

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

by Marie Davies



JOE VANDERMOLLEN

2012-15. Back Row. 50 appearances. 7 tries.

Players' Player of the Year 2013-14

Welcome back to Goldington Road Joe!

Joe has travelled from his home in Westcliff-on-Sea to be at our game this evening.

Joe writes:

'I was born in Southend, Essex and started to play rugby quite late, at the age of 13. I had always enjoyed football, but after going to watch my brother play at the local rugby club, Westcliff, I thought rugby was the game for me. Starting rugby at this age meant I experienced a few positions. I was put on the wing, then centre but finally found a home in the forwards. Back row became my natural position.

School rugby was non-existent in my area and it was only when I started college life at SEEVIC that I played rugby. At the age of 17, I was playing college rugby on Wednesdays, senior rugby on Saturdays and Colts' games on Sundays. It's quite painful thinking about that now. At college, I was coached by the Southend (National 2) senior squad. I experienced the biggest influences on my rugby career here - Chris Green, Mark Williams and Michael Guess. I was put under their wing, learned a lot and they pushed me physically and mentally. It was great! I went on to captain the college team and after two years playing for the first team at Westcliff, I signed a contract at Southend in Nat 2.

Two years later, I had the opportunity through Andy Holloway to have a trial at Bedford during the summer pre-season. I never imagined playing rugby at a high standard. I just enjoyed playing rugby with my mates at the weekend. I went from a pre-season social in Wetherspoons with Southend to a pre-season trip to Bordeaux with Bedford! I knew then that Bedford was a great club with great people and I might fit in. Eating oysters and drinking red wine in

the South of France while playing rugby, doesn't get much better!

The first pre-season session was the bleep test! I thought I would stay close to Toops on the edge, but around level 13 I wasn't that close to Toops and had to retire, although I thought it would be much closer. He taught me how to get away with lots of things, some legal, some not so legal. At the end of the pre-season, I was lucky to sign my first contract at Bedford. The four weekly 180-mile trips around the M25 and up the M1 from Southend to Bedford had finally paid off!

In the first league game that season I was selected on the bench. It was my first Bedford Blues experience at Goldington Road. Big John, Nos, all the volunteers and, of course, the supporters, all made it a proper club that made you feel at home. That season we reached the Championship Final Play-offs v Newcastle. I still have the medal somewhere. Newcastle that night was memorable for all the right reasons and the next day I experienced my first "All Dayer" and Bedford signed me for a second season.

In my second season, I moved to Bedford and lived above the social club on Goldington Road with Darryl Veenendaal. Plenty of stories from there but let's keep to the script. Probably two games stood out for me that season. They were the first game of

JOE.
PLAYER OF THE
SEASON 2014

JOE AND MOLLY

the season v London Welsh which, unfortunately, we lost narrowly. However, it was great to be starting league games and I won M.O.M. The second was v Nottingham, at home, under lights. This time we won narrowly and I scored the winning try and won the Followers M.O.M. It was totally unexpected but at the end of that season, I was rewarded with the Players' Player award. I was sitting next to Toops and he told me to thank him while receiving the reward. Again, thank you Toops!

I stayed close to Toops, Charlie Clare, Darryl Veenendaal and Booj. 'The Rose' till 'close' was a regular occurrence. However, after missing a weekend I would regularly come back to the flat and find the remains of a typical Bedford after-party. Once I got back to find my room covered with muddy footprints, muddy sheets on my bed and a large 'For Sale' sign in my bed. The photo is still available if 'he who shall be nameless' denies it happening!

There were plenty of away trips. This usually meant a stayover in a hotel and a night out after the game, so everyone was out socializing. Trips to Jersey, Newcastle and Cornwall, private jets to Ireland and a few trips to Scotland and Wales for B&I Cup games will always be remembered. Not to be forgotten are all the cheese boards, cured meats and wine at the back of the bus.

During my last season at Bedford, I had a few injuries and things didn't go to plan. Looking back, it was the best three years of my rugby career. I wouldn't have played at another Championship Club, so decided to start a career and also join Chinnor in National 2. After a year in Oxford, I decided to move back to Westcliff and my home club. I played six more seasons and retired last year.

Moving back to Westcliff I met my fiancé, Molly. We have three great kids - Teddy, Honey and Huxley plus our dog Tiger, an Airedale Terrier. Teddy loves



TEDDY, HONEY AND HUXLEY

football, but Honey who's two has started her rugby career, which I strongly encourage!

In 2016, I started a career working for Marsh, a global insurance broker. I'm a Vice President in the EMEA International Property team placing insurance mainly in Africa and the Middle East. Rugby and the insurance industry have plenty of similarities, so it was an easy fit.

Tonight I hope to enjoy the Goldington Road experience once again! Good luck boys!

JOE IN ACTION FOR THE BLUES

