



# UTTLEY ON RUGBY

with  
ROGER  
UTTLEY

# Gatland is right man to lead Lions Down Under

**A** BRITISH and Irish Lions tour is always special, and the wheels have already started to get in motion for next year's tour to Australia with the appointment of Warren Gatland as head coach.

I think he is the right appointment having assisted Sir Ian McGeechan in South Africa in 2009, because what you don't want in a Lions coach is somebody who is doing it completely for the first time.

That is particularly true on this occasion when the timescale for everything in terms of preparation is going to be so limited and affected by domestic rugby in the northern hemisphere.

They are going to be up against it from the outset, and it is important that you have someone in charge who knows what it is all about.

Gats (pictured below right) has got plenty of experience with Wales and the Lions and is at the top of his game, so now seems to be the ideal time for him.

I thought it was bad news when Graham Henry got appointed for the 2001 tour to Australia, and I even wrote a letter to the Times saying as much which they published. Yes, you have got to have the best people, but you have got to rely upon your own people to do the job.

In 2001 we could have had a guy from the British Isles doing the job but they chose Graham. I couldn't imagine any of the other countries appointing a foreigner, (although having said that Australia have currently got a Kiwi in Robbie Deans doing the job!).

What I really mean is that we have enough strength in our own coaches to make our own appointments and should be confident enough in them to do that.

I don't regard Gats as a southern hemisphere coach even though he is from New Zealand. He has been up here and served his time long enough now to really qualify as a 'homer'.

Scotland's Andy Irvine as tour manager is a direct contemporary of mine. We toured South Africa on the successful 1974 Lions tour and he is a safe pair of hands.

He has done well, he knows what it is all about and he will be a good manager. A Lions tour is really about what the coach does and how he reacts, and Andy's role is to facilitate that and make the coach's job as easy as possible.

As we have just seen with the Olympics, if you set your stall out properly you can achieve very positive results.

The good thing for Warren is that he has got the time to prepare now because Wales have given him a sabbatical in advance of the tour, which should allow him to step back a little and view things from a more balanced



**FOREIGN COACH** Jonny Wilkinson (left) with coach Graham Henry on the Lions' tour of Australia in 2001

perspective. He has got to get to that level of planning and organisation that Team GB have shown in the recent Olympics.

It is more difficult in a team sport because there are many more imponderables to take into account.

There are numerous external factors affecting your preparation and performance, so an outcome is far less predictable. He has got to try and ensure that he has all

the in-form and key players he wants available.

That is absolutely key, and when those players are not available that is when he will start to have to earn his money!

It takes an element of luck in rugby to get a Lions test side together, and a lot of the success will not only be down to Warren Gatland but the senior players he has available to him. Each and every player needs to buy into the notion that it is

down to them, and how much they want to be part of a successful team.

That might sound like an obvious thing to say, but that is what happens in any successful organisation. They believe, and they don't mind what they have to do in terms of gophering, training on Christmas day, doing those extra laps and ensuring that when they go out onto the park they have left nothing to chance.

Any player chosen to represent the Lions has got to recognise all of the heritage and history, and maybe take time out to just think a little bit about what that means. They need to look at the sides who have been successful in the past, and be inspired.

The greatest thing is seeing how all



## FALCONS ARE OFF TO A FLYING START IN CHAMPIONSHIP

**NEWCASTLE** Falcons have got another five points in the bag from Saturday's trip to London Scottish, and they have really hit the ground running.

I noticed in both league games so far this season they have been points up at half-time, and that is a really positive sign. It shows they are getting out there, putting the pressure on and maintaining it for 80 minutes.

It looks good, and glancing at the other scores in the Championship they certainly

have a chance of doing things this season if they can maintain this momentum.

The key is going to be how all the players buy into the challenge. If a player is not in the match-day squad that doesn't mean he should sit in the corner of the changing room or the back of the bus moaning and bitching.

In that situation he should bite the bullet, get on with it and make sure that he is doing everything he can to ensure the side remains successful. Ultimately

that is what it is all about, as you can only benefit positively from being part of a successful squad.

It is going to require a huge collective effort from everybody involved at the club, as I discussed last week, and I think the squad element is going to be a recurring theme as the season progresses.

The first home game this Friday against Doncaster Knights is a great opportunity to keep the ball rolling.

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these guys come together from four nations, making sure they are switched-on and on the same wavelength. They are all from slightly different cultures.

They have got to forget any sort of animosity fuelled by the competitiveness that has taken place during the Six Nations. Good selection will be crucial here.

When you speak to anybody in rugby the Lions concept is still incredibly special. It is rightly regarded as the pinnacle of the game for northern hemisphere players, and I believe southern hemisphere players feel exactly the same way.

Lions test matches are the ultimate rugby contests. You can win a Grand Slam or a Six Nations with your country and that is great, but the next step is to go on a winning Lions tour.

People are concerned now because the Lions haven't won a test series since South Africa in 1997. For that reason some consider that the future of the Lions might be in doubt. Not my view.

If you had seen the quality of the test matches in South Africa as I did first hand in 2009, they produced fantastic sporting theatre. I was fortunate

enough to be over there as a supporter. The rugby was absolutely sensational, and to visit places I had played at as a young man was an amazing experience.

Lions tours are a unique sporting concept, and in terms of developing rugby globally they are crucially important, as demonstrated by the levels of traveling support and the interest shown for each and every tour. The tours also provide significant economic benefit to the host country.

From a tourists' point of view I have to say New Zealand would not be my first choice to visit. You go down there in the middle of their winter. It is a magnificent country, but it is a bit like being up here with the wet and cold, and it can be a bit dreary.

Australia and South Africa, however, are just such magnificent places with great geographical and climatic contrasts.

From a rugby stand-point Australia is a marvellous country to visit. One of my first England tours was out there, and I was also the assistant coach when the 1989 Lions won the series there.

You can train in shorts and T-shirt rather than layers and layers of clothing, and their attitude to sport is fantastic. They have proved consistently that they are a great side, and it will be a really good challenge for the 2013 British & Irish Lions.