

## KNOW YOUR CLUB

### NORTHWICH RUFC

A series of posts on Northwich players & playing positions.

With focus on 1<sup>st</sup> team players both current and through the ages, and explain each position on the pitch as we see it.

Each post will include a short profile of a current club player plus two or three others from the past.

Rugby positions have always been characterised by the notion that the sport is a game for all shapes and sizes. Uniquely, all rugby positions requires a different set of physical and technical attributes and it is this diversity which makes the game so accessible to all.

Rugby can be overly serious. Therefore, we hope our guide will inform and amuse.

For instance you may hear of the fly-half, stand-off, outside-half, five-eighth (5/8th) first five-eighth (1st 5/8th) all terms for a player wearing the 10 jersey.

In certain countries you will hear terms like '1st 5' and '2nd 5'. It comes from '1st 5/8' and '2nd 5/8', and refers to the flyhalf (10) and inside centre (12) respectively. I recommend you ignore these terms, because they were thought up by someone without any clue of fractions. We all know there are only 7 players in the backline, so the 'eighth' is meaningless. Add to that the fact that in a set of fractions there can only be one 5/8, the '2nd' becomes even more ridiculous. If you ask me, these were thought up by people without the faintest idea of counting, never mind fractions.

If you are interested in the evolution of the scrum (from a 20 man scrum to modern day), check out this 10 minute long podcast by Professor Tony Collins. His Rugby Reloaded podcast is a fantastic and informative listen.

<https://soundcloud.com/user-523674328/52-a-short-history-of-the-scrum>

We hope you enjoy our subsequent posts

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## IS EDDIE FOLLOWING NORTHWICH

Knowing your Club

### A FAMILY AFFAIR

Whilst compiling the series of features "knowing your club" some obvious and interesting information appears, with a fascinating tale which illustrates just how close-knit our community is, a family tradition.

All of us at Northwich pride ourselves on being first-and-foremost, a family club! It's a place, a community, an organisation for all. We would not survive without the countless families who do so much on and off the pitch. Their selfless efforts are the fuel which drives us forward on a daily basis and together, we look forward to a bright and exciting future.

Has Eddie been spying

*Recently Eddie Jones predicted that back-rowers and centres will become interchangeable in the near future, using England star Tom Curry as an example of an all-round athlete capable of making such a switch....*

Over the last 4 seasons Eddie need look no further than Northwich RUFC.

The current squad at Northwich includes Chris Dale, Chris James, Sam Naylor & Richard Dale, who all feature in the series, but in which position is yet a mystery.

Collectively they have all played both as forwards and backs. Covering as either, full-back, wing, centre, stand-off, scrum-half, No 8, flanker, second row, hooker, prop and even getting splinters on the bench.

All four came through the Northwich junior section, prior to following in their fathers footsteps, who were all ex-first team blacks. And all 4 have been involved as coaches in the SuperStars section as their fathers before them.

Last seasons squad also included Mike Gough, Richard Hart & Shaun Burmah again ex-Northwich juniors, who also follow in their fathers footsteps playing for the Blacks.

These impressive statistics and family playing connections don't stop. We also have brother and sister playing in the juniors, current senior players with sons in the juniors and numerous ex-players on the sidelines and coaching ranks proudly watching their offspring run around in Northwich colours.

Add to this the volunteer coaches, managers, committee members and supporters who have sons or daughters playing and you have a real family affair

The Club's most impressive set of family connections would have to be Naylor, Dale, Burmah, and Mills. They are all still involved in the club and you will often see the supporting cast on the sideline at home games.

And there is always a twist as coffin dodger Dave Frazer frequently says to young Daley "who's your daddy".

A genealogist would have his work cut-out tracing the family lines of descent running through Northwich RUFC.

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**Prop Forwards (1 & 3)**

Loose-head and Tight-head Prop along with the hooker, make up what is known as the front row of a scrum. To be successful, both props must be extremely strong and should relish head-to-head competition. While stopping their side of the scrum from moving backwards, the props also support the hooker. In the lineout, props should be able to support or lift the jumper. Away from set pieces, props help to secure the ball when a player has been tackled, or receiving short passes and hitting the opposition defence at pace in an attempt to occupy the defenders.

Or

They are supposed to push in the scrums. Previously it was not essential for them to touch a rugby ball, and there are quite a number of cases known of props who have completed successful careers without ever touching the ball. Without a doubt the manliest men on the pitch. Large, often hairy, beer-swilling carnivores that can and will smash anything in their path. Accused by some of simply being dumb, I prefer to think of this group as "open to unconventional ways of thinking".

Today, we look at the bedrock of any team, the prop forwards. A selection of players has been picked for your delectation and interest.

