

In Touch



The Official Newsletter of **COVENTRY RUGBY SUPPORTERS' CLUB** Issue 12 December 2020

Honorary Members: Harry Walker (1915-2018) & Ted Wainwright



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FROM THE CHAIR...



Welcome to this rather bumper December edition of In Touch, your link to all things Coventry Rugby Supporters' Club and Coventry Rugby.

As I write this Lockdown 2.0 will be, hopefully, coming to an end. Disappointingly the return of rugby watching is still just a scheduled wish for a January restart, or reboot. I hope my rugby starvation will come to an end

then.....please.

I didn't realise how much I would miss this game, the matches and fixtures, the camaraderie with like-minded supporters and living for next Saturday, home or away. I love travelling to away games and hope these can continue, although it remains to be seen if we can return to away travel. I have my doubts and this would be a massive blow if away travel is banned. You have to think this would take away some of the game's spirit and ethos.

Anyway, on to this edition. Included are contributions from Coventry Rugby, thanks to Rowland Winter, and Executive Chairman Jon Sharp

There's also a look back at a Coventry legend, Ivor Preece, compiled by former

Coventry Evening Telegraph journalist, Steve 'Scribble' Evans, together with a look at a more recent legend, Sam Tuitupou. Thanks Steve.

Please don't forget, CRSC are here, we haven't gone away and are still working for you, are working with the club and will continue to do so.

A big 'Get Well Soon' for CRSC committee member and away days coach manager Steve Hood. Steve is now recovering at home after a recent

health scare and hopes to be cheering on the Blue and Whites again very soon.

I think that's enough from me, I will leave you to discover what's contained within. Happy reading. Have a Happy and Safe Christmas and a better 2021.

All the best

Paul Ingleston

Chair

Coventry Rugby Supporters' Club



FROM THE BOARD

EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN JON SHARP

Firstly I trust you are all safe and well, although if like me, utterly fed up.

Whilst your club has done its best to keep you posted during recent months, we are ourselves working on minimum information with weak leadership from the powers that be at every level.

There is an old adage about mushrooms that I am sure you all know, something about being kept in the dark and fed on something or other.

During this time I have repeatedly been driven to saying to staff, "We are on our own and cannot rely on help from anywhere else", so that is how we have been operating.



I tend not to dwell on the past, but let's just review the 'perfect storm' that has come our way in 2020...

- **RFU cuts funding to the Championship with no notice*.**
- **Covid-19 leads to shut down one week before our biggest pay day of the season against Newcastle Falcons.**
- **2019-20 season terminated without any compensation offered to any of**

the Championship clubs for loss of income from their remaining matches.

- **Our projected lost commercial income over 12 months is c. £2m.**
- **Business Interruption insurance claim rejected by insurers*.**
- **Site development plans halted as developers feel the pain.**
- **RFU make further funding cuts, total cut now over £500k per club.**
- **DCMS funding assistance announced to a great fanfare, zero details received as I write, grant funding expected to be minimal.**

**Make your own judgements, mine are unprintable.*

Other Championship clubs are all impacted but with us having grown the biggest gates - we exceeded 3,000 spectators at home against Nottingham last year - we suffer more lost revenue than others, and more still as a result of the stadium being closed to the other sports that play here.

Sadly we have had to make cuts across the entire organisation, losing players and support staff alike, and shelve spend on developing the stadium. We have taken advantage of furlough and other schemes, but they do not cover our costs and we have had to dig deep into our reserves. All the True Blues who contributed to the crowdfunder and bought season tickets have been immensely helpful as have those loyal sponsors who have stuck by us; I am fully aware you all face difficult times

yourselves and I am very grateful. Any further assistance will be welcome.

With the advent of lockdown, we quickly adopted a three stage strategy of "Survival, Revival and Sustained Excellence" which I have described elsewhere; at present we are still in the first of those stages and desperate to move on, but are continually hampered by indecision and confusion elsewhere.

So we have decided to bite the bullet and get on with it; get the boys playing, get our supporters back in to Butts Park Arena, irrespective of what anyone else is doing.

Firstly that has meant moving to Stage 2 training under the Elite game rules and to do so we have to have players tested. I am very pleased to say that all rugby staff tested negative on the first week's roll out.

It is not cheap. There is only one test officially approved at present, the cost of which for a club our size is about £5,000 per week. Before we can open our gates, we have to follow the government's and local authority's rules - cost of signage to meet social distancing is up to £10,000 and the weekly costs of additional cleaning, sanitation, extra marshalling etc., is another £5,000 or so.

To put things in context, the brilliant response to our crowd funder pays for about two weeks of things at that rate. Whilst I have committed further funds to see us through, those are finite and raising more funds and cutting more costs is crucial

So, we are not out of the woods yet, but we are facing the future with great optimism

Hopefully Coventry will quickly return to

Tier 2 of national restrictions and in theory we will be able to host 2,000 supporters. But don't get carried away – when local regulations and distancing requirements are applied, our permitted capacity will be considerably less than that.

In regular pubs, the rules state you have to be seated and enjoying a 'substantial meal' to be served a pint. Fortunately, the latest guidance from DCMS has indicated that sports stadiums will be exempt from some of the guidelines in the 'normal' world, and as well as indoor meals we will be able to sell beer and food outside as well.

Nevertheless you should expect many significant changes to a match day, at least for the time being, and I thank you in advance for your understanding and co-operation. We continue to work through understanding how we will have to operate, obtain the necessary approvals and be ready for action.

We are working on organising some pre-season fixtures and hopefully we will be providing you with some cheer around Christmas/New Year. We are encouraged by the RFU to restart the league in mid-January 2021 but with continuing lack of clarity about the league structure (including whether some clubs will even participate or not), everything is still unsettled.

