

NO CUP BUT PARK STILL LOOKING TO PLAY

Welcome to

Parknews. Last Friday week the NCA and RFU bowed before the inevitable, announcing that there will be no official competitive rugby for the semi-professional game this season, after agreement to cancel the proposed Cup competition that was scheduled to begin once lockdown restrictions were eased. It is very disappointing, but following a series of recent meetings

involving all 48 clubs in the NCA, there was unanimous agreement that there would simply be insufficient time to stage an authentic competition, given the continued uncertainty over if, and when, training and playing will be allowed.

NCA chairman John Inverdale said: 'With every re-tiering and subsequent tightening of restrictions, it was getting harder to envisage the NCA cup getting off the ground. It's with a heavy heart that we've made the call because there was a huge amount of enthusiasm for the idea, but ultimately we've had to concede defeat.'

This leaves clubs with effectively two alternatives: either to play friendlies as and when restrictions are lifted, possibly 3 or 4 team tournaments among local hubs to take place in April and May, or to effectively mothball everything to the start of next season and try to minimize costs.

We shall still try to organise matches for the Firsts against other clubs looking to play just as soon as the restrictions are lifted sufficiently to allow this. The players and coaches at senior level have put too much into preparations to give up now on playing this season, even if it has to be locally and to adapted laws. Our other teams are keen to play, and we shall open up the ground for training as soon as we are permitted to do so and hope that they all get some rugby before the end of this challenging season. We shall also be arranging more of the very popular 6's, 7's and 10's tournaments as soon as conditions allow.

There can be no disguising that this continued lack of activity and income is a massive blow to the Club and all its people. The Management Board are doing everything possible to mitigate the impact, but now more than ever it is important that we all pull together to ensure that our great club survives now in order to prosper in the future.

Welcome Broncos

The club is delighted to have made an agreement for the London Broncos Rugby League team to use Rosslyn Park's facilities as their training base for the next three years. The Broncos are already training at the Rock in their bid to return to the Super League. The exact details of the arrangement are commercially confidential, but clearly to achieve a long-term hire of our facilities is a useful step forward in these difficult times. The Broncos are a fully professional outfit and will therefore use the pitch during daytime hours and will continue to play their league matches at the Ealing Trailfinders ground, therefore there is no affect on any of our own teams. As the Broncos are an elite team, subject to rigorous testing and Government guidelines, they are permitted to continue operating. /continued page 4



London Broncos training at the Rock. The Rugby League side will be using the ground as their training base on a 3-year contract - see story [Photo from London Broncos RL]

Future events

Future events are very much subject to Government COVID restrictions. We shall open up to stage Rugby Union and other events as soon as we are allowed to do so. However the safety of everyone is the primary concern, so we must stay strictly within the guidelines.

Check the website regularly
www.rosslynpark.co.uk
to keep up to date with events.

You can also follow our social media channels:

Twitter: <http://bit.ly/2PqDIQy>

Facebook: <http://bit.ly/2NG7bxV>

Instagram: <http://bit.ly/34d652t>

YouTube: <http://bit.ly/2PQSpqC>

STAY SAFE

RUGBY'S LONG-TERM INJURY PROBLEM

By Dr Ian Pickup formerly of Rosslyn Park, now Pro Vice Chancellor (Education & Experience) and COO at University of East London. Ian played for Park in the last throes of the amateur era before turning pro with Harlequins at the dawn of professionalism. He provides an interesting perspective on the sports present travails with the long-term effect of injuries.

Listening to former international Steve Thompson describing his inability to remember being part of England's Rugby World Cup triumph in 2003 is nothing short of shocking. His recall of arguably *the* most iconic match in English rugby union history is not just a little foggy; whilst most English rugby supporters will celebrate this victory for a lifetime and evoke the image of Johnny Wilkinson's winning drop goal with clarity, hooker Thompson can barely remember being in Australia.

And so, 17 years on from this match, and 24 years since the dawn of professional rugby union, the brutal dichotomy coursing through the veins of the game is brought into sharp relief. A game founded on the raw physicality of contests for possession, for territory, and for points hard-won in dark places and open spaces is now seen through freshly critical eyes. How can we reconcile the wonderful, life affirming and – for some – transformative athletic experience with the dawning realisation of irreparable damage done? Surely, surely, we must do far better than respond by asking '*well, what did they expect..?*' as some pundits have opined in recent days.

