

# DON RUTHERFORD

## THE IMMACULATE DON

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WHEN IT WAS FIRST ANNOUNCED THAT DON RUTHERFORD WOULD BE JOINING GLOUCESTER FOR THE 1964-65 SEASON, THERE WAS A BUZZ OF ANTICIPATION AT KINGSHOLM. RECRUITS FROM OUTSIDE THE COUNTY WERE RARE AT THE TIME AND THE ACQUISITION OF AN ENGLAND FULL BACK WAS A BIG EVENT.



"The Don" did not disappoint. One of England's first running full backs, he was immaculate under the high ball (an ability much appreciated in the Shed) and adept at turning defence into attack.

Don had played for Percy Park, RAF, Wasps, St Luke's College and Northumberland during his early career, but became most closely associated with Gloucester and Gloucestershire for whom he played until his retirement through injury in 1968, making 94 appearances for Gloucester and captaining his club in 1967-68. He captained Gloucestershire in 1965-66.

Rutherford won fourteen caps for England and toured Australia and New Zealand with the 1966

British Lions. He made ten appearances for the Barbarians, including Easter tours of South Wales in 1960, 1963, 1965 and 1968.

Donald Rutherford was born in Tynemouth on 22 September 1937 and educated at Tynemouth High School. On leaving school he joined the local Percy Park Rugby Club in North Shields before completing his National Service in the RAF from 1956-58. He played for the RAF in the annual triangular inter-services tournament, toured France and Italy, and also played for Combined Services. In the 1957-58 season, while still in the RAF, he played a number of games for Wasps when his service commitments allowed. Don made his debut for Wasps

against Cheltenham at Sudbury on 5 October 1957 and played his last game at Waterloo on 5 April 1958.

On leaving the service and returning to Northumberland, he went back to playing for Percy Park, but his performances for Wasps and the RAF had caught the eye of the England selectors and he had his first England trial later that year, playing for the Whites against the Colours (scrum half for the Colours in that trial was Mickey Booth). He remained in Northumberland for another eighteen months playing for Percy Park and Northumberland and during that time won his first four caps for England in the 1960 Five Nations tournament. In January the following year he played

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against the touring Springboks at Twickenham.

Rutherford then applied to St Luke's College, Exeter to train as a physical education teacher. While at St Luke's he played rugby for the college and appeared in the annual match against Loughborough College at the Old Deer Park, Richmond in 1963. Another future Gloucester captain, Keith Richardson, was playing for the opposition who won 16-13. Don continued to play for Northumberland and appeared for North East Counties against the All Blacks in January 1964.

In the summer of 1964, on leaving St Luke's, Don Rutherford took a teaching post at Wycliffe College. However, he was thinking of joining Bristol and might never have come to Kingsholm but for his future father-in-law, Jack Bradley, who was the harbourmaster at Sharpness Docks. Jack, a Gloucester supporter, had his



own views about Bristolians and his counterparts at Avonmouth Docks. When the Bristol committee came calling at his house in Sharpness, where Don was staying, he told them in no uncertain terms that "Don Rutherford will not be marrying my daughter if he joins Bristol," and they retired, chastened.

Don made his debut for Gloucester at Kingsholm, again against Waterloo, on 5 September 1964. His calm unruffled approach and genuine class impressed from the start. He in turn, used to playing his club rugby in front of a handful of people, responded to the crowds and the passion of the Kingsholm supporters. He was selected for Gloucestershire in November and followed this up with selection for the first of the 1965 Home Internationals.

He was an ever-present for England in the Five Nations from 1964 to 1966 and was then selected to tour Australia and New Zealand with the British Lions. He made his only international appearance for the Lions against Australia in the first test but, on the New Zealand leg of the tour, he broke his arm playing against Manuwatu and had to be flown home. He played once more for England against New Zealand in 1967.

Don Rutherford had two more successful seasons for Gloucester and Gloucestershire. He captained the club in 1967-68, playing with remarkable consistency and scoring over 300 points. Then disaster struck when he broke his arm again playing for the Barbarians against Newport in April 1968

and he was advised to retire from the game.

On retiring from rugby he left behind a coaching legacy at Gloucester that was built on by his successors. Tributes from his former team-mates abound, notably from two who are not easily impressed.

First 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 made an incredible difference."

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

Constantly innovative and always thinking about the game, Don was appointed the RFU's first professional Technical Director and later Director of Rugby within a year of hanging up his boots, serving at Twickenham for nearly 30 years until retirement in 1999. There he created coaching and playing programmes that were adopted by rugby-playing countries across the world, wrote a number of coaching and refereeing manuals and built up a nationwide structure from mini and youth rugby through to the national team.

He returned to Kingsholm in October 1973, having assembled an international team of glittering talent to play Gloucester in their centenary game.

Don was awarded the OBE in 2000 in recognition of his services to rugby union. He lived in retirement in Penzance with his wife Sue and died in November 2016.