I have long believed that a mid-January start means that time constraints preclude a full league programme of 22 games and that we will inevitably be forced to make do with a compromised version. If we do start in mid-January it will leave no slack in the calendar other than one free weekend, and no doubt there will be the usual interruptions from bad weather plus further flare-ups of the virus, local

lockdowns, travel restrictions between tiers and even whole teams put in isolation because of a single positive test. Cov will play what league games are possible and have friendlies where we can.

We will stagger through the next few months and rebuild. We already have eyes on 2021-22 because this crisis will bring about change to the game – it has exposed the structural flaws we knew existed and had been trying, unsuccessfully, to change; maybe people will now start listening.

Rowland will have more to say about the rugby side of things (he always gets the interesting bit).

The hiatus has given us additional time to review the development plans for Butts Park Arena and some exciting prospects have recently emerged which we hope will receive the enthusiastic backing from the City Council, with whom we are deeply engaged and whose support is essential. More about that when I can give you something more definite.

Space is reserved for a cowshed terrace opposite the stand and with plans developing for supporter shares in the club, we would hope in this way to source the funding for it so that our supporters have 'ownership'.

This City and this Club are famous for their resilience; that is down to the people who make them up. We have a great team here at Cov and the best supporters we could wish for. Thank you for your continued support.

Jon



FROM ROWLAND WINTER



I thought I would start by giving you an insight into how we have kept the team ticking over and engaged over the last 9 months, and bring you up to speed with where we are now.

Normally, when looking forward to a new season, the planning process starts with working back from our first league game and plotting our pre-season schedule. We would normally aim to play 3 weeks of pre-season games at the end of about 12 weeks of

preparation. Every step is planned with great detail and the players progress through various phases, building together as a unit and becoming more robust as athletes to prepare them for a long season.

Initially, back in March, we had just beaten Doncaster away and were preparing for Newcastle's visit to the Butts the following week. Instead we found ourselves giving the boys a home programme (including a mix of skills, running & strength training) that could last up to 6 weeks, we were optimistically planning that we wouldn't need that long and we could restart the season pretty quickly!

As you all know, that 6 week programme had to be adapted to a 29 week programme before we next saw the squad together again! During that period it was obvious that the team needed both a mental & physical break from training and to get away from rugby all together for a while. When the time was right, we then tried to entertain the players with quizzes, team challenges, regular 1 on 1s, interviews, cake making tasks, trying different sports etc - all aimed at helping them fill their time and keep them engaged with all things Coventry Rugby!! We tried to make it as fun as possible, whilst also maintaining their fitness levels and providing support for those who struggled (and continue to struggle) with their mental health. It was clear throughout this period that these players who appear strong, confident and athletic were so immediately vulnerable as people, with their chosen jobs being in one of the hardest hit industries from the pandemic.

It has been well documented that our playing squad and support staff group has been reduced significantly in size and experience. As a result of the financial hardship we suffered, there was no alternative but to partly dismantle a squad in only four weeks when it had taken four years to build and that was a really difficult period. The depth we had worked so hard to build up was one of the key reasons we were able to climb into the top half of the table and sneak a fourth place finish.

If we fast forward to the end of the 29 week gap, we eventually welcomed the squad (with a couple of new additions and an ambitious group of academy players) back to the BPA at the beginning of October. We began Stage 1 training, which in short is individual and small group training, completely socially distanced as part of the RFU regulations on the elite professional rugby return to play roadmap. More importantly, having the boys back at the club, sharing stories, banter flying etc was brilliant!

FROM ROWLAND WINTER cont...

We have now been training for 9 weeks and as I write this we have just completed our first full week of 'proper training' having now progressed to Stage 2, which requires PCR testing every Monday to allow us to train with any form of contact, scrums, mauls etc. I am pleased to say that our first round of testing returned all players and staff results as negative!

Throughout the last few months, the season start date has been penciled in and rubbed out again so many times I have lost count. At a time when the league really needed leadership and direction, it has become rudderless and the lack of vision and governance has been mind-blowing.

In stark contrast, I continue to be in awe of the endless time, commitment and dedication that the club receives from Jon. Couple that with the love and support from all of the Coventry Rugby family and I know that it is only a matter of time before we are back to our best.

Everything seems to now be leaning more strongly towards a mid-January league season start, which means we are up against it to be ready to play, but with a bit of luck (we are due some!) and if we can avoid further restrictions we will make sure we are ready to entertain when the time comes!

Lastly from myself, the players and every member of staff at the club - thank you for your support, donations, messages and patience - we are so excited to welcome you back to Butts Park soon. We are looking forward to rebuilding the club with your help!

See you all soon.

Rowland



MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS

Over the past few weeks we have taken the opportunity to reconcile the Supporters' Club membership list so as to make use of membership numbers that are no longer being used.

Therefore, many of you will now have a different membership number from that which you had previously.

Your new & updated membership card will be available for collection in person from the Supporters' Club stand as & when Covid & social distancing restrictions allow. We will keep you informed as to where & when the stand will be open and what, if any, social distancing restrictions apply.

SUPPORTERS' CLUB PLAYER OF THE SEASON 2019/20 - RYAN BURROWS



Members may recall voting for CRSC player of the year back in May. We had watched Coventry make steady progress from the previous season. Our league position had improved to a heady fourth in division by the time Covid 19 brought a premature halt to the season.

A number of factors had contributed to our improved position, but since his arrival in the preceding summer, Ryan Burrows was at the helm of most of our good displays.