Rugby, it seems, has been in denial as it has evolved as a professional sport in ways that make today's on-pitch battles unrecognisable from the game that sits at its amateur derivation. As players have become ever bigger, faster and stronger, then the physical and mental toll accrued by playing the game may have become almost too terrible to contemplate.

Concussion

Just as safety studs were introduced to avoid lacerations caused by stray boots, scrum laws amended to reduce likelihood of spinal injuries, addressing concussion has been a focus of the game's overlords in recent years. Concussion is, to the spectator and players alike, visible, relatively easy to understand, and simple to legislate for, particularly in televised matches where dazed and wobbly-legged players are led away from the field of play. Even so, Head Injury Assessments were only adopted into worldwide rugby law as recently as 2015, almost 20 years into the professional life of the game.

Although not unrelated to the phenomena of concussion, the claims brought by Thompson and his contemporaries are less associated with easily identifiable one-off blows to the head, and more aligned to repeated, seldom noticed, cumulative collisions in training and matches. It has been easy to look away, to look elsewhere, particularly towards the North American gridiron variety of football, and to the legacy of heading an association football. Even then, references to the past, to heavy leather footballs and that game's yesteryears, fool us into thinking that this is not a real and present danger. Even when a sport as genteel as volleyball is becoming mired in brain injury claims, rugby must urgently seek to protect and explore ways in which the current and future health of its players can be expertly protected. This is no longer somebody else's problem. We can no longer look the other way.

legacy

I explore this issue as someone with the look of a rugby man. Introduced to the oval ball as a 9-year-old in the 1970s, my own rugby legacy is evident today in my pinned bones and peculiarly misshapen ears. A twenty-five-year playing career, encompassing several clubs at home and abroad, tours, and a career pinnacle as a journeyman during the first flush of professionalism. Although



Ian in action for Park. He recalls this photo was taken (v Plymouth Albion) in "Nov 1993, pre the introduction of (legally sanctioned) lifting and a gap. First movement was always sideways! Team that day was: Parton; Porter; Wyeth; Ashworth; Roiser; Roblin; Smither (rep Walshe); Perrett; Barnett; Henderson (rep Buckney); Milward; Campbell-Lamerton; Pickup, Brooks, Downey. Park won 38-7. I can see Ian C-L, Hendo and Rich Downey in the pic. Think I am being 'supported' by Brooksy behind me. Those were the days when I could actually get off the ground!"

life has moved on since those days, I remain acutely aware of the role that rugby played in the development of my own identity, in the forging of life skills, self-esteem and cultural capital. I owe the game so much and like many, occasionally find myself reminiscing about my rugby days. A collection of matchday programmes and largely black and white photographs provided a somewhat self-indulgent trip along memory lane during a recent lockdown.

Unquestionably, the evolution of the game has diminished the dark arts of the amateur era and impacted positively on player behaviours and tactics that for generations blurred the lines between written and unwritten codes of acceptable physicality. I was a teenager being introduced to the senior club game in the 1980s and remember with comic affection a range of incidents that make today's version of the game look somewhat anodyne. Being asked politely to surrender possession in a northern maul under threat of having my arm broken; the savagery of rucking the body and being proud of a jersey torn from my back by an opponent's boot (but never, ever, finding it acceptable to place a boot near the head of an opponent); scrummaging in the dark for three hours on a Tuesday night, going around and around the pitch whilst the backs (I think) practised 'their moves'; trying to play on with a variety of soft tissue and musculoskeletal injuries with little more than petroleum jelly, electrical tape, a bloodied magic sponge and smelling salts to sustain my performance; having to ask my teammates which way we were playing following a blow to the head...

...Oh. And so, it is here, slap bang /continued next page... /

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amidst the humour and fond recollections of former teammates, highs, lows and skills developed in and around the game, that I reach a point of heart-wrenching realisation: that the game which featured so prominently in my life, a game that became inexorably intertwined with my identity and gave me so much, may well have made a lasting and devastating impact on my future self.

