

## UTTLEY ON RUGBY

with  
ROGER  
UTTLEY

# Dean's return great news for the region

## Points on the board is main concern

Former England and British Lions coach Roger Uttley is The Journal's new rugby union columnist. Here the ex-Gosforth player reveals how pleased he is to see Dean Richards at Newcastle Falcons.

**I**T is great to see Dean Richards back in rugby, having paid the price for a sad episode which is now very much in the past.

Newcastle are the beneficiaries of this because, if he had not have been banned, he would be doing other things at the moment. He would presumably still be playing his trade in the Premiership, so every cloud has a silver lining.

I coached Dean from 1987 to 1991 when he was playing for England, during which we got to the final of the World Cup, and then again on the successful 1989 Lions tour to Australia. He was around a good time, and played a very major part in the resurgence of the English national team during the 80s and 90s.

He is an interesting character, and very much his own man. I have got to smile when I see him in charge of teams, because there is a bit of the poacher turned gamekeeper in him.

Dean was never the most assiduous trainer in the world, but he did have an innate ability to play rugby. He was blessed with God-given strength, he had a great footballing brain and he was part of a strong club side at Leicester.

My early memory of Dean is him being the whitest man I had ever laid eyes on. He had probably never seen sunlight before, he was just a big slab of a bloke.

I can remember his England debut in 1986 when he scored two tries from the back of the scrum against Ireland at Twickenham, and thinking, 'here is a player'.

He was a great team player, but quite 'happy to plough his own furrow. In an attempt to raise the fitness of the players, we introduced fitness testing. Dean was always keen to find out what the minimum acceptable levels of performance were. He would always manage that!

His idea of training was a good game of five-a-side and, as for the indoor rowing machine we provided him with, I believe that never saw the light of day.

We collated a stack of information on players' test scores over this period, and it is a very interesting thought to consider that if Dean had really got stuck into that side of things as a player, how even more magnificent could he have been?

Don't get me wrong, he was very good as he was, and it always took at least a couple of people to put him down when he was attacked from the back of a scrum. He



### JURY STILL OUT ON THE VIDEO REFEREE

**I** AM a big fan of the television match official but I am a bit concerned about the trial going on at the moment expanding the powers of the TMO during Premiership games beyond merely try-scoring decisions.

It is obviously a good thing in one sense because it can avoid miscarriages of justice, but it needs to be applied consistently. London Wasps had a try disallowed because of a forward pass, whereas another game on the same

weekend saw an equally forward pass not picked up.

With it being a trial we have to give it a fair chance, but the jury is out on that for me at the moment.

It will only affect the Premiership, and even then it is only the televised games. If you consider that the better teams tend to be on TV most weeks then it does raise the possibility of them being unfairly penalised. We will have to wait and see.



### BACK IN THE DAY Roger Uttley with Dean Richards on the British Lions tour of Australia in 1989

Premiership and are now champions. He is back in the swing with Newcastle.

They had a great start on Sunday at Bristol. What they will be bearing in mind is that the Championship season is a marathon not a sprint.

How Dean keeps the key players fresh will be vital for them. The fact they have more depth to their squad than their rivals in the Championship is massively to their advantage.

Rotation of players to maintain this advantage right through to the end-of-season play-offs will be vital in order to make sure the Falcons bounce back into the Premiership at the first attempt.

It is critical for the future of the club. I would go even further and say it is critical to the future of English rugby. The North East has always had a strong rugby tradition of producing many great players.

In order for this to continue future generations need to have something to aspire to. The Falcons, led by somebody of the calibre of Dean and his team, will be vital in maintaining this tradition.

ONE of my sons was up at the weekend, and he convinced me I should sign up with ESPN so as

Fortunately we got it sorted in time for Saturday's Premiership double-header at Twickenham.

The Harlequins v Wasps game particularly caught my eye, with Quins winning a thriller 42-40.

It was a great game, but it just goes to show that with the points on offer the way they are nowadays, even if you go 17 or 20 ahead there are no guarantees you are going to win.

The only way to do it is to maintain the pressure, and every team is going to have to be super-fit to be able to play for 80 minutes at pace.

As soon as you fall off that pace you are going to let people in, and that is exactly what happened to Wasps.

Harlequins didn't panic, they have got a lot of experienced players who are fully committed to the club's cause.

They have got a great general in Nick Evans at fly-half, and he has developed the sort of reputation that Jonny Wilkinson had when

**“** He won't be bothered too much about making sure they are playing all-singing, all-dancing rugby.

he was up here with Newcastle in his pomp.

Sides were afraid to try anything too 'iffy' on the field for fear of getting penalised in their own half, as it would almost certainly cost them three points.

From the Falcons' point of view that is what Jimmy Gopperth's major role has got to be.

The forwards, under John Wells' experienced coaching, just need to make sure that they can play consistently in the right areas of the field.

Dean Richards is a great pragmatist. He won't be bothered too much about making sure they are playing all-singing, all-dancing rugby.

He will just want to get the points on the board, and win. As winning becomes a habit then the game plan can be expanded.

That is why their start at Bristol last weekend was so important. It put down a marker. The challenge now is to build on this excellent start and put themselves so far ahead that they are untouchable come the end of the season. I am really looking forward to seeing how it all pans out for them.