

Sedgley Park

v

Stourbridge

*W*elcome to Park Lane

Sedgley Park extend a warm welcome to our friends, the players, officials and supporters of Stourbridge RFC who are our opponents today in this RFU National League Three North match.

This is a very big match for both teams, with the situation at the top of what is otherwise a very skewed league being extremely tight indeed. Both clubs can take some heart from the defeat of New Brighton at Nuneaton in the only match played last weekend: the pressure on our league-leading visitors was reduced and, of course, it gives Sedgley a chance to take second or, just possibly, first spot

It has to be said that Stourbridge are a consistently class act, both on and off the field and that, should they finally obtain the promotion they have come so close to, so often, then it is surely well deserved. It also has to be said that Sedgley haven't beaten them since January 1998 *but* are currently by far the hottest team in the league. Past games have proven to be gruelling encounters for both sides: there is mutual respect.

Just before Christmas that we were commenting here on the likelihood of Stourbridge scoring 1000 points in the season and, now, Park are perhaps the more likely contenders for that rare achievement. If both clubs were to do it then that would probably be some sort of record!

Whatever the result today, we trust that our visitors enjoy the game and our hospitality, and we extend similar thoughts to the match officials, without whose efforts and commitment games such as this cannot take place.

Dave's Diary

Just occasionally you read something which makes you so angry that you feel compelled to write a stinging reply. This has just happened to me, the offending article being a piece by Geoff Green in the *Sunday Pink* of 18 February.

Now Geoff has served Sedgley Park well these last few seasons, and we are grateful to him for excellent publicity, but this time ... my views and his do not coincide.

The subject was County rugby, and the game which Lancashire felt they had to cancel against the Royal Air Force because a handful of players chose to make themselves unavailable. As Mr Green (correctly) states, "It used to be an honour to be chosen by your county ... The Red Rose was a rugby conveyor belt, spewing out England captains in just the same way that the Welsh turned out mercurial fly-halves".

It ceased to be an honour to play for your county, Mr Green, when the structure was altered and the very best players were no longer available. The very best players play for the Premiership clubs – like Sale, for example. It is they, and not the likes of Sedgley Park and Preston Grasshoppers, that have devalued the county game. Our players never used to be chosen anyway.

Perhaps my memory of the past is at odds with Geoff Green's. He remembers Bill Beaumont, Fran Cotton, Tony Neary, John Carleton, Tony Bond etc. So do I, and I remember the great win over the All Blacks at Otley; I was there! This led directly to an England side packed with Northerners, a side which won the Grand Slam in 1980. Yes, that was excellent.

But what about the years either side of that lonely success, the years in which English rugby was a joke, when the Welsh used to take the mickey out of us, and not the other way round?

During those dark years of the Seventies and middle Eighties, you could jump straight into the England team by having a good game in the Varsity match. Otherwise you had to play for one of the big London clubs, or for one of the Midland giants – which included Coventry and Moseley at that time – or for Gloucester or Bristol. The County

Championship, in that brief period of success, provided the only way for a Northern player to get to the top without having to move house and home. Even then, Fran Cotton played for Coventry.

English rugby at that time was so weak because the top club game was a closed shop. Northampton could lose every match and still Leicester would play them the following season. With no leagues, no relegation, there was no incentive to improve. The game was flabby and self-indulgent; English rugby was rubbish.

But Mr Green would like to see a return to that golden age. He wants a ring fence erected round the premierships clubs, so Harlequins (say) can be as hopeless as they like; they are protected from the predators – Worcester and Leeds, at the moment – by that fence. In turn, with no challenging prey, the predators themselves will weaken. England, now so vibrant, could return to the bad old days of Dodge and Colclough when the great Underwood, on the wing, used to get about one pass a season. B.C. – Before Carling!

Geoff Green saw Sedgley play the other week and wrote a very complimentary report. Yet, he can still write "... the clubs lower down the ladder, sadly semi-professional, and striving to get where they are never going to get, regard their own league battles as more important than helping their players on to county honours boards". That's *us* he's talking about. All our efforts are as nothing in his eyes.