Joe Maddocks A popular member of the club, Joe is a no-nonsense, no-frills forward. Never one to take a backward step, his work-rate is admirable and a solid and reliable defender. He began his rugby at Northwich in the U10s before joining Chester juniors, returning to play with our 3rd in 2013/14 prior to making his 1<sup>st</sup> debut v Sefton in 2015.

Tim "Trog" Wilding his brash character makes him stand out as one of the first club legends. He is perhaps the most celebrated forward to come out of the club. That may sound like a bold claim but it is based on fact. Tim started his rugby career in the lower teams rapidly rising through the ranks where his career flourished. He went on to establish himself in the first team as an uncompromising prop forward and captained the side. He represented Cheshire and moved onto Sale before returning back to his old club, once again taking on the captaincy. Tim coached both Colts & Senior rugby at the club and been an ever presence at the Northwich Festival.

Jan Cartman joined from our neighbours, another ex-captain who led by example and was a regular in the team for many years, a model of consistency and did a lot of the unglamorous tasks that are often unnoticed by the untrained eye. Jan was in his 10<sup>th</sup> season at Northwich when stepping out at Twickenham for the EDF Cup victory. Now classed a veteran he scored his latest try against Christleton 1<sup>st</sup> playing for Northwich 3<sup>rd</sup> followed by a 1<sup>st</sup> team appearance from the bench only last season.

Steve "Donk" Miodonski played for Northwich during the 1970s / 80s, strong as an ox, a master in the dark arts of the front row. Donk excelled in the Cheshire Cup competition appearing in our first outing in the competition v Old Parkonians in 1975, playing in our first visit to Douglas on the Isle of Man and starring in what was probably his most memorable game 12 February 1984. Not only dominant in the front row, it was Miodonski's slight of hand pass which led to the try, being the deciding factor of a Northwich victory in the first ever local derby fixture.

Well worthy of a shout are Nick Blake, Chris Birdsey & Andy Cornes amongst many others.

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## Hooker (2)

Lining up in the scrum between the two props, the hooker is one of the forwards' key decision-makers, coordinating the timing at the scrum. At the lineout usually responsible for throwing the ball in and in open play the hooker plays a similar role to the props, securing possession at rucks and mauls, or taking short 'crash' passes.

Or

They used to have a quick foot for hooking the ball in the scrum. These days they are the same size as props, which means they disrupt the balance in the scrum and struggle to find their jumpers in the lineout. The result is that they are highly frustrated, and tends to give away penalties. Fortunately they don't have to hook the ball in the scrums any more, since it is put in underneath the feet of the locks anyway. Too short for the rest of the front, too fat for the back, too slow for a winger and too short a temper for any of them.

Chris "Jaffa" James, son of Barry, is a modern day all-rounder of the club. Coming through the clubs junior section prior to his 1<sup>st</sup> team debut. Chris has played various positions for the Blacks, his physique is more suited to the front row nowadays, he combines this power with some surprising pace, and is prominent in the hooker berth since the arrival of DoR Poste. Jaffa made his debut on the Isle of Man in 2001 against Vagabonds

Barry "Rocco" James was a mainstay in the Northwich front-row joining the club as a 17 year old in 1975 and retired from the 1<sup>st</sup> team during 1999. Twenty four years 1<sup>st</sup> team unbroken service. A classy hooker who was as fit as a fiddle, and led the team around the field. A tough, old-school

forward. Hard as nails, he was a star hooker and a player that his team mates looked up to. Barry assisted as a coach but our younger supporters will associate with seeing him “walking” the touchline with flag in hand at Moss Farm. Barry is now a regular with Northwch Walking rugby every Monday.

Dean Kingi from New Zealand brought a level of knowledge to the team and took no prisoners on the field. Not the most vocal on the pitch, he preferred to let his actions do the talking he combined tactical nous with physicality. Mobile around the park and dangerous around the ruck, he marshalled the forward pack well.

There has been many others such as, these 3 who represented the blacks during the undefeated season and Twickenham victory Dave Massey, Voyu Pasiya and Jed Hill, we apologise in not highlighting them all

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## Second Row (4 & 5)

The second row forwards (also known as locks) are the engine room of the scrum and the target men in the lineout. If they bind to each other and the props too loosely in the scrum their pack will lose power, and they need be dynamic with their lineout jumping. In open play the second row’s duties have evolved from being support players at rucks and mauls to ball carriers.

Or

As broad as props, but twice as tall. Nowadays they are built like high jumpers, with the difference being they can’t jump. It’s not really necessary, because they are lifted by teammates now. This group of large, often foul-smelling brutes is also more than willing to relish the finer points of stomping on a fallen opponent’s body and will gleefully recount the tale ad infinitum. While they tend to take the tag “Powerhouse of the Scrum”. Their main purpose now is to loiter on the wings from where they score tries.

