



And Now They Call Him ‘Doris’

by Ian Whittaker



“Big Dave” they called him when he came.
The club would never be the same...
again. He came in ‘66 or so,
a judo mate of Dick Briscoe,
reputedly of seventh “Dan,”
an even-tempered, pleasant, cheerful man
who’d fix you with a baleful look,
or grip you with his baling hook,
his bucket hand, the fingers bunches of bananas
with grip so strong that all along we knew that
(if he chose to) he could harm us.
Big Dave the Mean, Dave Delderfield,
a fearsome sod who would not yield
to pressure applied by opposition prop.
Who’d dog it out and never drop...
the scrum, unless he chose to!

We tried him first in the back row -
Well, the way he talked himself up so
convinced us all of his ability,
of clever brain and fast mobility,
of distribution and control
bestriding games all at a stroll,
with passes never given late.
Yes, he played first at Number 8
to lock the scrum, because he chose to!

But soon the writing was on the wall,
though he played hard and gave his all.

He became a danger to his team,
and Number 8 did not quite seem...
the best place for him. And Blod,
our skipper, wond'ring where to put the sod,
because of late our Number 8,
when breaking from the lineout,
had nearly caused our skip to take some timeout...
at West Mid! Put him at prop!
Well, though a Number 8 he clear was not,
he knew that he could hardly prop.
A man of such physique, such fearsome presence...
Put him at prop - a lifelong sentence,
and after short deliberation, Blod chose to!

And at prop Dave found his true vocation.
Loose head he found his favoured station.
But when Pete Hobson back from Richmond came,
Dave made the switch of sides and gained more fame,
as fearsome tight head in a fine front five.
Bob Taylor, flanked by these on either side,
And behind these three short and burly fore-men,
two tall and burly Castle Ballroom doormen.
A second row of Wally and "Big Jim,"
both big strong lads and stout, no longer slim.
Or, when Wally couldn't play, fucked up by three-day week,
into this famous five, our Number 8,
Phil Ive, would step into the breach,
but only when Phil chose to!

A fine cup run we had during that season.
St. Mary's Hospital (a famous side) we drew,
and knew there was no reason why they should not be beaten.
And so it proved - a good stuffing we gave them!
Our pack never moved, and after, when they told us how....
they had not heard of us before, they knew us now...
all right. And so the next round...
against Paulines at the Thames Ditton ground,
with famous lock, brother of Peter Stagg.
At 6'10" or more, he had the lineouts in the bag.
But our front five, at scrums they were on top,
and Dave so hurt his opposition prop
that he felt lucky still to be alive,
worked over by our "short and fat" front five!
But Dave had left him still alive - because he chose to!

And remember how when Dave, recalled to save the day, propped against Slough.
On muddy pitch and at full stretch, remember how
in second half, he pulled a muscle in his calf

and had to go for an early bath,
and claimed he had been shot!
“You’ve pulled a muscle!” “No, I’ve not,”
and as he fell onto his knees
said “stop the game, they’re in the trees!”
Or when we had played London Welsh,
and beat them, too, it was Dave, who else?
Who, after drinking in the bar
too many whiskies - too many, by far,
and dozing off in Rising Sun,
arose to take the whole pub on,
and had to be restrained - because,
to restrain himself, he chose not to!

And when to Crowborough we came on Easter Tour,
the home side turned up short and were not sure
if they could raise a team. And when it seemed...
that this was like to mean the match might founder.
Our founder members all agreed
to lend them men to fill their need.
Such friendly cooperation was the order of the day,
and with these extra men they could still play.
A prop required - we lent Bert Visor,
but Bert was a back row, - ended the game much wiser.
He soon discovered what a hard position prop is
when up against the mean and ruthless Doris.
But Doris, Bert he hurt only a little...
because to hurt him more, he chose not to!

“Doris.” So how did he come by this strange nickname?
He won’t want me to tell - I’ll do it all the same.
We’d struggled for a bit, a dodgy bout...
of games, and Dave picked up an injury, dropped out,
unusual for him you understand?
Somehow he’d hurt his bucket hand,
and when we travelled up to play Letchworth,
a former first team prop came in and proved his worth;
and Jimmy Keohane, that veteran scrum half,
with twinkling skills on pitch and sparkling Irish wit to make you laugh
And after, sitting in the bath, reflecting on the day,
I decided there and then that the whole team would have to stay...
the same. Well, our next game would be the last that season,
so there really didn’t seem to be a valid reason
to make changes. But Dave you know was not best pleased.
Abused me on the phone, declared he’d leave
the club and go and play with his police mates
at Roxeth Manor. And while in this emotional state,
demanded to know what I’d been thinking of.

“Well, Dave, it’s like this, see. You’re not on the side because though we lost 18-17, I didn’t choose to change the team.” This was not what he wanted to hear, down slammed the phone and it was clear... to play for us - he’d chosen not to!

Well, as I’m sure you know, we’d heard this all before. We played our final game without Dave at the core... and it went well enough, we’d won and after, drinking in the Dysart in the sun, “Big Dave” with sheepish look returned, and we all wondered if he felt he’d earned more respect or less by flouncing like a tart Because he felt we had not valued in full part the part he’d played. And as he sauntered over to our table, the banter flowing as it does and us unable to keep straight face, each knowing what the other side was thinking, the knowing looks, the nudges and the winking, Jimmy Keohane, of twinkling Irish wit, (before “Big Dave” could think of what to say or utter it) broke the ice, the strain, the moment and the tension, by mentioning that which others were too coy to mention. He’d thought it out. “Big Dave” (for flouncing like a tart) with new name should be blessed . And loud enough for Dave to hear, as others held their breath, said “Oh look, here she comes, ‘Big Doris’ of Roxeth!” Great shout of laughter, a loud and merry din, and Dave? Well, he laughed too, he took it on the chin. And as we all dissolved to laughter, we knew from then until thereafter, Indeed, from that day until this, “Big Dave”’s been known as “Big Doris,” because to name him this - JIM chose to!

Ian Whittaker - April 1999

‘Fortis in Animo’