Of course, the Premiership clubs would like the rest of the game to return to amateurism. With natural market forces no longer applying, their wage bill would be drastically cut, a dozen players competing for every paid post.

Geoff, it's time to bury county rugby and, while we're at it, let's take the old counties out of the administration, too. Move over, the old order, the Golden Age is *now* – almost!

Photos By Peter Barton

Peter Barton, a professional sports photographer, has been present at various of our 1st XV matches this season. He has a website – www.peterbarton.cwc.net – where you can view some of his work, which is widely used by rugby magazines and the newspapers.

On The Road With Sedgley Park

Sunday 18 February – A short trip only, to Rochdale, Lancs Cup 1st round. More than any other event this season, this match demonstrated the advance our club has made on the field. The 20 players used included only one, Ross Bullough, who had started in the league game the previous day, and three others who had been on the bench.

But Sedgley's mainly young team came up trumps, winning 47 – 0 and playing attractive rugby despite a muddy pitch and aggressive opponents. Left wing Anthony Bentham scored three tries, including one very special one, and Colt Stuart Campbell came off the bench to score two on the opposite wing. Last season's Colts captain Andy Taylor opened the scoring; the game's most impressive forward, Dan Hogg, ended it. Full-back Pete Roberts kicked a couple of penalties and three conversions.

A very impressive performance. Next round is Preston Grasshoppers, away (of course).

Saturday 24 February – Down the dreaded M6 to Walsall, but at least it was sunny and pleasant in the Midlands, and the pitch was not too bad. With both sides desperate for the league points, this was always going to be a tight game, but no-one could have expected such a feast of running rugby from both teams.

The first half, in which Sedgley looked marginally the better team, produced six tries, ours being scored by Leon Treco, from a line-out; Ross Bullough following a quickly taken tap-penalty and break by Mike Wilcock; and Sion O'Hare, a fine individual run from quick line-out ball.

Walsall's big and talented centres each got a try, as did the home scrum-half after an interception by the right winger. Sedgley led 24 – 19 at half-time.

We were playing down the slope in the second half, and might have been expected to increase our lead. Walsall had other ideas and we were starved of possession for long periods. Uncharacteristic errors began to creep into the Sedgley game and it came as no surprise when the home side scored after our scrum had been pushed off its own ball.

The conversion put Walsall ahead and it took some brave defence over the next 15 minutes to prevent them scoring more points. Rob Moon briefly restored our lead with a penalty but Walsall were successful with a similar kick moments later.

It took a great break by Dave McCormack, leading to a try for Colin Stephens, to win the game for Sedgley. Stephens added the conversion and might have had a penalty a couple of minutes later but for a moment;s insanity. Final score 34 – 29.

Fortunately for Colin, Sedgley managed to survive the last thirty seconds, so our promotion hopes are still alive. Walsall, amazingly, find themselves near the relegation zone.

Sunday 4 March – a short hop to Preston for round 2 of the Lancs Cup. Once again we fielded a 2nd XV and, with ‘Hoppers adopting a similar strategy, a good game was in prospect.

Sedgley played much the better rugby in the first half. Big Paul Arnold was prominent in a strong display by the pack, the whole team looking organised and composed. Preston had plenty of possession but tended to kick it away at this stage. Wing Anthony Bentham scored an early try, from Pete Roberts’ long pass, and flanker Dan Hogg got another just before half-time, Arnold and Andy Losty doing the setting up. Pete Roberts had a couple of successful goal kicks and we led 15 – 0.

Two minutes into the second half, and it was 20 – 0, Sion O’Hare scoring wide out, and it all looked so easy. But now ‘Hoppers suddenly stopped kicking the ball and started running with it. The results must have exceeded even their expectations, as they ran in four (yes, four!) tries in fifteen minutes – good tries, too, though we wondered a bit about the Sedgley tackling. Sedgley managed just a penalty in this period, and Preston led 24 – 23.

Time for the cavalry, supplied mainly by Tim Fourie who came off the bench to demonstrate the not-too-gentle art of the tackle. He it was who scored the final try and, with Roberts adding the conversion and a late penalty, we had won 33 – 24.

