

FORMER BLUES PLAYERS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

by Marie Davies



LUKE BALDWIN

Scrum half. 61 appearances. 2011-2015. 12 tries.

Luke was a very popular member of Bedford's squad from 2011-14, returning briefly on loan during the 2014-15 season. He was skilful and very nippy on the field and lively and entertaining 'off the field'. It was great to welcome Luke and his fiancée Emma to the End of Season Dinner in May when the successful 2012-13 squad celebrated their ten year reunion. Luke and Emma's presence was particularly noteworthy as they were getting married in Italy the following weekend!

Luke writes:

'I was born in Pembury, Kent and had a strong family connection to rugby. My father, who was the biggest influence in introducing me to the game, played for Cornish Pirates when they were known as Penzance and Newlyn. He was at the forefront of encouraging and supporting me. I also owe a lot to Richard Sharples, a former Harlequins player, who had to retire due to injury. He coached me at County rugby level when I was a young teenager and kindly gave his time to meet up with me for extra training and practice.



I went to the Judd School where we had a very good Sevens' team and reached the final of the Rosslyn Park National 7s in 2006. Unfortunately, I had a falling-out with the Director of Sport in my final year, which meant I did not play. However, this gave me the opportunity to play for Saracens in the 'A' league and for Westcombe Park in National 1, which was great for my rugby development.

I hated rugby when I first began as a 6 year old. I remember sitting on the field at my local Tunbridge Wells club, refusing to play. Stern parenting from my Dad meant I got back out on the pitch and from then, started to really enjoy it. I always played as much sport as possible and my main hobbies, outside of rugby, were squash and ballet.

I grew up playing for Tunbridge Wells RFC. We were county finalists from U7s to U18s most years and I enjoyed the experience of being coached by my Dad.

At Saracens I was part of the team that had a dual registration policy with Bedford. I loved my time at Bedford. Mike Rayer is one of my all-time favourite coaches, who always encouraged playing to your strengths. The 'Bedford Way' - our Barbarians style of play suited my skill set. My favourite season was the year we reached the Championship Final v Newcastle. The away semi-final v Nottingham was a great match and even better was the party afterwards! We were encouraged to 'play hard' on and off the pitch, which I definitely did, as a young man in my twenties!

The Bedford fans were great- so friendly and supportive. I will always fondly remember Nos's Nosh. I loved his homemade 'Chicken Marengo', so much so that I coined the nickname 'Marengo' from the man himself. We had a talented team and I am still in touch with several of them-especially Ben Gulliver, Jake Sharp and Mark Atkinson.



TEAM PHOTO 2012-13 LUKE, MIDDLE ROW, 1ST ON LEFT

I loved our pre-season bonding trips, especially the trip to France where the squad competed for the title of 'Bedford Idol' a sing-off at the top of Dune De Pyla. Paddy Hogben, the Strength and Conditioning Coach, did a great rendition of 'Baby Got Back'!

The return trip from Newcastle after the Championship Final lived long into the early hours and even longer in the memory! The Chairman and the President's party at breakfast in the hotel were served more sausage or maybe chipolatas than they expected!

After Bedford and Saracens I went to play for Bristol and then Worcester for four seasons. I finished up playing for Dragons RFC in the Pro14. My last game of professional rugby was against Leinster. At the time I didn't know it would be my final game. We only lost by one point against the European Champions and I managed to get a try and an assist which, on reflection, was a great way to bow out of the professional game.

I am still playing part time for Rosslyn Park following my move to London. As I have had to get used to a completely new way of life it has been a good way to bow out of the professional game.

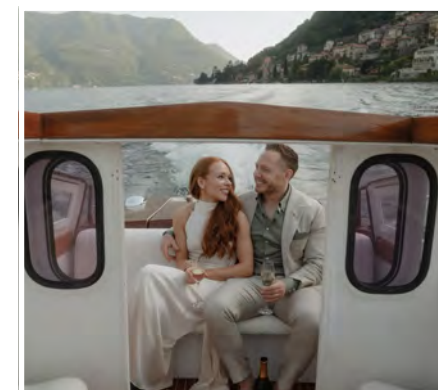
I now work for an Insurance Fintech in London having moved from Cheltenham two years ago. I first worked as a broker in the Finance sector. I am grateful I took advice and completed an English degree from the Open University and a Masters in Business Administration from Warwick Business School (not least because I met my wife on the course!). I am also conducting a research paper for WBS on the mental health of professional rugby players.

My most recent visit to Goldington Road was for the 10 Year Anniversary of the 2013 Championship Final. It was great to see so many faces from the past. Everyone with a few more grey hairs and inches around the waist!

I now live in Chiswick in West London with my wife Emma. We were married in May at Lake Como and we are expecting a baby girl in February. I am really looking forward to becoming a father. The transition from professional sport into the 'real world' has been one of the most challenging experiences of my life - Emma has supported me throughout and I am so grateful to her.

Bedford is a great club and I always feel welcome when I return. I wish you all the best for the rest of the season.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



EMMA AND LUKE - WEDDING DAY AT LAKE COMO