Again, we had to make an arbitrary decision on the names to focus on such was the list of players that we had.

Chris Heywood has really matured and grown into one of the leaders in the team over his long tenure in the Blacks engine room. He is one of the first names on the team sheet and plays the game in an uncompromising fashion. Hard-hitting in defence and incisive in attack. Chris has played in over 350 games for Northwich since joining aged 18. One of the stand out performers in the Northwich team, we hope he’s a regular for many more years to come.

Keith “Asa” Harrison was a old-school, no-nonsense second-rower with a superb work rate. A workhorse in the pack who would take ball in all day. Asa was a great team player and I would like to say “a gentleman on the field. A talented football player (a centre-half). He was Northwich’ equivalent of Gary Lineker, having never received a card or struck out, during his career” but I can’t say it was like that ! Asa was the type of player that simply “got things done”, just like his brother Ted who played at No8 in the same team.

Phil Clarke a familiar face around Moss Farm and a true club man. An honest player, he was a solid grafter with a good work-rate, and gave 100% performance, but he did enjoy a “time-out”. Phil was instrumental in establishing the club’s first junior section and played a huge part in ensuring this was successful. Then in 2004 with thanks to the hard work of Phil, Kevin Jones and Malcolm Griffiths, Northwich were able to launch Cheshire’s first Under 14 and Under 17 girls teams. Phil also coached the 1<sup>st</sup> a true stalwart of the club.

Rob Heath did a lot of the unseen graft often found in the middle of a maul or at the bottom of a ruck being a complete nuisance to the opposition. Many a spectator asked who sorted that out, "Heath" was mostly the reply. Teams often have an enforcer within the ranks, Rob was more an influencer a quiet word of "behave" to an over zealous opponent or a gentle arm around a teammate with a little encouragement. His organisation and motivational speaking were evident during the historic unbeaten season. And it's true he wore the unwashed skids all season! Rugby players are superstitious. If he hadn't returned to farming he would surely have been a prominent figure on the committee.

Not forgetting Joe Carroll, Chris Burmah, Jon Simpson, Rick Smith, & many more.

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## Flankers (6 & 7)

Flankers are often considered excellent all-rounders with inexhaustible energy. Speed, strength, fitness, tackling and handling skills are all vital. Out of all the rugby positions, they are more often than not at the centre of the action – winning balls at the ruck and maul, collecting short passes from tackled players and making their own big tackles in open play. While they can rarely be blamed for a loss, they can certainly be the key to victory.

Or

The loose-forwards have a tendency to let fly halves loose their nerve. As soon as they step onto the pitch they become animals, tackling anyone who comes near them, and often starting fights. I recommend you try and stay out of the way of these guys.

Today we come to the Loose-Forward position. We have been fortunate at Northwich to have been blessed with some exceptional flankers in our history. Today we can only pick four.

Sam Naylor progressed through the junior ranks and made his debut aged 17 against Leigh in 05/06. He can play almost anywhere on the field and has the useful combinations of speed and footwork. With a tendency to throw the dummy pass he has a good passing and off-loading game. Sam is a threat in attack and solid in defence. He has a strong rugby pedigree with his father.

Jamie Miratana a walk-in player who made his debut in the opening game of season 05/06 away at Vagabonds on the Isle of Man. He made an instant impression, named man of the match and scoring a try. An honest player, a solid grafter and had a good work-rate. He was a strong runner with the ball and gave 100% performance, a half-back's dream as he carried instructions to the letter, running into gaps and hitting the gain-line. A big hitter in defence.

Brian "BJ" Johnson was a regular in the side and was renowned for his industrious approach to the game and appetite for work. His defensive ability is also worthy of note and, he 'would run at anything'. A familiar sight with tape around his ears. And don't ask about the lit paper!

Colin "Sam" Naylor ex-Chairman a true one club man, had been a mainstay of the team and club for decades since joining the Blacks back in the 1960s. A well-respected leader both on and off the field. Sam retired from playing in 1990 but made his final 1<sup>st</sup> team appearance five years later coming off the touchline as a spectator to replace an injured player. Sam being one of many ex-players who has coached both junior & senior rugby at Northwich.

This is almost an impossible task we have had so many gifted flankers to add further names without highlights would complete an A4 paper, but we could mention one more....

Jeff Connor had the physique, full head of hair, and blessed with a superb moustache, endowed with all the attributes of a rugby player to make it big.

