



‘Bavey’s’ Finest Hour

by Ian Whittaker



Middlesex Cup, quarter final, just picture the scene,
The might of Richmond drawn-up ‘gainst our team,
Jim Thorne and Alf Shortland their four-square props,
Mattey and Slagter their towering locks,
Rick Naish, the skipper at No. eight,
Bucknall picked at seven, an English great,
John Fenton at six, no Grasshopper back then,
the centres were their sevens stars, Yeomans and Vyvyan.
What to give for our chances away at their ground?
Though fair dues, we’d played well in all previous rounds
and ‘Cookie’ our coach, who knew of these things
had driven us hard to ensure we had sting
with fitness to last and real pace on the wing.

Gary Fryer at full back, our own ‘JPR’,
as brave as they come and more solid by far!
Wings ‘Wiggie’ (Mike Wildridge), George Orish, young colt,
‘Wiggie’ abrasive, George young thunderbolt!
The centres were ‘Cookie’, a hard-northern lad,
who’d seen it and done it and copped it real bad,
with nose double-jointed from league tackles high,
one copped at Doncaster still brought tears to his eye,
and ‘Foxye’ our kicker and tackler dreadnought
was later the one who their talent scout sought.
The halfbacks were ‘Welchie’ of audacious wit,
and Birtles of course, the Welsh ‘wizard’, is it?
‘Whit’, Ali and ‘Millsie’ a compact back row,
Locks O’Neil and Clements, fierce bearded both,

'Hornie' the hooker, as hard as old tacks,
A scrapper by nature and hard to hold back,
with 'Squasher' at loose head, big, mobile fast-running
and, at tight head. 'Bavey' in there for his cunning!

So how to get up for this hardest of games?
A team talk to inspire all of these famous names?
As captain, I knew that they would need a lift
for Richmond, I knew, were unlikely to gift
us the game, nor to take us too lightly,
for they knew of our side's reputation quite rightly
earned as a strong, uncompromising team,
with backs full of running and forwards so mean.
I knew for sure that we'd be up against it
so racked my brain and eventually hit
on a way to show that though Richmond were able,
we could face them and match them and so turn the tables.
In days of yore (it was 1415)
when a former and even more famed England team
were up against it, knew battle fierce must be fought
against vaunted opponents at Agincourt!

And thus decided at Richmond, in dressing room,
the usual nervous banter started (as it does) and pretty soon
on 'Bavey's face that worried frown was seen,
when Ali mentioned "Alfie's looking mean".
Call for scissors or knife would clearly ring,
"No scissors (the reply), but a sharp piece of string!",
and requests for items required on the pitch,
no tie-ups, but a picture of a ham sandwich
And 'Bavey' with face set even more gravely
remembering Bob Chapman's sister in the navy
who smoked Woodbines! I called on them "desist, be quiet, stop!",
and when there was hush so quiet you could hear if pin should drop.

*"Today is called the feast of Crispin Crispian:
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
shall yearly on the vigil feast his neighbour
and stand a tip-toe when the day is named..."*

I had them now transfixed, stood tall, each muscle straining every inch,
to lay their bodies on the line I knew they would not flinch,
although I must confess, at first, 'Big Jim' looked somewhat less impressed,
I persevered, well I would, at least, have all the rest,
And Jim would get there anyway, he wouldn't stop,
he'd be in thick of fray with all the rest, unless he had to drop
on the ball! Surprising that, for though well-seasoned
since he had come back from New Zealand
though fierce, and mean, and tough and tall
we'd yet to see him drop on ball,
though at forefront when trouble's brewing,
some nasty antipodean shoeing
had put him off, made him less keen
to drop on ball, reluctant he did seem!

But 'Bavey', he was all agog, eyes glazed, with nostril flared,
like greyhound straining in the slip, teeth bared

*"...strip his sleeve and show his scars and say
'these wounds I got on Crispin's day.'
Young men grow old, old men forget,
but all will be remembered (with advantages)
and ye shall ne'er forget the feats you do this day!"*

Pity poor Alfie, he'd be expecting 'Squasher' running,
not 'Bavey' fired-up, grim faced and cunning!

