

## RUGBY UNION

# May's transfer to Gloucester 'sets a precedent' that could cause havoc

By Ross Heppenstall

Jonny May's move from Leicester Tigers back to Gloucester will "set a precedent" that threatens contractual chaos across a range of sports, a leading lawyer has warned.

May, an England wing, would have taken a pay cut to stay at Leicester and will now return to Kingsholm, where he came through the academy set-up, when his contract expires on 30 June.

Yet the Premiership season, currently suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic with nine rounds still to play, will almost certainly extend well beyond that date.

Legally, however, May is free to take up his deal at Gloucester from 1 July – the standard start date for rugby and football contracts – and could play against Leicester at Kingsholm if the season resumes.

Richard Cramer, a managing partner at Leeds-based law firm Front Row Legal, believes new guidelines must be set out to resolve conflicts related to player movement, salary cap and bonuses.

Fifa has proposed that football contracts are "extended until such time that the season does actually end", but Cramer (*above*) warned May's transfer will lay down a marker across several sports. He said: "There is nothing in English law to prevent Jonny May allowing his contract to expire at Leicester and join Gloucester on 1 July, even though the Premiership rugby season is nowhere near complete.

"The big debate is whether

Premiership Rugby will register him as a Gloucester player to allow him to play a part in the remainder of the 2019-20 season.

"To block May from doing so would be, in my view, a restraint of trade and a significant number of footballers will have already signed contracts elsewhere with effect from 1 July.

"Is that player allowed to play for his new club and you would have to say, why not?"

"You have also got another scenario where a player's contract is due to expire on 30 June and he has signed elsewhere, but wishes to stay at his current club until the end of this season.

"His new club could try and stop that by saying 'we've got a prize signing, we don't want to risk that player being injured when technically he should be with us from 1 July'.

"Football and rugby authorities are going to have to come up with some clear guidelines so there is complete understanding about what players can do."

Players swapping clubs in essentially mid-season will also cause havoc for salary-cap sports and bonuses paid out to rugby stars and footballers.

Cramer continued: "Ordinarily, Jonny May's salary at Gloucester would count on the 2020-21 season but his arrival on 1 July could send them over the cap for the rest of this season.

"Therefore, there is going to have to be a relaxation of the salary cap in rugby union and the Financial Fair Play rules which exist in football too.

"The bottom line is that you can't



force a player to extend his contract. A player from an existing club who are in line to win two or three big trophies may decide he wants to extend his contract there.

"Some players will be on bonuses of several hundred thousand pounds for making so many appearances, winning a trophy or avoiding relegation.

"They would then have to go to their new club to seek a variation on their contract to allow a new commencement date beyond 1 July.

"Liverpool are going for the Premier League title and I would

imagine all their players would want to be crowned champions.

"What happens if their new club says no and says they must transfer?"

"You have all kinds of problems and I think, following the Jonny May transfer, a precedent will be set.

"We will start to see the impact of the suspension of professional sport on contract expiry dates.

"The rules and regulations that are carved in stone at the start of the season are going to require amendments – and the clubs are going to have to agree those amendments as well."

When Kobe made a grand exit from NBA

## On this day 13 April

LA Lakers great Kobe Bryant signed out with the type of memorable, bombastic performance he was notorious for – 60 points in a win over Utah Jazz, four years ago today.

Bryant died earlier this year in a helicopter crash at the age of 41, but will be forever remembered by the sport.

That final game personified the way he played the game; never giving up even in a seemingly lost cause.

The Lakers were nowhere near the play-offs heading into that final regular season game in 2016. Neither were the Jazz. Bryant himself appeared to be fading into retirement. He had spent the season a shadow of his title-winning self, still earning eye-watering sums of money for a disappointing lack of productivity. He was grumpy. His team-mates were young and sub-standard.

And until the final three minutes against Utah, it appeared that Bryant's final game would be his last season for LA in microcosm. He had been profligate with his shots – a stick which had been used to beat him throughout his career – and the Lakers were 10 points in deficit.

But then Bryant did what Bryant does: he took hold of the game, spinning past two defenders to reduce the gap to eight points. Then came two free throws, followed by a deft dodge to a lay-up, a throw ahead which he catches himself, an impossible three-pointer and a 22-foot winner with seconds left on the clock.

He finished the game with 60 points and the ecstatic roar of the crowd ringing in his ears. It was Hollywood stuff, fittingly in front of Jack Nicholson, David Beckham, Jay-Z and Kanye West. If he wanted to go out on a high, he certainly achieved it.



Kobe Bryant's final season was lacklustre. His final game wasn't

### Sport in brief

#### TRIATHLON

### Thousands raised in lockdown Ironman

Former Olympic champion Jan Frodeno has raised more than €200,000 (£175,700) for charity by doing a triathlon in lockdown.

The 2008 Olympic champion and three-time winner of the Ironman World Championship (*right*) swam 3,800 metres in his counter-current swimming pool, cycled 180km on his roller trainer and then ran a marathon on his treadmill. The German completed the course in eight hours, 33 minutes and 39 seconds at home in Girona, Spain.



#### RUGBY UNION

### Ex-Puma Pichot to run against Beaumont for top job

Agustin Pichot will run against incumbent Bill Beaumont for the top job in World Rugby this month.

Pichot, 45, who won 71 caps for Argentina, has served for four years as vice-chairman under former England skipper Beaumont. He promised radical change if elected to be the first non-European chairman.

Beaumont announced he was standing for a second four-year term in January with French Rugby Federation president Bernard Laporte as his proposed vice-chairman.



Pichot (*left*), who also had a spell with Richmond in the late 1990s, wrote: "Women and men, we all fight for and believe in fair, equal and more inclusive world. Do we?"

"If so, it is time to make these dreams a reality for our sport, rugby.

"It is time to think of a sport where professional and commercial income becomes a true benefit for all, by empowering rugby's growth around the world and by moving on from the time where those benefits were for just a few. It is a critical time and a critical election."