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## Number 8

Support play, tackling and ball-carrying are the No.8's areas of expertise, similar to the two flankers. Together the trio forms a unit called the back row. Binding on right at the back of the scrum, the No.8 is also the only player from the forwards who are allowed to pick the ball up from the base of the scrum, for it to be truly effective the No.8 must be an explosive, dynamic runner.

Or

These individuals are known to be gentlemen off the pitch, but as soon as the whistle blows they relish dislodging teeth and constantly strive to achieve the "big hit", and think they are by far the biggest drinkers – and most are.

Today we focus on the position of No8. As with previous positions, it was an arbitrary task to select only four players from the extensive list available.

Chris Dale international cap at centre, he was England U18 captain and an ex-club captain. He can play almost anywhere on the field and has the useful combinations of power, and speed. A prolific points scorer over successive seasons. A well-respected leader on the field, he still has a couple more seasons left in the tank to play alongside his brother and cousin.

Graham "Robbo" Robinson was a big, powerful 8 who was always a handful for the opposition team. He was one of those players who always had plenty time on the ball. Good in defence, mobile around the field and had an excellent hand-off and offload.

Peter "Charlie" Charlton ex club captain, an experienced player and knew his stuff he was an excellent all-round player with strong skills in attack and defence and a good ball-player. A great player to have up your sleeve, a match-winner with a habit of producing a moment of magic that could turn a game and demoralise the opposition. For that reason, he's always worth a place

Ted Harrison, Donny Phillips or Dave Briggs all uncompromising to their opposition, no quarter asked or given, and all stretched the laws.

With so many back-row players being interchangeable open-side, blind-side or number 8, who would be your choice?

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## Scrum Half (9)

Acting as the link between the forwards and the backs, the scrum-half is the key rugby position when it comes to building attacks. Playing just behind the forwards, a good scrum-half will control exactly when the ball is fed out to the backs from the rear of a scrum, ruck or maul. The playmaker needs good vision, speed and awareness, quick hands and lightning reactions.

Or

Ideally here you are looking for someone with a severe Napoleon complex so that he can bark orders at the forwards without fear. The smallest chap on the field, about half the length of a prop (hence the name), one eighth his width, but twice as aggressive as a hooker. Talks a lot, especially to the referee. Previously they could pass the ball in a straight line across the width of a rugby field, but since they are now the size of loose forwards, they find it difficult to pass a ball further than 2 metres. They therefore prefer to kick, or run into forwards, which necessitates that they should be even bigger. He is like those small yappy dogs that seem to think they are huge Alsatians.

Today we look at the position of scrum-half and have a selection of the good, the bad, the rough, and the classy.

You, dear reader, can figure out who is who!

Matt Poste has held the position since his arrival 5 years ago. Able to do the gritty work of a forward combined with the ball-handling ability to release the backs. He is quick thinking and a good organiser who is a valuable help to less experienced players who have joined the team.

Mike Naylor was a very talented rugby player and had all the attributes needed to be a successful scrum-half; speed, passing ability and physicality. He was an attacking minded player who kept the opposition (and his team-mates) wondering what he would do next. A good organisational scrum-half with a neat side-step and excellent communication skills. He played in the same team as his brother but also played alongside his cousin Donny Phillips.

Rollo Hawkins is another former black who is no longer with us but he is fondly remembered within the club. He had a long association with us coming through the junior section and went on to become a mainstay of the 1st team and a very effective player. Also a very active committee member and a leading light on the referee circuit.

Mike "Gally" Gallimore fiery and gritty he got under the skin of many opposition scrum-half, referees and the odd teammate, with his "sledging". Explosive from a standing start leaving many a defensive line flat footed. Gally joined the blacks from our neighbours in 2003-04.

Incidentally the same season another Northwich scrum-half made his debut stepping up from the colts Gaz Davies.

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#### Stand Off (10)

The heartbeat of the side and arguably the most influential player on the pitch. Almost every attack will go through the fly-half, who also has the responsibility of deciding when to pass the ball out to the centres and when to kick for position. Must orchestrate the team's back line, deciding what rehearsed moves to put into action and reacting to gaps in defence. Also has to be able to relieve territorial pressure by kicking down the field into touch, and is often the team's designated place-kicker for conversions, penalties and drop goal attempts. In defence, will marshal the backs to ensure each opposition player is covered, and a strong-tackling stand off can snuff out opposition attacks before they start.

Or

The ballerinas of rugby, who could slip through the smallest of gaps, and leave the opposition confused in one place with their illusiveness. They used to be the generals on the field who dictated play, and could kick a ball the whole length of a rugby field, with both feet. If you have highlights in your hair and practice your disco moves, you're a #10. Primary role is the leader of the backs – a dubious honour at best. Main responsibilities as far as I can tell is ability to throw the ball over people's heads and to provide something soft for opposing back rowers to land on. While some may argue that these players must be protected, I find it hard to support anyone whose foot touches a rugby ball on purpose. Nowadays they look like old time locks, the idea being that they bulldoze into the opposition, who unfortunately also look like old time locks.

