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Hosted by
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big name guests
talk rugby league

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Irvine's Indigestion



Cup winners v champions: Halifax and Sheffield Eagles will kick things off on the last day of January
rlphotos.com

New Year's resolve

CHRISTOPHER IRVINE girds his loins and wine cellar for the task ahead

Pause for breath. While the players work towards a peak of fitness and strength for the start of the new season, those of us who write about the game have been equally rigorous in sharpening pencils and limbering up laptops for firing 600 or so pithy words into the ether, bang on the first hooter of the year.

Players, pundits, fans, all of us are about to embark on a ten-month marathon, or ten months and a day if you're a real glutton and headed to the Shay for Halifax v Sheffield Eagles on 31 January.

Some of us will be at Headingley Carnegie the following night to see 'Sir Kev' Sinfield launch yet another Leeds Rhinos Super League title defence against a reinforced and, what we're assured, is a reinvigorated Hull FC team.

Fast forward to 30 November and we'd love to imagine England walloping the Kangaroos in the World Cup final at Old Trafford and 'Sir Kev' lifting that brute of a trophy we're seeing so much of on league's highways and byways. Do that, of course, and he'll be Lord Kevin of Waterhead, free to roam his sheep over the Oldham hillsides.

Ah, that's the beauty of a new year just a couple of weeks old. You're still prone to the odd flight of fancy, even if any resolution you could be bothered to make bit the dust on 3 January. The worse one, for what it's worth, is the shunning of alcohol in January by the so-called virtuous. I ask

you, how on earth can you get through the year's most depressing month without Mr IPA and Mr Shiraz? In June, maybe, but January, come on.

Just like the players on their carefully prescribed protein shakes, we in the press pack need our alcohol supplements to sustain us through a gruelling campaign. Something would be very wrong in the world if the men from the *Mail on Sunday* and *Star on Sunday* weren't having their glass or two of pre-match red. To me, it's always a reassuring sight, even if I'm more of an apres-match imbiber.

Personally, I mourn the passing last year of the convivial old Leeds supporters' club behind the South Stand at Headingley, where the Tetley's was not only damn fine but cheaper than most other places. The club has gone and brewing of Tetley's in Leeds ended 20 months ago after nearly 200 years, since when a drop of the stuff (now brewed in Wolverhampton) hasn't passed my lips. Call me a daft old fart, but that's the kind of stand I believe in.

Mercifully, there's more than enough good stuff emerging from small and micro breweries in Yorkshire to sustain we ale and hearty drinkers east of the Pennines. Enough, certainly, to keep up protein and carbohydrate levels for the longest year at the rugby league coalface. The World Cup looms large in the autumn, but not before the ups and downs of a domestic season that ensures no let up for players emerging from cold weather camps in some cases and warm ones for others.

Now to pummel that latest software package at high altitude. Ten months, here we come...

Christopher Irvine



December competition winners

Greatest Games DVD (PDI): Jamie Butler, York; Bruce Bramhall, Clayton; ISC Dream Team shirt and big match Paul Butler, Thorne; Clare Hopkins, Liversedge; Beth Williams, Patrington | hospitality: John Byrne, St Helens