

FORMER BLUES PLAYERS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

by Marie Davies

THE IRISH CONNECTION



As we have already featured the club's Welsh Connection and its Scottish Connection, this seemed an appropriate time to look at the Irish Connection. Why? Firstly, St. Patrick's Day was celebrated last weekend when we didn't have a game, so today seemed the next best choice.

Also, of course, we currently have four Irish players in our squad, which looking back at our history is quite a remarkable statistic.

So this season our Irish players are:

JOEY CONWAY

Loosehead prop from Limerick, Munster.
65 Blues appearances, 17 tries.

SEÁN FRENCH

Wing from Cork, Munster.
46 Blues appearances, 36 tries.

BRYAN O'CONNOR

Tighthead prop from Cork, Munster.
15 Blues appearances.

OISIN HEFFERNAN

Tighthead prop from Galway, Connacht.
26 Blues appearances, 3 tries.



All have made valuable contributions this season. Sean is currently the joint highest try scorer in the Championship with 12, also adding four in the Premiership Cup. Joey has a commendable six tries in 23/24 and Oisín and Bryan are also great assets in our pack.

Joey also informed me that scrum half James Lennon is eligible to play for Ireland, so definitely has an Irish connection as his father is from Donegal.

THE INTERNATIONALS...

From the present to the past! Bedford Blues only has two Irish Internationals.

VICTOR J. LYTLE

Victor J. Lyttle was born in Belfast in 1911. Having studied photography, he came to Bedford to work for Kodak in 1933. He played part of the season for Harlequins but joined Blues in 1934. He played on the wing and soon established himself as a prolific try scorer, scoring more than 100 tries. He scored three in a match eight times. A highlight of his rugby career was appearing, along with five other Blues players, for the East Midlands v Barbarians in the Mobbs Memorial match in 1937. It was known as the Prince (Obolensky) against the Leprechaun (Lyttle).

Both scored a try in the 13-3 East Mids win. Vic went on to gain three caps for Ireland in the 1938-39 season. His Bedford record is 138 appearances, scoring 103 tries.

Vic lived in Birmingham later in life and when Bedford played Moseley he started donating a cheque for £500 to Bedford Junior Blues every season. This continued after Vic died in 1994, when family members carried on the tradition at our away games v Moseley. Our Junior Blues were indeed very fortunate to benefit from the family's generosity.

DARRAGH O'MAHONY



Our second Irish International is Darragh O'Mahony from Cork. He started his senior rugby career at University College, Cork and in 1993 was awarded a rugby scholarship at University College, Dublin. While there, he was selected for the Irish World Cup Squad in 1995 and gained his first cap v Italy in May, prior to the World Cup. With the advent of professional rugby, Darragh was offered a contract with Moseley RFC for the 1996-97 season when he scored 15 tries - a club record. Other records he broke were scoring tries in five consecutive matches and scoring three tries in a league match. He broke his own records the following season with seventeen tries in a season and a hat trick of tries in three matches. He joined newly promoted Bedford in 1996 and

his 13 tries, which made him joint top scorer in the Premiership, made him very popular with the fans. When he was capped for Ireland v Romania in 1998, he became the first Irish Bedford player to gain this honour for nearly sixty years. At the end of the season, he joined Saracens, where he remained for five seasons, playing 118 Premiership games and 27 European games - scoring 53 tries. The try scoring record is being continued for us by his close relative Sean French.

In 2004, Darragh retired from first-class rugby, and having settled with his family in Hertfordshire he turned out for his local club - Old Albanians. He has returned to Goldington Road recently to support Bedford and of course, Sean. Darragh's Bedford record is 32 appearances, 13 tries.

OTHER NOTABLE IRISHMEN...

CLEM BOYD

Prop
1996-99

Clem is another of our Belfast born former players. He went to Edinburgh University to study Mechanical Engineering, before returning to Northern Ireland. A prop, Clem made 24 appearances for Ulster before moving to Bedford and making 68 appearances from 1996-99.

Clem certainly made an impact at Goldington Road in a playing and social capacity! In 1999, he moved to play for Bath for one season before gaining a place back in the Ulster squad and making 24 appearances. He was at Ulster Rugby Club in 2016 to welcome Bedford for our British and Irish Cup game which we won 22-17. It has been great in recent weeks to see Clem and Nicola's son Jacob playing in the front row for Ireland's very successful U20s team. Clem is Director of Rugby at Instonians RFC and owns and runs a DPD Depot.



BRENDAN BURKE

Utility Back
2006-14

Finally, the very popular Brendan Burke, who joined Bedford in 2006 and stayed until 2014!

Brendan comes from Leixlip in the County of Kildare and started his rugby at Bramhall RFC and later training and, eventually, playing for Leinster. When he left Ireland he joined Rotherham before arriving in Bedford during the 2006-07 season, where he had a very successful rugby career and a great social life.

After Bedford, he was player-coach at Ampthill, Cambridge and Coventry in National 1. In 2018, he went to coach Olney with former Blue Dan Seal. He now works full time as an electrician, lives in Peterborough and continues coaching with Peterborough Lions.



I have now used my allocation of words so must not write in detail about the other Irish connections - for example Mark Flanagan. We appreciate all the hard work and endeavors of our Irish contingent and always enjoy seeing them back at Goldington Road.