

Voices from the Back of the Bus

Tall Tales and Hoary Stories
from Rugby's Real Heroes

Stewart McKinney



About the Author

Stewart McKinney is a former Ireland international rugby player who was part of the British and Irish Lions team that was victorious against South Africa in 1974. He played for Ireland for seven years.

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I would like to dedicate this book to my children:
Sam, Kathleen, Jamie and Joseph

And also to the surgeons, doctors and nurses at St George's Heart Hospital, Tooting, and Moorfields Eye Hospital, St Ann's Tottenham.

There are many people who have helped me make this book a reality, but there are also a few without whose support this book would not have happened. They are: Siobhan McKinney, Ray, Dessie and Bernadette O'Rourke, Steve Cork, Claire Evans, Liz Fay, Bill Campbell, Suzanne Milligan and Nick Hague.

I must also thank everyone who has contributed a story to this book. These stories have come from my friends, but that each has been so happily and freely given is a measure of these players. I have been delighted by every story - and the excuse it has provided to renew old friendships.

There have also been friends whose efforts in helping me compile this book deserve special mention, and they are: from Ireland: Carmel Dwyer (IRFU), Cavor Drudy (IRFU), Syd Millar, Jim Stokes (BBC Sport NI), Jim Neilly (BBC Sport), Victor Scarlett, Dungannon FC), Ken Nelson (Newtownards Round Table), Joe McKinney (my brother), Mick Fitzpatrick (IRFU Golf Society); from Wales: J.J. Williams, Medwyn Parri, John Evans; from England: Peter Jackson (*Daily Mail*), Mike Burton, Nigel Davies, Alan Hunt, Mark Hudson (Front Row Events), David Willis (National Sporting Club); from Scotland: Sandy Carmichael, Andy Irvine, Ian McLauchlan; from New Zealand: Derek McKeen (Dungannon FC); from South Africa: Choet Visser Rugby Museum (Nico Du Plessis

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24 August 2009

Dear Stewart

As the Chief Executive of the British Heart Foundation, I'd like to extend a huge thank you for making a donation of 50 per cent from all the royalties from the sales of your book *Voices from the Back of the Bus*.

I am a rugby fan myself and the stories have given me great deal of pleasure, as I'm sure they will to many others.

The British Heart Foundation is the nation's heart charity. With around 2.5 million people living with heart disease in the UK, it is extremely important that we continue with our life-saving work.

Your extremely kind donation will support our vital and life-saving work to fight heart disease. With donations like yours, we can provide specialist care from BHF heart nurses to improve the physical and emotional health of heart patients and their families, and fund research which could lead to a cure or improvements in treatment.

It is only through the wonderful generosity of supporters like you that we are able to continue with our vital work, making

a huge difference to those affected and their families.

Thank you once again and I wish you every success with this endeavour.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read "Peter Hollins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Peter Hollins
Chief Executive

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FOREWORD BY SYD MILLAR

Sydney 'Syd' Millar CBE (born in Ballymena, 23 May 1934) is the outgoing chairman of the International Rugby Board. He played for Ballymena RFC and represented Ireland in the pack, winning 37 caps as a prop. In addition, he played nine times for the British and Irish Lions, in 1959, 1962 and 1968. Millar also coached the successful 1974 British Lions tour to South Africa and managed the tour there in 1980. He served as manager of the Irish national side at the 1987 World Cup and as head of the IRFU. On 12 December 2007, he was awarded the Légion d'honneur by Bernard Lapasset, his successor as IRB chairman.

The game of rugby football has changed radically since the contributors to this book played. The stories originate in a different era. An era when the game was amateur but 'professional' with a small 'p' at the higher levels, and Test matches and international matches particularly were played with no less intensity than today. It was an era before high-tech was available and before there was a proliferation of coaches and advisors to coaches, etc., etc.

Rugby football, once sampled, becomes addictive and many of us have been addicted for most of our lives. It's hard to let go, and once the enjoyment of playing is over people tend to stay on in various capacities. Some continue to play as Golden Oldies, others coach, manage, administer, comment and write, happy to remain in a game that has given them so much pleasure. Rugby football generates a camaraderie that is unique; friendships develop and last a lifetime.

I am fortunate to have had a long playing career followed by coaching, managing and administering, and it is a privilege to have been allowed such a long involvement.