A strong ball carrying no.8, a commanding figure at the base of our pack and a reader of the game both in attack and in defence. Most importantly his leadership qualities became instantly evident as he led by example and teammates quickly followed his example.

Supporters enjoyed Ryan taking the game to the opposition and delighted when he destroyed their efforts to attack us.

Ryan was a deserving winner of our supporters' club player of the season and we had hoped that he would have been presented with his award at a pre-season BBQ at BPA at a family and supporters day to meet players and coaching staff.

The continued COVID pandemic, lockdowns and furloughed players has denied us the chance to hand over the trophy, but it will be presented in the presence of supporters as soon as arrangements can safely be made. Congratulations Ryan and well done to all team members on their sterling efforts during the shortened 2019/20 season.



REPLICA SHIRT - PRIZE DRAW WINNERS



We ran an early bird discount for anyone who either renewed their membership or joined the Supporters' Club before August 31st this year.

For the Early Birders, as an added incentive we offered members the chance to win one of five new, either home, or away, replica Coventry Rugby shirts.

Consequently, all those who renewed by the August 31st deadline were entered into a prize draw and 5 lucky winners will each receive a voucher that can be presented at the club shop to collect their replica shirt.

An online random number generator www.calculatorsoup.com was used which selected 5 numbers from the number range of those members who qualified for entry into the draw.

The winners were:

Phil Reynolds, Roger Pulley, Matthew Fearn, Graham Read and Brian Nairn

To claim your club shop voucher please E-Mail the Supporters' Club, before January 1st, at CRSC1874@gmail.com

In addition to the above prizes we also have the following items to give away, raffle off or auction once the season is up and running:

- **A further 10 Replica shirts**
- **One 3rd kit shirt (The pink one!)**
- **30 match day tickets**
- **16 VP match day tickets**
- **16 NHS Tickets**
- **1 hospitality table in the Marquee**



All of the above were purchased with CRSC Funds during the various money raising offers which Coventry Rugby Club carried out during the lockdowns and in total just under £3000 was paid to Coventry Rugby club and the associated charity events



Project: **500**



A Community Initiative by Coventry Rugby



The term 'now more than ever' is banded around a lot nowadays.

Since the global pandemic, almost every type of organisation has used this phrase to describe the vital nature of their work, thus emphasising your need to purchase, subscribe, or donate.

In our case, what we have strived to achieve now is simply the same as it has ever been. A normality to allow us to return to our primary cause: making a positive social impact via our work in the community.

After six weeks of multi-sport camps in the summer, the Coventry Rugby Community department have remained as active as they realistically can be.

Since September we have been working nearly 40 hours per week in Sherbourne Fields school, providing our vital SEND support work, as well as the continuation of our Friday afternoons over at St Lawrence's Primary in Southam. We've had some players involved in Camps and Project:500 such as: Rob Stevenson, Luc Jeannot, James Martin, Dan Lewis and Sam McNulty has been in Sherbourne all year.

We raised over £11,000 thanks to the Aviva Community Fund and match funding from Sport England, to which the CRSC donated a fantastic amount.

Despite being out of training, the Wheelchair Rugby team have kept in contact and now have a return to play programme that should be able to commence in December. For now, regular



PROJECT 500 cont...

Zoom call quiz nights are the perfect way to maintain team cohesion.

We welcomed nearly 40 young rugby players to our RML Rugby Camp over at Old Laurentians, running two days of fun and skill development, assisting OL's also thanks to our Cashback for Camps initiative.



Coming up this month, All Kids Active will see its first Free Green Space for Schools block, with four weeks of free activity at the Butts Park Arena, paid for by the Coventry Rugby Foundation, for the pupils of Spon Gate Primary School to enjoy. With limited green space for some of our local schools, this initiative could transform their PE programmes.

And finally, during the October half-term, we welcomed 32 disadvantaged young people onto our Project:500 camp. Whilst Marcus Rashford continues to pioneer for Free School Meal programmes, it is now the first anniversary of the Project:500 scheme, a year that has seen us get over 100 young people from the local community active and



fed during the school holidays. No doubt, this number will increase over the next few months as Lockdown 2.0 brings a new wave of difficulties, hitting the most vulnerable in our society the hardest.

We will push for our work to continue, even in adaptive means. Our camps were limited to 30 in the summer, only able to expand to 40 come October. The

Wheelchair Rugby players will only be able to return to individual training come December, and our Community Officers working in Sherbourne are confined to working in bubbles of one class rather than moving from one to the other in order to help cover staff demands.

Now more than ever, Coventry Rugby is working hard to achieve its normality, its impact, and its integration with the community.

If there is anything that you would like to contribute or any question you would like to ask, do not hesitate to do so, contact us now at: community@coventryrugby.co.uk

And thank you once again for your support.

Hal Sparke

Foundation manager



FAREWELL TO COUNDON ROAD



THEY turned out in force to say a fond farewell to a fabled acre, a field of dreams, a stage upon which the game's immortals hugged the leather and danced.

On the terraces, beneath the rusty, ramshackle roof of a vantage point known dearly and devoutly as The Cowshed, they looked down on the springtime

greenery for one last time and they lamented the end of an era.

It was the day legions of Coventry kids stood together in one last taste of Coundon Road camaraderie, one final boisterous bellowing of banter from the 'Shed', and one ultimate act of remembrance.

It was the day they gathered on the outskirts of a cathedral city to say goodbye to a sporting shrine long regarded as a High Church of the oval-ball code.

It was akin to Leicester taking their final bow at Welford Road, or Gloucester at Kingsholm, or Northampton at Franklins Gardens, or even Manchester United at Old Trafford or Warwickshire at Edgbaston.

