THE CLIVE SULLIVAN STORY

TRUE PROFESSIONAL

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Contents

A World Cup

THE Stade de Gerland in Lyon, France, was not the most obvious choice for the Rugby League World Cup Final. Even in 1972, when the French were much more of a force in the international game than in 2017, Lyon was a long way from the game's heartlands in the south of the country.

When Great Britain and Australia emerged into the vast stadium, led by captains Clive Sullivan and Graeme Langlands respectively, they were met with nearly empty stands. The official attendance was said to be 4,000, leaving large pockets of concrete stand exposed in a venue capable of holding over 40,000. Aside from the location, the French had also had a largely disappointing tournament, dampening what little interest might have remained. Even the chill of this mid-November afternoon was unappealing, making the grey of the terraces appear even bleaker on BBC's television coverage.

The crowd present made so little noise in the opening quarter that the broadcast's only atmosphere was provided by players talking to one another and the referee, whose shrill whistle echoed around the stadium.

Intensity, though lacking in the stands, found its home on the field. The tournament only featured four teams – Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and France – in a round-robin format, after which the top two would face off in the final. Britain and Australia had been, by far, the best of the tournament; Britain had gone undefeated, winning their first game against the Australians 27-21 in the much more welcoming city of Perpignan, located on the south coast.

Perpignan's Stade Gilbert Brutus only had around 7,000 in attendance, but this almost filled the stadium, creating a boisterous atmosphere as the French spectators got behind the British underdog.

Australia were the tournament's clear favourites. They had won the World Cup in 1970 in the UK (Rugby League World Cups have not always had the most regular of schedules). Their triumph came in a brutal final at Headingley 12-7, during which Australia's scrum half Billy Smith and Britain's centre Syd Hynes were both sent off for fighting; the image of the pair consoling one another as they left the field is etched into rugby league memory.

The final whistle brought more carnage as British winger John Atkinson punched Australian full back Eric Simms, resulting in a mass brawl broadcast live on afternoon British TV. The scuffle led to a local councillor describing the sport as 'degenerating into street corner brawls', due to the 'crude violence and lack of sporting content'.

The 1972 British team had only one player left over from the previous tournament. Oddly enough, it was Atkinson. This was partly due to a slate wiped clean by coach Jim Challinor, but many key players were missing due to a variety of circumstances. Castleford enforcer Mal Reilly, the loose forward, had left the British game to carve a fearsome legacy for Manly in Australia, making him ineligible for British selection. The sensational Mick Shoebottom, nicknamed 'the Lionheart' due to his commitment, was also ruled out.

After playing at stand off in the 1970 final, Shoebottom was nearly killed by a stray boot from Salford's Colin Dixon at Leeds in 1971. Paralysed for a period, he eventually recovered sufficiently to be able to walk, but rugby was out of the question. Roger Millward, in superb form for Hull KR and expected to be Britain's main playmaker, suffered a variety of unfortunate injuries and thus was ruled out.

The Australians themselves were not the same team as seen two years previously. They had been through an overhaul with only a few key players still involved. The mercurial Bob Fulton, born in Warrington but raised Down Under, remained along with John O'Neil, the huge South Sydney prop, and teak-tough loose forward Gary Sullivan.

New to the Aussie class of '72 was the infamous Arthur 'Artie' Beetson, an icon of the Aboriginal community. He was a strapping back-rower renowned for a combative attitude both on and off the field, which

led to numerous bust-ups, sendings-off and the love of the rugby league public in Australia. He had been involved with the national team since the 1960s, but for '72 he was set to be a key player.

Despite the lack of continuity between the two squads, the rivalry between the British and Australia had not subsided. Both sets of players had a great deal of mutual respect for each other, highlighted when they shared beers moments after the 'crude violence' of the 1970 final. But, the British/Australian rivalry never truly dies regardless of the sport, be it rugby union, rugby league or cricket.

Both classes of '72 were eager for the first meeting. The two teams had scoped each other out around Perpignan in the lead-up to the first meeting, the British noticing the huge size of the Aussie team in the outside backs alone, with the forwards even bigger. According to the British players, they were riled even further because they felt the Australians also carried themselves with an air of superiority and arrogance.

Finally, the two sides met. The match in Perpignan featured some brilliant running rugby; Fulton bagged a hat-trick in a losing effort. John Atkinson, Phil Lowe, Dennis O'Neil, Mike Stephenson all scored. But the best try went to captain Sullivan. Steve Nash, at scrum half, collected the ball inside his own ten-metre line after a scrum, raced to the halfway mark, and fed full back Paul Charlton in support. Charlton passed to centre Chris Hesketh in space, who sent a looping ball out to winger Sullivan, who showed blistering pace to go over untouched from 20 metres out.