Rugby football has given me and many of the other contributors an opportunity to travel the world, to play with and against some of the great players of the game and to meet people from various walks of life, but above all it has given me the valued friendship of many.

Lions tours were, and still are, unique, where four countries come together to take on the might of the southern hemisphere. Tours were longer in my time, for instance in 1959 we played thirty-three games, six in Australia, twenty-five in New Zealand and two in Canada; in 1962, in South Africa, we played twenty-five games. My son was born during that tour and he was three months old before I saw him, so wives were very long-suffering. I was fortunate to have such a wife, in Enid, who despite my time devoted to rugby is still there as a great support and has been over the years.

Lions tours are where players from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales come together to make up the touring party. Players who have played against each other in the Six Nations become teammates and a loyalty to each other develops. This was especially true when the tours were longer and we had more time to enjoy the game, the country and each other's company. Lifelong friendships were made with teammates and some of the opposition. Many of the stories told in this book originate in Lions tours and when we players meet, as we do from time to time, the 'craic is mighty'. Stewart McKinney is performing a service to the game, ensuring these stories are put into print for others to enjoy and are not lost. Stewart - great player, hard man - who played at the highest possible level, is demonstrating the caring side of rugby football and deserves our thanks and support for producing *Voices from*

the Back of the Bus, royalties from which will go to the British Heart Foundation.

Well done, Stewart, and everyone who has contributed their story to this book.

Syd Millar
September 2009

FORWARD BY TERRY O'CONNOR

Terry O'Connor has been the rugby correspondent for the Daily Mail for 31 years and has covered internationals since 1949. He first toured with British and Irish Lions in 1962 and then went on a further ten trips. He does not believe the invincible record of the 1974 team will ever be eclipsed.

This book proves that rugby union towers over other sports when it comes to creating friendships that last a lifetime. That is why Stewart McKinney, an Ireland and Lions forward, was inspired to capture the views of legends from amateur rugby and their memories of overseas rugby tours and record them for posterity.

Prompted by hearing the stories told at former Ireland coach Jimmy Davidson's funeral (May 2007) - and worried they might be lost or forgotten - McKinney has devoted the past two years corresponding with and telephoning famous players (some opponents but all friends) throughout the world in memory of Davidson, a fellow Ulsterman with whom he played for years, including an Ireland trip to New Zealand in 1976.

McKinney has brought together well over 100 players from all over the world, and the great majority of them enjoyed international status. Two of the most famous, Willie John McBride and Gareth Edwards, toured together three times with the Lions and every year found themselves opponents during the then Five Nations Championship - now of course Six. Gareth writes that some of the Wales-Ireland games were rough and intense, even for him. The memory of competition still burns bright all these years later.

During my time reporting on matches from 1962, there have been many changes to the sport. Rugby ceased to be an amateur game in 1995. This has led to shorter trips abroad and possibly compromised the intense camaraderie so evident among the amateurs – an unfortunate casualty of the demands of professionalism. Thus the winning 1997 team in South Africa did not have the same pleasure of visiting the famous Kruger National Park, with its vast array of wildlife, particularly jungle animals. The 1974 team were able to benefit from R & R in this spectacular venue as a respite from training. As a result, midday training runs in the sun, warthogs and other encounters make up many of the yarns fondly remembered by those tourists.

On reflection, the two Lions centres in the 1974 Tests, Dick Milliken of Ireland and Ian McGeechan of Scotland, did not receive the praise they deserved. Sadly, injuries shortened Milliken's playing days, but he has no regrets, only great pride in having played a major part in the golden era of British Lions rugby. Andy Irvine was one of the superstars of the amateur game in 1974, and he nostalgically recalls what conditions were like for touring teams in the now distant past – more than 35 years ago. Clive Rees reflects on the personality of a fellow teammate, a side not usually seen by the public, but one that his fellow players came to know and one of the reasons why they loved him so.

There are many tales of players taking medical risks to ensure they could play when team doctors would have ordered a rest. Misunderstandings and mistaken identities, pathos and high jinks, flashes of brilliance and regrettable disasters all have their place in this collection of stories. The different sections cover touring, coaching and selection, South Africa, New Zealand, administration, and general miscellaneous anecdotes and hoary tales from around the world.

