



SPORT

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Commentary box

Sports editor James Ronayne offers his opinions on the moves, matches, backroom decisions and developments in local sport



AND so the Inih Effiong saga rumbles on for another week.

Hopefully the news that the two clubs will go to a tribunal will bring a swift conclusion to an episode that has dragged on far longer than the Saints would have liked.

Hopefully the club is able to gain a level of compensation that is fair for a player the Saints have helped bring on leaps and bounds in the last 12 months.

Let's not forget that it was Boreham Wood who discarded Effiong last summer following their promotion to Conference South, presumably because they felt he couldn't cut the mustard.

Admittedly Effiong is far from the finished article as anyone who saw him regularly last season will tell you. Yes on his day he was excellent but far too often he just drifted through games when the going was tough and his inability to challenge in the air is something he will have to rectify if he has ambitions of playing further up the pyramid.

It is clear Effiong sees his future away from Clarence Park and everyone at the club seems to have accepted that - but they are well within their rights to stand their ground and get the money they feel they deserve for the player, money Farnborough were more than happy to pay out for the 19-year-old's services.

Interest is high in Effiong and I've heard names like Luton and Cambridge United mentioned in that regard. That should bode well for the Saints when it comes to the tribunal and will hopefully provide the club with a nice little bonus with which to start the campaign.

THE squad is starting to shape up nicely at St Albans City following the addition of Nick Jupp and James Bent this week.

Goalkeeper Jupp's signing is a big one for the club and he should prove to be a valuable asset for the club this season following his return from the World Student Games in China. He has also shown a good commitment to the cause with the news that he is going to travel down from Loughborough for each game while he continues his studies at University there.

Bent will add to City's options up front and assistant boss Ken Charley says he can also do a job at right-back, a position City don't appear to have a first choice player in at present.

The match at Colney Heath tonight (Thursday), Saturday's trip to Potters Bar and next Tuesday's Herts Charity Cup tie with Cheshunt provide the Saints management team with their last opportunity to tinker before the real action gets underway against Cirencester a week on Saturday.

Howell and Charley are thought to be looking to work with a squad of 18 players for the coming season and looking at the squad list below of 16 who've already signed for the club it looks like a second choice goalkeeper and players in the full-back positions will be the priority for the Saints.

Goalkeeper: Nick Jupp **Defenders:** Koyo Appentang; Matt Cutchey; Ross Dedman; Ryan Moran; Reece Yorke **Midfielders:** Marvin Alebiosu; Joackim Ehui; Danny Hart; David Ijaha; Sol Shields **Forwards:** James Bent; Rob Haworth; Brian Haule; Sean Shields; Jerome Walker.

There certainly appears to be several players vying for most of the other positions in the squad which should give the Saints a base from which to launch their promotion push.

Goalkeeper Jupp revealed that the banter is already starting to bounce around the dressing room and there certainly appears to be a positive mood amongst the players. Things certainly appear to be on the up at Clarence Park - here's hoping it continues throughout the season.

THANKFULLY there is only a week and a bit to wait until the real football gets underway.

I wrote a couple of weeks back about my dislike for friendlies and this summer's matches haven't done anything to change my mind!

Do you agree with James' views? Email your comments to james.ronayne@archant.co.uk

Saracens hooker George hungry for more success

SARACENS' preparations for the defence of their Aviva Premiership crown sees them welcome Esher to Woollams on Sunday, August 21. To see how Sarries' pre-season workout is shaping up, the Herts Advertiser's James Ronayne visited their Woollams training camp to chat to up and coming hooker Jamie George.

THE sun is shining and the Saracens players are tucking into their lunch. Life is good for Saracens' England U20 international hooker Jamie George, who joins me on the balcony overlooking the immaculate showpiece pitch at Woollams fresh from being put through some speed drills by the Saracens coaches.

Last season was somewhat of a breakthrough season for George, making 12 appearances for the club in the Aviva Premiership, and culminated in the Welwyn GC-born hooker finishing the season with a Premiership winners' medal after being an unused replacement in Saracens' Grand Final victory over Leicester Tigers at Twickenham in May.

"It topped off a great year," explained George, breaking into a smile at the very mention of that day. "We'd been working towards that for two years and the feeling at that final whistle was incredible and you just have to look at all the scenes from that day. It was a really special moment and it is something that will last for the rest of our lives.

"You dream of that sort of thing when you're growing up and to play at Twickenham in a big game like that and to win the Premiership - I have to pinch myself when I'm looking at my medal to realise that we have actually won the Premiership."

The announcement that South Africa's 2007 World Cup winning captain - and hooker - John Smit will be linking up with Saracens' following this year's edition of the World Cup may leave many wondering what this year holds for George. But far from feeling threatened by Smit's arrival, the young hooker sees it as a situation that will benefit his career in the long run and is determined to make the most of the South African's time with the club.

"I want to learn as much as I can from as many people as I can," he said.

"I'm just a sponge at the minute; I'm just trying to learn as much as I can from everything. The things that you learn at this early stage are so valuable when you progress in your career. I've learnt from some of the older guys like Steve Borthwick, Ernst Joubert and Schalk Brits; I've been speaking to those guys and they've said you've just got to take in all the information you can.