Sullivan had been something of a surprise pick to captain the side. Despite being on the international scene since 1967, he didn't make the cut for the 1970 World Cup team with Leeds's Alan Smith picked instead of him. Still, Sullivan showed an obsessive will to win, a consistently excellent try-scoring ability, and a strength few could match either physically and mentally.

Competitive while remaining disciplined on the field, Sullivan was ready and willing to produce crunching tackles and do the dirty work of carting the ball upfield, often resembling an extra forward rather than a fleet-footed winger. Yet he was also capable of producing a sudden burst of pace, a piece of magic that an opposing side could never anticipate. He had the ability to lift the spirit and intensity of his side, and he was always willing to lead by example.

Off the field, he was quiet, even shy, according to those who knew him. A gentleman, he was well-liked and respected by his own fans and teammates at Hull FC and the fans and players of the opposition. That gentle nature fled him as he stepped out on to the park. A ruthlessness came over him that matched even that of the Australians.

He was also a black Briton, the first to skipper a British sports team. England's soccer team would have to wait another 23 years until Paul Ince donned the armband, while the Welsh rugby union team would not even pick a black Briton until 1986 when winger Glenn Webbe was selected. Yet such was Sullivan's standing in the sport that his selection for captain garnered very little comment, either in or out of the rugby league bubble.

While the 1970s had certainly seen some progression in terms of race relations around the world, it was also the decade of sitcoms like *Love Thy Neighbour,* in which a working-class white man comes to terms with having a black neighbour. Even more sinister, the 1970s saw the rise of the neo-fascist National Front, also headquartered in Hull, which exploited racial tensions across the country. Even as a man born and bred in Wales, Sullivan still represented a break in aesthetic from the typical captain.

The mood in the camp was buoyant following the win over Australia in Perpignan. The next challenge was the French, who had beaten New Zealand 20-9 in front of 20,000 fans in Marseille in the tournament's opening game, in the famous Stade Velodrome.

Yet Britain triumphed again, winning 13-4 at Grenoble, Sullivan again scoring to add to two from Hull KR's loose forward Lowe. Lowe was in superb form and his athleticism was drawing envious glances from a number of clubs across the world.

New Zealand, who had only just lost to Australia 9-5, were up next. Britain went on to produce one of the most complete performances in their history, hammering their opponents 53-19. Sullivan scored again, and John Holmes, the young Leeds stand off, got two tries and ten goals in a record-breaking haul. Holmes had taken over goal kicking duties from a rested Terry Clawson, and the stand off berth from Dennis O'Neil. He produced a performance of such youthful vigour that he retained his place against Australia in the final.

The British had gelled wonderfully, both on and off the field. For this, credit is split between Sullivan and coach Challinor, for creating the

kind of environment where Britain, as underdogs, could play carefree, expressive rugby league. Players like Holmes could slot in and express themselves in an era when half backs and scrum halves tended to be much more freewheeling in their play than today's organisers.

This isn't to say that the underdog tag was fully deserved, either. A quick look at the roster shows the team's astounding quality; all 13 players would have long and successful careers, and it was the perfect opportunity to right the wrongs of 1970. The paper talk of the time seems more a reflection of British self-deprecation and lack of confidence in sporting prowess than earned worry.

Going into the final, however, the British Lions had every reason to believe they had one hand on the Paul Barrière Trophy. Their perfect record in the tournament meant that they could win the trophy with a draw. Australia would need to win.

The game was scrappy, dissimilar in aesthetic to the try scoring seen in the meeting a few weeks earlier. Instead, it was a war of attrition. Both sides ripped into each other with an aggression that seeps through the footage. It wasn't just the forwards, either; both sides' flair players mixed it up with brutal tackles and runs.

Eventually, Britain broke the deadlock. Clawson, one of the toughest props of his or any era, was also a superb goal kicker. Referee Georges Jameau penalised Australia for an incorrect feed at the scrum around 20 metres out and to the left of the posts, and Clawson, with his distinctive toe-poking style, slotted the ball over to put his side up 2-0.

The lead would not last. Australian hooker Elwyn Walters fed prop Bob O'Riley, who pivoted and popped the ball up for an on-rushing O'Neil. Making a mockery of his 'Lurch' nickname, O'Neil showed a brilliant turn of pace, and went at the gap between Lowe and Sullivan. Lowe attempted the tackle, textbook around the legs, but O'Neil evaded, and the falling Lowe prevented Sullivan from attempting the tackle himself.

