilliant, workmanlike, semi-final victory over Sheffield set the Rovers up nicely for the trip to Headingley. A Grand Final victory wasn't to be though, but Featherstone can be very happy with their seasonal efforts and will look forward to 2015 in anticipation.

2014 Star Player – Will Sharp: The winger has featured at full back at times in 2014, and has definitely not disappointed. A strong runner with the ball, Sharp is a very deadly try scorer who can make the most out of any situation. The two tries he scored in the Grand Final really proves the point, and he's impressed fans and pundits alike this season, featuring in the Championship TOTW on quite a few occasions.

Halifax RLFC (3rd) – A third place finish for the Shay side wasn't enough to save Karl Harrison's job. With second place in sight nearing the backend of the season, losses to Doncaster and Featherstone really sealed their fate as second place became a distant dream. A mid-season loss in the dying embers to Leigh speaks volumes; they had the class, but just couldn't finish off the job. Scott Murrell took charge of the last regular season game, as well as the two playoff games Fax encountered.

A win against basement team Barrow rounded the regular season off, but disappointing losses to Featherstone and Dewsbury meant a sour end to the 2014 season for Fax. Richard Marshall is at the Halifax helm for 2015, with Marlon Billy as assistant. With new signings already being made, fans can be excited for the upcoming year, will Fax get into the middle 8?

2014 Star Player – Ben Johnston: Johnston has made the scrum-half position his own in 2014, the young prospect has really been a shining light at The Shay. With Murrell by his side, Johnston can only get better as he looks to get his game to the next level. Other coaches have been impressed, too. Mark Aston (Sheffield Eagles coach) picked Johnston for Ireland's European Championship squad. The scrum-half played in two out of the three games for the Wolfhounds.

Doncaster RLFC (4th) – A surprise package in the Championship this season. Doncaster overtook their local rivals Sheffield in the league standings, a 4th place finish will have pleased Paul Cooke in his first season as player-coach. With many expecting Doncaster to just make the top 8 and secure mid-table security, the Dons really showed the league what they're made of and were fighting for 2nd all the way up to the final day of the season. Cooke's side were the team to stop the Leigh Centurions unbeaten streak, as Rowley's men were looking unstoppable. A couple of gems were unearthed as the Dons season went on too. Mid-season signings Tom Hodson and Pasquale Dunn impressed on every outing.

2014 Star Player – Dave Scott: Fast, pacy and great footwork, Scott has got what it takes to take that step up into Super League. The fullback/winger is always near to the score sheet and will always put in a good shift for you in defence and attack. His good work during the season has been acknowledged by Steve McCormack who selected Scott in the Scotland squad for the recent European Championships. Scott played in all three of the Bravehearts' games, adding to the experience he gained at last year's World Cup.



Sheffield Eagles (5th) – Sheffield were coming into the 2014 season looking to make history, by becoming the first team ever to win three consecutive Grand Final's. The Eagles fell two hurdles short, losing in the semi-final to a ferocious Featherstone outfit. The regular season campaign was rather bland for a usually exciting side. The transition to Owlerton was terrible, only winning 5 out of 12 matches at the stadium. It's not a surprise that Mark Aston's men are moving to Doncaster for a season whilst their new stadium gets constructed. The big wide pitch at the Keepmoat suits Sheffield down to the ground. The away form was good, with only three losses during the season. With new signings including the likes of Jamie Langley and Tony Tonks, the Eagles won't be short of firepower come 2015.

2014 Star Player – Scott Turner: The former Dewsbury man showed just why he's a fans favourite at the Sheffield club this season. Solid in defence and strong in attack, Turner has been a great acquisition since his switch to the Eagles before the start of the 2012 season. A fourth season with the Eagles is in store, and with a very respectable try scoring record to his name, he'll be looking to add to that and hopefully send the Eagles into the middle 8.

Dewsbury Rams (6th) – Just a bit inconsistent but definitely had the talent to upset one or two. An opening day victory against Featherstone laid down a marker that the Rams wouldn't just lay down and die. With spirited performances against most of the top 4, including a sublime 25-0 away victory against Halifax in the play-offs, Glenn Morrison can be proud of his players after this season. With new signings which include Barrow's top try scorer Dalton Grant and Halifax's influential full-back Ryan Fieldhouse, expect the Rams to have a decent season.

