

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Marie Davies

BRENDAN BURKE

Centre/Full back

2006-2014. 180 appearances. Countless tries!

Brendan writes:

My rugby began at an early age almost by accident. My mother and father came from the West of Ireland where Gaelic Football was the only sport. It was a neighbour who asked if he could take us (four lads) up to the Barnhall RFC for a few hours and my mother was chuffed to bits to get us out of the house!

Once I arrived up there I loved it. All of us just loved the game. In the end Barnhall got my five brothers and me. My sister dabbled in it too. I arrived in Barnhall when I was about seven and stayed there until I was twenty-four.

I had amazing times. It was a family club and it is where I learned to love this game. Every time I go back home to Ireland I always visit Barnhall.

I played with my older brothers and my younger brother for some time there. Barnhall trusted me and gave me my first senior cap at sixteen.

While playing for Barnhall I was offered an IRFU Academy contract. Maybe only fifteen were given out each year for the whole country. It was a three year deal. It was amazing to train with Irish legends like O'Connell, Darcy and many others. I was the only one working which I found very difficult. I was a year into my electrical apprenticeship while trying to juggle the rugby on top.

During this time I played for Ireland U18 and U19 7s and Leinster U18, U19 and U21.

When I was 21 I got a message asking me to train with Leinster senior squad for a game against Connaught. We played in Galway and I was on the bench. I came on for the last 20 minutes. This was amazing as literally forty eight hours before I was working on a site and the next thing I know I'm playing with and against Irish internationals.

I thought that was going to be it for me. I really heard nothing else from Leinster and my contract with the IRFU was up. I was just about to finish my apprenticeship.

Then about a year after the Connaught game, Leinster called and asked me to train with a development squad.

I did about four weeks training with Leinster and was given a development contract. Leinster had just announced Gary Ella as head coach and apparently all players had impressed.

During the pre-season I had never been as fit and quick because I played Gaelic football during the off season. It was a World Cup year so a lot of internationals were away and I got a break which found me starting a few games and led to me being offered a three year full time deal with the IRFU.

My time with Leinster was amazing, but I do feel I didn't take my chance well enough. Badly timed injuries just didn't help. However, to play in the back line like that was unbelievable.

I left Ireland and arrived at Rotherham. I spent an amazing six months there, ending when I had a falling out with the coach. We had a great side with a great pack and a very dangerous backline.

I arrived in Bedford halfway through the 2006-07 season. Mike had seen me play when I was with Leinster and knew me a bit. The first few sessions were very difficult not knowing anyone.

BRENDAN BALL IN HAND



Players had their little cliques. Also the ribbing I kept getting from JP and Q didn't help (LOL). After a few weeks and a few games the lads got to know me and I got to know them - a few Red Stripes helped! That first year with Bedford was very good.

I stayed with Bedford for 8 years and loved every minute of it. A few games really stood out for me personally.

For example the Leeds win when we scored from our 5m line. Games against Bristol at home were out of this world!

But for me it was our win against Leinster in the Cup that meant so much. Unfortunately during that game Sacha and I got injured in a tackle. He broke his arm and I destroyed my knee, which meant I missed the Cup Final and play-off game against Worcester. It was so hard sitting in the stands watching these games.

During my last season in Bedford I knew it was time for me to go back to normal life and start working again. I finished my Bedford career off the way I started, scoring a try in front of Nos shouting 'PIKEY'. Can't beat it!

I decided to go to Ampthill and be a player-coach. I enjoyed my time there. I think I brought a style of rugby which the players enjoyed and we ended up getting promoted after a play-off.

I then went to Cambridge again as a player-coach, but more of a coach and we ended up winning National 2 and got promoted.

I got offered a coaching role with Coventry in National 1. I was really enjoying it, but it was too much travelling from London and too much work on top of a full time job. We ended up finishing 4th that season

SQUAD 2010-11 BRENDAN FRONT ROW, 5TH FROM RIGHT



in National 1, playing again the style of rugby I love.

In the 2018/19 season I was asked to coach Olney which I am really enjoying with former Blue Dan Seal. I am backs coach and we play a style which I really enjoy and the lads are all buying into it.

Life outside rugby is busy. I'm working as an electrician based everywhere - mostly London, but recently on a contract in Milton Keynes. I'm living in Peterborough with my partner Claudette and her two daughters.

I still have my two dogs and I am now playing touch rugby which I really enjoy - less strain on the body!

I try and get to as many Blues games as possible, or just pop in to see Nos and sample his terrible cooking! I always get a great welcome coming back and I do miss Goldington Road.



GOLF CAPTAIN OF THE PLAYERS WINNING THE PRESIDENT'S CUP



JUNE 2019 FAREWELL TO 'PRITCH'