We look forward to meeting Aldwinians, here, in the semi-final on 8 April.

Next 1st XV League Matches

The 1st XV are away against Sandal next week. Places are available for travel to the match on the team coach for around £2.50 per person – contact Ray Fallon on 0831 460709 if you are interested.

For those making their own way, it is a doddle to find:

- M60 and continue on to M62 east for 39 miles to J29 (M1 J42)
- Join M1 heading south west for 7 miles to J39
- Take A636 to Wakefield
- After three-quarters of a mile turn right at roundabout into Asdale Road, signposted A61
- After 1 mile the club will be found on the left

The following week sees another big match at home to NEW BRIGHTON. We should have beaten them earlier in of the season and we want a lot of supporters present. Pass on the word to ANYONE.

Today's Match Officials

We welcome the match officials today. The referee is David Mathews, from St Helens. His touch judges are Paul Meehan, of Stoke-on-Trent, and Steve Barr, who hails from Lichfield. The Assessor is once again Bob Wilkinson, of Formby, and he is joined by a Touch Judges' Coach in the form of Alan Clarke from Prescot.

Foot-and-Mouth Trivia

When the last major outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease happened in the UK in 1967, Ireland cancelled two rugby union international matches against the New Zealand tourists.

The previous time that a match in the then Five Nations tournament were called off for non-rugby reasons, before last weekend, was in 1972 - both Scotland and Wales cancelled their matches against Ireland in Dublin because of terrorist threats from the IRA.

Forget the tragic situation regarding foot-and-mouth disease for a moment and consider whether Sedgley have the first instance of pedodontology. Otherwise known as foot-in-mouth disease, any sightings should be referred to Mr D H Smith.

Forthcoming Events

Aside from the regular fixtures, we can confirm several events taking place before the season's end. In fact, there are a lot of such events either planned or in the pipeline: you are advised to keep a look out for additions to the list below – information will be available on club noticeboards, in future programmes and on the website at www.sprufc.com

- Tonight Annual Dinner Dance – admission £25, tickets from Rob Williamson or Leighton Hughes
- Tomorrow Junior Lancs Cup matches
- 31 March The 31st annual Bottom Trophy match, with Shirley Wanderers coming here in a (hopefully vain) attempt to wrest the world famous Piss Pot from our grasps.
- Also:*
- Club Tour – see Ricky Wilkinson or Steve Ward for details
- 6 – 8 April Junior Section Tour. You should have paid your deposit by now and, ideally, a good bit more
- 8 April Home (a rarity in recent years!) against Aldwinians in the Lancs Cup semi-final
- 16 April Super 10s Tournament (U13s through to U16s). Sedgley are hosts and organisers
- 29 April Hosts to the Junior Lancashire Cup Finals - a fitting situation as our Mini and Junior sections celebrate their 25th anniversary season

The John Eady Award

The inaugural winner of this prestigious award is Colin Stephens. His tap-penalty in the last minute of the Walsall match two weeks ago was adjudged to be a perfect 10 on the Eady scale. A suitable trophy is needed – any suggestions?

Tomorrow – Lancs Cup Match

The Junior Lancashire Cup competitions resume tomorrow. We are sure that other teams in the Junior section could repeat stories similar to the one that follows concerning John Pepworth's U16 side ... but he seems to be the only one taking advantage of repeated offers of space in the programme.

In a season when five key Sedgley U16 players, out of a small squad, have been required by Lancashire over fourteen weeks, the team have struggled to field a XV most weeks. Tomorrow they play Preston Grasshoppers here at Park Lane (kick-off 11am) and have not played a match for the preceding four weeks!

Let's hope they can repeat the success of the 1st XV last week against the same club. Please do try to lend your support: they are an enthusiastic and much improved side on that which they were a few years ago when the combined efforts of Pep and Dave Allen were first ministrated to them.

Head To Head

Below is a summary of past encounters between today's two clubs. Venue and outcome are from Sedgley's perspective. The clubs did not meet until Sedgley joined the National Leagues in the 1997-98 season.