Today we look at arguably the most coveted position on the field; Stand-Off. Much like the centre forward in football, young boys dream of wearing the number 10 jersey.

Nick Baldwin is a classy player who does the basics well and has an excellent kicking game, both out of hand and for goal. A player who always seems to have time on the ball and has an aura of calm. Nothing appears to be difficult to him and he has a good presence on the field. He has a fair amount of pace and is a good all-rounder being both sound in defence and accurate in attack.

Peter Hudson was a typical, old-school reliable and steady stand-off who played for the blacks in the 1970/80s. His strength was steering the team around the field and marshalling the defence so he didn't have to tackle. A one-club man, Hudson got the job done and was reliable. It has been reported to me (not naming any names) that his secret nickname was 'Tired'.

Bogdan (Dodo) Muntean was appointed 1st team player-coach in August 2009. Dodo had an illustrious career with Romanian club sides Steaua Bucurest, Dynamo Bucharest and Farala Constanta, and had been on the fringes of the international side for 10 seasons, appearing for his country against New Zealand A side and Italy. At Northwich he was instrumental in the 2010 Cheshire Vase victory and represented Cheshire v Lancashire in the Bill Beaumont Cup.

We can mention Phil Ayers for his last kick of the match a 35 yard conversion from the touchline clinching a one point derby victory in a Cheshire Cup semi-final.

Worthy mentions from the 90's include Peter Scott and Charles Wood & Gary Bell.

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Centres' (12 & 13)

The inside centre – who stands closest to the fly-half when the backs line up – and the outside centre tend to be strong, dynamic runners with a good eye for exposing gaps in the opposition defence. The centres take on their opposite number in an attempt to either break the defensive line, or draw in enough opposition defenders to create space and try-scoring opportunities for their team-mates. As such they need to be strong and powerful, and when attack turns into defence, they must also be accomplished at tackling. The inside centre is often the more creative in a centre pairing and should be able to pass and kick nearly as well as the fly-half. Meanwhile, the outside centre tends to be the faster of the two and the ability to offload the ball quickly to the wingers is also vital.

Or

Two variations, one being the playmaker or hard charger, who, with quick hands and feet, caught the opposition asleep, and put their outside players into gaps to score tries. The other one, flitting fairy was a man with an incredible acceleration, that could make a 90 degree change of direction at full pace. The flitting fairy is regrettably more common and will usually attempt to avoid contact at all costs. The flitting fairy is also only one good smack away from bursting into tears and leaving the pitch to cry on the shoulder of his inevitable girlfriend. Both types will have extensive collections of hair care products in their kit bags and will be among the best dressed at the post-game festivities. These days they both look like old time props, and their duty is to enforce a ruck in the middle of the field.

We have been fortunate at Northwich to have been blessed with some exceptional 12 & 13 in our history.

Richard Dale (forward or back) a 'Swiss Army Knife' of a player. He will do a job in the back row and certainly in the midfield. Richard can play virtually anywhere and you'll never find a more intelligent and astute rugby player who's superb on-field He is one of the first names on the team sheet and plays the game in an uncompromising fashion. Hard-hitting in defence and incisive in attack.



Rick Smith is a studs firmly set in the ground, in your face, head-on aggressive tackler. However he could also perform a tippy-toed pirouette gliding between the tightest defensive line. Maybe a surprise selection for some, maybe not for our followers during season 06/07. A solid rugby player as either a pack member or centre partner.

James Underhill deceptive in appearance but a very robust tackler in defence with a number of gears breaking through an opposition defensive line. Undies progressed via the junior section. Injury cut short his on field involvement now head of the players committee.

Stephen Campbell he got himself around the field and into the areas he needed to be. Sharp and dangerous, Cammy had an eye for a gap and was a good organiser and communicator. His passing game was excellent as was his defence. He transferred to Macclesfield for a couple of seasons before returning and captaining the blacks. Cammy was the first player to win successive Player of the year awards in seasons 2001-02 & 02-03.

Rick Dodd captained the team during the mid 1980s, had a different persona on the field than he did off it with a physical approach to the game which complimented the more refined approach he employed off it. He relished the physical aspect of the game but could also step off both feet. He was another speedster, scoring plenty of tries during his blacks career. Rick was also a solid defender and was a more than capable player in all respects.

Lindon Cole played in the mid 1970s, was best renowned for his silky hands and graceful running. His defensive ability and his round the ankles style of tackling meant not many attackers got past him.