2014 Star Player – Anthony Thackeray: Somewhat enigmatic. Thackeray has that little bit of magic needed to win a game, and definitely a player who can dictate play. The half-back has been in top form throughout 2014, an ever-present in the Rams team with 28 tries to his name. He came back to haunt his former team Halifax in the play-offs, Thackeray played a big part in many of Dewsbury's tries during the 25-0 win. Glenn Morrison will certainly be happy that Thackeray's services are at the Tetley's Stadium for 2015.

Workington Town (7th) – Rejuvenated and inspired in the second half of the campaign. Phil Veivers took over at Derwent Park when Town were staring down the relegation barrel in mid-season, with low confidence and no reason to feel good. What occurred when the former Salford boss took the reins was truly magnificent. A seven match winning run resulted in Championship consolidation for the highest placed Cumbrian team of 2014. The win that started the seven match winning streak was the great 20-18 win over Featherstone at Derwent Park. Brett Phillips won man of the match for Workington in that victory, definitely a standout player for Town. With the core base of the Town tribe signed up for 2015, talented signings have been promised by coach Veivers so it's a good time to be at the Town.

2014 Star Player – Brett Phillips: One of the hottest properties in Championship rugby. Phillips, a Scotland international, is never too far away from team of the week selection, even when Town are on the end of a defeat. A very consistent player in defence and attack, he's held in high regard by the Workington faithful and there's no reason why he shouldn't be. At 26 years old, Phillips still has time to become a Super League player and it wouldn't surprise the people up Workington way if he does achieve that.



Batley Bulldogs (8th) – A pleasant end to what could have been a very unpleasant season for the Mount Pleasant outfit. John Kear's side, similar to Whitehaven, kept their Championship status on the last day of the season. The Bulldogs recorded a barnstorming 34-10 win at Doncaster whilst Keighley were downed by Featherstone. The result was well received by the Batley following as they blasted out the Great Escape theme tune in delight. It had been a very stressful few weeks prior to the Doncaster match, with the Jacob Fairbank ineligibility case leaving a black cloud over the West Yorkshire club. The RFL initially deducted Batley (Fairbank) and Doncaster (Ben Crooks) three points but both clubs appealed the decision and, controversially, were given the three points back. The points reinstatement came with two games left to play, both games Batley won and in convincing fashion. The two wins got the Bulldogs into the last playoff place but bowed out 16-0 to Sheffield, but the job everyone cared about was done and dusted. 2015 is looking like a transitional season for the Bulldogs; stability has been hard to come by as Super League have been known to come and cherry-pick their top players. Signings such as Shaun Ainscough and Cain Southerwood from Whitehaven will excite the Batley fans whilst Irish international Sean Hesketh has made a return to the Pleasant after a few years away.

2014 Star Player – Anthony Nicholson: A diamond in the Batley rough. Miles Greenwood was up there in the Batley ranks but dummy half Nicholson provided a spark which got his team down the field. A diminutive figure, former Leigh hooker Nicholson is a favourite at Mount Pleasant and has been a good acquisition since his arrival. Signed before the start of the 2014 season on a two year deal, Nicholson would have probably stayed put in West Yorkshire if Batley had gone down but all the more reason to be cheerful as his Bulldogs stopped up.

Whitehaven RLFC (9th) – Another relegation survivor. Whitehaven secured their place in the 2015 Championship with a 44-18 win at Swinton Lions. Dave Woods left the club soon after the win, the Whitehaven club informed him that his services were no longer needed. Steve Deakin has taken over at the Recre for the 2015 season. Haven did show glimpses of class here and there with the speed of Shaun Ainscough and Jesse Joe Parker, in conjunction with the brute power of Samir Tahraoui and Carl Forster but consistency just didn't come about. Top wins against Sheffield at home and Batley both home and away couldn't be worked on; a 34-0 home loss to North Wales Crusaders really typified their stop-start nature. Signings for 2015 include Thomas and James Coyle; the latter will be Deakin's assistant. A very highly rated signing is that of Egremont Rangers half-back John-Paul Brocklebank. Brocklebank has represented England and GB at amateur level.

2014 Star Player – Samir Tahraoui: A real handful and a menace to deal with. He impressed the Whitehaven fans over the course of the season with his riotous runs. With time on his side, Tahraoui has the size and strength to become a big success in the sport, a move to Bradford in 2015 improves his chances no-end. James Lowes offered the prop forward a full-time deal at the Provident Stadium at the end of the 2014 season, a no-brainer for Tahraoui who'll be looking to take his game to another level next year.

