

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Marie Davies

## BEN COOPER

Prop. 2011-13 &amp; 2016-19. 116 appearances.

Long standing supporters of Bedford Blues will know of the close connection we have with the Suffolk rugby club, Bury St. Edmunds.

In the 60s and 70s many players travelled some distance from the East of England to play for Bedford, as it was the nearest first class club. Players like Brian Arthur, Peter Green, Derek Wyatt, Dennis Hart, Nick Martin, Tony Rodgers to name but a few, plus several who joined us from Cambridge University.

The tragedy that struck Bury St. Edmunds RFC on March 3rd 1974 when the DC-10 crashed shortly after take off from Orly Airport, Paris on March 3rd, 1974 with no survivors. 18 from the Bury St. Edmunds club who had travelled to Paris for the France v England International were among the 346 fatalities, including our then, recent former player Brian Arthur and our current player Peter Green. Peter joined the group from Bury because he was still recovering from a recent injury.

The connection with Bury continues as our former player Ben Cooper is now player-coach and in the squad are three other former players - Camilo Parilli-Ocampo, Charlie Reed and Ben Kelland.



SONS ARE  
MASCOTS  
FOR BEN'S  
100TH GAME  
FOR THE  
BLUES.

BEN IN THE  
PREMIERSHIP

## Ben writes:

'I was born and grew up in Bury St. Edmunds. My first taste of rugby was at St. James's Secondary School where I got asked to play for the school team as I was the biggest boy there. I went on to represent the school in the National Schools Cup at Twickenham where we were runners-up. From school I went on to play for Bury where I found my love of rugby. I then continued to play rugby for West Suffolk College, based in Bury, where I progressed as a player under the guidance of coach Nigel Brown and playing against quality players from Hartpury College, Oaklands and Moulton. I represented England Colleges for two years and was in the Bury Colts team that won the National Cup in 2007.

There are many people to thank for my rugby career. My parents didn't miss a game while I was playing for the Blues and London Welsh and transported me all over the country. My youth coach Rick Martin and my school coach Nigel Brown who both gave me advice on and off the pitch. Last, but not least, my wife Michaela and my three boys who have been there to support me at all times.

At 18 I joined Cambridge RUFC. This gave me the opportunity to play at National 1 Level at a young age. James Shanahan was the coach and was brilliant, ultimately putting me in the position to step up to the Championship. I was able to join Bedford in mid-season while Dan Seal was unavailable. It was great to join such a well-respected club and I was buzzing! My debut was against Plymouth the first week I joined and then I was selected in the squad for the semi-final against London Welsh. More about Bedford days later.

After two seasons at Bedford I was given the opportunity to sign for London Welsh, who had



THE COOPER BOYS

END OF SEASON.  
BEN BACK ROW  
1ST RIGHT

just had promotion to the Premiership confirmed. I started half way through pre-season as we were expecting the arrival of our second son, so it took a while to settle in and get up to speed. I made my debut off the bench in the Premiership in November and went on to make my full debut against Bath in December, where I was propping against old team mate Nick Auterac and this Premiership debut has to be one of the stand out games of my rugby career. I had a great time at London Welsh and made 'friends for life', but unfortunately the club got into financial difficulties and folded so I made my swift return to the Blues in 2016 for a further three seasons. There were still familiar faces hanging around, such as Toops, Charlie Clare, Mikey Howard and not forgetting Big John!

I made many friends both on and off the pitch at Bedford and I must name a few. Mike Rayer was great for me. He taught me a way to play rugby that perhaps I didn't think I would play. I was a 'big scrummager' but Mike always drove his players to offer something extra which was brilliant for me. Then there was Hynesy - the 'character' at the club who helped me to develop my scrummaging which in turn made me a better prop. Many of my teammates have become life friends. To name a few who I spent a lot of time with - Jarad Williams, Tom Armes, Hayden King and of course, Camilo who some would say, I still spend too much time with.

Bedford and Mike always felt bonding 'off the field' was very important and I have very fond memories of our trips. The special ones were our mini-tours to Bordeaux (twice) and Dunkirk, Ypres and Bruges. These were brilliant trips with great people which I shall never forget.

Where am I now? After leaving Goldington Road, the second time I decided to take a different route out of professional rugby and took the opportunity to

spend more time with Michaela, my wife and three boys - Ollie, George and Charlie who are already into rugby life. It's great to see them following in my footsteps and wanting to take rugby seriously. Maybe one day, in years to come, I will be watching them play at Goldington Road!

I decided to step into the world of coaching rugby and took on the role of player-coach at my old club Bury St. Edmunds who are in National 2. I am enjoying the dual role and I have been lucky enough to be joined by ex-Blues Charlie Reed, Ben Kelland and one of my best mates Camilo. We are currently competing for promotion in National 2 South and currently hold a home unbeaten record. Unfortunately, our away record has let us down so far, but we are confident we can turn that around.

I have to thank everyone at the Blues for so many of the most memorable playing days of my career. Who can forget playing at Goldington Road on a Friday night under lights?

Appropriately, the game that stands out for me is my 'return' game on Boxing Day 2016 against a strong Jersey side when we scored in the final play to win! Good luck to the Blues today!



SUCCESSFUL 3  
PEAKS CHALLENGE  
FOR MICHAELA  
AND HER FATHER  
EARLIER THIS YEAR.