

FORMER BLUES PLAYERS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

by Marie Davies



JOE ATKINSON

Back Row

2019-22. 53 appearances. Five tries

When Rich Lane joined Bristol Bears, Joe was made captain for the final two league games and the Championship Cup campaign, which was played at the end of the 2021-22 season.

Joe's rugby career

Joe was capped by England at age group and student level. Having started his rugby career for Loughborough University Students, who were in National One, Joe joined Cornish Pirates in 2013 for three seasons, making 67 appearances, before heading to Richmond to play for London Scottish in 2016. He made 50 appearances, scoring 11 tries and in his first season was named Players' Player of the Season. Before joining Wasps in 2018, Joe had built a reputation as one of the Championship's best openside flankers, so we were very happy to welcome him to Goldington Road in 2019.

Joe writes

I was born in Winchester and I watched a lot of rugby when I was growing up because my Dad used to play for the local club. I would always watch the games and be drawn into the atmosphere. I was lucky enough to watch the rise of England's 'infamous' 2003 squad, so obviously Jonny Wilkinson was a stand-out inspiration.

I went to Churcher's College where I played at Number 8 and sometimes in the centre. I played and enjoyed other sports as well, especially cricket and hockey.

I went straight from school to Loughborough University and played in National League 1 and 2 plus the BUCS set-up (British Universities and Colleges Sport-rugby). I have great memories of when we were promoted from National 2 North to National 1 with five games still to go in the season.



2021-22 TEAM PHOTO

From Loughborough, I went to play for Cornish Pirates, London Scottish, and Wasps. When I am asked how I came to play for Bedford I always say how much I enjoyed playing against Bedford when I was at London Scottish and Pirates, so when I left Wasps, Bedford was the first club I looked at. Also, when I was at London Scottish, I played a season with Bedford's legendary Jake Sharp when he was a player/coach there. He was back coaching at Bedford so I got in contact with him and asked him to put in a good word for me with Mike. The rest, as they say, is history. I had three very enjoyable seasons at Goldington Road even though my time there was interrupted by COVID. In the 2019/20 season, we were having quite a tough time. There were plenty of 'close shave' games and games that got away from us. We lost a few consecutive games by a couple of points, but then we came back from three tries down against London Scottish to win and that turned our campaign around until it was rudely interrupted by COVID. We had some cracking derby games that even if they weren't the prettiest, were certainly packed with intensity and passion.

I always got a warm reception when we headed back down to Pirates. Although I am not sure about the Mennaye being a favourite 'away' ground! As a Pirates player, we always used to say that visiting teams, 'Don't like it down the Mennaye', probably because of the 6+ hour coach journey!

I managed to come up to Bedford for Tappers' Testimonial last year, so I got to catch up with a lot of old faces, which was great. Hopefully, Deano's testimonial won't be far off now and I can come up to Bedford again - cough, cough.

There were many social highlights during my time at the Blues. I enjoyed the team bonding trips, especially Barcelona. The Spanish stories were folklore among the lads for a couple of years! Even the boys who weren't at the club at the time felt like they had been there, which was down to the amount it was spoken about. Also, the pre-season 'camp out' along the River Ouse, with kayaking, campfires and singing was very memorable.

I decided to retire from playing at the end of the 2022 season and concentrate on my family farming career. I am working on my farm in the South Downs National Park where we have livestock, arable and contracting enterprises. My wife Sof and I now have two boys, Maxwell and Eli. They are growing up as feral farm kids! The only rugby I play now is for charity games and testimonials. I need a new leisure activity! I'm thinking... Padel!

I am so pleased to see Bedford's impressive position in the Championship and wish the team good luck for the rest of the season.

JOE AND FAMILY



JOE IN ACTION



JOE'S FINAL GAME AT GOLDINGTON ROAD