Date	Venue	Sedgley	Stourbridge	Result
22 Nov 1997	A	21	27	L
17 Jan 1998	H	39	19	W
5 Sep 1998	A	17	32	L
27 Mar 1999	H	24	43	L
20 Nov 1999	A	20	35	L
8 Jan 2000	H	23	23	D
23 Sep 2000	A	12	49	L

In case you think that these results look a little lop-sided, why not take a look at the match reports on Sedgley's website – they are available from the 1998-99 season and, if anyone has copies, we'd love to add the earlier reports. Almost without exception, games between the two clubs have been tough, fair and, above all, enjoyable.

The RFU National League Division Three North

1st XV Results 2000-2001

August	19	<i>Stockport [Friendly]</i>	A			W
	26	<i>Preston Grasshoppers [Friendly]</i>	A	22	24	L
September	2	New Brighton	A	9	12	L
	9					
	16	Sandal	H	P	P	
	23	Stourbridge	A	12	49	L
	30	Walsall	H	25	7	W
October	7	Kendal [TBC 2]	H	17	9	W
	14	Bedford Athletic	A	18	23	L
	21	Bedford Blues [TBC 3]	A	15	45	L
	28	Morley	A	23	15	W
November	4	Dudley Kingswinford	H	37	5	W
	11	Nuneaton	H	57	3	W
	18	Aspatria	A	21	10	W
	25	Tynedale	A	18	8	W
December	2	Whitchurch	H	59	3	W
	9	Doncaster	A	13	18	L
	16	Liverpool St Helens	H	43	13	W
	23	Whitchurch	A	39	14	W
	30	Tynedale	H	P	P	
January	6	Aspatria	H	57	3	W
	13	Nuneaton	A	56	17	W
	20	Morley	H	P	P	
	27	Dudley Kingswinford	A	23	11	W
February	3	Sandal	H	47	16	W
	10	Bedford Athletic	H	69	0	W
	17	Morley	H	63	7	W
	18	Rochdale [Lancs Cup 1]	A	47	0	W
	24	Walsall	A	34	29	W
March	3	Tynedale	H	P	P	
	4	Preston G'hoppers [Lancs Cup 2]	A	33	24	W
	10	Stourbridge	H			
	17	Sandal	A			
	24	New Brighton	H			
April	31	Liverpool St Helens	A			
	7					
	8	Aldwinians [Lancs Cup Semi-Final]	H			
	14	Doncaster	H			
	21					
28	Tynedale	H				

League at 3 March February 2001

	P	W	D	L	F	A	D	- Pts	Pts
Stourbridge	19	17	0	2	688	259	429		34
New Brighton	20	17	0	3	570	269	301		34
Sedgley Park	20	16	0	4	723	263	460		32
Doncaster	20	15	0	5	522	294	228		30
Nuneaton	21	13	0	8	451	474	-23		26
Dudley Kingswinford	20	9	1	10	383	427	-44		19
Liverpool St Helens	20	8	0	12	410	537	-127		16
Whitchurch	20	8	0	12	350	601	-251		16
Morley	20	7	0	13	359	581	-222		14
Tynedale	18	6	1	11	282	311	-29		13
Walsall	18	5	0	13	379	442	-63		10
Bedford Athletic	19	5	0	14	294	499	-205		10
Sandal	19	5	0	14	420	640	-220		10
Aspatria	18	4	0	14	307	541	-234	-2	6