We took the field to mighty roar (we'd attracted quite a crowd)
with Grasshoppers round the ground all cheering loud.
Our pack began to get on top
and (with ball won) 'Bavey' the scrum did drop,
much to Alfie's constantly-voiced vexation,
and (from the flank) my steadfast assert(at)ion
that 'Bavey' was really giving him a torrid time.
Well anyway, he put his body on the line!
And when eventually (as we knew he would), 'Bavey' received a smack,
'Foxye' kicked the goal that set us on our track.

Their towering locks at lineout we did negate
and as we went from strength-to-strength, they lost their shape.
a punch inside that landed on my jaw
I grabbed and held onto the offending paw
and as the maul broke up and we were left alone
I found I had locked on to No. 5 (Slagter), big (six foot six), rawboned
and quickly grabbed his shirt and knotted it about
his head so if I should give him a clout, he wouldn't know who'd knocked him out!
The crowd they bayed for blood, " 'it 'im, Whit" they said,
and I was poised with fist above his head,
but, for bashing locks before, I'd been sent off
(and as the ref by then had come across)
I let him off, assumed the moral high ground
and as his team mates, from his head, his shirt unwound,
his skipper came across and told him off.
And 'Welchie' sidled up and said "Good job for you, you didn't make Whit cross!"
and Slagter said to Welch "Fuck Off!"

Then George was taken out, bounced right across the advertising board,
a dangerous tackle that earned another penalty award,
and 'Foxye' kicked the goal to put us 6-0 up,
and we began to think we'd win the cup.
But then we received a tragic double blow,
a double whammy Barry Cook and Clements both laid low
and 'Cookie', clearly in much pain, writhing about,
said "I've broke my leg, I knew I would, I left it out
so if he stepped inside I'd still get him.
and now the bastard's gone and broke my shin!"
And Clements? Well, he'd broken his shin as well
or so said Dr Naish as sure as he could tell!
Of course, we had replacements on the side,
Roskilly for the pack, Lee Wilton on for Cook out wide,

with 'Squasher' moving back to lock (a rib he'd popped)
and 'Roscoe' taking over loose head prop.

But slowly they began to turn the tide,
with solid drives up front and pace outside,
and, when 'Squasher' had his clearing kick charged down,
their winger grabbed the ball and ran around.
It clearly was no try, but touch in goal,
but, seems that their touch judge had sold his soul
and as he steadfastly his flag held down,
the seeds of doubt crept in, the first were sown.

But 'Bavey' was having the very best of games
for Alfie had gone quiet, he had been tamed
and when, once more, the scrum was dropped
Rick Naish had stern words with his prop
"If he does that again, give him a clout".
"Don't be stupid, skip, just leave it out,
I can't hit 'im again, don't be absurd,
for the ref's already had a word.
If you want him done, you send one through,
I won't do your dirty work for you"

But, perhaps because the ref these words had heard
and, perhaps, because the Richmond crowd gave him the bird,
at last, at scrums, more closely he did watch,
trying to gauge which of the props were the more guilty of the drops
and though, this time, clearly, Jim Thorne, was to blame,
it was our loose head (Roskilly) that was named
and now that he had penalised us,
we were the ones to curse and cuss,
for it was right beneath our post
they kicked the goal, the game was lost
by single point, just seven - six,
and we limped off, our wounds to lick,
knowing that we had come so close,
but that we'd failed at final post,
unlike that team at Agincourt
who'd won the battle that they'd fought.

Still, one man, from those in our team
had had the game of which he'd dream,
not in the side for skill at running
but worth his place for his low cunning.
He had locked horns with famous prop
And overall come out on top,
taken Alfie on in thick of fray
and had by far his finest day.
With cunning negated Shortland's power,
This was in truth 'Bavey's' finest hour!

Ian Whittaker – 1st February, 2000

'Fortis in Animo'