Loose forward George Nicholas then tried an ankle tap, but it did little to prevent the marauding prop. O'Neil finally crashed over in the corner with full back Charlton having made a futile last-ditch tackle attempt on the line. The score had moved to 3-2 and O'Neil was mobbed by his teammates, while a visibly annoyed Sullivan looked on. Winger Ray Branighan, or 'Braaaaanighan' as commentator Eddie

Waring anointed him, then slotted over the touchline conversion to make it 5-2.

The Aussies were in the ascendancy and looking to land another telling blow with Britain on the ropes. However, the Lions's defence was resolute and it would clearly require a moment of brilliance to prise it open. Unfortunately for the British, their opposition had plenty of players capable of such an act.

Scrum half Dennis Ward launched a high kick down the left flank about 20 metres out. Sullivan and centre Hesketh turned to chase it. However, Aussie full back and captain Langlands was facing the right direction and had read the play superbly, outpacing them. With an outrageous swan dive, he plucked the ball out of the air and scored, winding himself in the process.

The crowd was suddenly alive – standing, clapping, cheering – with the thrill of such a well-worked and exhilarating try and the score stood at 8-2. Or, it should have been. Langlands had just completed what was dubbed 'the greatest try never scored' as the referee Jameau incorrectly ruled him offside.

It was a major turning point but the Australians still hammered the British line. The ball worked its way across the line to O'Riley. Half-tackled by Nicholas, O'Riley attempted to offload the ball. Instead, it slipped forward out of his grasp, and bobbled into the waiting hands of Sullivan on his own 15-metre line.

Sullivan picked up the ball on the run, showing his superb hands, and ran hard, seemingly straight at the Australian players, attempting to quickly regroup. The crowd, already fans of Sullivan and aware of what he could do, rose to their feet.

'Can he go?' asked Waring.

Suddenly, Sullivan sidestepped, smoothly, around opposition winger John Grant. Sullivan did not miss a step, but Grant slipped in his attempt to match the change of direction. Sullivan was now in the clear down the wing.

'I think Sullivan will go … everyone's shouting, go, go, go!' Waring announced, and the crowd began to roar with Sullivan's advance.

Some of the Aussies almost kept up, including O'Neil, as Sullivan ate up the metres. Just as O'Neil bore down upon him, Sullivan pulled away. The sun hung low enough in the winter afternoon for the flashbulbs of

the pitch side photographers to visibly pop as Britain's captain crossed the try line. Then, Sullivan turned to huge prop David Jeanes, who was in support.

Clawson missed the resulting kick so the score remained 5-5 as both sides went in at half-time. The game still had plenty of drama left in it but Sullivan had lit it up with one of the most thrilling, timely, and fondly remembered tries in the history of the British national team.

As it stood, Britain would win the cup, but 40 minutes was a long time to keep the Australians at bay.

While Fulton was seen as the big danger man, the diminutive Ward, the lightest man to ever wear the green and gold of Australia, was not to be underestimated. He received the ball from the play-the-ball, slowed and dummied, and then cut through the British defence, leaving a heap of defenders in his wake. Charlton raced up to meet him, and hit Ward hard, but the ball had already found Beetson, tearing up the inside in support.

Thinking quickly, Stephenson attempted to punch the ball out of Beetson's grasp, but 'Artie' made it under the posts.

The game scoreboard read 10-5 as Branighan kicked the easy conversion. The clock ticked on and it looked as if Britain were set to lose another close final. With seven minutes remaining they were only around 15 metres from the opposition try line and were growing increasingly desperate.

Lowe threw a wild pass out to the right wing, which found air and nothing else, and the ball trolled along the ground. Sullivan scooped it up and quickly sidestepped the onrushing defender. He then straightened up, sidestepping another tackler, and the crowd's excitement grew. A posse of Australians eventually brought him crashing to the turf, but not before he off-loaded the ball.

It found back rower Brian Lockwood, another uncompromising forward of sublime skill. Lockwood ran hard at the defensive line, then pivoted and saw Stephenson running at pace on his inside. Lockwood popped the ball up into the onrushing hooker's hands. Stephenson then went over the line as more flashbulbs popped, though unclear pitch markings led to Stephenson placing the ball further away from the sticks than was needed. Despite this, the ever-confident Clawson still kicked the goal to leave the game 10-10.

After the final whistle an additional 20 minutes was played and if the Lions could keep the scores tied, they would win. Even so, with both sides exhausted after one of the toughest 80 minutes of rugby league ever seen, Great Britain came the closest to winning. Centre Josh Walsh made a break up the field and found Hesketh obstructed. Hesketh kicked the ball forward and gained a penalty around 25 metres out. The kick was a tough one, even for Clawson, so although it had the length, it sailed wide.