It was difficult for the fans to concentrate solely on the match unfolding before them because, on occasions like that, the mind keeps flashing back to the ghosts and the echoes of yesteryear, when Cov were arguably the greatest club in the land and giants trod the turf.

Anyone who has ever made the pilgrimage to the old cabbage green stands of Twickenham for, say, a game against the French will know what I mean.

A date with the French was always a colourful assault on the senses - Gallic sounds, garlic smells and grand sights, klaxons, cockerels and Tricolours, a blazing honking unmistakable French Armada.

HQ was where you shared a beer with Jacques or Jock, Dai or Dermot, depending on the nationality of that day's invasion of London suburbia.

It was the same at Coundon Road, though not nearly as grand of course, when thousands of Cornishmen filled the ground in the 60s for classic County Championship encounters, or when once-mighty Cardiff were regular visitors and every flat-capped miner called Williams or Davies emerged from the Warwickshire coalfield to declare their allegiance to their classy counterparts from beyond Offa's Dyke.

FAREWELL TO COUNDON ROAD cont...

I have always regarded the Cowshed as a little cousin of the Anfield Kop and the spiritual home of some of Coventry's most knowledgeable followers. The humour has always been ribald and risqué, but they know a good player when they see one and, over the years, they have seen a glut of good players.



The Honours Board is a testimony to that and a tribute in a manufacturing city to the awesome production line of Coventry Football Club (RU).

Etched in gold letters are dozens of names of international players who have now passed into Coventry folklore - each one revered because he wore THE jersey with a woven red rose across the heart.

That proud emblem of English rugby achievement, sewn on dazzling white, bloomed more than ever at Coundon Road during the early 70s.

Some, like the dashing David Duckham, were handed what amounted to bouquets. Others, like Bill Gittings and Barry Ninnes, were given a derisory but no less cherished single stem.

Back in 1973, England beat the fearsome All Blacks in their own back yard for the first time. There were five Coventry lads in the team that day.

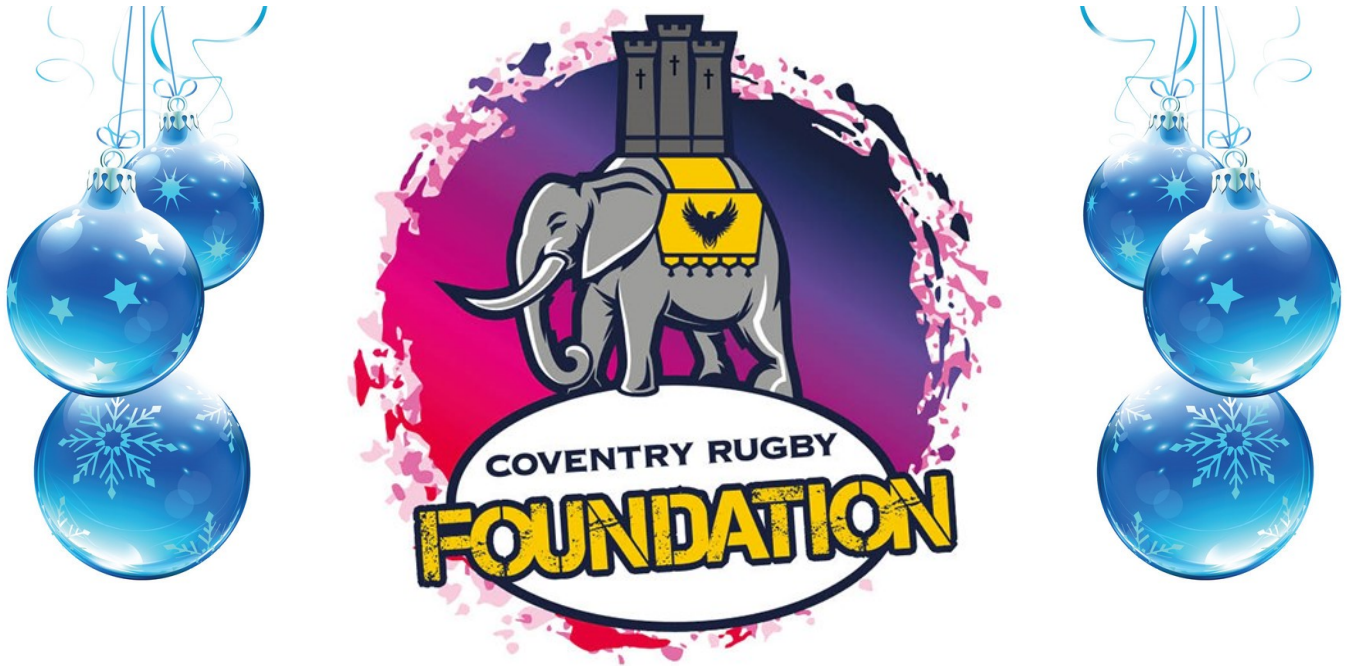
It boiled down to this: a little field of dreams in the very heart of England had honed the skills of a quality quintet destined to humble a team who were then regarded as invincible.

There was an air of solemnity about the curtain falling upon Coundon Road, a sense of bereavement, a gut-wrenching feeling that you were burying an old pal.

It was not the end of an era. It was merely the end of a chapter in a city's proud sporting chronicle.

Credit Steve "scribble" Evans





COVENTRY RUGBY FOUNDATION LAUNCHES NELLY'S RFC

The Coventry Rugby Foundation is proud to be launching Nelly's RFC – a Mixed Ability rugby team. The Programme will run during school term-time for approximately 33 weeks of the year and be based at Butts Park Arena.

