

FORMER BLUES PLAYERS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



by Marie Davies



OLLIE DODGE

2006-18. Wing/Centre. 224 appearances. 58 tries.

England U18, U19 and U20

Ollie's Bedford Rugby playing statistics certainly make him a Club legend. Twelve seasons and 224 appearances playing for a club in the professional era certainly shows commitment, loyalty and evidence that Goldington Road is, for Ollie, a very special place and that he was for us, a very special player.

Ollie writes:-

'I was born in Leicester and grew up with a family of rugby players. My father Paul, also a centre, made 436 appearances for Leicester Tigers and was captain for the 1987-88 season. He also gained 32 caps for England and was captain in 1985 and was a member of the British Lions Tour to South Africa in 1980. My brother, Alex was a rugby player, taking a similar path to me, but playing for Nottingham, not Bedford. My uncle was Bleddyn Jones, an ex-Leicester Tigers player. He played fly-half for the Tigers for nine seasons, making 333 appearances. When he retired from playing, he commented on the Tigers' games for BBC Radio Leicester. I also have three godfathers who are ex-Tigers! My future in rugby seemed destined to be!

With all these family links I practically grew up at Welford Road. Some of my earliest memories are of being there watching games and playing around on the pitch afterwards. My father got me involved in rugby at one of the local clubs when I was about eight years old and I never looked back.

I didn't really take rugby seriously until I went to John Cleveland College. The school was involved in some of the National School Cup Tournaments, as well as hosting touring schools from as far away as Canada. From there, I moved to the Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, which was used as a feeder school to the Tigers' Academy, where I was already involved.

I joined the Leicester Academy when I was thirteen, so I had to balance School, Club and Academy rugby. I did play for Hinckley RFC for a while, but when I left school, after my 'A' Levels, I went full-time into the Academy set-up. I played in their Development side in the 'A' League before getting a senior contract.

I had a season with the Tigers, while Pat Howard was in charge, but only had a few run-outs with them. Andy Key was involved with our Academy coaching team at the time, but also coached the backs at Bedford. I think he could see that we younger guys weren't getting the exposure to men's rugby or game time that we needed, so suggested that a few of us went on loan with him to Bedford to get some experience. After spending the season dual-registered my time at Leicester had come to an end and Mike was quick to snap me up. It was an easy decision for me to make as by that point I had grown to love the culture that Bedford offered and the opportunity for regular game time was one I couldn't turn down.



2017-18. OLLIE FRONT ROW 3RD FROM LEFT

I had ten amazing years at Bedford. It was a joy to travel into training and to represent Bedford every week. The management was great and there was a real sense of community around the club. Everyone involved with the club was passionate about making it the best it could be and that went from players and management to back room staff and match day volunteers. I have great memories of on the pitch at Goldington Road on Saturday afternoons or under the Friday night lights, and the away games, after our long trips to Cornwall and Jersey.

Best of all were the 'big' games, where we had made it very far in a competition or were playing against a Premiership team that had just been relegated. The 2012-13 season springs to mind with the play-offs v Newcastle. We were 'written off' but as a team we ignored that and pulled together and played really well. Although we didn't get the outcome we wanted, we pushed them all the way to the very end!

Mike and the management knew when to 'crack the whip' and work hard and when to ease off and let the lads 'decompress'. You could always count on a decent pre-season social and after weeks of hard work we finally got a chance to really get to know each other. The pre-season visit we had in France was the 'stand-out' one for me. I won't go into too much detail, but it involved a drinking session on the highest sand dune in Europe and a dinner hosted by a local rugby club, who weren't expecting 30+ inebriated rugby players to turn up!

Over the years rugby had given me too many injuries and the end of the 2018 season seemed the right time to bow out on my own terms, instead of waiting for something to force me to do it. Rugby had always been my life, so after I left I re-trained and got a job as an engineer with Openreach. My wife Hannah and I decided to move back to Leicester with our daughter Arabella so we could be more involved with

our families. Arabella is now seven and she has a sister Florence, who is three. Hannah is a pharmacist and currently works for GP surgeries.

We loved our time in Bedford and Hannah and I have made friends for life there. Now that we're more settled we're looking forward to visiting more often, so hoping to see you all soon.'

OLLIE, HANNAH, ARABELLA AND FLORENCE



Ollie, Hannah, Arabella and Florence visited Goldington Road for our game v Cornish Pirates in January. It was great that they visited the Former Players Bar which was buzzing after our win and we know they had a great welcome from the Goldington Road supporters.

Thank you Ollie!