KEIGHLEY COUGARS

Keighley Cougars (10th) – The team that had to bear the brunt of the RFL's decision to reinstate Batley's points back. A heart-breaking defeat in the dying embers of the final league game against Featherstone consigned the Cougars to Championship 1 rugby next season. Paul March's side definitely had the talent to stay in the division but three consecutive losses to end the season really sealed their fate despite the off the field debacle with the RFL. Keighley just couldn't quite get over the line against teams above them when the game was finely poised. The Keighley club will come back better and stronger after their ill-fated relegation, with David March signing back at Cougar Park to reunite with his brother Paul. The Cougars will have some much needed experience in the third tier next season.

2014 Star Player – James Feather: Feather has recently departed Keighley after a decade on the books in West Yorkshire, but the hooker had a good season to end his tenure as club captain. 'Buster' as he is nicknamed, has been a brilliant servant for the Keighley club, always giving 100% for 80 minutes and always striving to be the best. He goes unnoticed time after time, but the work he does from dummy half is integral to the team and he's appreciated on the field and in the stands.

North Wales Crusaders (11th) – The team from Wrexham couldn't quite work on their success in 2013. Promoted from Championship 1, the Crusaders, with their eccentric fans, were always climbing a mountain to get to safety with 5 teams facing the drop. Clive Griffiths stepped down from his coaching role halfway through the campaign, former Barrow Raiders boss Anthony Murray took over and results didn't improve. A big miss for the second half of the season was USA international prop forward Mark Offerdahl, who accepted a trial in Australia. With most of the team signed up for next season, the Crusaders will be wanting to make a swift return back to the Championship.

2014 Star Player – Jono Smith: The loose forward has impressed the Racecourse Ground goers for a good number of seasons now, a very good player to have on your team. Smith is very hard to stop once he gets going and his offload game is pretty tidy, too. A big hit in the Championship, next season in League 1 should just showcase what a talent Jono Smith really is.



Rochdale Hornets (12th) – Ian Talbot's men, similar to the Crusaders, couldn't kick on after promotion in 2013. With a major statement of intent coming in the signing of Fiji international Ryan Millard, many were expecting Hornets to hold their own in 2014. A home victory against Featherstone is probably the only real shock worth writing home about, the use of dual registration from St Helens didn't really help Rochdale's cause in the way of results. Shannon McDonnell and Adam Swift turned out for the Spotland outfit time after time, but a 12th place finish will have disappointed coach Talbot. With most of the 2014 squad signed up for next season, exception of Ryan Millard who's departed to Featherstone, the Hornets will be looking to kick on in League 1.

Star Player – Ryan Millard: the half-back was a star signing and was tipped to take the Championship by storm after a very good World Cup campaign with the Fijians. Things didn't quite go to plan but his star quality was there for all to be seen during the season. Sometimes on a different wave level to his teammates, Featherstone should be a very good place for Millard to kick on and impress. The Hornets enjoyed some dazzling work from Millard on occasions but, likewise to the actual team, he couldn't produce it as consistently as he would have liked.



Swinton Lions (13th) - The Lions were one of the favourites to make the drop to League One and they didn't show much to prove the bookies wrong. Josh Barlow and Zach Johnson were two of the impressive figures in a usually tame Swinton side, whilst speedster Kevin Penny scored spectacular tries time after time. A home victory against Dewsbury was a highlight for John Duffy's side, also running Sheffield and Doncaster close away from home. The Swinton outfit, currently based at the Leigh Sports Village, will be wanting to get back on track sooner rather than later. The departure of assistant coach Marlon Billy to Halifax has made that road a bit more winding. However, coach Duffy has announced a big bulk of the 2015 squad which includes new signings Stuart Littler and Iain Morrison, as well as the lesser experienced Matt Pendlebury who captained the successful Leigh u20's side to Grand Final glory in 2014.

2014 Star Player – Zach Johnson: Johnson will be playing his trade at Dewsbury next season. A rather impressive 2014 season at the Leigh Sports Village obviously caught the eye of Glenn Morrison. A player who can pack a punch, Johnson will be hoping to get into a Dewsbury team where competition for places will be high.



Barrow Raiders (14th) – The basement team of the 2014 Kingstone Press Championship, it's certainly been a year to forget for the Craven Park outfit. Things started well for the Raiders, recording their first win of the season away at Sheffield, where Dan Toal put in a star-studded performance. Unfortunately for Barrow, only three more wins followed. A colossal 22 losses doesn't put the Cumbrians in a good light but the Raiders army kept turning out in force, highlighting just how popular rugby league is in Cumbria. Club legend Paul Crarey will be taking over at Barrow for 2015, replacing Bobbie Goulding who stepped in when Anthony Murray departed the club in early 2014. A club statement announcing Crarey's arrival said: "We're sure he has always been the right man for the job." This will excite the Raiders following who will be hoping for some good performances in contrast to 2014.