The programme will run after school one evening per week from 4:30pm to 5:45pm with sessions including exercises for warm up, fundamental rugby skills, and then basic touch matches to finish.

Nelly's RFC is for young people aged between 13 and 19 with special educational needs from schools around Coventry. We will work predominantly with those who have social and behavioural disabilities or learning difficulties. This includes, but is not limited to, young people with autism, Asperger's, Down's Syndrome and ADHD.

The Foundation will be running a taster session on Wednesday, December 16th at Butts Park Arena between 4:30pm and 5:45pm, which will be a fun and active introduction to rugby games and skills.

The Coventry Rugby Foundation is also looking for volunteers to support the project. This will involve helping to run sessions and supporting the young people and other coaches. It will be a great way to gain experience of supporting children with SEND requirements and practical experience of coaching Mixed Ability Rugby.

Volunteers must be prepared to undergo a DBS check, and while previous experience volunteering with SEND young people or in coaching sport is not essential it is preferred.

To register your interest or if you would like any further information about how to support us please contact the Community team on community@coventryrugby.co.uk

PARTNERSHIP WITH COVENTRY RUGBY FORMER PLAYERS ASSOCIATION (FPA)



The Supporters' Club & Coventry Former Players Association are in early stage discussions with a view to sharing certain resources and to combine efforts for the benefit of Coventry Rugby Club. It is intended that the FPA will have a dedicated page on the new & improved Supporters' Club website and in our newsletter. If Covid / lockdown / Tier 3 had not come along we would have progressed these discussions much further than we have.

This edition of the newsletter contains the first of a regular feature regarding former players (Ivor Preece & Sam Tuitupou are included in this issue) and look out for more articles about players from both the past and recent times in future issues. We are sure that you will find these to be interesting and informative and will be making further announcements regarding our collaboration together, as and when it is safe to meet to progress and conclude our discussions.

The FPA is not only made up of former players, but they are supporters too just like you and they have a burning desire to help in every way they can to propel Cov to more success both on and off the pitch. Look out for more news soon !

SAM TUITUPOU



IN TRYING to write a fitting send off to Sam Tuitupou, who hung up his boots after two seasons with Coventry, a lot of words beginning with F come to mind.

No, the oath you'd expect from those on the receiving end of one of his ferocious tackles isn't among them.

Fan favourite, fearsome, fearless, fastidious, faithful, friendly, family and fate are just some words that resonate with the career of the former All Black, who was a key part of Coventry's promotion winning campaign.

Fate, because there is a tantalising series of 'what ifs' that punctuate Big Sam's rugby journey from Auckland on New Zealand's North Island to the English Midlands.

How different might it have been had he gone to National League One promotion rivals, Amptill, as he originally planned?

He might never have made it to these shores, with the option of staying in New Zealand and extending his international career very much on the table.

He might have been lost to rugby union, with the teenage Tuitupou being offered a contract in league with Canberra Raiders.

And he might never have played first class rugby at all, without the support of his older brothers, who defied family rules to give him his big break in the sport.

'You have to make the most of your opportunities,' says the man affectionately nicknamed Hacksaw Sam by Munster supporters for his tackling when he was a feature of the Irish side. *'When one door closes, another one opens. I have always had to make a mark for myself. I had bigger brothers who would run over me in the back yard.*

Tackling is something I've always had to work on. It's my strength.'

He talks of *'putting in some big tackles...to impress the boys, to gee them up'* during games.

But he had to tackle a strict Tongan upbringing in Auckland before making the grade in professional rugby.

When Sam talks about his family, love and pride filters through every sentence, every word. His father, mother, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and now his own children, in the UK and back in New Zealand.

His parents said 'no' to him making a name for himself in rugby league, refusing to let him join Canberra because they felt he was too young. They also ruled out playing

SAM TUITUPOU cont...

rugby on a Sunday with worship given precedence over sport.

'I grew up watching my brothers play rugby,' he remembers fondly. 'We were brought up in a strong Tongan heritage, and my parents wouldn't allow us to play on Sundays, which was when the New Zealand trials are held.'

'My brothers used to take me to the trials without my father knowing. He'd stay at church and they'd whisk me off to the trials. I think my older brothers were probably good enough to play at the top levels, better than me, but they never got the chance.'

'I actually started playing rugby league. My older brothers played both. The family across the road who took my brothers to play league, I think they felt sorry for me, always waving them goodbye. So they started taking me along.'

'In New Zealand, you can pretty much play both codes. One is in the morning, the other in the afternoon and I'd be playing two games every Saturday. The school I went to, Calston Boys High, put me onto union more, but they played league on a Wednesday. So I continued to play both league and union.'

'But my childhood, my introduction to rugby, was watching Tonga and Samoa play rugby league. The Tongan rugby league side was always who we would want to go and watch. I always wanted to play for Tonga.'



Fate and opportunity saw him in an All Black shirt instead of the red and white of Tonga.

'It felt kinda weird. It didn't really kick in until I was at the hotel. The first person I rang was my old man. My old man is a staunch Tongan, the type who doesn't show his feelings. He said he was happy for me, but didn't

show any emotion...I know he was really happy for me.'

'My dad is known as the hard man of the family. For me it was about making my family proud. It was not all about me. I couldn't have done it without my brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles and the family who prayed for me.'

'I was hugely honoured and privileged to play for Auckland, where I was born and bred. Then the All Blacks. Singing the national anthem (of New Zealand) for the ABs, and doing the haka was a very special moment.'

Sam stresses: 'I never dreamed I would make a living from playing rugby.'