Home \ Away	Aspatria	Bedford Ath	Doncaster	Dudley Kingsford	Liverpool St Helens	Morley	New Brighton	Nuneaton	Sandal	Sedgley Park	Stourbridge	Tynedale	Walsall	Whitchurch
Aspatria		30 - 20	17 Mar	13 - 20	30 - 19	26 - 40	20 - 36	15 - 18	7 Apr	10 - 21	P	8 - 26	14 Apr	19 - 12
Bedford Ath	24 Mar		0 - 18	17 Mar	19 - 20	25 - 17	7 Apr	8 - 25	24 - 19	23 - 18	14 Apr	29 - 22	24 - 16	10 - 26
Doncaster	43 - 20	32 - 17		46 - 7	10 Mar	25 - 15	11 - 3	38 - 11	55 - 33	18 - 13	17 - 16	31 Mar	7 Apr	64 - 21
Dudley Kingsford	10 Mar	21 - 7	33 - 3		44 - 31	20 - 10	11 - 24	48 - 13	14 Apr	11 - 23	14 - 29	13 - 13	24 Mar	29 - 19
Liverpool St Helens	19 - 10	26 - 20	14 - 33	14 - 36		34 - 18	17 - 21	25 - 15	21 - 13	31 Mar	7 Apr	6 - 34	33 - 20	17 Mar
Morley	21 Apr	10 Mar	22 - 5	16 - 17	31 - 24		14 Apr	26 - 16	29 - 15	15 - 23	24 Mar	23 - 11	12 - 10	13 - 23
New Brighton	45 - 8	31 - 7	18 - 16	32 - 13	24 - 9	79 - 0		31 Mar	35 - 28	12 - 9	27 - 18	17 Mar	35 - 26	53 - 0
Nuneaton	33 - 22	22 - 13	22 - 12	29 - 0	14 Apr	50 - 27	20 - 8		24 Mar	17 - 56	5 - 46	29 - 9	10 Mar	41 - 13
Sandal	15 - 29	26 - 18	11 - 53	39 - 21	22 - 34	31 Mar	5 - 48	18 - 22		17 Mar	27 - 47	10 - 23	39 - 30	22 - 17
Sedgley Park	57 - 3	69 - 0	14 Apr	37 - 5	43 - 13	63 - 7	24 Mar	57 - 3	47 - 16		10 Mar	28 Apr	25 - 7	59 - 3
Stourbridge	33 - 10	37 - 20	13 - 10	31 Mar	26 - 19	72 - 17	31 - 10	17 Mar	65 - 10	49 - 12		18 - 0	46 - 6	65 - 7
Tynedale	33 - 20	24 - 10	0 - 6	7 Apr	24 Mar	9 - 5	10 - 16	10 - 20	10 Mar	8 - 18	16 - 35		21 Apr	14 Apr
Walsall	51 - 14	31 Mar	5 - 17	16 - 9	48 - 15	17 Mar	10 - 13	8 - 28	P	29 - 34	22 - 25	24 - 23		38 - 30
Whitchurch	31 Mar	P	24 Mar	13 - 11	30 - 17	34 - 16	10 Mar	15 - 12	22 - 52	14 - 39	10 - 17	21 - 11	20 - 13	

Today's Sponsors

The club is always grateful to those who support it, in whatever manner.

The match sponsors today will be familiar names to our regulars. Bellway Homes are present and, of course, are also the club's main sponsor. In addition, we thank HH Smith & Sons, builders and plumbers; Roberts Printers (self-evident!) and our old friends from Regency Factors, the corporate financing specialists.

Sedgley's Future International Players

Alex Loney, who joined us from Aldwinians and who played number 8 for our first ever Lancashire Cup winning U14 side in 1998, is set to play for England Schools U18 on their tour Down Under this summer. He has not played for Sedgley this season, having been head-hunted by Kirkham Grammar School and seeing the schools' representative route as the way to advance his career. He has also changed his position, moving forward to tight-head.

Two other young men from that same team, both very much with us still, decided their Welsh ancestry gave them their best chance for fame and fortune. Prop Mark Fryer and flanker Gareth Somers both played for the Welsh Exiles U17 v District F (whatever that is!) last Sunday at Hendy RFC (near Llanelli), hoping to be selected for the full Wales XV with fixtures against England, Scotland and Italy to come.

Just reverting to the situation regarding Alex Loney, it is sad that young people have to change school and abandon club in order to further their chances of selection for the highest levels of the game. We have other highly talented players in our Junior ranks who are approaching the time when they will have to make such a decision and we can only ask "why?" Perhaps someone would care to comment on this for a future programme?

Many A Slip 'Twixt Cup And Lip

A true enough saying but not one you would imagine applying to the always sober and careful George Hinds. Nonetheless, a couple of weeks ago he proved it – literally – in a local public house when he somehow managed to miss his mouth with a pint. He looked a bitter man for a moment and now asks for a straw.

