

## FORMER BLUES PLAYERS

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Marie Davies

## JONATHAN COOLEY

Scrum half

1993-96

In Bedford the name 'Cooley' is synonymous with sport. Jonathan's father John played rugby for Bedford and Northampton Saints, while his uncle Norman Cooley played football for many years for Bedford Eagles and cricket for Bedford Town and Bedfordshire. John is currently the Secretary of the Former Players' Association.

### Jonathan writes:

I am a Bedford boy - 'born and bred' and have been involved with Bedford Rugby Club as a fan and player since I was a toddler. My dad John was a coach of the very successful Colts' team in the late 70s and 80s and when I was old enough I ran the line for several seasons.

I've always been able to pass and kick, but only really started to play rugby aged 14, when I was at Wootton Upper School, where my PE teacher, Dave Fleur was very supportive. In fact, he along with my father were probably the biggest influences on my rugby career.

I went on three rugby tours to South Wales with Wootton School. We played in Aberdare in the Cynon Valley and learnt how tough rugby can be, but it provided a useful learning curve - I think we only won one game out of six! One of the schools we played was where Welsh international and current Director of Rugby at Wasps Dai Young learnt his rugby. However, we got some revenge in the home fixtures!

My local team has always been Bedford and I started playing for the U16s "down the Ath" on a Sunday morning, with the likes of Leigh Mansell, Andy Jones and Chris and Matt Wright, to name a few - we had good times and friends for life developed.

When I was sixteen I joined the Colts' set up at the Blues and played three seasons there - the final year as captain, which was a huge honour and proud moment for me. We had a decent side that year and

beat Leicester, Saracens and Northampton, with a couple of lads gaining England age group caps - Paul Simmonds and Charlie Simpson

The final year with the Colts was probably the best fun and the quality of rugby played was excellent. I think we had one of the best teams in the country on our day and I managed to get in the Midlands squad, which was another proud moment, especially as I'd been injured with a dislocated shoulder the previous season. The first game against Leicester after surgery was a big deal for me.



BEDFORD'S TOUR - CANADA 1994

I played in the U21s for a couple of years, in between injuries - another operation on my knee and then was selected to go on the Canada Tour in 1994, which was certainly a highlight. I'd only played a handful of Wanderers' games at this time, but the tour served me well and after a couple of man-of-the-match performances, I pushed on to the First Team XV.

I was only really a squad member, and first choice, Johnny Farr wasn't a bad player, but I am proud to be able to say that I am the second generation Cooley to play for Bedford, after my Dad. Highlights of my games for the 1st XV include beating Northampton at Franklin's Gardens in front of

FATHER AND SON - JOHN COOLEY AND JONATHAN COOLEY



CANADA TOUR 1994. JONATHAN, BACK ROW, 1ST ON LEFT

about 9,000 people and playing at Goldington Road on a Monday night against Canterbury from New Zealand. Probably the most nervous I've felt before a game, but we gave a decent account of ourselves and I sat next to Andrew Mehrtens at the post match dinner.

I also represented East Midlands Colts and the Senior side, captaining on a couple of occasions. I also played in the Mobbs game at Northampton against the Barbarians, which was a huge honour.

I'm proud to say I played for U16s, U17s, Colts, Rams, Rovers, Wanderers and 1st XV whilst with the Club.

I left Bedford at the time the game was turning professional. I was never good enough to earn a living out of rugby, so joined a certain Paul Alston and others at Luton. I enjoyed my time there and we secured promotion a few times and I captained the side for two seasons, before I dislocated and snapped medial ligaments in my knee. With work and family pressures, I retired aged 30.

I still live locally (I don't get out much!) in Biddenham and get to a few Blues games each season.

My three amazing children Sam, Ben and Grace keep me busy.

I work in finance for a Merchant Bank, Close Brothers, providing finance to SME size businesses.

I am a member of Towers gym and try to keep in shape, although I do have a few aches and pains these days which makes it hard.

In July last year, I did the London to Paris bike ride and didn't even own a bike until a few months before. That was tough (recommend anyone who does it to wear two pairs of cycling shorts) and play golf when I get time. My lad Ben plays off 7 and beats me every time!

I also enjoy watching Sam playing cricket at Biddenham CC and watching my daughter Grace dancing.

Of course, I always look out for the Blues' result and being a fan is in the blood. C.O.Y.B.

JONATHAN NOW. FRONT ROW, 1ST ON LEFT



SONS - SAM AND BEN



DAUGHTER - GRACE