This is the guy who played for his school, then North Island Schools, Auckland Schools and New Zealand Schools. A guy who made his debut for Auckland Blues in Super Rugby as a teenager, and who captained the junior All Blacks to World Championship success at U19 and U21 level.

SAM TUITUPOU cont...

In fact, his curriculum vitae is pretty special.

As well as the Junior World Championship successes, he's won two Air New Zealand Cup titles with Auckland and then Auckland Blues in the Super 14 league.

He moved to Worcester Warriors, then Munster in the season they won the Celtic League, before joining and captaining Sale Sharks in the Premiership.

Had it not been for injury, he may well have represented Tonga in the Rugby World Cup.

Injury is something he's had to deal with given his powerhouse style of play. He broke a leg during Coventry's National League One winning season.

Moving to centre suited his approach to tackling, although anyone foolish enough to think that he's a one trick pony would not understand that his turn of pace, eye for a gap and silky footwork and hands are match-winning attributes.

'I wasn't the biggest, but I always enjoyed the physical side of the game. I started off at full back, then moved to first five before ending up at 12, where I preferred playing.'

'I played Super Rugby at about 83, 84 kgs, whereas nowadays you get centres who are 95 to 100 kgs. Back then, for that position, because I wasn't tall like other centres, like Tana Umaga, I had make my mark for myself.'

'Putting in some big tackles makes everyone on your side feel good. At the end of the day, it comes down to confidence. I always felt I had the confidence to dominate the opposition. You either dominate the opposition or smother them stopping the offload. You have to identify the person you're up against, whether they're a prop, a lock or a centre with good feet.'

There are several highlights reels of Hacksaw Sam putting in bone crunching tackles on YouTube. They're not for the faint hearted, with Sam giving the impression of a 5ft 9in tall speeding bullet knocking players down.

James Haskill the former Wasps, Saints & England stalwart said *'Sam Tuitupou hit me harder than anyone else I ever played against. It was more like being hit by a swinging girder. And it's not very nice when you're off on a gallop and someone like Sam suddenly flattens you from another direction. It must be like stepping onto a road without looking and being hit by a four door saloon. Suddenly, you're cut in*



half, flying through the air and wondering if you're going to land safely. And when you do land, you're like a rag doll with the stuffing removed, unable to move a muscle.'

SAM TUITUPOU cont...

Sam went on to say, *'I'm a very laid back person. I've loved playing rugby for a living, I've loved the experiences and I'm so grateful for the opportunities I've had. Tackling was simply something I enjoyed.'*

It's clear that as well as tackling, Sam has a deep love of his Pacific Islands heritage.

The reason why he was keen to join Ampthill, before being persuaded to join Cov by Director of Rugby Rowland Winter, was because of the Tongan group of players at the Bedfordshire club.

At Coventry, he enjoyed the opportunity to play alongside fellow Tongans, including Auckland-born Dan Faleafa, with the Scottish qualified Bulumakau brothers, from Fiji, also part of the blue and white Pacific Islands brotherhood.

It is Sam's understanding of how daunting it can be for players to travel around the world to play, their heritage and abilities that has led him to launch his own player agency.

'Player welfare has been a massive issue for me and especially the Pacific Island boys who come, and those with young families. One problem area has been agencies and I had the opportunity to carry on playing, but to be able to start my own agency appealed to me. This is a big opportunity for me and I couldn't turn it down.'

Sam had hoped to play to 40, and play alongside his teenage sons. Even though they are rugby mad and showing promise, the idea of helping a wider 'family' swung the balance in favour of retirement.

'I should have come to the UK years ago,' he admits with hindsight. 'Now I can advise other young players from New Zealand to come over and experience it while they can.'

His own experiences in the dressing room at Auckland have helped shape his attitude to the rugby family. In those days, the younger apprentices weren't expected to talk unless they were spoken to. He credits the great Eroni Clarke in making his introduction to top class club rugby easier.

'For us young Polynesian boys, he just helped make the transition easier,' he recalls. 'He remains a big inspiration.'

While acknowledging that the game, and its old dressing room codes, has changed, it's Clarke's example that is informing Sam's vision as an agent.

He cites his brothers as his other big inspirations in life, and rugby.

Family. Brotherhood. In blood and rugby.

Sam has fond memories of being part of the Cov set up and admits to a few regrets about leaving Butts Park Arena.

Rowland Winter has revealed how Sam took a notebook to his first session with Coventry, showing just how professional he was, setting benchmarks for his teammates on and off the field.

SAM TUITUPOU cont...

But Sam praises Winter for persuading him to abandon plans to move to Amptill, citing the DoR's drive to Stoke-on-Trent, where Sam was staying with his in-laws, to set out Coventry's history and future ambitions.

He is the fourth former All Black to play for Coventry, following Shayne Philpott, Scott Hamilton and Zinzan Brooke, a former Auckland legend who was playing at Coundon Road as Sam was making his debut in the Auckland side. All Blacks 883, 895, 1040 and 1067.

'I honestly didn't know the rich history of Coventry Rugby Club or about the other All Blacks who had played here,' he admits.

'It's a great club. For me, being here and able to embrace that history, what the club is all about, that meant a lot to me. It is an amazing club. To see the former players still coming back to support is something else.

'Being able, for an Auckland born and bred guy, to come to this famous club and be a little part of creating history is something I will cherish.

'The loyal support at this club is something special.'

He signed off in front of the Butts Park Arena faithful with a try and Man of the Match performance in the narrow defeat to Nottingham. A fitting final act that words cannot match.



Sam's memorable send off from Coventry along with his many pals

ERIC'S ARMY STILL FINDING THINGS TO DO



During the lockdown period Eric's Army initially took leave of BPA – the majority had to cocoon, hibernate or lie low for fear of contracting the dreaded Covid 19. Some of the team were deemed vulnerable, so there was no choice but to heed medical and scientific advice.