"We've signed John Smit who is obviously someone I can learn so much from. There aren't two better hookers to learn from

in the world; if you had to pick two hookers you'd pick Schalk Brits and John Smit.

"So for me it's such an amazing experience and to try and learn as much as I can from them would be unbelievable, especially John Smit in terms of his leadership skills - it's invaluable the help he can give me so I've just got to try and pick at him as much as I can."

The club's work during pre-season has been geared towards Saracens maintaining their position at the top of the English game as well as making a mark in Europe. Sarries finished bottom of their Heineken Cup group last season recording just one win from their six pool matches and George admits that is something the club is keen to rectify this time around.

"The good thing about this club is there is always a great vibe about it and everyone enjoys pre-season," added George.

"The coaches make it really fun whilst we're working really hard hopefully onto bigger and better things and hopefully on from the success of last season.

"The vibe at this club means it is not like having to get up and go into work every day; we're having fun, we're with our mates and we're working hard for each other, so we can't really complain.

"We've proven that we can do it domestically but now it's making sure we're a big club on the European stage. I think (the Heineken Cup) last year was a good learning curve for us; we had a very, very tough group last year and I think that we were quite unlucky but this season we're really looking to attack that and we've got the confidence we can go all the way in that as well

Rugby World Cup taking place during the English domestic campaign. Aviva Premiership clubs will be relying on their young talent to hold the fort while their internationals bid for World Cup glory in New Zealand. George sees it as a great opportunity and the 21-year-old is confident Saracens' have enough talent to be successful during the period.

George explained: "It's a fantastic opportunity for other younger guys and that's why I'm confident we'll be successful in that time because the younger guys that are coming through, like Jackson Wray and George Kruijs, they'll get a good opportunity when the World Cup comes with other guys leaving and it's a fantastic opportunity for them to get a lot of game time and I'm confident that they're going to do well.

"You just have to look at guys like Owen Farrell and James Short; guys that are progressing through the academy and did fantastically well last season and will do again this season I'm sure. We just want to follow in their footsteps and progress on into the first team."

George has also earned international honours, representing and captaining the England U20s side for the last two seasons. Despite now being ineligible to play at that age level the hooker is in no doubt the huge impact the experience has had on his progression at club level.

"I'm out of that loop now but it was such an amazing experience and it really prepares you well for the Premiership and the Heineken Cup because they are big games for players who aren't playing potentially in their first teams at clubs," he explained.

"It makes you more aware of things like how to play in front of bigger crowds and it's a really high tempo game and high quality rugby so it was really, really good for me. I got to play for the U20s for two years and I couldn't have asked for more in terms of preparation for the Premiership and Heineken Cup."

Following our chat George rejoins his team-mates around the lunch table and fresh from having tasted success in the Aviva Premiership last season you're certainly left with the feeling that this is a Saracens' squad hungry for more.

■ Saracens entertain Esher at Woollams on Sunday, August 21. Kick off is at 2.30pm and entry is £10 for adults and £5 for concessions.

As well as the match, fans will have the opportunity to have their photo taken with the Aviva Premiership Trophy, get the autographs of their favourite Sarries' stars and see the Saracens Sensations Cheerleaders in action. There will also be a barbecue and bar on site.



Nathan Hughes.

Nathan makes a splash in Sheffield

SWIMMING: HARPENDEN swimmer Nathan Hughes enjoyed a golden weekend at the British Gas National Age Group Championships in Sheffield last week.

The 11-year-old won five individual gold medals in the 200m breaststroke, 200m and 400m freestyle, 200m and 400m individual medley as well as recording a second placed finish in the 100m breaststroke, third in the 100m freestyle, fourth in the 200m butterfly, fifth in the 200m backstroke and sixth in the 100m backstroke.

The Kings School pupil's achievements in Sheffield earned him the crown of overall 11 Years National BAGCAT (British Age Group Category) champion. Speaking of Nathan's performance throughout the week, his coach at Hatfield Swimming Club, Sean Bailey, said: "Nathan swam incredibly well all week, he's exceeded my expectations and he has worked very hard for it."

Nathan's achievements in Sheffield completes a fantastic year for the 11-year-old having already captained the St Albans District Primary School Swimming team to victory in the Hertfordshire Primary Schools Championships in May.

Heath beat Met Police Bushey

FOOTBALL: COLNEY Heath triumphed 3-2 against Met Police Bushey in their friendly match on Tuesday evening.

The game followed a 1-0 defeat to Crouch End Vampires last Thursday.

Tonight (Thursday) Heath entertain neighbours St Albans City. Kick-off is 7pm.

Physio required

FOOTBALL: LONDON Colney Football Club requires a physiotherapist or sports therapist for the coming season.

The club will provide travel expenses.

Anybody who is interested in the position should contact Steve Murphy on 07976 726508.

■ Some of the sport stories you can find on our website this week



■ Pictures from the local derby between Radlett and Harpenden as well as Harps Ills' game with Hatfield



Charlery enjoying his new City life

■ St Albans City assistant manager speaks about settling into life at Clarence Park

■ Plus all the other sports news, match reports and photos from across the St Albans and Harpenden district.

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