2014 Star Player – Dalton Grant: Similar to Swinton's star player, Grant will also be part of Glenn Morrison's Dewsbury Rams in 2015. The top try scorer for the Raiders in 2014, the twenty three year-old has great pace and can play in the centres as well as on the wing where he's played for all of the season. Some work on the defensive aspect on his game may be needed but with his experience and maturity comes the attributes to become a top player, Grant certainly has what it takes to get to a good level.



Be sure to give @DanFowler97 a follow on Twitter. He deserves it after this great review!

Sheffield Eagles 2014 Season Review, by Dan Fowler

[@DanFolwer97](#)



A turbulent first, and last, season at Owlerton for the Sheffield Eagles. That's the single line synopsis of the Eagles 2014 campaign. It's true that the Eagles didn't get along with Owlerton, only playing to their potential, in honesty, on one occasion in the league. But anyway, here's the season review. The place where we look at what went wrong, what went right, the players the Eagles missed most due to injury and the turning point of a rather woeful first half of the season. Enjoy!

What went wrong? Home form! If you're going to be a successful side, your home form needs to be on point. Sheffield lost their first home game of the season to basement side Barrow Raiders, it was a sign of things to come, unfortunately. With the exception of the comfortable win over Dewsbury, Owlerton wasn't the happiest of hunting grounds for the Eagles, it's not a surprise that the board of directors have handed the keys back to the greyhound stadium's executives. Things could have been a lot different though. There was a good number of games where Mark Aston's side were in front at the break but relinquished their lead after half time; (See Featherstone and Doncaster for spectacular capitulations!) A 5th place finish with home form like the Eagles is an achievement in itself. Let's hope come next year's review, I won't be talking about the same issue.

What went right? Despite irregular home form and worries of relegation in mid-season, quite a lot went right. The away form was terrific. Standing toe to toe with the Centurions at the LSV, almost beating Fax away and a close loss to Whitehaven were the only regular season away losses for the Eagles. All games warranted bonus points for the Eagles, a vital component to their 5th place finish. Top three away wins in no particular order...

North Wales Crusaders 6-56 Sheffield Eagles. A very impressive performance. Quentin Laulu-Togagae was the star of the show, Menzie Yere played despite injury worries to his ACL.

Workington Town 14-24 Sheffield Eagles. A very well fought out victory. Matty Garside was my Man of the Match with two tries, the last one being a corker. It's not surprising that he will be playing in a full time environment in 2015.

Doncaster RLFC 22-26 Sheffield Eagles. The win that kick-started our revival in the league. A loss at home to Batley the week before put the Eagles in a precarious position so a win was needed against our local rivals. We dented our neighbours hopes of a second place finish with a good comeback from 22-12 down in the second half, when Donny looked in control. Scott Turner scored the winning try, assisted by a ridiculous flick pass from Menzie Yere.

What was the turning point? The mid-season signings of Kyle Briggs and Etu Uaisele were a work of genius by Mark Aston. Both arrived from Featherstone and both became fan favourites, even after a handful of games. Bradford Bulls was Uaisele's next port of call, after the loan with the Eagles ended. Briggs signed on a two-and-a-half year deal. The team showed a vast improvement when both former Rovers entered the fray, Uaisele's brute force and Briggs' intricate game management were exactly what Sheffield needed. Despite losing to Featherstone in the Grand Final eliminator, Eagles managed to put one over on them in the regular season, in their own back yard. Man of the match? Kyle Briggs with an hat-trick, lovely stuff!



Missing in action. Sheffield haven't really had to deal with many injury problems over the course of the season, but one player has been out of action for the whole season. Ultra consistent loose forward Joe Hirst hasn't really had the best of luck with injuries over the past few seasons, this season proved to be no different. Arm and jaw injuries have seen him out of action in seasons past, a knee injury ruled him out of the 2014 season. A big blow for the Eagles as Hirst was a big part of the Championship winning sides of 2012 and 2013. Corey Hanson played in the home loss against Barrow but couldn't find his way back into the side, a last minute injury on international duty with Jamaica didn't help his case. Ben Jones was a new signing in 2014, he impressed when he took to the field in the red and gold. Unfortunately, Jones couldn't really stake a positive claim for a first team spot as injuries riddled his chances.

