



**TAG RUGBY
DEVELOPMENT
TRUST**

TRDT Twickenham Triumph

Whilst England's heroic 7's squad was winning a nail biting final against New Zealand at the IRB 7's at Twickenham recently, an altogether more chilled out bunch of players were basking in the glory of a job well done on the hallowed turf of HQ.

For those who haven't been to the annual IRB 7's jamboree at Twickenham it is a must-go-to event. It is the complete antithesis of a test match with the England 15 – it is fun for a start and the powers that be are significantly more laid back in their approach to crowd movement and stewarding. In the spirit of this approach 4 rugby charities were invited to play an 18 minute (we are talking military precision here) game of tag and touch against each other on the pitch, in front of 50,000 people (ok maybe 25,000 had gone to the loo or the bar but it was still a lot).

Hearty congratulations must go to the RFU here for allowing this to take place right in the middle of a world class sporting event. It was certainly appreciated by all who took part.

The day began like any normal Sunday. I awoke with a slightly fuzzy head and over a healthy breakfast (the eggs were poached not fried) the enormity of what I was about to do hit me. I was finally going to make my long over due debut at Twickenham. For some unfathomable reason successive England managers had selected a bunch of ne'r do wells like Probyn, Rendall, Chilcott and even Gary Pierce ahead of me for the national side in the 80's but, at last here I was...playing tag rugby at Twickenham!



Arriving at the ground with my new team mates, "hello mate, what was your name again?" we were duly escorted by our riders to meet some bloke called Eric. I was at a loss as to who he was but he seemed important. Thankfully I kept my curiosity to myself as ERIC turned out to be a bar called England Rugby Internationals Club! Inside this lovely air coned room under the west stand we ate fruit and prawn sandwiches (so Roy Keane was right all along) and were briefed on the task ahead. Martin Hansford, our esteemed leader and Chairman of TRDT, had kindly, and sensibly, used the opportunity to invite past volunteers, our alumni, to join the squad, together with two superb girls from the GB womens' rugby league team and me. I was delighted to discover that at least 3 of our squad would never see our 40th birthday again but my heart sank when we realised that our opponents, IRB SOS Kit Aid, had, somewhat bizarrely, selected the Blackheath RFC u17 team to play us. Bring them on we said over early lagers!

No sooner had the beer started to work its way through the system than it was time to go and play. We were marched to the north east corner of the pitch and were inspired as the Portuguese amateurs lowered the colours of the Aussie pros and the day just got better and better. Standing next to the New Zealand team as they warmed up was a strange experience too, but we passed on a couple of tips to them, pass the ball when you run out of space mate, which they seemed to appreciate. And then...then we were on.



Martin demonstrated his Alex Ferguson-like ruthlessness in selection by leaving Popey and me on the bench but we put aside our dismay in favour of team spirit and dutifully stood under the posts waiting with quivering behinds for our turn. When it came I realised that tag rugby has changed a lot since I coached the u7's in it 6 years ago. It was fast...so bloody fast... and hot but great fun. I received my first pass and the world stood still. I had been desperate not to cock up my first touch as the baying 50,000 were sufficiently plastered to have shunned all sense of sympathy and howled their derision. But no, it was perfect, I took the pass on the burst (trot?) and powered past two defenders before giving a try scoring pass to one of the girls. That was it, I could die a happy man and stick two finger sup to Jack Rowell et al for their snub all those years ago. The old legs still had it, now for a scrum and a maul. Of course they never came and, with lungs bursting, I took a break whilst the younger element of our squad battled manfully against the whippets from Blackheath. To be fair a bagful of tries were scored by both teams, although the youngsters probably edged it 2 to 1. We scored some of the best tries though, with Popey rolling back the years with a lovely switch move, Graham showing a clean pair of heals to the kids and enhancing his CV value to Mill Hill School where he directs rugby with such aplomb and Tom, a young bolter from Tonbridge Juddians scything through the oppo with ease. Old man Hansford himself showed that the years haven't dimmed what little talent he had and big Trev conveniently turned a blind referee's eye when we accidentally had all 10 of our squad on the pitch at the same time.

To a true rugby supporter and a player who was happy to have made the school 1st XV in 1866 (or so it seems) this was heaven and it summed up what this great game of ours is about. It would *never* have happened at Wembley, even at half time in the Community Cup, or at Lords when all 3 supporters had gone to get their cakes in a Middlesex v Scotland 2nd XI game. But it did at Twickenham and I think I speak for all concerned when I offer a massive thank you to the RFU, the IRB and above all to Martin Hansford and Trevor Martingell at TRDT. The work these guys, and the numerous volunteers, do in taking rugby to some of the poorest and under represented parts of the world is outstanding and joining them will be, according to my team mates, a "life changing experience". But I suppose we shouldn't be surprised really. Camaraderie and support is what rugby is all about.

What a great day !
Roger McKerlie