

SHOCK AS EX-CAPTAIN TONY BROOKS DIES

Welcome to Parknews Before we get on to news about last weekend and previews of the coming one, the previous weekend we were devastated to be confronted with the terrible news of the sudden and untimely death of our former player and skipper, Tony Brooks, at the age of 57. Tony led the Club when we were one of the top sides in the land. At 6'2" and 15 stone he would not have been a big number 8 nowadays, but he was a Colossus at the back of the Park pack, and well ahead of his time in terms of mobility and ball-handling skills in open play. He read the game superbly.

He was educated at Plymouth College and Oxford University – where he earned his 'blue' playing in the Hundredth Varsity Match, the year that 3 inches of snow covered the pitch – and he played for Plymouth Albion and Bath, plus county Rugby for Devon, before joining Rosslyn Park. It is no coincidence that the Plymouth College, Oxford, Plymouth Albion pedigree mirrors that of a previous Rosslyn Park stalwart in the person of Peter Berryman. It was Peter who spotted Brooksie when taking Park on the annual West Country tour, and used those similarities to persuade him to join Park. "I would describe him as the thinking man's number 8", recalled Peter, "he read the game brilliantly. If he had been just two inches taller he might well have been the best in the country. I had a chat with him after the match to persuade him that if he ever came to London then Rosslyn Park was the club to join". The rest, as they say, is history. Peter added, "His death at such a young age is just an absolute tragedy".

Barbarian

Tony Played his first match for Park on 1 September 1984, a 15-10 win over Vale of Lune, in which one of his powerful runs set up Park's second try. After joining Park Tony played his County Rugby for Surrey, at a time when playing for the county was a key stepping stone to the England side. He represented England at Under-16, Under-19 (including 7s) and under-23 level and was a Barbarian; as a senior he was one of the best top-level number 8s not to be capped. His loyalty to Park may even have cost him more representative honours when he resisted siren voices with "connections" that tried to lure him elsewhere.

He took over the captaincy in 1987-88, the first season of League Rugby. Park were placed in League 2 and won promotion to the top division, beating Northampton 22-0 to claim the title. Life was a bit of a struggle in the top tier the following season, but wins over Moseley, Bristol, Waterloo, Liverpool St Helens and Orrell kept Park in the top tier. The 1989-90 season was Tony's last as skipper. Park won their first two matches (against Nottingham and Moseley) to top the table. Thus



Tony Brooks



Saturday 24 March
Curtain raiser

B XV v Haberdashers 2
Middlesex Merit Play-off semi-final
Home (4G) noon

1st XV
v
Ampthill
League
Home (4G) KO: 3:00PM

The match will be preceded by a minute's silence
in memory of Tony Brooks
*To book for the pre-match lunch please call David Booth in the
Club Office on 020 8876 6044*

Effingham 2 v Nomads
Surrey Championship
Away (but poss in Richmond Pk) KO TBA

Hatters seeking friendly
Fours TBA

On tour, back row fifth from left



Brooksie had the distinction in the following match – away to his former club, Bath – of being the only person to lead Park onto the pitch as officially the top club in the country. Unfortunately a 34-6 defeat brought that to an end!

On Tony's retirement as skipper an extant Rosslyn Park newsletter reported, "One of the longest and loudest bursts of applause at the AGM greeted the adoption of a vote of thanks to the retiring Club Captain. Tony took over the captaincy at a difficult time for the Club and proved his mettle leading us out of the Second Division and his understanding of the challenge posed by the First Division environment was instrumental in the Club's retaining its position at the level". The following season Park were relegated without winning a League match (which is no reflection whatsoever on his successor, Richard Moon, but emphasises the difficulties Park had faced).

It was no surprise that Tony had ended up being skipper, he was always a natural leader, spoke well and had a natural air of authority that was untainted by ego. Mind you, some of his more Churchillian team talks were not always listened to with 100% silent respect by the younger members of the squad. Flanker Matt Hill recalls, "I played with Brooksie at the 'Park' for many years, a good few of which he was the captain. A number 8, he was part of the back row which at the time generally consisted of Brooksie 8 and a combination of Tim Hyde, Peter Tayler and myself at 6 and 7. Far too good looking to be a forward with an unblemished face, it was hard to tell what Brooksie did but he had the hands and mind to add great balance to the unit.

