

My first appearance for Gloucester was at Moseley on November the 14th 1964. I faced the England and British Lions' prop, Mike Coulman, and survived well enough to be selected to play again the following week.

Adult rugby had begun for me, as a fifteen-year-old at the Longlevens club.

There were 33 local clubs in the North Gloucester Combination in those days, and most clubs had three or four teams. This helped the development of young players in the area, because you were graded according to your ability, and there was plenty of opportunity to play, and develop.

First local rugby was unforgiving, and a good grounding for the progression to Gloucester United, which was in effect the Gloucester 'B' team, where there was more experience to be gained against stronger opposition.

Among the leading Welsh teams were Pontypool, Pontypridd, Cardiff, Newport, Neath, Aberavon, Swansea, Llanelli, Bridgend, Newbridge and Ebbw Vale. They all provided great opposition whether at home or away.

When I think that Worcester, Bath, Bristol, Gloucester and Exeter are a few miles over the border I have to ask myself why some room could not be found in this soon to be confirmed world calendar for these matches to be played during this time.

Pontypool were Kingsholm favourites because both Gloucester and Ponty always provided a hothouse of an atmosphere whether at Kingsholm or Pontypool Park. The battles are not a recent feature of the Gloucester-Ponty matches. These games have been played since the 1920s.

I remember one game when we went down on a Wednesday evening before Wales played Argentina at the weekend. There was no Terry Cobner and the international front row of Charlie Faulkner, Graham Price and Bobby Windsor weren't playing. So they were four international players short because they were rested ahead of the international. Yet they still gave us a tremendous match and one of the hardest games I can remember. I finished up with eight stitches in my head. I can't remember the result but it was a good evening.

Ray Prosser was an inspirational coach for Pontypool and he was a great thinker and a student of the game. He always wanted to understand what had been going on during the match even though he had been watching. In my time they had some exceptional players; a full back called Robin Williams; he would go to one side of the pitch and kick the ball over the posts with his right foot and then go to the other side of the pitch and kick the ball over the posts with his left foot. He was phenomenal.

Just after the start of one battle in the Gloucester v. Pontypool series I took a knock at a lineout just five yards in from touch, right in front of the partisan Pontypool crowd sitting in the main stand. The roar went up but as often happens in these situations the recipient of a loose elbow (that's me) had no idea what had happened. Rumbblings amongst our pack gave rise to the notion that Pricey (Graham Price) was responsible.

The referee was a fair man and having helped me to my feet, he remarked that what he had seen was diabolical, and that prompted me to ask if the player responsible had been sent off. 'No,' said the referee, *'I can't send 'im off, I've got a relative on the committee 'ere you see. But you can 'ave a free 'it.'* So I said no more and I waited until the chance came along to land a retaliatory blow on the alleged assailant. This was observed by the very same crowd of Ponty spectators who went wild with anger that such a thing should befall one of their favourite sporting sons.

The referee was soon upon the scene and he beckoned me forward with the crowd screaming for the instant dismissal. Knowing we had a deal I walked confidently up to the referee. He put his index finger under my nose and began wagging it as he admonished me. *'Burton,'* he said, *'all the people in the crowd think I'm bollocking you. Now you've 'ad your turn, no more otherwise the crowd will get their wish.'* And I walked back. He awarded Ponty a penalty and the kick went quietly into touch.

I also much admired the great Pontypool pack of that era, their two productive locks, John Perkins and Ron Floyd, in the back row Terry Cobner, a magnificent forward, and of course the front row made up of three British Lions, Charlie Faulkner, Bobby Windsor and Graham Price. Now, whatever time of day you play that pack it was a hard day's work.

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