Ultimately, with both teams out on their feet and players cramping up, the referee blew his whistle and, with the score at 10-10, the cup belonged to Great Britain once again.

The Australians graciously congratulated the winners, and a few players swapped shirts in the aftermath. The mutual respect that was a major source of the rivalry between the two teams – and indeed, the two countries – remained after 100 minutes of brutal warfare.

Finally, after the weeks in France away from work and family, focused on nothing but the tournament, Sullivan was handed the trophy at pitchside. This was not the choreographed and stage-managed presentation of modern-day sport, yet Sullivan's joy as he shook the hands of the various officials and held the trophy overhead was captured by many cameras, and by the television broadcast as he was lifted by his teammates and carried from the pitch. The meagre support inside the arena applauded the new World Cup winners.

Clive's wife, Rosalyn, was watching the BBC broadcast back in their home in Hull. She could see what becoming a World Cup-winning captain meant to him, a reserved man committed to being the best he could. 'The look on his face when he won the World Cup,' Rosalyn recalls. 'I could tell how happy he was.'

A Proper Introduction

THE 1972 World Cup campaign is a great microcosm of the career of Clive Sullivan, MBE. He acted as a superb captain for a superb team, one of the brightest players of a squad filled with stars. His speed, skill, stamina and support play were top notch. His defensive discipline, reading of a game, ability to motivate and lead by example were displayed in abundance. When it mattered, he ran plays that directly resulted in Great Britain winning their last major international honour in the 13-a-side code.

For rugby league fans in the UK, it was a joyous occasion. The immensely well-liked Sullivan was the perfect talisman for that achievement, a man who united the country over a game prone to intense tribal loyalties.

But, following the signal of the French public, the British public (outside of the code's hotbeds) was rather indifferent upon the team's return. The squad was not met by scores of press members clamouring for interviews, or requests for endorsements and sponsorships. Sullivan – as the photogenic captain, proven try-scorer, and most thrilling player – should have become an overnight sensation. He received an MBE and an appearance on *This Is Your Life*, the Eamon Andrews-fronted 'surprise' television documentary. Unfortunately, the episode appears to be lost, but it still starred Clive on prime time British television.

But the glamour and attention did not last. He returned to Hull and went back to his day job with rugby league for Hull FC squeezed in-between normal life with his young family.

Sullivan still had many good years left in rugby league, which was glad to have him. But his stardom did not ascend to the heights it deserved following one of his and British sport's most defining moments.

The indifference of the media and the general public morphed over years into forgetfulness. Sullivan is still revered in Hull and respected across the whole rugby league community, but saying his name to most of the general public does not generate the flickers of recognition that the likes of Bobby Moore, Ian Botham, Henry Cooper and Johnny Wilkinson elicit.

As the 1972 World Cup is a microcosm of the career of Clive Sullivan, so, too, is Sullivan's career a microcosm of rugby league as a whole. To this day the sport is still only given national attention begrudgingly. No matter what blend of finesse and toughness the players exhibit, they are acknowledged and respected only fleetingly. Their honours are not deemed prestigious enough to be remembered, as they deserve to be.

Sullivan deserves to be remembered. That generation of rugby league players – still rooted in their local, working-class communities when they played – deserves to be remembered.

He would like to have been remembered as a great, committed rugby league player and an approachable, friendly father and husband off the field. Yet, regardless of how little he would have welcomed the tag, he should also be remembered as a trailblazer. The black British community recognised his historic and, at the time, unprecedented successful leadership as captain of a British sports team by naming him as one of the 100 Great Black Britons in 2000 following a public poll.

Yet, why Sullivan and his team were and are not given their full due is a complicated and somewhat controversial topic. Some would say it was due to a southern media antipathy for 'The North' and the working communities and their culture, of which rugby league is a key part. Some say that those northern communities are not the best at self-promotion and self-reflection of their achievements. Some claim that it was just that generation of rugby league players' bad luck to be in their primes when other sports – such as cricket, boxing and soccer – also experienced golden periods. Some may say it was due to Sullivan being a Welsh rugby union convert, who deserved to be ignored by union acolytes for his 'crime' of professionalism.

It could be a combination of all of the above, plus hundreds of other variables.

Regardless of exactly why this imbalance exists, this book seeks to readdress the value of such moments. It seeks to place Sullivan, the city of Hull, the north, and rugby league where they deserve to be, back in the public consciousness.

It has not been easy. Many of the generation of players whom played with Clive have either passed away or are not well enough to now speak of their experiences. Clive himself died tragically young, depriving the game of his insight, charisma and experience. The communities that produced these players – and the wives and children that supported them – have, in most cases, fallen away and dispersed, along with the industries that supported them.

