



# UTTLEY ON RUGBY

with  
ROGER  
UTTLEY

## Nothing can stop powerful Falcons

NEWCASTLE Falcons travel to Bedford on Saturday for the meeting of the top two teams in the RFU Championship, and they have a bit of daylight now after Bedford lost their unbeaten record at Bristol.

The Falcons, meanwhile, were 33-0 winners at home to Rotherham in difficult conditions, and they crushed them really, not even conceding a point.

With the snow as bad as it was for significant parts of the game, I imagine Kingston Park will have been the last place on earth Rotherham wanted to be, but the key to it all remains the Falcons maintaining their own standards without being dragged down to the level of the opposition.

I talked about this a couple of weeks ago, and Friday's result in getting the four-try bonus point and conceding none at the other end was a major indication of their ability to do that.

They have now opened up a seven-point gap between themselves and Bedford going into Saturday's game down there, and the important thing is to make sure that they continue to do a proper job.

All of these games are important, but this is an opportunity to really set a marker to their nearest challengers.

The Falcons' form away from home has been excellent so far, but Bedford will provide their most significant challenge given their own impressive start to the league season.

Knowing Dean Richards, I cannot imagine for one second that there will be any complacency, and he will be making sure that the guys step up to the challenge of the occasion.

They have not been hit too hard by injuries at this stage of the campaign, and they really seem to have it together.



NO COMPLACENCY  
Falcons coach Dean Richards



**SENSIBLE CHOICE** Chris Robshaw's appointment as England captain is deserved reward for his consistency over the last 18 months

**E**VERYTHING seems to be building up towards the autumn internationals now with England kicking off against Fiji at Twickenham a week on Saturday.

One concern for the England management will have been the number of their players getting injured or suspended.

Courtney Lawes and Dylan Hartley are now out for at least a fortnight which will put a dent in the squad, and it now becomes a real test for Stuart Lancaster in terms of his management and how they pull things together.

As a coach or selector you can have great players in mind and a great team on paper, but the real crux comes when you do suffer injuries and suspensions, and how you are able to adapt your squad to cope with those.

The squad that he has got together at the moment shows a good mix of youth and experience, and there seems to be a good spirit epitomised by the decision to continue with Chris Robshaw as their nominated captain.

It is an appointment which makes a great deal of sense, and he has done a very good job so far.

I am amazed he has been able to achieve the level of consistency he has shown during the last 18 or so months, and he is always there putting himself on the line. He is one of those guys who leads by example from the front, and he is inspirational for the guys he plays with.

The other thing I like to hear is that the coaches, while acknowledging the leadership credentials of Robshaw, are also keen to highlight the role played by other senior players within the squad.

It takes me back to 1980 when England won their first Grand Slam for 20 years with a Calcutta Cup match against Scotland at Murrayfield.

Bill Beaumont was our captain, and a very good one at that, but one of the main reasons he was so effective was that he had numerous other former England

# Injuries give Lancaster his biggest test

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Lancaster (pictured right) who has to make these decisions.

Getting the balance right in terms of how many changes you can make to a side, and still expect them to operate effectively, is crucial.

Year on year something like three to four changes is probably manageable, but if you make any more than that then it can be too much and makes it more difficult to achieve what you want.

Last weekend's Premiership programme produced some fantastic games, and I was particularly impressed with the way in which Gloucester took on Leicester. It showed how gripping the game can be

at its best, and it had moments of great individual brilliance combined with tenacity and spirit in defence.

The marginal difference that defence makes in a game is enormously significant, and when everyone is as committed as they were the opposition realise they are up against it.

Making ferocious tackles, not allowing them over the gain line and hitting rucks in numbers took all the momentum away from a pretty heavy Leicester attack during that all-important last ten minutes.

It was a very good watch indeed.



captains in the pack alongside him with the likes of Fran Cotton, myself and Tony Neary.

Having that ability to spread the load makes a big difference, and as a group of senior players you have conversations on the field assessing where you are at in the game and where you need to go.

The current coaching team have gone with a bit of youth up front, and have experience in the backs with the likes of Ugo Monye.

They know exactly what Monye can do, and while it is interesting to speculate from the sidelines about what a youngster like Christian Wade could have contributed in that position it is Stuart