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#### Wingers (11 & 14)

Playing out wide on the side of the pitch, the winger is a team's finisher in the attack. A winger is also often the last line of defence when they don't have the ball and as such, pace is their major resource.

Or

As the name indicate, guys that could fly down the touch line. Racehorses. Their hands used to be somewhat suspect, but with ball in hand they could beat the opposition with sheer pace. For a winger to get the ball, almost every single other member of the team needs to have done something right and they all need to have done it consecutively. This happens almost as rarely as winning the lottery, so poor wingers need to wrap up their delicate frame in layers of Lycra, goose fat and fleece and hope that the referee's final whistle blows before their fingers and toes snap off. Their bright boots remind us they're there sometimes. It is not required of them to score tries any more – this is done by locks after the centres enforce a ruck in the middle of the field.

Tom Husbands has surprised many an opposition team with speed and strength that belie his size. Whilst not yet a prolific try-scoring winger in the traditional sense, Tom is a true team player and never shirks the hard work. He carries his fair share of ball and gets his head in harm's way (as his ever more bashed up nose testifies).

Bud Skinkis was possibly the fastest ever in a black shirt, and as fit as a butchers dog. His balance speed and agility left defenders flapping in the wind. With a good footballing brain he was also very good defensively.

Ian "Finbar" Finn or 'The Flying Fin" was regular in the blacks backline during the 1980/90s. Blessed with blistering pace, he was a prolific try-scorer and preferred to evade defenders rather

than run through them. A popular member of the squad, scoring two tries in claiming the clubs first silverware the Cheshire Plate in 1988.

Alan Pendleton another speedster with uncompromising defence and power in attack and a try scoring record that caught the eye.

Alan Ryder, just missed out on a profile mention as did Andrew Henrietta (who just didn't have longevity in his legs).

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### Full Back (15)

Lining up behind the entire back line, the fullback is the closest thing that rugby has to a sweeper in defence. But they also receive deep kicks from the opposition, so they must be comfortable catching high balls and launching attacks from the resulting possession. This high-pressure rugby position is not for the faint-hearted, but those who can combine tackling, kicking, catching and running with a cool head can excel here.

Or

The guy in the last outpost. Nowadays an absolute risk under the high ball, with suspect defence, but the wings make up for this. How he can play 80 minutes of RUGBY and stay clean and sweat free is beyond me. The fullback's status as a rugby player is questionable as he spends the majority of the game spectating from afar. In fact, this personality continues off the field; at post game functions, he is often seen drinking by himself in the corner.

Joel Barber has established himself as one of the most dependable full-backs in the league over the past several seasons. He is strong in defence and has developed into a robust ball-carrier. Joel only completed 7 fixtures before injury brought a premature end to his campaign, last season. What has been most pleasing is the development of Joel's 'footballing' nous and instincts. His ability to read the game and make the correct decision is very good and he looks sure to be a mainstay of the team for a good few years to come.

Keith Jones despite being only 5 feet 4 ½ inches and weighing a little over 10 stone, he was a talented full-back for years. Keith joined the Blacks at 16 playing in the 2XV. Building his reputation as being one of the most dependable full-backs in the game being well known as a "great touch finder and goal-kicker."

Adam Bown another Black coming via the junior section. Adam savoured the best moment of his rugby career after scoring the try that secured Northwich Twickenham glory. The 22-year-old shone in the sunshine as Northwich added the EDF Energy Senior Vase to their South Lancs and Cheshire League one title. Bown, who was a livewire throughout and finally got on the scoresheet in the 59th minute, said: "It's overwhelming and I can hardly believe it. It was nice to get my hands on the ball early and do something positive and then to score...what a feeling?" Northwich went on to win the Cheshire Vase and Bown added: "It's been a great season but Twickenham was definitely the best day in my rugby career. It was a great team effort and the lads made the position for me to score."

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JB reflects on the talent that has passed through our senior section to name his 'Overseas Dream XV'

Most of us have had some time on our hands due to the Covid-19 lock-down, so with rugby games cancelled and very little to do on a Saturday afternoon I sat down to select an "Overseas Dream XV" based upon a couple of rules:

1. Select players I have seen play Northwich 1st XV senior rugby
2. Select players who have travelled from overseas to represent our 1st XV
3. And without using home nations players (this rules out the likes of Dara Cairns and Kyle Lindsey).

Hopefully, my selection will generate some debate and might even inspire our supporters to pick their own 'Dream XV'

Reflecting on the task, we have been very fortunate to watch some superb rugby players at Northwich and we have been blessed with some very loyal, honest lads.

