

Var Village Voice

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STOP PRESS

AND HOW!

JONNY WILKINSON BECOMES A 'VAROIS'

"JONNY" HAS ARRIVED IN TOULON!

It was a love Fest yesterday, Wednesday 27 May, between the Press and Jonny Wilkinson. At last, at last after all the nail biting, would he sign, could he? Jonny arrived in Toulon to a huge Press Conference, to heartfelt applause and massive clicking of cameras. They gathered round him so thick you could hardly see this rather shy and young looking Jonny. He's just turned 30 in the past couple of days, but admits, after a seven month lay off due to his knee injury last October, to feeling fit and says he feels really about 20, eager to play rugby again. Toulon Rugby Club owner, Mourad Boudjellal, finally walked into the Press conference, wearing black top to toe as usual, looked at the assembled press, cameras, TV journalists - most sported at least two huge cameras with zooms dangling round their necks - and said with great pride " There are two great world class rugby players – Jonah Lomu – AND – Jonnee Wilkinson, and in walked

Jonny sporting Toulon's new red and black strip. Jonny all but disappeared from sight from the onslaught of cameras. They asked questions, and Jonny patiently answered in pretty good French, hesitating over a word or two, looking over for guidance to Mourad and a player who was acting as fall back interpreter – correcting his grammar here and there, he pronounced himself 'ravier' to be here in Toulon, and just eager and anxious to start playing. They clapped, and clapped at every statement as Jonny described how pleased he was to be coming to Toulon, clapping with happiness, and bursting into



applause after every answer. The warmth of the welcome was obviously totally genuine and heartfelt. Toulon has captured the big prize, the incomparable and legendary Jonny!



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fortune in publishing, mainly comics) has pulled off a great coup putting together a great new team, with Jonny as its star, and including coach Philippe St. Andre. Jonny is looking forward to a great new future, a new beginning. He loved playing for Newcastle Falcons, but the time had come to move on, and coming to Toulon had become the logical next step. Talking about his previous visit here last month, he said

He talked of his passion for the game, and his admiration of French players, and past games played against France, of what he had seen in his past visit, the passion of the Toulon crowd, their wholehearted support for their home club.

When asked if the money had been the important reason for coming to Toulon, he responded very believably that what had influenced him most was the team and coach that Mourad had pulled together, this was what they had been discussing for the past few months. He wants to be part of a great team, and help them win. Applause, applause.

Undoubtedly Mourad Boudjellal (he is estimated to have made a 40 million

he'd soaked up the atmosphere, the passion one could feel emanating from the Toulon crowd, and fell in love with the whole 'ambiance'. It was a Hero's welcome, justifiably, for a real Hero. There are not too many of them around right now in these depressed and cynical times.

Jonny is a fitting one - a joy to watch on the pitch, totally fearless, despite the injuries he has sustained, and a great team player. Jonny was one of the players credited with pulling the England team literally out of the rubbish bin at the beginning of the 2007 World Cup series, when they were all but eliminated in the first round, to fight back nearly to the grand final –

providing totally nail biting performances.

Toulon President Boudjellal's signing of Wilkinson is very likely his smartest deal. Following the signing of former New Zealand Captain Tana Umaga (now playing and coaching Toulon) his salary had been paid off within three home games from the sale of replica shirts. Smart. Expect to see Jonny Wilkinson's red and black strip on every young boy you know from now on, possibly with the No. 10 on the back.

What quite stunned me at the end of the Press Conference was to realise that Jonny is not all that large physically; he walked out dwarfed by the press and cameramen. He's a neat 1.78m in height, and only weighs 88 kg. that's only 30 kgs more than me, I'm a bit tall, and have all the resistance of a paper bag! Ah well, just shows you!

TOULON SQUAD

Last week President Mourad Boudjellal announced the club's squad list for next season which included a number of captures from English sides. Sale pair Sebastien Bruno and Juan Martin Fernandez Lobbe, Munster prop Tim Ryan, Bristol flanker Joe El Abd, Saracens back-rower Kris Chesney and Cardiff centre Jamie Robinson were all included in the list as well as Wilkinson's former team-mate Tom May. And Leinster back

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Argentinean Felipe Contepomi has agreed a move to Les Varois, but it depends on how serious his knee injury is sustained in a recent match.

VVV's RUGBY CORRESPONDENT

More about the potential of this new Squad will come from VVV's new Rugby Correspondent Simon Eveleigh (of Siddalls). A former rugby player, he played for French club Brioude in the Auvergne for three years.

Both he and I limped severely into the Press Conference on Wednesday, had Jonny been there at that minute, he might have thought we were trying to take the Mickey - Simon had badly sprained his right knee and had it in a brace, I sprained an ankle weeks ago which is taking ages to get better.

But from now on you can look forward to getting a well informed view of Toulon's performance from Simon, someone who can appreciate all the nuances of RFU rules and play.

Toulon Manager Tom Whitford commented "I don't think Jonny appreciates how excited people are by him coming here" - he'll find out. Simon confirmed this, he knows quite a few rugby fans, season tickets holders in St. Maximin la Ste Baume where he lives, and they are over the moon. They will be following the matches with total devotion!



SEASON TICKETS

Season tickets for the Stade Mayol go on sale for the 2009/10 season, from 16 - 19 June, and range in price from €230 - €720. I'll bet there are a more than few people like me, VVV readers, rugby fans, who despite the present hard financial times, will be severely tempted, and I reckon, tickets from now on are going to be at a premium, like gold dust.

Go to the link for the Toulon Rugby Club website at www.rctoulon.com

LUCKY US IN THE VAR – WE'VE GOT JONNY - AND GREAT RUGBY GAMES TO WATCH THIS WINTER IN THE VAR, IN TOULON AND AROUND AND ABOUT

IT WON'T TAKE LONG FOR A VVV SUPPORTERS CLUB TO GET GOING!

THINK SHARED CAR RIDES,. DOWN TO THE STADE MAYOL AND ELSEWHERE! MAKING NEW FRIENDS IN THE VAR, ETC IT MAKES SENSE.

HAVING A GREAT RUGBY GAME TO GO TO WILL REALLY CHEER UP THE VAR WINTER FOR LOTS OF US.

SO RUGBY FANS GET IN TOUCH, LET ME KNOW, : I AM AT:

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