

FORMER BLUES PLAYERS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

by Marie Davies



CHARLIE HARRISON

Scrum Half

1998-2000. 47 appearances. Three tries.

Two weeks ago, we were delighted to welcome Charlie, his wife Emma, and son Oscar back to Goldington Road to watch our Premiership Cup game against Bath - two clubs he played for, battling it out until the end.

They spent the day with former teammate Jon Wells and his wife Lori and, of course, post-match met up with other former teammates in the Former Players' Bar.

It was Oscar's first visit to Goldington Road but of course, Emma was an avid supporter here when Charlie was playing. She did assure me that she was definitely supporting Bedford.

Charlie writes:

'I was born in Chippenham, Wiltshire and my first introduction to Rugby was at Mount St. Mary's College, near Sheffield where I went to school. We won The Daily Mail Schools Cup in 1994, which gave me the confidence to push on into university and club rugby after school. I went to Bath University where Richard Hill, former England scrum half was the Academy and University coach. He was a big influence, impressing on me the importance of practice. He even gave me the bag of balls he had used to prepare for the World Cup in 1991 - it felt like all my Christmases had come at once! Practice in the garden with my brother Chris was the story of all holidays. Chris went on to play for the Vale of Lune and Canterbury, and Kent in the County Championship. The support of my parents was the most important and constant factor from start to finish. At the end of my playing career with Rotherham and Doncaster, it was good to be closer to home and share some of my final playing moments with them.

I was at Bath University studying Economics and Politics between 1994-98 and played for the club during this time, as an amateur at first and then as a professional from 1996. In 1998, Geoff Cooke signed me for Bedford when they were promoted. It felt like a really exciting time, with a young and talented squad and amazing support. Both my seasons at Bedford were tough both on and off the pitch at times. Finances were precarious at the best of times. However, we won our fair share of games and played some great rugby in the process. There was some great young talent (Dan Harris, Tony Yapp, Roy Winters, Ben Whetstone, Darragh O'Mahony, Scott Murray) alongside some more seasoned pros (Rudi Straeuli, Junior Paramore, Alistair Murdoch.) The blend of youth and experience created a great team spirit. I could see straight away why promotion had happened, especially in the strength and conditioning aspects, which were well ahead of what had been happening at Bath.



CHARLIE - SCRUM HALF



1999-2000.

We played hard and partied lots, win or lose. There was a 'never say die' spirit which is what all coaches aspire to. We spent lots of time together off the pitch too - BBQs, bonding trips and on the golf course. There was always a club family atmosphere within the playing group and supporters, which the special men like Gareth Davies, Geoff Irvine, David Gunner and Ian Bullerwell were brilliant at fostering. We can't forget 'Noz' either. He fed us so well after training and matches and was very much part of the family. I still think about his 'Chicken Marengo' from time to time!

We enjoyed some great wins in my two seasons at the club. Maybe the most memorable was the home win against Zinzan Brooke's Harlequins, when we overturned a 13-point deficit with only five minutes left on the clock! Final score 35-33! Goldington Road went wild that afternoon and also long into the night!

Emma joined me in Bedford and taught at Dame Alice, as it was then. We made some great friends and some of our fondest memories. Emma has been right by my side throughout and shared all the 'ups and downs' of life with a rugby player.

After Bedford, I signed for Rotherham and enjoyed four seasons with them, yo-yoing in and out of the Premiership. My final playing days were at Doncaster as they climbed the leagues and I finished as player-coach in their first Championship season.

Then, we moved to Wiltshire and I started my teaching career. I taught Economics and Politics at Marlborough College and was also Master in Charge of Rugby. After nine years I 'passed' on the rugby and have been a Housemaster at Marlborough for nearly a decade. I still enjoy coaching U14 rugby and have grown to love refereeing too.

We have a son and daughter who have grown up here in Wiltshire. Lucia is a hockey player and a runner and is now in her first year, studying History of Art at Exeter University. Oscar loves his cricket and golf and is a scrum half (no surprise!), enjoying success with the Bath U16 Academy side.

The Harrison family thoroughly enjoyed their visit to Goldington Road, despite the dreadful weather conditions.

'It was wonderful to be back as a family. We had such a good day and it was lovely to see old friends. Oscar enjoys anything to do with rugby, but he absolutely loved the atmosphere at GR and the club 'feel' that the Blues have managed to maintain. We all enjoyed the welcome and the reunion 'tea and cakes' in the Former Players' Bar'.



EMMA AND LUCIA



EMMA OSCAR AND CHARLIE