That concludes the 2014 season review, a big thanks to all the people who have read my pre-views and reports over the course of the season. A big year is on the horizon and I hope to see you all at the games as the Eagles try to play their way back to Super League.



Why Rugby League? By @Greenwoodd

A sport that brings passion, adrenaline, big hits and the occasional brawl... Why wouldn't you pick rugby league?

Maybe it's the way that even though rugby league is a small community, compared to football or rugby union, it still seems massive to those who enjoy the sport; I bet most rugby league fans will sit and watch the grand final when the day finally comes, it's just an event that you cannot seem to miss, whether your team is starring or not.



From a very little age I was introduced to the world of rugby league, I may not have known what was going on from being so young but I seemed to enjoy it seeing as for the past 17 years I have attended most games as well as having a season ticket.

Not only did I go and watch Bulls play week in week out but I also went to go see my Dad play at West Bowling and various other clubs. I thought it was a luxury to be able to sit in the dug-out throughout the game and talk to the players but now thinking back and realizing I was sat on a small, dirty bench surrounded by sweaty men, I don't find it as much of a luxury. I even remember my Dad throwing a BBQ and Karl Price and Stuart Fielden turning up, I sat there in awe, I genuinely thought I was in the company of celebrities.

With every sport brings its good and bad memories, the most recent of memories being the Rugby World Cup, I was lucky enough to attend the opening ceremony as well as the semi-finals and the final itself. The semi-finals will stick in my memory until the day I die; 20 seconds to go, one final play and Sinfield goes in for the early tackle and misses, allowing the kiwi to slip through and score the heart wrenching try, the one try that would mean England wouldn't go through to the finals. I will admit I cried and whenever I see the clip I still get tears in my eyes.

That's the amazing thing about rugby league; a few seconds can change the whole outcome of the game. You have to have your head in the game at all times, you zone out for a second and your opponent is past you and over the try line in most cases. Another amazing thing is how patriotic the players are, to be able to play for your country is a rather big deal. Compared to a sport such as football (I apologise to any football fans out there), even Roy said himself that the English football players just didn't seem to care anymore whereas you appoint a rugby player to play for his country and he will put his heart out on the line, not only that but you get to see amazing talent come together and show how much potential there actual is out there.

For example, before the World Cup I didn't really like any Leeds players (being a Bradford fan I was taught that Leeds was our rivals, obviously) but during the World Cup I began to actually like them, shocking, I know... Hall is an immense player, he scored tries I wouldn't be able to carry out myself no matter how hard I tried and Sinfield really brought the England team together, he kept his cool which benefitted the England team, especially with it being such a big event.

With big events comes phenomenal atmosphere. Atmosphere can help to pick a team up, whether they're winning or losing. Knowing you have the power to be able to give your team the drive they need to push forward throughout the full 80 minutes, however challenging it may seem. One of my favorite times during a match is when it seems like everyone is chanting their hearts out, it makes me smile every time; full of passion and love for their team, nothing will stop them from singing, is there really any better moment? Other than winning, of course...

Rugby League has made me who I am today, the rugby league fanatic. I come across as a shy teenager, but as soon as someone brings up anything rugby related I will gladly sit down and talk to them for hours about the topic, it's also how I've made most of my friends, which is a huge positive! Just like any other sport it brings an amazing community, filled with people who just love rugby league, it really doesn't matter who you are, just have a passion for the amazing sport and you'll fit right in! I am a rugby league fan and forever will be one.



YOUR SAY!

How Can England Beat New Zealand Tomorrow?

@Lucyyy_Nicole—Don't get slack, remember what happened last year & NZ scored, I think they have a chance just need to give 80 mins.

@SaintdavidE— Get our own ref! Seriously, Whitehead in, J Tomkins out, more time for Clarke, play without fear, concentrate for 80 .



@PaulCampbell1980—Hope New Zealand don't turn up.

@smithy2607—Need a good kicking game. Kick Johnson, then Mannering, then Nightingale etc .



@Whiterosesam—Get Pita Godinet a UK passport? (Or) Wear the new Castleford home shirt, so the Kiwis die laughing?

@GiantsFanzine—Play like we did against Aus, and if goes well, DON'T BLOODY CHANGE IT. Trying to go defensive and conservative was the wrong option

@rhinorobinson—Get the ball out to the backs and play Whitehead instead of Joel !!

@wobblinwoody—Attack, attack, attack, steamroll 'em up the middle an spread it out wide. Simple.