S *tourbridge – A Brief History*

Stourbridge is a club that has had many starts and, self-evidently (!), one less stop in its chequered history. Indeed, it is difficult to think of another club with so many incarnations.

The first organised game of rugby football in Stourbridge was played on Stourbridge Cricket Ground on 28 October 1876. There is no record of that game but it is probable that their opponents were Moseley Football Club.

Initiated by members of the Cricket Club who wanted a winter activity, at first it was successful but, within a few years, lax organisation and shortage of players led to rugby football being ousted in favour of soccer, a game that was sweeping the Midlands at the time.

From 1883 rugby soldiered on in a variety of locations throughout the town until, in the early 1890s, the successful team began to disperse and there were few replacements. The club folded after four games in the 1893-94 season. There was a brief revival in 1907 but it was always a struggle to raise a team and the club folded again after two lacklustre seasons.

The club was revived yet again in 1921, playing at two unsatisfactory locations before settling on an old soccer ground at Vicarage Road, Wollaston, rented from the Church. This remained their home for 43 years. The headmaster, Mr. J E Boyt had introduced rugby football to King Edward's Grammar School nine years previously, and although it was only played for one term, henceforth it guaranteed the club a regular supply of players and administrators. They played between 23 and 27 fixtures a season, most of them within Birmingham and the Black Country, with Hereford the furthest regular fixture. The best season was 1933-34 when only two games were lost and one drawn out of a total of 25.

The club was re-formed in 1945 after the Second World War and it has made steady progress on and off the field ever since. Facilities have improved throughout the period but the most significant change was the move to the present freehold site at Stourton in 1965-66. Originally just over 11 acres, it was extended to its present 15 acres in 1983-84. Now they possess four senior and two mini pitches, and in 1996-97 completed a 450 seat stand.

In the last few seasons, the RFU has rewarded the club for its enterprise and its increase in status by granting it some prestigious representative fixtures. The most recent was the England v Ireland Under 18 group international in April, 1998.

It was the unusual consistency of performance that ensured that Stourbridge remained one of the leading Junior clubs in the Midlands throughout the post war era. The success was due in no small measure to the close rapport with the Grammar School, converted totally to rugby football. The club has produced players who have performed at all representative levels, probably the most distinguished are Bob Lloyd-Jones (Moseley and Wales), Peter Shillingford (Moseley captain and Barbarians), and Huw Davies. They were all Grammar School lads and all three played for Stour Colts and 1st XV before pursuing a first class rugby career.

The club grew in size as well as stature. A third team was introduced in 1949; the Colts date back to 1957-58; and the mini section began in 1973. Now apart from five and sometimes six senior sides they have a comprehensive and thriving mini, junior and Colts section - their most recent product is the hooker, Matthew Williams who played for England Under 19s only a few years ago.

When the League system was introduced in 1987, Stourbridge, after a golden era in the early and mid 80s, were put in the National Leagues. Area League North in those days consisted of eleven teams and involved ten fixtures a season. They are the only side to remain in that league, in all its various forms for the 14 years of its existence. Although they have flirted with promotion (but never with relegation) throughout that period, their most spectacular achievements have come in the last two seasons, ending runners up on both occasions and hounding the eventual winners almost to the very last game. In so doing they established a reputation for open attacking play, smashing the League record for the number of tries in 1998-99 by averaging well over five tries a game. Last season they scored 108 tries, second only to Kendal, and this was the third consecutive year that the 100 try barrier had been broken.

This season, with a new coaching staff, and a strengthening of the squad, the aim must be "Third Time Lucky", although in modern sport luck really plays second fiddle to ability and organisation.

To B Or Not To B, That Is The Question

You will all (hopefully!) be aware that some leagues this season have been operating bonus points systems in various forms, often abbreviated to “B” or “BP” in the league table headings – hence the shockingly poor pun above.

Before going any further, here’s a quick recap for the uninitiated. Bonus points are *not* awarded for artistic interpretation, much as it might liven up some games if the crowd were able to watch a prop perform a triple pike with two-and-a-half twists and a back somersault before planting the ball dead centre between the posts.