### Overseas XV

1 Nick Blake (Aus) One of the most effective props. His physical presence on the pitch speaks for itself. Unlike many prop forwards Nick also had incredibly good hands and feet! A powerful scrummager and with Blakey as the cornerstone of this front row, the scrum becomes a real weapon.

2 Dean Kingi (NZ) Dean was the classic modern hooker - athletic, great hands and the ability to appear in a forward position as a supporting runner.

3 Adam Grabski (PI) Uncompromising and a dynamic ball carrier who got over the gain line time and time again.

Northwich have been blessed with some outstanding back row forwards and I've selected a pair to compliment each other in the "engine room".

4 Matt Ensor (NZ) There's no way I could leave out Matt; one of the best line out operators in the game; a superb leader of men. And dynamic driving forward.

5 Huia "H" Whale (NZ) H's defensive work was second to none and his tackling ferocious; often resulting in a turnover ball. Huia was also very effective in the line out. Locks come in pairs and H's selection would compliment Matt perfectly.

6 Fungile Tevise (SA) had a phenomenal engine and he was a class player. Fitness had an enormous impact on his performances - how many times in tight games his speed across the pitch resulted in a breakaway try where he left his opponents for dead?

7 Jamie Miratana (NZ) Is someone you want alongside you in a battle. He never took a backward step and there's no such thing as a lost cause when he's on the pitch.

8 Jack Watts (Aus) A principle ball carrier; this is phenomenally hard work and takes its toll on the body, but Jack never complained and invariably got the job done.

Defensively, nothing gets through with this back row.

9 Cas Wilding (NZ) Again, this was a tough decision, with no recognised scrum-half to select, but in this case, I have gone for one of our 10;s. The 'whole is greater than the sum of the parts' because having Cass increases the sides ability to produce the unexpected and, furthermore, Vass was a great competitor willing to back himself and take a chance, even when the chips are down.

10 Lohane Kiewiet (SA) To quote Alan Partridge: "he's got a foot like a traction engine!" Lohane had an incredible skill-set and on his day a match winner. Kicking from hands, or off the floor, there's no one better.

11 Stacey Hosking (NZ) wholly committed to maintaining his fitness and level of performance. An incredibly honest and reflective player who contributed as much to the collective as he did to his own game.

12 Dorian "Dizzy" Simes (Aus) Dizzy's game was founded upon his superb defence, but he also had the game to release the creativity around him.

13 Kolo Fifita (Aus) a star performer, who had it all; pace, power, tackles and tactical awareness. Kolo's 'signature move' would be a huge midfield tackle and turnover followed by a diagonal run-in to score. He was also the perfect complement to his centre partner...

14 David Khanyile (SA) An out and out finisher who was top try scorer with 21 in our unbeaten season. David one of the quickest wingers we have seen at Northwich and his ability to wrong-foot defenders from a standing start was a joy to watch.

15 Simon Pratt (NZ) Having Simon in the side ensures that you have a very tactically astute and natural footballer who can cover the back-line to a very high standard

16 Adam Bennett (NZ) Prop

17 Voyu Pasiya (SA) Hooker

18 Derek (Nigel) Farrow (Aus) Second Row

19 James Gwynne (Aus) Centre

20 Tamas Szabo (Pl) Prop

21 Juan Lazaro (Sp) Hooker

22 Sione Tangi (Aus) Prop

Coach/Player: Dodo Muntean (Rom) Stand-Off

So, there you have it! JB's ultimate overseas XV. Send us a comment on your choice or a star player I've overlooked.

Some of you could consider:

3 players from "back in the day". I cannot include in my selection as I was still wearing the shirt as a player, not a spectator.

Ben Elston (Aus) centre. A good player who helped coaching the juniors. But a bit careless while working in UK he managed to put petrol in a deisel van (first day).

Nathan Trivitt (USA) centre Great player with aspirations to get into the USA national squad. Good in defence and extremely creative.

Jason Winnara (NZ) centre. Big hitting player who was injured and returned to NZ earlier than we would have liked.

I'm assured all these players could feature in a best of team, but only Trivitt was with us long enough to maybe earn a place.

And our elder supporters may consider Richard Saunt (SA) second row/backrow, son of ex-Chairman Brian. I am sure he was born in SA and I believe he may reside there now. He was a very physical and aggressive player.

What a team, and what a legacy for Northwich RUFC – if only this squad could have all represented the club at the same time.

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Juniors to Seniors

Young Guns go for it !

Since the formation of our junior section in 1985 we have laid down strong foundations for the development of our players and we are consciously trying to integrate them into senior rugby. Over the preceding years many of our ex-junior players went on to play senior rugby at Northwich and other clubs.