@TimN1982—Take our chances, be brave and win the ground going forward.

@Rob4471Bainton—Defence + Attack and if we get a lead keep it play a full 80 minutes.

@MidgleyAndrew—Start by playing Whitehead and let him do what he does best **#breakdefences**

@StorrPaul—Not [can't win] if our right edge defend like last week. I'd like to seen four changes to last week: Whitehead Westerman, J Burgess and Shenton. Shenton and Westerman dropped from a winning team? Charnley was poor and sol [O'Loughlin] not fit .

@orthoeyeagle—Push up through the middle .. Out of dummy 1/2.. S Tomkins following ..give Hall more ball earlier

Thanks for getting involved on Twitter, guys!

**Thanks to every-
one that got in-
volved. This has
been the best Issue
yet!**

GET IN TOUCH!

@League1895

League**1895** 



The One That Didn't Make It—

By @RLLatest

As lots of you who follow me on Twitter may know, I am not a Warrington fan. In fact, I'm the quite opposite. Luckily, I was on the winning side of the Semi-Final play-off game this year (sorry), but that won't stop me from reviewing Warrington's 2014 season. Wish me luck..

Warrington started off the season already being written off by almost-everyone due to the departure of inspirational half-back, Lee Briers, who retired at the end of the 2013 season. The effects of this showed in the first few fixtures of 2014, but after that Warrington were playing smooth, nice rugby again.

One of the players I was most looking forward to see playing (although, for the wrong side) was Matty Russell. His debut came a little later in the season, but after his successful performances in the 2013 Rugby League World Cup for Scotland, which saw him fend-off FOUR Tongan players and reach over the line, he was really something I was excited to see.

It was around round 3 where Warrington got their 'mojo' back, and they won three matches on-the-trot against Hull FC, London and Salford before being defeated by Wigan at home. It was at this point, Warrington were starting to get credit back and people started to stop writing them off.

Warrington saw losses against Hull KR, Bradford and a heavy defeat against Castleford in the middle of the season, but eventually Tony Smith got them back on track and they started to show their potential, with wins against Wakefield, Leeds, St Helens and the Catalan Dragons.

Warrington were hitting form at the right time at the end of the regular 2014 season, with a massive victory of 72-12 over the London Broncos. They also managed victories against every fan's team of-the-season Castleford Tigers and St Helens, with also a draw with the Huddersfield Giants.

The last regular game of the season for Warrington was held at the DW Stadium, where Wigan just about came out on top with a 24-20 victory, and, boy, it was an entertaining game. Some (every Wigan fan) people were arguing that Warrington were lucky to awarded one of their tries, scored by Myler, but their performance this night showed that they weren't to be messed with in the upcoming play-offs. And Monaghan showed that he still has the talent to score from just about anywhere. Unfortunately for Warrington fans though, this game was just foreshadowing the future...

Warrington played Widnes on a Sunday afternoon at the Halliwell Jones Stadium for their first play-off fixture, and their play-off journey started off very well for the side. Although they started off pretty slowly against Widnes and didn't really hit top gear (in my opinion), Warrington still managed to scrape a 22-19 win and head to the next round of the play-offs, where they faced a fierce Castleford Tigers side.

Warrington started off very well against Castleford, with centre Ryan Atkins getting himself on the end of a charged-down kick to score under the sticks. Castleford were accused many times of 'failing under the pressure' and unfortunately for them, they did this again in this game. Warrington put in a solid performance and with tries from Atkins, O'Brien, Evans and two from Monaghan, Warrington finished on top 30-14.

Then, there was Wigan. Now I'll keep this short as many of you Warrington fans won't want to be reminded. In my opinion, it was the game of the season. It was entertaining, jaw-dropping, thrilling and a real good advert for the sport. A try from Burgess in the corner in the dying minutes left Warrington fans speechless, and Wigan fans reckless (with celebrations).

Unfortunately, it wasn't to be their year (how could I not include that?!), but I bet you next year may just, JUST be their year...

Rising Star

Gareth O'Brien appeared 19 times for Warrington Wolves in 2014, and he caught the eyes of almost every Super League fan. At the age of 23, the half-back was leading Warrington around the field and was impressing almost everyone that watched him play. He made 20 try-assists in 2014 and scored 6 tries, which is impressive for a half-back of any team. Although not the first half-back choice with the number 20 on his back, he was soon pushing Ratchford out of the competition and claiming the half-back position almost every week. Very soon in the future, this player is going to be a real talent (more than he is already!).