We knew, of course, that playing the game came with risks. Most of us played because we thrived on the physicality of the contest, yet it seems extraordinary now that we didn't call into question some of the practices that we willingly engaged in at the time. When the game first ventured into professional territory in 1996, we were quick to train more, train harder and attempt to make up for lost time. Although we soon learned that we couldn't train at maximum intensity all day or every day, the quest for optimum impact in collisions led to an inevitable focus on the development of power and strength, to equip ourselves to assault opponents – themselves also growing as a result of new gym regimes – on or near to the so-called gain line.

defensive lines

Today's defensive lines are characterised as iron walls, spanning the width of a pitch, with no spare inch evident for an attacking player to exploit, every defensive player poised and positioned to take space and drive an opponent back towards their own line. In the early days of professionalism, most teams retained variations of non-tackling fly halves (I mention no names here), and members of the front row union whose contribution to the game started and finished as gnarled cornerstones of every scrum. As the game has evolved, then so too has the skillset in every position, so that the previously non-tackling fly half has become a key gain line enforcer, and the cornerstone prop an all passing, running and tackling rugby maestro. Consequentially, there is no fly half to compensate; no prop to cover; no space to exploit with skill and guile. More contact. More pain.

I am certain that today's players are cared for in ways that we would never have imagined possible in the 80s and 90s. It once more seems funny to recall the game's first professional contracts and – at least for club players like me – to consider how little mention was made of health insurance or salary protection schemes. We were, however, well looked after by our medical teams, with unrestricted access to physiotherapists to enable a swift return to the fray. For more serious concerns a trip to Harley Street could always be arranged, perhaps one of the benefits of playing for one of the capital's most famous and well-heeled

clubs.

The onus must now be for the game's global authorities to construct a plan that seeks to protect the modern-day gladiators who ply their trade in one of the most physically abrasive sports on the planet. This response will be a defining moment for a sport struggling already amidst the Covid-19 context. Changes to the laws of the game, and the frameworks through which players are asked to train and play are all entirely possible. A maximum number of full contact training minutes per week and season per player? Reducing the number of players on the field to create more space? Making the field of play larger? Reducing the number of substitutions possible so that players are able to slow down, become tired and not be faced with a fresh-legged powerhouse for the final 20 minutes of each game? Of course, regular scans to monitor player cognitive function and general health are an obvious must.

Above all else, the dreadful experiences of Thompson and perhaps as-yet undiagnosed countless others must be a wake-up call for those with the power to make a positive difference. As I once sat on a muddy pitch, wet sponge to my head and smelling salts under my nose, the game itself now lies in prone position, stretcher bearer rapidly approaching. Creating an environment in which every rugby athlete, at every level, is able to play freely in the knowledge that all of the physical, social and affective benefits of taking part far outweigh the health risks must be the game's number one priority.

Although changes may very well come too late to help today's crop of just-retired players, the very future of the game and of the people who currently play it, hangs in the balance until this reckoning is complete. I sincerely hope that retired players for years to come are able to look back fondly on their careers, dig out the old programmes and reminisce with lucidity about the enjoyment they once experienced on rugby's field of dreams. Our wonderful game of rugby, in all its glory and with all of its faults, is a far too precious a pursuit for the need for urgent change to be ignored.

As I continue to monitor my own cognitive functioning with some trepidation, and secretly rejoice in watching my teenage children taking part in other, non-rugby sporting pursuits, I cannot help but hope that the game's global authorities commit to the 'hard yards', and work with the same levels of full-bloodied commitment as the game's players in order to protect all that remains good about the game.

OUR ETHOS IS DEFINED BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE CLOTHING WE WEAR HAS A DIRECT IMPACT ON OUR LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE IN SPORT

OUR REMIT IS TO DELIVER THE BEST POSSIBLE PRODUCT

OUR INTENT IS FUNDAMENTALLY ENGRAINED IN OUR PROCESS

LET'S PLAY!

SERIOUS-STUFF.COM

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Sevens blow

The club has suffered another significant blow with the postponement of this year's Rosslyn Park HSBC National Schools Sevens. Given the disappointment of the 2020 tournament's cancellation and the importance that rugby plays in young people's lives, Tournament Director, Andrew Higgins, and his team have done everything within their power to deliver a tournament in March 2021. However, given the serious ongoing circumstances, it was concluded that we simply could not proceed with good conscience and, very sadly, have had to confirm postponement of the 2021 March event.

While the Club must be realistic and recognise the current national situation, we are working with the RFU & ERSFU on the feasibility of hosting a Summer Tournament in its place. This will be contingent on meeting several criteria and we are currently examining the format and safety aspects.