Northwich Junior coaches are always delighted when an ex-junior member makes the transition into senior rugby, while many have played in the Seconds, Thirds and even the Vets, they are especially pleased when the players debut at 1<sup>st</sup> team level.

Continuing with our Know Your Club features we thought we would take a look at selecting a “Best of Team” from the extensive list of players who made the transition into a “Black”.

1 John Brotherton 2 Luke Hewson 3 Rob Birtles 4 Chris Heywood 5 Jon Simpson 6 Brian Johnson 7 Sam Naylor 8 P Charlton 9 Gaz Davies 10 Chaz Wood 11 Chris Caulfield 12 Richard Dale 13 Chris Dale 14 Stephen Campbell 15 Joel Barber

The list for selection was so great we also produced another XV

1 Joe Maddocks 2 Chris James 3 Mark Thompson 4 Dave Farley 5 Tom Clarke 6 Dean Thompson 7 Phil Williams 8 Graham Robinson 9 Rollo Hawkins 10 James Underhill 11 Bud Skinkis 12 Julian Hamer 13 Stuart Hough 14 Andrew Henrietta 15 Hew Jones

I leave you to argue the ups & downs in the selections & inclusion of players omitted, but what a match could unfold between them and what a legacy produced by Northwich Junior Section over many years.

#### Northwich Superstars

Sam Naylor, Head of Junior rugby at Northwich, says: “I started my journey with the mini section progressing into the Colts Development Squad, and ultimately joined the 1<sup>st</sup> squad aged 17”.

Sam has played in a number of positions as he has come through the game, giving him a strong technical and tactical skillset that he employs well as a player and coach.

He continues “Northwich have been setting great store in their junior development programmes, over many years and the senior squads reap the benefits. We relaunched the section a few years ago and it will be a really tough few years, until we see fruition. But I remember when we were younger we went through some pretty tough years, and it's a really good chance to character build and test yourselves”.

#### Superstars of the Future

"Hopefully the current batch of Superstars will forge their own path once again. Because you certainly don't want to see the hard work of the last decade fade away."

“Age Grade rugby has always been an integral part of the club and having a pathway from Under 5s right the way through to the first team is a cornerstone of the club’s continued development” added Martin Poste, Director of Rugby at Northwich.

“The progression to the senior squad is just reward not only for the hard work and effort put in by all young players themselves, but also the time, energy and commitment by their coaches along their rugby journey to date. It is important that they continue that work rate in the senior squad environment – individually and collectively they will be supported by the wider coaching team at Northwich Rugby Club.”

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We began our Know Your Club series with a story of genealogy so we thought fitting to end in similar fashion.

Ask anyone involved in rugby what sets the sport apart from others and the overwhelming majority will state that its family ethos is unlike any other sport in the country. Families are encouraged to support their local team - and clubs often pride themselves on being family-orientated.

Here at Northwich we are no different. We are always pleased when players who have come up through our Minis and Juniors take the field with the Senior teams, and we have several home-grown players representing the club every Saturday. Many times we have seen sons follow in their fathers' footsteps in the Black shirt. A few times we have had grandsons following as well.

It's well known that family play a role in a child's initial socialisation into sport and his or her continued participation. This family involvement is certainly evident on a Sunday morning where siblings of both genders and all ages participate in a range of activities. Add to this the fact that as many of the mums and dads are former players who now help with coaching and refereeing, with a few grandparents thrown in as well, there can often be three generations of the same family involved.

Colin "Sam" Naylor's contribution is well documented on these pages as is son Sam Naylor Jnr and more recently grandson Carter Naylor commenced his rugby journey with the superstars.

Steve Wood has represented the 1<sup>st</sup> XV but since his arrival in Northwich in the mid 70's Woodsy was a regular and mainstay of the 2<sup>nd</sup> team until hanging up his boots in 1989. Both sons Chaz & Joe progressed through the clubs juniors & played 1<sup>st</sup> XV, and daughter Andrea was a familiar face around the club every weekend during her childhood. Woodsy has coached both junior & senior rugby at Northwich while continuing with many administrator roles. Woodsy's grandson Jack is now in his second season of Superstars.

John Blower regularly played for every club team from 5<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> most seasons, retired aged 44 following serious injury in a 1<sup>st</sup> team derby fixture at Warrington. Both sons played junior rugby, where John was a coach and eldest son Chris now plays social rugby for the 3<sup>rd</sup> team. Chris assisted in the relaunch of Northwich Superstars and continues coaching the junior section. Grandson Alfie was one of the original 3 players who attended the first superstars session and is now playing in the U8s.

All generations agree that once they joined they fell in love with the club as players & supporters Northwich is a great family club that gets in your blood.

Many of our ex and current players are starting a family so within a few years Northwich may well have more members of the 3G club.