Also, rugby league has not always been blessed with the type of amateur and professional statisticians that document other popular sports. This leads to some unavoidable gaps in detail regarding try-scorers, goal-kickers and attendance figures.

Yet the game has always had a resilient, communal spirit, and I am indebted to that spirit. I am indebted to the committed historians who have given countless hours to compiling dusty old newspapers featuring match reports, such as Bill Dalton, Roger Pugh, Tony Collins and Phil Caplan. A special mention should also go to Joe Latus, who wrote a biography of Clive in 1972, entitled *Hard Road to the Top*. Though the biography only features half of Clive's career, it has been an invaluable resource, even WITH Latus's bias as a Hull FC director, having had major involvement with the club throughout Clive's time with the team.

I am indebted to Clive's former teammates who were willing and able to speak to me. And I am most certainly indebted to Clive's family, who supported the project from its earliest stages. Rosalyn Sullivan in particular, as someone who has a unique perspective on the pressures and strains of a rugby league player away from the field, was wonderfully helpful and supportive throughout.

Above all, I am indebted to Clive Sullivan. I just hope the book does him justice. He deserves it.

Setting the Scene

LIKE most rugby league cities, Hull was known for a trade. Castleford, Featherstone, Wakefield and St Helens were pit villages. Leeds and Bradford were mill towns, dealing in textiles. The clutch of towns around Dewsbury and Batley were the 'heavy woollen district'. Warrington was a hub of steel production, specialising in wire, giving Warrington their distinctive nickname, 'The Wire'. In the case of Hull, situated on the east coast of Yorkshire, it was fishing.

It is no great mystery why fishing would rule the economy – the river Hull runs almost down the middle of the city. It leads out towards the Humber Estuary, which in turn runs 25 miles out into the vast, unforgiving North Sea.

All of these tough, physical industries helped to produce townspeople who were robust and rugged enough to play one of the toughest team sports ever played, the 13-a-side code of rugby league football.

The adage 'you could shout down a pit in Featherstone and find a new prop forward for the first team' sounds absurd to those unfamiliar with the game's origin, but the game has for most of its history been played by the working-class residents of the towns where it flourished. These trades, often extremely dangerous but always physically punishing, helped to foster a sense of community, camaraderie and locale. This was reflected in the passionate support given to the local rugby team, and the pride the players had in wearing their team's colours.

Perhaps most importantly for rugby league in its early days, these industries also created a steady income for towns folk to spend on leisure pursuits, not least of which was live sport. Journalist and historian

Anthony Clevane states, 'The industrial revolution had been driven … by the local trinity of home, work and leisure.' Rugby league was the perfect marriage of these, as local teams reflected their place of origin, usually featuring heavily people from the local area, and watched by those of the same.

In Hull's case, that sense of camaraderie, togetherness and community was magnified by the fact that men would be away for weeks at a time at sea or trawling the estuary, while the families left behind would support and protect one another.

This led to a unique and distinct culture which featured heavy amounts of superstition, both from trawlermen and their families. Much of this culture sought to ward off death and danger in a profession in which it was prevalent, but it also helped to further cement the already tight bonds and build a language that is almost impenetrable to outsiders. The obscure traditions of these fishing communities included wearing items of green clothing, avoiding hauling in from the portside (left) of a ship, and not washing any clothes on a sailing day.

To an outsider, the superstitions seem peculiar, and the source of their creation unknowable. But they were strictly adhered to and taken seriously by those whose greatest friend – and indeed, worst enemy – was the sea.

The river, which runs down its centre, was vital for establishing the city, and remains a key part of its identity to this day, even though the fishing industry is now all but non-existent. That industry, with its own unique sensibilities, alongside something of a geographic isolation from the rest of Yorkshire, provided the town with its unique character and uniquely strong passions, not least of which was sport.

The river was also a vital dividing line between two rugby league sides. No other town has sustained and supported two vibrant and successful rugby league clubs for such a prolonged period. Leeds briefly had an all-conquering Hunslet RLFC and a solid Leeds RLFC, but Leeds eventually overtook their city rivals, and the two have never really been on a level playing field since.

The story of both clubs is fascinating, and, like the formation of the code, has been written about extensively elsewhere. However, it is important to understand the history of each of these famous clubs before Clive Sullivan cut his figure into the scene as a raw teenage winger.

Hull FC were formed in 1865. The public-school boys network, playing forms of soccer with modified rules, was the bedrock of the early days of the FC club. Rugby was only adopted formally in 1870. It is worth noting that while FC would go on to have the famous black and white hooped strip, they started out in the cherry and white hallmark of their neighbours and rivals, Hull Kingston Rovers.