Andrew said, "We hope to consult with as many schools as possible regarding our plans. This may be both directly and through teaching associations / bodies so that we may understand the appetite for attending a summer event.

"If we are unable to stage a tournament in 2021, we will stand by our commitment to either refund or carry over the payment to 2022. However, we would suggest that we should first complete our discussions with the schools, RFU and government about a Summer Tournament. We will then be in a position to either publish details of an updated summer format or decide that it would not be possible to host a tournament this year".

Although the postponement comes earlier than last year, the club will have inevitably incurred expenditure. Let us hope that a summer tournament will be possible and that it will be well supported by the schools.

Good deeds

The B XV and the Slingbacks are not sitting back while the restrictions are in place but are doing good things to help others.

#Rugby4NHS



The Slingbacks have started an initiative that would see Rugby clubs – inveterate users of A & E units everywhere – give back to hard pressed NHS staff. Slingbacks skipper Sam Emery explains: "We're launching a drive to get the UK rugby community to donate care packages to NHS workers today and it would be great if you could get involved.

"It dawned on me that we've been active users of A&E on Sundays over the years and have always had teammates working in healthcare. I'd seen several posts online saying how appreciative workers are of snacks and hot lunches turning up and thought we could try and give back to raise their spirits.

"We have a hashtag #rugby4nhs that can be used when sharing posts of your teams' donations (also tagging your team and where it went). It would be great if you could consider supporting your local hospitals and helping to get this going across the rugby family.

"Our first hamper went to Queen Elizabeth Blackheath where, a

decade ago, an ambulance delivered me into their care fresh off the rugby pitch with a dislocated elbow.

"High as a kite on pain meds, my usual food-centred thinking led to high-stakes diplomatic negotiations to secure a Mars bar from all and sundry despite being nil by mouth. I now live locally to QE so belated apologies have now been offered in the form of several multipacks!"

The initiative has already gained a lot of traction. Sam and Slingback colleague were interviewed on TalkSPORT and the local Radio station Riverside Radio, and the campaign made it onto the RFU England Rugby pages. There have been numerous retweets including England Internationals Owen Farrell (men) and Marlie Packer (women).

The hashtag and launch post is live on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ8NPndgEKF/?igshid=1eh47vkohrzf>

<https://www.facebook.com/183396441730571/posts/4841485405921628/?d=n>

https://twitter.com/RP_Slingbacks/status/1348924953647865856?s=20

Bs run to help kids



The B XV are running for a good cause. During January 14 of them are attempting to run over 1250 miles for the War Child charity, which works exclusively to improve the resilience and wellbeing of children living with violence and armed conflict. The charity works to empower children, unleash their inner strength through a creative and engaging approach. They deliver vital child protection, education and psychosocial support. Anything you can spare will be going to a good cause, and will be doubled by the Government. You can learn more about War Child at: <https://www.warchild.org.uk/home>
[You can sponsor the Park Bs here.](#)

Our former grounds

1: South End Green





As most supporters probably know, the club was founded after a meeting at the Roebuck Hotel in Hampstead at the end of the 1879 cricket season, from members of the Rosslyn Park Cricket Club. The oldest of them, Charles Hoyer Millar, recently arrived from boarding at Clifton School, was keen to keep together his newly-made bunch of friends and suggested forming a football club. The price he willingly paid was to become Secretary and Treasurer, and to find them somewhere to play.

The obvious answer, the vast expanses of the local Hampstead Heath, were effectively out of bounds. A previous government panicking at the growing tendency of working people to combine in unions, had added a clause to the 1835 Highways Act as it passed through Parliament banning all forms of football from being played on public land. Ostensibly this was a public safety measure, but the real purpose was to restrict opportunities for the working classes to get together outside of the workplace – not that the young founders of Rosslyn Park Football Club could in any way be mistaken for horny-handed sons of toil. But it did mean that Millar's task was complicated by having to find a plot of private land to hire.

(It may be interesting as a side-note here that this is why Rugby Union has traditionally been associated with Public Schools. Rugby Football was primarily a schoolboy sport and only fee paying schools, and not the state-run schools, had the private grounds where the sport could be played).

