

GLOUCESTER RUGBY
HERITAGE

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“AWAY THE LAD” TO GLOUCESTER

With Newcastle the visitors this afternoon, our thoughts turn to a Geordie lad who travelled south to become a favourite son of Kingsholm.

THE IMMACULATE DON

An astonishingly neat and gifted player, a dapper dresser, and a highly organised and inventive coach, Don Rutherford has been an immaculate top-level performer in every aspect of his long and successful rugby life.

He was born and bred in Tynemouth, and played his early club rugby for Percy Park in North Shields, where he won caps for Northumberland and England, before going to St Luke's College, Exeter.

We have his wife and father-in-law to thank for Don's arrival in Gloucester. Don was travelling from Newcastle to Exeter by train, when Sue Bradley got on for the leg from Birmingham to Gloucester. She was returning home to Sharpness, where her father, Jack, was the docks manager.

This short journey was enough to spark the flame, and whilst Don was pondering which club to play



Don as captain of Gloucester in 1967-68

for when he left college, he went to stay with Sue at Sharpness.

He was tracked down by a deputation from Bristol RFC, keen to obtain his services. Met on the doorstep by Sue's father, it was made quite clear to them that they were wasting their time - the hand of his daughter was entirely dependent upon Don playing for Gloucester. Don took a teaching post at Wycliffe College, signed on at Kingsholm, and wedding bells rang.

Don arrived at Kingsholm for the start of the 1964-65 season. He may have been an international fullback, but the Gloucester selectors put him in the Possibles side for the pre-season trial.

Mickey Booth got John Bayliss to smell Don's shirt before the game, and then sent up a series of high kicks for Don to catch with John hunting him down. Don came through unscathed and was soon the most respected and valued of Gloucester men.

Don found playing at Kingsholm a revelation: "...it was one man and a dog at Percy Park - my father and about another ten people watching the match. I thought I was in heaven at Gloucester.

"My shorts, my socks, my shirt were hanging up in the dressing room. There was a big crowd - The Shed was full - and I just loved it. It was the atmosphere and I thought 'God, at last! Here are people who want to play rugby' And the players themselves were utterly fascinating - utterly fascinating - brilliant."

In the course of the next four seasons, 1964-68, Don made 93 appearances for Gloucester, scored 539 points, and was captain in 1967-68, before injury brought a

premature end to his career.

He captained Gloucestershire in 1965-66, played for the Barbarians, added 9 further England caps whilst playing for Gloucester to the 5 he had won previously, and became a British Lion in Australia.

But his influence on the Gloucester club was much greater than the picture painted by these impressive statistics. He was the classiest of players, calm

ignored the other two and ran round the blind side to score a try.

A whole generation of Gloucester players still eulogise about the effect which Don had on the Club.

Those two who plotted his downfall in his first game are to the fore in their plaudits.

Mickey Booth: "Don immediately stamped his class on this Club. He opened our eyes up to what the game was all about. I think he

rugby. He was a professional before his time - he altered the whole way of training. He taught tactics, different styles of game. He could change a game in the middle of the game. I think he brought us forward no end."

When it came to the centenary of the Club in 1973, Don assembled an international team to take on Gloucester at Kingsholm, which was probably the most spectacular array of stars ever to appear at Kingsholm. But Gloucester played out of their skins and won 24-14.

Don's coaching talent was recognised nationally when he was appointed as the Technical Director of the Rugby Union in 1969 – their first-ever professional appointment.

He contributed so much to the development of English rugby that he remained in post for thirty years, putting in place a national coaching structure.

Needless to say he continued to strive for improved standards, and just as Gloucester players had found some of his innovations uncomfortable, so did the England team when first faced with weight training and the like.

He was awarded the OBE in 2000 in recognition of his services to Rugby.

Don and Sue now live in retirement near Penzance.

THE GLOUCESTER TEAM		Referee: J. JOHNSON (London Society)	THE INTERNATIONAL XV	
15. P. BUTLER (C)	FULL BACK		15. P. VILLEPREUX	Toulouse and France
14. R. J. CLEWES (C)	RIGHT WING		14. J. P. A. G. JANION	Gloucester and Gloucester Counties
13. R. WHITE (C)	CENTRE		13. J. S. DAWES	London Welsh and Wales
12. R. JARDINE (C)	CENTRE		12. J. MASO	Toulouse and France
11. R. ETHERIDGE (C)	LEFT WING		11. D. J. DUCKHAM	County and England
10. T. PALMER (C)	STAND OFF		10. J. L. BEROT	Toulouse and France
9. J. SPALDING (C)	SCRUM HALF		9. S. J. SMITH	Sea and England
8. D. OWEN (C)	NO. 8		8. B. DAUGA	Went of Marston and France
7. J. HAINES (C)	FLANKER		7. A. NEARY	Brougham Park and England
6. J. WATKINS (I) (C)	FLANKER		6. N. A. MACLEWAN	Sea and Scotland
5. J. FIDLER (C)	LOCK		5. C. W. RALSTON	Gloucester and England
4. A. BRINN (I) (C)	LOCK		4. C. SPANGHERO	Toulouse and France
3. M. BURTON (I) (C)	TIGHT HEAD		3. A. B. CARMICHAEL	West of Scotland and Scotland
2. M. NICHOLLS (C)	HOOKER		2. J. YOUNG	London Welsh and Wales
1. K. RICHARDSON (C)	LOOSE HEAD		1. I. McLAUCHLAN	Wigan Hill and Scotland

(I) = International (C) = County

The teams for the Club's centenary game in 1973

and unruffled, and seemingly with so much time to perform even under pressure.

He queried and cajoled the team into taking their preparations for games more seriously, and as captain he lifted the coaching of the team to a new level. He was a master tactician, and introduced many innovative moves.

One memorable tactic was to put Mickey Booth (scrum half) Terry Hopson (stand off), and Don himself (fullback) in a straight line behind one another, about 25 yards out from the goal line.

The baffled opposition, and an equally bemused crowd, would then find Booth going one way, Hopson going the other, and "The Don" being left to take a clear shot at goal with a drop kick.

Except of course when Terry

made an incredible difference".

And John Bayliss: "Don was a tremendous asset to Gloucester



A trio of Gloucester and England fullbacks get together in 2010 – Bill Hook (1950s), Peter Butler (1970s) and Don Rutherford (1960s)