"As the captain his pre-game team talks exalting the troops to greater efforts could be blown apart by a choice of phrase: 'young thrusters' reminding us that our places were under threat springs to mind. Having built us up to fever pitch, the dressing room would dissolve into childish laughter. For those that were there the talk down at Llanelli involving, "We in this room are a team but we... pull it in... tighter, we the forwards are f..... family". Hyde and I were grinning and Karl Shuler was in tears. He was a good fella".



No 8 Tony Brooks crossed the line and slams down Rosslyn Park's second try against Thurrock (Owen Jones)

A more recent image



Another member of that superb back row, Tim Hyde, heard the news in Baha California, and got in touch to say, "Shocked and really upset to hear about Brooksie. Please pass on my respects and condolences for a lovely man. In terms of memories I suppose the main one is the long term scar he has left on my self-esteem by being so goddam beautiful - and always unmarked after a game - how? Admittedly, as Noddy [Andy Holder] says, not much competition from Matt, Pete and me but never understood how he did it. A perfect gent and a lovely human being".

Tony played in numerous important matches for Park, but when asked what his favourite moment was he replied, "Waking up and seeing the snow had fallen overnight causing the cancellation of Orrell away". (He also said his worst Rugby moment was being beaten to the breakdown by prop John Reid).

After retiring from Rosslyn Park he became Director of Rugby at his local club, Maidenhead, where he was still Head Coach of the Colts team. It was there that David Hitchcock bumped into him. "I went down to Maidenhead RFC with a Hatters team just after he'd retired. We arrived at Maidenhead to be greeted by the massive "Next Match" boards emblazoned with Today at 3.00PM Maidenhead vs Rosslyn Park. We were watched by a crowd rather larger than we were used to. Tony came down to watch. He stayed on afterwards for a beer and a long chat with the team. One of his 1st XV buddies at Plymouth College, Kim Rowe, used to play in the row for the Hatters ... oh, and the Hatters were victorious ...

"For my 40th I was given a second hand copy of "The Centenary History of the RFU" and strangely inside it was a cutting from the Telegraph reporting the 100th Varsity game. Tony featured in that game and also managed a sub-head: "Storming Brooks". Also I was down at the East Grinstead Sunshine 7s last year and they use an historic photo in their programme each year of Tony collecting the winners Rosebowl from Lady Astor".



On the morning of his passing Tony had coached his colts team to a 45-0 victory over Chinnor. He had settled into an armchair and was watching Rugby on television when he simply and totally unexpectedly passed away.

Off the field he had a successful business career and was no mean artist. But he was first and foremost a family man. Rosslyn Park has lost a great player, captain and friend: Tony's wife Caroline and their daughters and son, Charlotte, James and Annabel have lost far, far more. To them we extend our deepest condolences on this tragic loss.

There will be a minute's silence before the match against Ampt Hill on Saturday to mark the Club's respect for one of the finest to pull on a Rosslyn Park shirt. When we have details of the funeral arrangements we shall, of course, pass them on.

This Saturday

On Saturday the pressure remains on when we entertain fourth-placed **Ampt Hill** at the Rock, kicking off at 3:00PM. The Amps entertain realistic thoughts of finishing as runners-up in National 1, being just a point behind third club Plymouth Albion and six points behind the second club, Darlington Mowden Park, and so will be going flat out to win. Last Saturday week they welcomed back their Tongan internationals Aleki Lutui and Maama Molitaka, who had both been out injured and presumably both will be parading their significant physical presence at the Rock. That weekend the Amps produced a sensational finish to defeat Plymouth Albion 33-28. Earlier in the season we lost away to Ampt Hill by 23-29, but it was a match from which we can take some crumbs of comfort. At the behest of the Senior Touch Judge we lost a penalty try and yellow card for an incident that few saw, including the referee who was much closer, and a further yellow later in the match that looked a bit harsh. In fact Ampt Hill did not cross our line while we had 15 players on the pitch!

So Ampt Hill are beatable if we play at our best, though definitely opponents to be respected, especially their powerful forwards. Hopefully we'll be able to field our sixteenth player – a home crowd really getting behind the team. Please do come along and bring as many friends as you can recruit.

Please do come along early and support the **B XV** who are in a Play-off semi final against **Haberdashers**, due to kick off at noon but may be brought forward slightly just in case of extra time.

Club sides

Will Thorogood reports No rugby activity last weekend. Thanks Jane for the beer and bar service during the 6 Nations. The few stalwarts at the club appreciated the refreshments, particularly a gentleman from Wexford!