Fortunately an answer was close at hand. There was a field for hire just down Pond Lane, downhill from the Roebuck and only a couple of hundred yards from Hampstead Heath Station. The first Rosslyn Park ground was at South End Green, off Fleet Road in Hampstead. It had been the eponymous pond of Pond Lane, fed by the Fleet River which now flowed under the ground. The pond and its surrounds had recently been filled in, bought by the local vestry and had all the characteristics of a village green. It is nowadays a housing estate. Millar secured its use for the princely sum of £5 for the season.



How the original ground looks nowadays

Having acquired somewhere to play, the pitch had to be marked out, not with white lines but with V-shaped grooves cut into the turf. Only the rectangle of the in-play area itself and a half-way line were necessary – no “in goal” areas (and it was frequent that players would run many yards beyond the goalposts to place the ball in order to get a straighter shot at scoring a goal). Placing the ball down earned a “try” at goal - and matches were decided by the number of goals scored, number of “tries” only came into play if goals were equal.

One problem with marking the lines by grooves cut in the turf was that as soon as it got really muddy most of the lines disappeared. This led to disputes which – no referees those days – were resolved or not by the two skippers. Much depended upon the “spirit of the game”, which was not always honoured. Many of the Rosslyn Park players had attended Cholmeley School in Highgate, which had played football to the Rugby code on its cricket field on Hampstead Lane from 1862 until 1877. The first season's fixtures, organised by the indefatigable Millar, were mostly against clubs the cricket club had played against or teams known to the players..

There was a pub – the White Horse – close to the green, where a small upstairs room was hired for changing and the Club's portable goal posts were stored there. It was from there that the team emerged on 18 October 1879 to play their first match against Belsize Sefton, which they won 5-0. The pub was rebuilt a couple of years later and has recently been renamed the Cork & Bottle wine bar, but it still occupies the same footprint. You can look out of the window and across the road to the housing estate in front of where Park's original ground once stood. There were 43 members who paid five shillings (25p) as players, three shillings (15p) for non-playing members. The club's total receipts in its first season were fifteen pounds twelve shillings, showing a very small profit.



Although 15 members left at the end of that first season they were replaced by 33 new ones and Rosslyn Park FC was on its way. After a second season at South End Green the club upped sticks, to somewhere that they could erect permanent goalposts in a paddock of their own. They also changed the club's shirts to the now famous red and white hoops. The South End Green ground was redeveloped shortly afterwards. The new ground was at Gospel Oak – and it nearly cost the club its very existence. But that is for another newsletter.

Misconceptions

It may be worth dispelling some misconceptions, following the previous piece. Firstly, the members decided to name the club Rosslyn Park Football Club. Several people have asserted that only clubs of a certain age or distinction can call themselves football clubs. That is nonsense – anyone still could if they wanted. But at the time Park were formed the split between Rugby football and Association football had happened only a few years earlier, so both codes still referred to their sport as football – indeed some clubs (like Sale) played both codes on alternate weekends.

Another misconception is half true. It is a fact that the initial intention had been to call the club Hampstead, but there was already a club of that name. But it was not the Hampstead club that split to become Harlequins and Wasps – that had happened a few years previously. Another club, the Ashantees RFC, had taken the ‘vacant’ name Hampstead, thus our founders decided to adopt the name of their cricket club. Incidentally, that Hampstead club that was previously Ashantees never reformed after WW1: the present Hampstead club was formed more recently.

It has been claimed by the existing Belsize Park club that Rosslyn Park was formed by their former members. This is not true. What actually happened was that the original Belsize Park was founded in 1871, and were represented at the meeting that year which founded the RFU, but they folded in 1881, two years after Rosslyn Park were formed (the current Belsize Park club re-formed some 90 years later under the same name and wearing similar colours to their predecessors). Those members of the original club who

wanted to keep on playing split pretty evenly between joining Park and joining Harlequins, doing so as individuals looking for a new club.

Thanks

The Chairman, Adam Tyrer, recently sent a letter to members, outlining our current position, which is too long to reproduce here especially as most readers will have received a copy. In it he particularly thanked supporters and sponsors for their support in these difficult times.

He said, "Despite the extremely challenging situation and in particular the impact of the pandemic on our club finances, we remain in a stable financial position, due in no small measure to the hard work and dedication of our team led by Dom Shabbo. With your continued support and understanding along with those of our sponsors we are confident that we will be able to emerge from this difficult year in a strong position.

"The vast majority of our current sponsors have stuck by us this season. Without them, it would have made an already challenging season even harder and, on behalf of everyone associated with the club, I would like to thank them for their wonderful support".