Once the three month spell was over we were all ready to get back to the stadium but immediately we found ourselves facing a few problems.

For a start there were no matches taking place – therefore no litter to be gathered. There were no discarded plastic beer mugs – therefore no to addition to our MacMillan appeal – the loss of so many home games left us with little to do around the grounds. Only the pigeons seemed keen to add to our workload.

But if you look hard enough, you will always find little jobs that need doing and Eric is a past master at identifying these jobs.

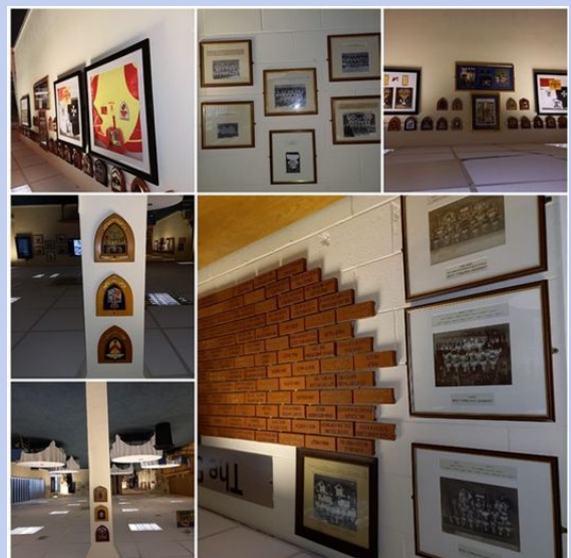
We did find some fencing to repair and the Thursday team trimmed back a whole load of scrub behind the railway end. The front car park area has also been cleared of overgrowth and litter.

Inside – oh the temptation. The beer cellars had to be emptied and all out of date beer readied for collection by breweries – tantalising. The bottled beer and soft drinks checked to ensure they were still in date. Likewise wines and spirits. All duly checked we were good boys and never touched a drop during the entire process.

The paint work behind the bars needed redoing and so our best painters were set to task, with due encouragement from the rest of the team. The Jon Sharp room looked devoid of memorabilia and evidence that visitors and members were in fact in a rugby club. Many old photos and shields from visiting teams, gathered over many years were discovered. They were brushed down, some even polished and are now proudly on display around the room and in the area adjoining the Millerchip suite.

Harry Walker's photos were removed from the upstairs suite bearing his name and are now given pride of place where all visitors can view them. Great care was taken in ensuring these old photos (1896 to 1952) will act as a reminder of the great history of our club. Photos remain of the host of great players who played during the 1960s and 1970s as well as all our Internationals.

We continue our search for photos from the late 1970s up to date and would love to hear from any members or friends who can provide us with such gems.



VOYAGE OF THE LAST SEA LIONS... WITH A COVENTRY LEGEND ABOARD SHIP

Article by Steve Evans



First test team.

WHOEVER organised the British Lions tour to New Zealand in 1950 had clearly done his homework.

To him fell the task of transporting 30 rugby gladiators halfway across the world by sea and ensuring that, a month later, they arrived ready and primed for sporting combat against the feared and mighty All Blacks.

The four home unions decided that there should be few distractions on the trip across the Atlantic, through the Panama Canal, and into the open Pacific.

It was the last great sporting pilgrimage before jet-age travel. The last sea Lions.

So when the 15,896 tons SS Ceramic steamed out of Liverpool with the British Lions on board, there was little to occupy the minds of the players other than what awaited them Down Under. The ship was a cargo vessel catering for just 82 passengers...and only three were women!

Coventry's Ivor Preece was on board. He was not a stowaway. He was there on merit, one of only four Coventry players in history to become captain of England, with Phil Judd, Fran Cotton and Dick Greenwood.

Ivor said farewell to his wife Betty and five-month-old son Peter. He would not see them again for six months.

VOYAGE OF THE LAST SEA LIONS...

WITH A COVENTRY LEGEND ABOARD SHIP

Cont...



I was privileged, no, honoured, to spend an afternoon in Ivor's company in May 1983 - less than four years before this Coventry legend passed away. If you think of a Cov icon, you will think of Ivor.

This is what he told me at the time: "We spent four weeks and two days at sea and the organisers, in their wisdom, made sure we had a quiet ship. It was a little bit tedious because there wasn't a lot to do. After we went through the Panama Canal, our only companions were the flying fish.

The touring party departed on April 1 - but they were nobody's fools.

Within 48 hours of sailing, the tour manager "Ginger" Osborne organised a whip-round among the players. With the proceeds, the Lions threw a cocktail party - traditional on long sea voyages - and invited the other 52 passengers.

Ivor told me: "It was a master stroke. Ours was the first cocktail party and, from then on, the other passengers organised their own. Naturally, they could not leave us out and we were invited to every one."

Apart from the ship's captain, there were four other "skippers" on board the Ceramic. There was Ivor (Coventry and England), Karl Mullen (Ireland), Peter Kininmonth (Scotland) and Bleddyn Williams (Wales).

They docked at Wellington on May 2 to a warm Maori welcome but Ivor said: "We needed seven days to get our land legs. We had got used to the sea-sickness but we still had to keep our eye on one or two individuals who later suffered from home-sickness. Curiously, it was always the big tough guys who suffered in that way."

The Lions had gone to New Zealand with a record which showed only one Test match win there since 1904.

It was a record which they would not improve on during the forthcoming four-match series against the All Blacks - but they won a legion of friends.

The Lions played on average every four days - they won 17 of their 18 provincial games.