The recollections in this book have brought back many fond memories of the game, both on and off the pitch, and

of the players from that era of epic battles and performances of unparalleled genius for me. What this book does most of all, though, through the pithy, self-deprecating modesty of its contributors, is prove that rugby is a 'game for thugs played by gentlemen' - truly gentlemen.

Terry O'Connor
September 2009

THE CONCEPT

The memorial service to celebrate Jimmy Davidson's life was held in the orchard in the beautiful grounds surrounding his home. He had a wonderful send-off, and as I was leaving, heading for the Maze Golf Club for 'refreshments' with a host of other rugby folk, I ran into Tommy Doyle, who had played for Ireland in 1968.

'Bejaysus,' said Tommy with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. 'All the great Irish back-row forwards are dying, McKinney, but you and I needn't worry, as we were never that good!' I laughed, but unknown to Tommy I was struggling with a heart problem of my own so was also a little anxious about my future.

In the golf club we recounted many rugby tales, and Charlie Murtagh remarked that as we were from a different era it would be a great pity that our little escapades would be lost for ever.

On the way home I thought of those players of my vintage, unique characters who had passed away: Shay Deering, Terry Moore, Ken Goodall, Jimmy D. and Tom Doyle's brother Mick, killed in a tragic road accident outside my home town of Dungannon. And I thought of Gordon Brown - what a man. That's what hatched the plan. I would write anecdotes and collect stories from players of the amateur days. It started off as a hobby, but it developed into a worldwide project, with contributors from far and wide.

The most wonderful aspect of the undertaking was the confirmation that rugby friendships forged all those years ago still remain. We had a unique bond. The greatest flanker I ever played against, the All Black Ian Kirkpatrick, talked for half an hour on the phone, and I hadn't been in his company for 34 years!

Nearly all of the contributors are internationals - All Blacks, Springboks and Lions - but I also have included some players who were great clubmen whose attitude to our game was typical of true rugby men.

Stewart McKinney
September 2009

TOURING

TOURING PREFACE

Touring was part and parcel of an amateur-rugby player's life. At club level it might have been a pre-season tour to build team spirit for the coming year. Easter heralded a great exodus to all parts of Britain and Ireland, and many of those tours were traditional, going back many years. The most famous Easter tour in my day was the Baa-Baas' to South Wales - four games in five days: Penarth on Good Friday, Cardiff on Easter Saturday, Swansea on Easter Monday and Newport on Easter Tuesday. The Baa-Baas were a club without a home, so a Porthcawl base was set up in the Esplanade Hotel, and photographs and memorabilia were hung up in the team room. Nothing was free: ties and scarves were paid for, and woe betide anyone who tried to steal a jersey. (No replica stores in those days!) There was no training or practice, as the lyrics of the club song explained: 'For it's the way we have in the Baa-Baas, and a jolly fine way, too.'

The Irish on club jaunts tended to dress more formally, with club ties and blazers for the Easter tours. But one Easter Monday I happened to come upon a Welsh rugby team, I think it was Tredegar, in Moony's bar in Belfast, dressed in garish Bermuda shorts and dummy teats stuck in their mouths. It made me think that perhaps we Irish weren't so daft after all.

Four rugby aficionados in Bermuda changed the face of Easter tours for ever. Pat O'Riordan, John Kane, Tom Gallaher and David Lunn, four Irishmen collectively known as the 'Bermuda Murphia', secretly invited a ringer, none less than Tommy Kiernan the Ireland captain, to play in the annual Irish v. the Rest of the Island game. There was great protest from the Rest, so the next year Gareth Edwards guested for them, but the Murphia kept the balance in favour of the Irish

by importing Ken Kennedy and Mike Gibson. By the time I played in the game in 1978, it had been switched to Easter Sunday, was called the Bermuda Classic and 11 international players were involved. Later, the Murphia - I think the year was 1989 - organised the first Golden Oldies Festival, which has developed into the famous Bermuda Is Another World event, and many of the stories in this book originate from the island.