It would take 17 more years for Rovers, or KR, to be formed. Formed from slightly more working-class stock, it was apprentice boilermakers who decided to set up a rival club on the iconic Hessle Road of West Hull. Hessle Road was to be key in both teams' history, though it would become synonymous with Hull FC.

Both teams started out playing rugby union until the famous split of the northern union occurred in 1895. In essence, northern teams, which were seeing huge crowds, wished to pay their players – most of whom worked in the pits, factories and trawlers – for giving up their time away from work. This offended the sensibilities of the midlands- and southern-based Rugby Football Union, who whole-heartedly endorsed amateurism in the game. Crucially, many of those advocating the continued need for amateurism, being from more lofty stock with greater personal wealth, did not have to trouble themselves with working for a living.

At a fateful meeting at the George Hotel in Huddersfield on 27 August 1895, 21 clubs resigned from the union and formed the Northern Rugby Football Union, one of which was Hull FC. Hull KR followed in 1897. Rugby league had officially arrived in Hull.

Around this time, the clubs also switched sides of the river, with FC taking up the expired lease on KR's Hull Athletic ground, thus transferring to their long-term home on the west of the city. Likewise, KR moved over to the east side of the city, living nomadically for a time before settling in Craven Park.

The move to rugby league worked out particularly well for Hull FC in the early years. They reached three consecutive cup finals from 1908 to 1910, although they went down all three times in defeat, to Hunslet, Wakefield and Leeds, respectively.

They finally won the cup in 1914 with star signing Billy Batten in the side. Batten's signing highlighted the prosperity and pre-eminence of the Hull FC side as they parted with a record £600 for the British and

Hunslet outside back. Batten was a prolific points-scorer and one of the sports very earliest superstars, capable of playing full back, centre or wing. Newspapers at the time also passed comment on his unusual habit of not drinking or smoking regularly, a rarity at the time for most men, be they athletes or not.

After a dispute over wages with Hunslet, Batten was offered to both of the Hull clubs as well as Huddersfield, Oldham, Wigan and Leeds. Such was the nature of professional sport at the time that he was also attracting interest from soccer teams, with Manchester City offering him £200 a year to switch codes and Manchester United offering £4 per game. Ultimately, Batten picked Hull FC, his wages allegedly rising from around 50 shillings per game to an astronomical £20. It proved a small price to pay for a player of such skill.

A league championship, a Yorkshire Cup triumph and more visits to the Challenge Cup Final followed the signing of Batten, as the team, now in black and white and firmly settled in the Hessle Road community to the west of the city, embraced the new brand of fast-flowing rugby league football.

The present-day RFL is often criticised for its trigger-happy attitude towards trying new concepts and quickly abandoning them. Yet the Northern Union and the Northern Rugby Football League were not hesitant to alter the rules of the game. The code was built upon the idea of entertainment, and by the time Batten was showcasing his skills, the game's rules had long differed from rugby union. The removal of rucks, line-outs and flankers, leading to 13-a-side teams, were all intended to encourage the kind of spectacle Batten and his contemporaries could provide.

Batten eventually moved on to Wakefield for £350 in 1924 after notching 89 tries in 226 games. He was an overwhelming success, and he helped the FC club set their stall out as one of the more exciting sides in this fledgling sport.

Hull KR, entrenched in the east of the city, had also taken wonderfully to the new code, appearing in the 1905 Challenge Cup Final in a losing effort to Warrington. They then picked up championships in 1923 and 1925 as well as a Yorkshire Cup at the start and end of the 1920s. The club, nicknamed 'the Robins' due to their distinctive red and white-hooped shirts, had some wonderful players, particularly in the 1920s,

like stalwart Gilbert Austin. The outside back made 346 appearances for KR and made his debut on the same day as Hull-born Frank Bielby, a rampaging back rower who retains a lasting place in fans' hearts.

Unfortunately for both sides, they then entered something of a barren spell. The 1930s and '40s saw neither pull up any trees as teams from Lancashire and in particular West Yorkshire dominated the Challenge Cup, although FC did pull off another Yorkshire League Championship victory in 1935. The whole of the 1940s saw neither side pick up any silverware, although it goes without saying that the events of the Second World War impacted not only on both Hull teams but organised sport across the board.

This is not to say that the teams during this time period lacked decent players, but, understandably, the disruption and shifting priorities caused by the war made rugby league no more than a fleeting concern. Hull, with its vast civilian fleet, was one of the most heavily-blitzed cities in the country, spending over 1,000 hours under bombardment. By the time the dust cleared, there were 1,200 civilians dead, 3,000 injured, and just under half the population, around 150,000 people, were left homeless. Many of the city's schools, churches, pubs and hospitals were destroyed. Hull could not take much more of war.