Feeding the players on board a train proved a novel exercise. Orders would be taken and the guard would telephone the details to a station 50 miles ahead...and they had to scoff their snap on the platform in just 23 minutes.

"Don't ask me why," said Ivor. "But that was always the amount of time we had to eat and get back on board."

VOYAGE OF THE LAST SEA LIONS... WITH A COVENTRY LEGEND ABOARD SHIP

Cont...

The trip home was a contrast. They returned via Australia, Ceylon and the Suez on board the P&O ship "Strathnaver" carrying 1,100 passengers. Ivor said: "I only saw my team-mates at meal times".

After six months away - two of which were spent at sea - the party arrived at Tilbury bearing gifts for long-awaited reunions with their families. Ivor handed over a sailor doll to his son Peter, now almost a year old.

Twenty-three years later, Peter was one of five Coventry players in the England team which beat New Zealand in Auckland. But that's another story.

Our grateful thanks to our good friends at Broadstreet R.F.C., who sent us copies of these great pictures featuring Ivor.

credit Steve "scribble" Evans



NEW WEBSITE

Over the past several months we have been working hard to develop a new & improved website. The original website was based upon a 'Wordpress' platform which served our needs adequately in our formative years, but it did have certain limitations in terms of functionality.

Therefore, it was decided to upgrade and migrate our website onto a new platform with increased functionality, with the new website up & running by year end. Unfortunately, our progress has been hampered by the continuing Covid restrictions and it is now intended to launch the new website before the end of January. We will keep you informed.

RORY JENNINGS



Tim Smith received the following message from Rory which he felt ought to be published, as Rory clearly holds Coventry supporters in high esteem.

We all wish Rory well at Clermont and thank him for his great displays for Coventry.

Hi Tim,

I hope you and your family are doing well during this odd time.

It will be coming out either today or tomorrow that I have signed for Clermont. Other than through social media, I won't be able to reach and thank all the supporters I would like to. Therefore, can I ask you kindly to pass on my huge thanks and gratitude to all the supporters at Coventry throughout my year at the club. Best fans in the championship by a mile. Not only on match day but off the field too, particularly during this crisis we find ourselves in. I wish you all the best in the future and hopefully catch you at Butts Park at some point.

Thanks,

Rory

**WE'RE PART OF
COVENTRY'S
STORY**

PROUD SUPPORTERS OF



**20
21**

COVENTRY
UK CITY
OF CULTURE

2021 CLUB MEMBER

PARTNERS

We have been very fortunate in agreeing partnerships with local organisations who have agreed to work with us to the benefit of members.



Coventry Plumbing and Heating Supplies (CPHS)

www.covplumbing.co.uk

Coventry's largest independent plumbers merchants have been trading for over 30 years and have showrooms in Swan Lane and Curriers Close, Coventry, and in Weddington Road, Nuneaton.

CPHS have made a significant financial contribution towards the costs of setting up our website, for which we are extremely grateful.



Builders Supply Stores

<http://www.bsscov.co.uk/>

Archways House, Spon End, Coventry CV1 3HG. 02476 712000/412733

Established in 1931 BSS is an independent builders and plumbers merchant.

BSS have agreed to pay 1 1/2 % of the total value of sales purchased by CRSC members into the CRSC bank account each quarter.

They will set up a monitoring system at their sales points and will give the customer, who must show his CRSC membership card, a receipt accordingly.

<http://www.akbarscuisine.com>

Akbars Indian Cuisine, 7-9 Butts, Coventry CV1 3GJ 02476 22213 / 228899



An organisation which has been in business for over 30 years, this is a high quality restaurant serving contemporary Indian Cuisine at its best, as well as Indian tapas. It has modern décor, a bar, a lounge and a terrace.

Upon production of their membership card, Supporters' Club members will benefit from a discount of 15% off their food bill.

Please note: a party of 4 or less receives a 15% discount on their food bill. For parties of more than 4 people the 15% discount is applied to 4 of the party, the additional attendees receive a 7.5% discount on their food bill.

Members are asked to show their CRSC membership card to staff both when they order from the menu AND when they ask for the bill, in order to assist staff in their preparation of the bill.

PARTNERS



We are delighted to have reached a Partnership Agreement with the **Ramada Hotel**, in The Butts (less than 5 minutes walk from BPA) who are offering:

Car parking - supporters can use the Ramada car park on match days for a discounted price of £2.00. On returning to their car at the end of the match supporters will be required to go into reception and produce either:

- a current **Supporters' Club membership card**
- a current **season member ticket**
- a **date-and-game-specific match ticket**



Restaurant dining - upon production of a current Supporter's Club membership card the bill will be subject to a 10% discount

Accommodation - £75.00 for bed and breakfast and £125.00 for dinner bed and breakfast, for a couple sharing either a twin or a double standard room, and subject to availability. To take advantage of this offer supporters must book directly with the hotel either by telephone (02476 238110) or email reservations@ramadacoventry.co.uk since this is a local agreement - the discount cannot be applied to reservations made online - and by quoting "Coventry Rugby". It may be necessary to produce your membership card to the reception staff.

This offer is also being sent to all Championship clubs and to their Supporters Club, for their visit to Coventry next season, in the hope that many supporters' in particular will take advantage and use their weekend stay to explore and appreciate the tourist features which Coventry has to offer. We are also extolling the fact that Coventry will be the City of Culture in 2021.



PARTNERS

We are constantly investigating the prospect of setting up more Partnership Agreements with local organisations to provide benefits for members. If you know of any potential opportunity which you think we should explore, please email us via our email address - crsc1874@gmail.com or via a committee member.