Stewart McKinney

SHIP'S RATIONS

JACK KYLE

FLY-HALF Queen's university, NIFC, Ulster

IRELAND 1947-58, 46 caps

LIONS TOUR '50, 6 Test matches

Tom Clifford was the first rugby player from Limerick to be made a member of a Lions side. He had a wonderful send-off from the town and from his club. He was renowned far and wide as a man who enjoyed his food, and his mother was worried that he might be going to countries that would not be able to cater for his appetite. There was also a ship journey from Liverpool to Wellington of more than a month. It was not on a passenger liner, but on one that brought lamb and sheep from New Zealand and carried about 90 passengers, so it was important Tom didn't go hungry.

On board we were told that all large trunks were to go to the ship's hold, but Tom insisted that one huge trunk of his go to his cabin. We found out the reason for this when after a few days at sea, and just before bedtime, someone remarked that he was hungry, as it was quite a few hours after dinner. Tom invited us to his cabin, where we likely imagined that he had a bar of chocolate or some other small titbit. He proceeded to pull a huge trunk from under his sleeping berth and opened it. It was filled to the brim with cakes and various durable foodstuffs. Mrs Clifford must have been cooking for at least a month to provide Tom with such nourishment. Tom invited us to help ourselves, which we did that night and on other nights until the trunk was empty.

One night someone suggested that we write a thank-you note to Mrs Clifford, and we all scribbled a line or two to her.

'Dear Mrs Clifford, Just enjoying a piece of your excellent cake. Many thanks.'

To give some idea of Tom's appetite, we had an eating competition at dinner one night on board the ship. Tom was a clear winner, eating every one of the eighteen courses on the menu. Bill McKay was runner up with thirteen, and the rest of us could only manage the usual three or four.

Sadly, Tom is no longer with us, but this is one memory I have amongst others of a wonderful character and a remarkable man.

BRITISH LIONS: ANCIENT AND MODERN

ANDY IRVINE

FULL-BACK Heriot's FP

SCOTLAND 1972-82, 51 caps

LIONS TOURS '74, '77, '80, 9 Test matches

Having been a member of the victorious 1974 squad to South Africa and now currently chairman of the British and Irish Lions board, I was very much involved in the preparation of the 2009 tour, and I thought it might be quite interesting to compare the make-up of the touring party of 1974 v. 2009.

The 1974 tour lasted three months and comprised twenty-two games, of which four were Test matches, and the total touring party amounted to thirty-two people (thirty players, one manager and one coach). All the players were strictly amateur, and the daily allowance that each player received was £1.50. That may not seem a lot, but as all accommodation, food and travel were free, the daily allowance was really just used for socialising and a few beers in between games.

The training in 1974 was pretty simple, with sessions from 10 a.m. every morning until 12 noon. We then had lunch together, and our afternoons and evenings were free so that we could go golfing, sightseeing, shopping, and to the beach and local nightspots. Also, there were no distractions or diversions from communication technology and gadgetry. This was an era before mobile phones, iPods, Game Boys, laptops, etc. The height of sophistication and high-tech machinery was probably a cassette player; otherwise, the

players interacted with each other and the people whom they met.

Moving on 35 years, and things are very different. Obviously, the most important difference is that the game is now professional. All the players are elite athletes, and whereas we trained for just two hours a day, the current squad started in the gym most mornings at 7 a.m., had breakfast around 9 a.m., trained between 10 a.m. and midday, had a specially prepared lunch and then trained again in the afternoon. Many evenings, they watched videos and went over tactics at team discussions.

The intensity of the games is now, of course, much greater, and players have to endure a much longer season. In 1974 all of the players were requested to rest for the whole of April. Some of the 2009 squad played right up until they left the British Isles. Whereas in 1974 we took thirty players, the squad this time was thirty-seven, even though the number of games played was only ten.

Ultimately, there was nearly double the party for less than half the matches. The total tour party was sixty-three, and in addition to the players included perhaps a dozen or more 'ancillary staff': four or five coaches, doctors, physios, masseurs, lawyers, specialist chefs, a manager, assistant manager, baggage men. The medical back-up was second to none, which provides an interesting comparison with '74, when we had no doctor, no physio, no nothing! I don't even recall a water boy. (Taking fluids on board was regarded as unmanly . . . and we were *never* sissies.) Apparently, a half-time orange quarter was sufficient to replace lost fluids, salts and electrolytes in those days.