While rugby league was not a priority, it found its place as an escape. When the war did come to an end, people were keen to return to some form of normality, and FC could provide something like it: they returned to the finals in 1946, losing 10-0 to Wakefield at Headingley in the final of the Yorkshire Cup. The result was a disappointment, but it marked a return to competing at the sharp end of leagues and cups for an area accustomed to success.

This quest for continued success led to Hull FC signing, for over £1,000, the prolific centre Roy Francis in 1949. This would prove to be crucial both for the continued resurgence of FC and, in the decades to follow, the tactical progression of the 13-a-side code. On the field for FC, he was a classy addition, notching 61 tries in 130 games, but by 1954, after a spell captaining the side, he had more or less retired. He did make six more appearances over the next two seasons, but he focused more on his new role as team coach.

Francis did not seem like the type to bring about a revolution in the sport. He was not an immediate success in the professional code, after

being signed by Wigan in 1936 from Welsh amateurs Brynmawr RUFC after only a handful of appearances in rugby union. He eventually moved on after three patchy seasons to Barrow as the war loomed into view. However, as was the norm during the war years for players, he 'guested' for Dewsbury. His talent truly blossomed under the management of another rugby league visionary, Eddie Waring.

The West Yorkshire side reached three consecutive championship cup finals, winning two, with Francis crossing for a try in all three games. His talent for contributing with scores in the biggest games was further evidenced with two tries in the 1942 Yorkshire Cup Final triumph over Huddersfield, in one of Dewsbury's most successful sides to date.

The story of Roy Francis has many similarities with that of Clive Sullivan, and his own life and career would intertwine with his fellow countryman. Roy overcame the stigma of switching from rugby union, the culture shock of moving from Wales to Yorkshire, and the issues of being a black man in pre- and post-war Britain. Francis and Sullivan also both had spells in the armed forces before making their marks on the game of rugby league and the city of Hull.

As the league teams recovered and regrouped following the war, so did the fishing industry. The city still maintained a major fishing fleet, which saw hundreds of boats coming in and out of the docks, providing if not affluence, at least a regular, secure source of income.

The Hessle Road community and that fishing fleet, already the main foundation of the FC club, helped to produce a further key part of the re-emergence of the team as a major force on the playing field.

In 1930, Reg Whiteley, unsurprisingly a trawlerman by trade, and his wife Clara had a son named Johnny Whiteley. The Hessle Road area, described by historian Alec Gill as 'the spinal cord of Hull's fishing community', was at its zenith at the time. The city had 250 trawlers by the time Whiteley was eight, as Icelandic fishing grounds had also long been added to the original North Sea hunting ground.

The bustling area, with numerous pubs and community shops such as bakeries and butchers, also contained the St. Andrew's fishing dock. The dock also provided work for those not going to sea. Its work, while not quite as perilous as a life at sea, was still tough, demanding work; with ships not spending much more than a day in the dock before heading back out.

'Bobbers', who landed the trawlers, generally began work at 2am, emptying the 'fish rooms' of on average around eight ships.

Jobs such as filleting, cleaning and restocking the vessels had to be done, and done quickly, to prevent any fish caught from spoiling and fish uncaught from being snapped up by rival fleets. This work was done almost round the clock in all weathers, with fillet knives freezing on dockside chopping blocks. When this happened, they froze so solidly that they had to be hammered free.

Once filleted, the fish would be then placed on trains which delivered them all over the country. The railways themselves were the biggest employers of people in the Hull fishing community; such was the size and scale of the operation and the volume of fish being brought ashore and transported up and down the UK. Academic and writer Brian Lavery points out, 'Hull had arguably the biggest fishing fleet on earth. Grimsby could argue but they didn't go as far as Hull.'

Yet as Lavery says, more so than almost any other trade, the whole fishing industry was extremely dangerous, 'Although it was a massive industry and made gigantic profits, it also exploited the men to an alarming degree. It's estimated that 6,000 men died in a century, that's one every week. Can you imagine if you had a factory where someone died every week? You'd have it shut down. They were running essentially a side winder fleet. As it suggests, you ship from the side of the boat. Which is fine in the North Sea. But when you go out into the really bad weather, it's difficult enough to keep your boat stable anyway.

'It was more difficult to fish those areas in those boats. Because of something like the silver cod trophy, which was won by the biggest haul of the year averaged out in the year, it encouraged skippers to take more risks. But skippers did want to come home as well. But there were skippers who'd take risks. As I said in my book, you get old skippers or bold skippers but you don't get old, bold skippers.'