They were, in fact, introduced in the hope of opening up the flowing, scoring game and so that even the losing team might have something positive to gain from the outcome of a match. Putting this in a context relevant to Sedgley, the recently inaugurated Lancashire & Cheshire Colts Leagues use such a system at present, with a bonus point being awarded if to a team each time it score five or more tries in a match, whether or not it wins the match. The system is different for the Zurich Premiership and National League One clubs, but the intent is the same.

Being reasonable people, we decided to canvass the opinions of the managers of both our Senior and Senior Colts teams. Perhaps we should not have bothered, as the outcome was predictable: Ricky Wilkinson was opposed because his team kept scoring four tries but never the fifth required for the BP, whilst Bob Walters loved the scheme because his lot were gaining the points! To put it perhaps more bluntly than is advisable unless wearing body armour and blessed with the pace of an Underwood or a large breakfast of beans, these chaps seemed to be concentrating at the time on the “selfish” viewpoint rather than the any broader perspective!

So, we cast our net a little wider and had discussions with the supporters of various Premiership clubs. Surprise, surprise, at the time of asking the supporters of Saracens liked it whilst the supporters of most other clubs were either ambivalent or opposed. Why no surprise? Well, if you recalculated the Zurich league at the time of asking, in order to remove the effect on league standing of the bonus points, only the Fezheads’ team would have been in a lower position as they and Northampton would have swapped places.

You will also not be surprised to hear that the whole idea comes from, wait for it ... the southern hemisphere.

One reason that bonus points have failed to set the English leagues alight with positive rugby is perhaps the standard of refereeing. Bonus points are only one point of the Australian Super 12 package: one of the main reasons for high-scoring games in the southern hemisphere is that referees are happy to play advantage, sin-bin players who kill the ball, and award penalty tries for the first cynical offence, not the fifteenth. There are also the issues of ignoring forward passes and knock-ons, and paper-thin defences but we don't need those, thank you. Until the general standard of refereeing improves further, no amount of minor tweaking is going to stop the likes of Leicester and Bristol sucking the life out of matches.

Another reason for the lack of impact over here is that teams play to win by the greatest possible margin - always have, always will. In the ZDP situation, if you're 5 points up in the dying minutes, and get awarded a kickable penalty, you're going to kick it - even if you've scored three tries. You're not going to risk 4 points for 1 bonus. If you're up by 8, it's a different matter, but most teams would still go for the try even without a bonus on offer. In fact, the effect of bonus points in the ZDP is largely confined to skewing the end-game: you will see a few games where teams kick a late penalty (or drop goal) to prevent the other team keeping their losing bonus - and less often you will see a team kick a penalty of drop goal to gain a bonus point.

More generally, there is a danger that a team could lose more games over a season and yet finish higher than teams which most people would consider to be "better" by dint of a greater number of wins.

There are additional issues when bonus points are applied as by the Colts League. It is considered by some of the League officials that their scheme is proving to be contrary to the spirit of Colts rugby. Teams are tending to play at full strength at all times, in an effort to achieve the 5 tries, thus preventing other players in the squad from getting regular games. Also, weaker teams are being left behind in the tables, negating the chance of a closer competition and discouraging them from trying.

Can anyone see any *broad* reasons for keeping these systems, ie: not merely because they benefit a team for which you have a soft spot?

International Rugby At Park Lane

Our club's ever increasing status within the game can be measured by our selection as hosts for last Friday's Students' match between England and Scotland. First-time visitors must have been impressed, and it was good to see a fair-sized crowd on the terraces and packed into the clubhouse.

Tony Bolton must be congratulated on the perfect state of the pitch; anything less would surely have led to abandonment as the temperature plummeted.

The game itself was fast, skilful and exciting. Scotland dominated possession in the first half and led through a penalty by Craig Laidlaw. Against the run of play, England scored a good try, number 8 Howard Quigley (Northumbria University) looping outside his wingman to dive over in the corner; Cambridge University's Simon Amor, a beautiful kicker of the ball, added the conversion.