Adam went on to describe some of the things in the pipeline, most of which are mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter. "As mentioned, we are working to delivering a series of friendly fixtures for you to come and enjoy if this will be at all possible. Along with this, we will be incorporating all the 2020/21 season club members' names onto the shirt numbers on the 1st team's shirt next season as a thank you for your continued support.

"We're not sure exactly what the format will be but we are cautiously optimistic we will be able to hold some sort of Floodlit 7s tournament although as with everything that will be dependent on what will be allowed and in particular the extent it will be safe for spectators. You may have seen recent press articles about the Championship in connection with the Government's Sports Winter Survival Package and in particular that the support was in the form of loans and not grants. As you can imagine, clubs are not in general that keen on loans.

"Below the Championship however we understand the situation is different and grants rather than loans will be available. We don't know the mechanics of how these support packages will work yet but we will be looking to make a strong case for support from this centrally held fund. I will update you once I know more.

"I would like to wholeheartedly thank you, our members for your ongoing support. Your subscriptions are incredibly important for the club's cash flow this year and we cannot thank you enough for supporting your club through this period and continuing your membership. We're absolutely delighted with the recent successes of the 250 Club raffle where we managed to sell 250 tickets, and also received some generous donations.

"We will also be working towards a summer event (again when permitted) for all members as a thank you for your support".

Sponsorship Opportunities

A very wide range of sponsorship advertising, marketing and promotional opportunities are available throughout the season with prices suitable for all budgets. These provide a very powerful and cost effective opportunity to promote your business. Sponsorship proposal for 2020/21 Season

During the lock-down, Jodie Rocket, our Commercial and Sponsorship Manager, has been working on some exciting sponsorship opportunities for the new season. We will be promoting these over the coming weeks as more is known about how the season will be structured and run. The first of these packages is featured below. We understand that we are currently living through uncertain times, but if individuals or their businesses feel able to commit to the package at this time – your support would be significant to the Club and very much appreciated.

- **Email marketing & campaigns to club database throughout the year.** Database of over 3,000 members and players
- **Feature on RPFC website & full company description**
- **Social media support across all channels throughout the season.** Twitter, Instagram, Facebook & YouTube
- **Branded pitch board located around the venue** 6m x 2m board designed and produced by club for the full year
- **Table of 8 guests including 3-course meal for one home game of the season.** Home game of choice, including 3-course meal & car parking spaces
- **Hire of the club/venue free of charge.** This can include both pitch and clubhouse for one full day
Cost: £2,000 + VAT per season

For an additional £1,000 + VAT

- **Company branding on Men's 1st XV playing kit**
National exposure throughout the year

Digital Marketing

The Rosslyn Park website, database, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram all represent a large and fast growing audience with targeted engagements.

These platforms allow opportunities for companies to build bespoke and extremely cost effective packages and are a great way to interact with our supporters and social media followers instantly. Our social media not only provides the latest Rosslyn Park tries and score lines but also highlight your companies involvement at the club.

Please contact Jodie Rockett, our Sponsorship Manager, via email: jodie.rockett@rosslynpark.co.uk or phone: [0208 876 1879](tel:02088761879) to discuss how sponsorship at Rosslyn Park may fit with your own promotional plans.

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR SPONSORS AS THEY HAVE SUPPORTED US

400 Club

January draw result - John Spain £100, Nick Overend £50 and Michael Kempner £25. If you would like to help your club while having the chance to win monthly cash prizes (and an end-of-season 'Jackpot') then the 400 Club could be just what you are looking for. Contact Boothy in the Club Office on 020 8876 1879 for full details.

Times have changed



The London Broncos Rugby League team training at the Rock underlines another big change in attitudes. Rugby League was effectively forbidden from Rugby Union facilities for many years. Indeed, players who "took the Northern shilling" were generally barred from their old clubs if they tried to return. When Martin Offiah (pictured above in different red & white hoops - those of Wigan RFC) returned to Park for a drink with some of his old mates, after a distinguished Rugby League career in which, incidentally, he had a brief spell with the Broncos, he received a distinctly frosty 'welcome' from a senior officer of the club. To the extent that he didn't enter the Clubhouse. Although, in fairness, almost everyone else at the club would have welcomed him with open arms had he got through the door. He would certainly be made very welcome today, should he choose to drop in. How things have changed – and for the better!