Slingbacks

The Slingbacks match at home to Crowthorne on Sunday was called off due to the amount of snow on the pitch. At time of going to press we have no revised date, but presumably it will be before the next advertised fixture against Harlequins on Sunday 29 April.

National 1 review

There were only three matches last weekend, and we have to congratulate **Coventry**, coached by our old friend Nick Walshe, whose away demolition of **Caldy** sees them emerge as Champions with five matches to spare. They were 43-0 up at half time and eventually coasted to a 55-12 victory. They will probably receive the trophy at their next home match, which is against Park on Saturday week.

Plymouth Albion beat **Bishops Stortford** at home by 17-10 to go a point ahead of our opponents this weekend, **Ampt Hill**, into third place. It leaves them just five points behind **Darlington Mowden Park** (25-15 winners at **Cambridge**) with a game in hand. That game is against Park!

This weekend's matches

Caldy v Birmingham Moseley
Cambridge v Old Albanian
Darlington Mowden Park v Bishops Stortford
Fylde v Esher
Loughborough v Blackheath
Old Elthamians v Hull Ionians
Plymouth Albion v Coventry
Rosslyn Park v Ampt Hill

Away travel

We have no 'away' matches until we face the Champions, **Coventry** on 07 April and **Birmingham Moseley** on 21 April. Cheap advance rail tickets for both of those matches are now on sale. Coventry play at Butts Park Arena, Butts Rd, Coventry CV1 3GE. It is walkable from the station, but every time we go there the layout of the paths and subways immediately by the station changes so we won't try to give directions for fear of causing confusion. Our regulars usually go into town for a pre-match refresher, but if you arrive at the ground there's a perfectly good local pub just the other side of the car park opposite the main stand. Coventry charge £15 for admission (£11 concessions).

Birmingham Moseley play at Yardley Wood Road, Billesley, Birmingham, B13 0HN (on the east side of Billesley Common if you are familiar with Birmingham). It's a fair distance from New Street station, though there is a frequent bus service that passes near the ground and it is walkable from Yardley Wood station if you take a local train. It's quite an expensive taxi ride unless there is more than one of you to split the cost. Our regulars cannot, alas, recommend a local hostelry having always respected the advice of a friendly Moseley fan, "Don't use the pubs near the ground unless you are looking for lager, Sky Sports and a fight"! In any case, they serve a decent pint at the ground. Moseley charge £15 for admission, £11 senior citizens and £6 for 16-17 year olds (below that age is free). It's an extra fiver if you want to sit in the stand.

The away match at **Plymouth Albion** has been re-scheduled for Saturday 05 May, the week after the season ends. It is the firm intention of both clubs to fulfil the fixture. However, the Editor, strictly in personal capacity, would sound one note of caution: there is a precedent for matches scheduled to be played after the end of the season, upon which nothing depends, not being played at all. Assuming Park could not be relegated at that stage, and the result would not affect Plymouth's league position, it is difficult to envisage a large crowd. If the situation were to be that clubs had to extend players' contracts in order to play the match, and Plymouth got in touch to say that it would cost more to put the game on than they could ever make at the gate, it is difficult to envisage Park absolutely insisting on shelling out and making the journey! That is pure conjecture but worth considering before you buy *non-refundable* rail tickets or hotel bookings.

Masquerade Ball

For the first time in a while the Club is holding what used to be the Annual End-of-Season Ball, and it will be a very special event. The Masquerade Ball will take place at the Rock on Saturday 05 May. It will be a Black Tie dinner, dance and auction, with several other attractions. We are hoping the event will bring together the whole Rosslyn Park family – mini parents, coaches, club sides, ladies teams, players and admin staff. It will also contribute to two worthwhile causes: the Rosslyn Park Injury Trust and Cancer Research. You can find out more and book your tickets through the following link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/end-of-season-masquerade-ball-tickets-42625758792?aff=eac2>



We will also be running and end of season BBQ on the 29th April and details will follow shortly

Next Parknews

Normally Parknews appears on the Club website weekly, usually between Tuesday lunchtime / Wednesday afternoon. Contributions are always welcome and the deadline is normally at noon on the Tuesday of publication. If you would like to receive a 'tweet' immediately it appears then subscribe to the @RPNoseyParker twitterfeed. Letters and other contributions from readers are always welcome: the usual deadline is around noon on Tuesdays.