Scotland continued to press but England's defence was impressively organised and only one try was leaked, just before half-time, with scrum-half Chris Black getting clear away from a quickly taken tap. Laidlaw's conversion put his side 10 – 7 up at the interval.

The second half was all England. Three more tries were scored, all in the left corner, strangely, as indeed the first one had been. Left wing Simon Hunt (St Mary's University College) got two of them, full-back Alistair Newmarsh (Loughborough University) scored the other as England exploited the narrow side inventively.

With Amor continuing to strike goals from all over the place, the final score was 33 – 10 to the men in white – and a great victory for the Sedgley Park organisers, too. Come again, England, you're welcome any time!

Northern Merit Table

There were no matches last weekend due to the effects of the foot-and-mouth outbreak and/or the weather. Sedgley's 2nd XV remain well poised to take the title, with the only other obvious contender being Manchester. Of course, our 2nd XV did play a match – in the Lancashire Cup on the Sunday, as reported elsewhere.

J *unior Games Tomorrow*

The information below is correct at the time of printing – please check the fixture list by the main bar for confirmation.

- U18s: home vs Altrincham-Kersal 1.30pm [Lancs and Cheshire Colts League A]
- U16s: home vs Preston Grasshoppers 11am [Lancashire Cup Round 2]
- U15s: home vs Leigh 11am
- U14s: home vs Leigh 11am
- U13s: home vs Leigh 11am
- U7 to U12s: away vs Leigh

A *nnual Golf Day*

This event will take place on 11 May 2001 at Whitefield Golf Club. It has always proved to be a very successful and enjoyable occasion that concludes with a dinner back here at Park Lane.

For further information please contact Ray Fallon on 0831 460709 or in the clubhouse.

A *spatria Docked Two Points*

The eagle-eyed will have noticed that last week Aspatria were docked two points by the RFU. Here's why.

In the cold spell just after the Christmas they were due to play Sandal. The Referee rang Aspatria's coach early on the Saturday morning of the game seeking assurance that the game would be playable. At that time in the morning the temperature there was - 7degrees.

The Referee subsequently reported that he was given to understand that the game would not be played and he did not show up. Sandal duly arrived, the weather improved and the ground was deemed playable ... but no referee!

The game was not played and because Aspatria were considered in the wrong, totally ignoring the standby procedure for when a game is in doubt due to weather they were docked the two points.

Lights Off - Is Trevor Lewis At Home?

T Lewis, Esq, landlord of the Parkfield Hotel and dedicated Sedgley supporter, demonstrated once again recently why he'll never qualify as a rocket scientist.

He found that one of his bottle fridges was malfunctioning and so called up Rob Williamson, who works for the supplier, Jordon Refrigeration. Having explaining to Rob that the fridge was warm and that the light wasn't functioning, it was agreed that an engineer pop round to take a look.

This visit was completed later in the day and no faults were found: the fridge was cooling again etc. The next morning, our Trevor was back on the phone to Rob. He was cursing the engineer for being unable to find a fault when, yet again, Trevor had found that the light wasn't working. He agreed that, this time, the fridge was still cool and so Rob said he would personally pop over with a new bulb and also give the equipment a check-over himself.

Of course, Rob is in that pub almost as much as he's in Sedgley's bars, so it wasn't too much hassle for him to pop over on his way home from work. By this time, the fridge was warm.

Rob's diagnosis was immediate and embarrassing: the cleaner had been intermittently unplugging the bottle fridge in order to power her vacuum and not always replacing said plug. Indeed, it was sat next, next to the socket as he pointed out this technicality to Trevor.

Live music at the Parkfield this week: Trevor Lewis ... Unplugged.

And Finally

In a *Sunday Pink* article entitled "It's time to learn from the States", Alex Keay (Director of Rugby at Manchester) says that he went to watch a match in America and was impressed to see four or five stewards going around explaining to spectators what was going on.

Sedgley Park RUFC is, therefore, appealing to volunteers prepared to stand with Bob Sharpe, Tony Smith, etc, and help them through the technical side of the game. A very worthwhile idea, Mr Keay.