As chance would have it, we were fortunate to have two doctors with our touring party - players! Ken Kennedy was a practising doctor and was very approachable, but he had limited time, as he was committed to keeping pressure on Bobby Windsor to win a Test spot. J.P.R. would tell you to

take a gin and tonic - and if that didn't work, you were told not to be a wimp!

The other huge difference between then and now is the amount of support and media coverage that a British and Irish Lions tour generates. In 1974 there were possibly as many as 1,000 fans supporting the team, and most of those only for the third and fourth Tests, whereas on the 2009 tour it was estimated that as many as 25,000 supporters flew over from the British Isles, and the worldwide television audience was huge.

All in all, it was a great tour, but I just wonder if they had as much fun as those of us involved in '74.

SOME GUYS HAVE ALL THE LUCK!

PETER BELL

FLANKER Blackheath

ENGLAND 1968-9, 4 caps

I was lucky enough to go on tour with Jeff Butterfield's ex-international side to Jamaica, the Cayman Islands and the Bahamas. Tony O'Reilly was supposed to have joined the team in the Cayman Islands but only arrived by private plane with a few friends in time for the last game in the Bahamas.

In the evening there was a huge party in the clubhouse, with its obligatory swimming pool, which made for a superb setting. At about 8.30 p.m. 'Golden Boy' Tony O'Reilly turned up in his Ireland tie, Lions blazer and, as far I know, sporting his Barbarian underpants - ever the model of understated sartorial elegance! Tony was the centre of attention, as he had scored the first try of the game, which seemed to stir up Dickie Jeeps, who was not at all happy that Tony had arrived for the last match only and was now being hailed the hero of the hour. Such is hero worship (fickle at times) that there was a feeling that Tony should be thrown into the pool. It seemed only right. Four of the players grabbed him by a limb each and began to swing him backwards and forwards to get the best possible heave. As the final fling was about to take place, Tony said, 'I thank you, on behalf of Kerrygold, for throwing me into the pool!' And, splash, in he went!

After a considerable amount of time, he eventually resurfaced and paddled up and down the pool with his blazer like a halo around his head, whereupon the best-looking woman at the party, in full evening dress, jumped in to join him. They swam up and down for about 20 minutes and then disappeared, never to be seen again, much to our

frustration and annoyance. It just goes to show that some guys do have all the luck.

ACROSS THE MILES - RUGBY FRIENDSHIPS ARE FOR EVER

STEWART McKINNEY

***FLANKER King's Scholars, Dungannon, London
Irish, Ulster***

IRELAND 1972-8, 25 caps

LIONS TOUR '74

King's Scholars, my college side, toured Cowichan in 1969. We stayed in hotels in Calgary, Vancouver and Victoria on Vancouver Island, but when we travelled farther up the island to Cowichan we were billeted out for our stay in that beautiful part of the world. Much to the disgusted envy of the rest of the team, big Hammy Moore and I were assigned accommodation with a lumberjack called 'Goody' Gumundseth. He looked after us royally in his shack, way up a mountainside. He was a horse of a man and ate like a horse, too - six eggs and T-bone steaks for breakfast. Hammy and I thought we'd found heaven.

We played and beat Cowichan then had a magnificent salmon barbecue outside their clubhouse, surely one of the most beautiful settings on God's earth. Of course, the only fitting way to finish off the evening of triumph and celebration was to drink them out of beer . . . so we did.

I often wondered about Goody over the years. I only knew he had gone on to play for Canada. Twenty-five years later, my fond memories probably sold the NIFC (North of Ireland Rugby Club) on a tour to Canada. We took in Vancouver Island, as my college team had done, and I happened to be with the front-row union - Scottie (David Scott), Huddy (Stephen Hutton), Davy Jordan, Brian Berry and Simon Crawford - in a restaurant overlooking a lake in Cowichan.

The barmaid asked me if I'd been in this part of the world before. I told her I had stayed with a wonderful rugby player called Goody Gumundseth 25 years previously. 'That's him sitting in the corner with his wife, Angie,' she said.

And there he was, that great bear of a man. Like me, greyer, more stooped, plumper. 'Goody!' I said. 'Stewart McKinney, King's Scholars. I stayed with you 25 years ago!'

'Yes!' he replied. 'And you young bastards drank us out of beer after the game!'

Goody and I attempted over the next three days to drink Cowichan out of beer again. These things have to be done.