

FORMER BLUES PLAYERS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



by Marie Davies



WILL HOOOLEY

2017-20. Fly Half / Full Back. 49 appearances. 270 points.

Will writes:-

'I was born in Cambridge and got involved in rugby when my father took me to Cambridge Rugby Club when I was five years old.

He has been the greatest influence on my rugby journey and was usually (although my mother played her part) the one who drove me around the country for rugby events. He has travelled the world to watch me play and always gives me an honest review. I also played for my school teams at St. John's College and The Leys.

A cliché perhaps - but I would probably say Jonny Wilkinson also had an influence on my rugby journey. When he dropped the goal to win England the World Cup in 2003, I was 9 years old. From that moment I knew I wanted to become a rugby player!

I played for England at U16, U17, U18, U19 and U20 levels, winning the Junior World Championship with England U20s in 2013. I signed my first professional contract with Northampton Saints just before I finished school at 18.

In 2015 I signed for Exeter Chiefs, but an injury in my last year there kept me out for most of the second half of the season. I realised that Rob Baxter had limited plans for me to stay at the Chiefs after my injury, so I knew I needed to go and play regular rugby elsewhere. Ali Hephner, who was Head Coach at the Chiefs and had been my Northampton Saints Academy coach, mentioned that I should look at the Blues (a past club of his). I met with Mike Rayer and also got in contact with my former Saints teammate and good friend, Lee Dickson, who was also heading to Bedford to finish his career. Everything married itself together and I joined the Blues in 2017.

It's only when I look back, and reflect, that I feel so lucky to have been part of Bedford Blues. A fantastic club, in a brilliant town surrounded by some of the best fans in rugby! I recall so many memorable

occasions at Goldington Road and 'on the road'. I'll never forget our game against Leeds, during the 2018 'Beast From The East', where snow threatened to call off the game. The Bedford faithful came out with their shovels and cleared the snow off the pitch for a perfect grass track to be waiting underneath. We put on one of our best performances, winning in front of an amazing crowd, who stood or sat in the freezing cold!

My wife and I were so fortunate to become very close with some of the players and their partners. We are still very much in contact with many of them, even though we live in California. I was recently part of Justin Blanchet's groomsman group for his wedding in December, when he married Jojo, one of my wife's best friends. We met Justin and Jojo during our first week in Bedford back in 2017!

WILL IN ACTION FOR THE BLUES



WILL AND MOLLY ENJOYING THE SUN

Rich Lane, Dean Adamson, Jacob Fields, Jamie Elliott and Oli Curry are just some of the boys I'm still very close with. It's also great to see my good friends, Alex Day and Alex Woolford, now playing their rugby at Bedford.

I have so many fond memories of Bedford. I loved our wins on the road against the Cornish Pirates and Munster in the British & Irish Cup. We had many quality team socials at the Blues, which helped create a strong team environment. Our team bonding trip to Northern France and Belgium has to be one of my favourite, funniest and most memorable trips. We managed to locate a packed-out venue in the Belgium town of Ypres to enjoy a typical Bedford Blues' night out!

I qualified to play for the USA through my American grandmother and was fortunate that Mike Rayer and Bedford Blues were so supportive in my quest to represent the USA. I've played 20 tests for America, including 18 caps and one Rugby World Cup in Japan in 2019. I've travelled the world and been lucky to play in some of the most iconic stadiums against fantastic players. I'll never forget my first appearance against Argentina XV in Los Angeles and my first cap against Canada in Sacramento. Then getting back on a flight to the UK to prepare to play Rotherham away!



THANK YOU WILL!



WILL NOW

I feel very fortunate to have played against England at the World Cup, the All Blacks in Washington and Ireland in a packed-out Aviva Stadium. However, my greatest memory has to be our win against Scotland in Houston, in 2018. It was the single greatest game and night of my rugby career.

For Molly and I, Bedford was our first proper 'move-in' together after spending just over a year and a half with each other in Exeter. Molly has supported me through thick and thin and has seen me at my highest highs and lowest lows. I moved to Saracens for the Covid-interrupted season of 2020/21 and Molly and I got married in Devon in August 2021, before jetting off to San Diego, California.

We now live in the beautiful beach city of Carlsbad, where the San Diego Legion headquarters are based. Another Bedford former player Scott Murray is the Forwards Coach here. Playing for San Diego in America's Major League Rugby has been an amazing experience. Travelling all around America, with guys from different parts of the world has been so enjoyable. Throwing the ball around in the beautiful Californian sun is something I don't take for granted coming from the UK! There are challenges, but I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

I'm approaching 30, and after the USA failed to qualify for the 2023 Rugby World Cup (something I missed out on due to shoulder surgery), I feel unsure about my rugby plans. I'm focused on doing my best for the Legion this season. I will continue to keep myself busy outside rugby with sports media work, writing articles or broadcasting. We want to continue in California for as long as possible and will keep our options open.

One thing is sure, I will certainly get myself to Goldington Road in the near future to cheer on the Blues!