

IN MEMORY OF NEIL FISCHER

1979-2022

By Peter Borg-Neal

It is with immense sadness that, on behalf of Tring Rugby Club, I pass on the news that Neil Fischer has passed away at the very young age of 43.

Neil was affectionately known at the club and among all his friends by his nickname of 'Fish' and I will refer to him by that name in this tribute.

Fish was a prominent member of the Tring first team throughout the first decade of this century. If I could choose one word to describe the man, it would be 'irrepressible'. Always bubbling with energy, he was an unremittingly positive force of nature. He displayed huge courage and passion in his approach to life in general and rugby in particular.

I was Head Coach in 2003/4 and Fish was our scrum half. One of group of ex-Berkhamsted schoolboys who followed the Club Captain, Sam Seward into our club Fish was instrumental in the huge success of the team that season.

A new team was built around Sam's leadership on and off the field, the experience and class of Steve Kempster, the emerging brilliance of Tom Newton and, in the centre of it all, there was Fish. Blessed with electric pace and superbly fit he was always in the game – leading the attack whilst covering acres in the cause of defence. Even his biggest admirers, such as me, wouldn't have called him a strategic, 'thinking' scrum half. Instead, he was spontaneous, even mercurial but, even if his team-mates weren't sure what he was going to do next, they had a much better idea than the opposition. As a coach I remember several occasions when he took risky options, perhaps tapping and going when we had an easy three-point penalty kick on offer, but, before I could complain he had seared through a gap to score or create a score. Sam was the only man who could control him. They had played together for years and had an almost telepathic understanding – not something you would normally expect between a loose-head prop and a scrum-half. My favourite memory of them was how Sam would arrive at a break down and just give a sharp clap of his hands and Fish would pop the ball up to send the big man crashing through the defence.

His pass wasn't always the most accurate I have seen but it was fast, very fast and we always played with momentum when he was at 9 for us. His vast reserves of energy meant that he was always in the midst of the action, keeping the team moving forward and barking orders at his teammates.

That year we swept the board, winning the league, winning the Hertfordshire Presidents' Trophy and reached the quarter-finals of the RFU Intermediate Cup for the first time in the club's history claiming several notable scalps en route.

In the following years, with the emerging talent of Sam Clapham at 9, Fish often played on the wing where, with his blistering pace, he was equally accomplished. Indeed, he played on the wing on the day of what must be considered Tring's most famous victory. This was in season 2008/2009. After three promotions over the preceding years the club was now in National League three at level five of English Rugby – the highest in our history. A daunting fixture list included many semi-professional clubs including Jersey who had invested heavily in professional coaches and full-time players. Everybody in the league presumed we would be put to the sword when it came to our visit to the channel island – indeed Jersey were unbeaten at home for several seasons. Of course, one person who believed we could beat them was Fish – his irrepressible optimism to the fore once again. Along with his teammates he played like a man possessed that day and despite being under the cosh throughout the game the team battled their way to a famous victory. The picture below of Fish is one that I took at half-time in that game. I like the photo because it captures the man behind the constant smile and effervescent personality – a hugely committed and courageous sportsman who never saw defeat as an option that should be easily accepted.

I make no apology for focussing on the rugby player because that is how most in the club remember him.

Off the field he was my friend and we had stayed in contact over the years since we both stepped away from active involvement at the club. We got together regularly at events such as our weddings, annual meetings of HRYC (a club of rugby mates), birthdays and for occasional drinks.

I was incredibly fond of Fish. I loved his energy and enthusiasm, and, always looked forward to seeing him. I will miss him terribly as will all his friends.

But now is the point at which I will stop using his nickname.



Tring Rugby

I know many of you will want to pay Neil their respects. We do not know at this time what arrangements might be put in place for a funeral or memorial service. We will provide the details on this site as soon as they are available.

Ultimately, our final thoughts must be with his family and, in particular, his children. We have lost a friend, they have lost a father, a brother, a son. They have suffered a terrible loss and my heart goes out to them.

Peter Borg-Neal
12 September 2022