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The Hessle Road area, however, was still cramped and crowded. Whiteley grew up around the destruction of the war, as many of the homes and streets were bombed out and not all were rebuilt quickly. He quickly sought refuge in sport, although at first couldn't settle for

his first choice of rugby league. The last key component of the Hessle Road community was now very much Hull FC's ground, the Boulevard, with its intimidating threepenny stand being home to the hard core supporters who jeered and heckled opposition fans and players. For a young man such as Whiteley, it was not hard to see why rugby league held such a high appeal.

However, Whiteley was forced to play soccer, turning out as a goalkeeper for the Fish Trades team as the Second World War also decimated the area's amateur and junior rugby league set-ups, which were either disbanded or offering irregular fixtures unsuitable for such an energetic and athletic young man as Whiteley.

Come 1946, however, the junior rugby was back up and running, and Whiteley was the stand-out operator of a clutch of brilliant talent for Hull boys clubs, a group of players who had been moulded playing unorganised street rugby, along with football and boxing. Whiteley himself was a proficient young boxer, but Hull boys club policy at the time required him to choose which sport to continue with, and rugby league was still his sporting passion.

Unsurprisingly, after leaving school at 14, Whiteley worked in the fishing trade, as a filleter on the docks, but a career in sport was his only focus. As he himself recalls, 'We had 28,000 people who were involved in the shipping industry in one way or another [in Hull.] All my cousins were skippers. My dad was a fisherman. Everyone around me was a fisherman. All I wanted to do was play rugby. And I fulfilled my destiny; I did what I wanted to do.'

Before he could achieve that, however, he served a spell in the army for his national service commitments, where he did get the opportunity to box a few more times.

That single-mindedness to make it in rugby league remained when he returned to the city. Once demobbed from the army, both Hull FC and Hull KR were after his signature, with Whiteley unsurprisingly choosing his beloved Black and Whites, appearing as a trialist in an 'A' team game against Huddersfield. Such was his evident talent, he signed permanently in December 1950 and made his first-team debut that same month against York.

It was the start of a near 20-year association with FC as he became the heart of a club regaining its confidence and chasing its prior glories.

An able centre, he was most effective out of loose forward, becoming the ultimate exponent of the art of a position, which blended the toughness and physicality of forward play and the creativity of stand off play.

While the role of a loose forward has now evolved in the modern game into that of an extra prop forward and metre maker, in Whiteley's time it fulfilled a different purpose. It was a link between the forwards and half back and stand off, a mixture of brain and brawn. Whiteley was an imposing physical presence and says his attitude to the game was, 'I wasn't a hard hitter; I used to think with my brain to get out of trouble.'

He can still eloquently describe the role as he performed it in Francis's 1950s Hull side. 'First of all, you looked after your scrum half, you got across him and defended him. You cover defended, the ball was played and you'd stick your head up and have a look. Your backs would move in and I would always get across the ball. I'd break; the second row would get behind me. If our winger got the ball, and got beat, then I'd be there to tackle the opposition winger into touch.

'Occasionally I'd pick the ball up to move everyone out one. From the tackle, I'd be first receiver. I had good hands, I was 6ft 2in and 15 and a half stone and I was quick. I used the ball to move people. I was a ball player. And the difference between a ball player and a player who thinks he's a ball player is the former can change his mind. If I say go through that gap and that gap closes, you don't get the ball. If I think I'm a ball player, then you're getting the ball if it closes or not. A ball player has all the time in the world. And if I thought I'd get someone into trouble, I'd absorb the tackle and we'd start again.'

Ultimately, Whiteley would find work as a brewery drayman rather than in the fishing fleets, his strength, fitness and professionalism had an enormous impact on rugby league both locally and nationally. Indeed, aside from his skills and game IQ, what so many spoke of when praising Whiteley was his incredible stamina. He was as fast and strong at 80 minutes as he was in the first. The drayman job may have played a major part in this, involving a serious amount of running and lifting, which supplemented his on-pitch training for FC.

This fitness and commitment to the cause led to him gelling superbly with Francis.

He said, 'I was his blue-eyed boy from day one, because I'd run up mountains. I was already an international when he came [and became

coach.] Roy was a novice when he started. We signed a brand-new side on, really, as Roy came along. Train, train, train. That was my forte.

'I'd train every day. I'd been a PTI in the army, like Roy. He came out with all that knowledge he got in the army. And he'd push you. That was right up my street. We were two of a kind, but he was up 'ere [he held a flat hand above his chest and then lowered it to his thigh] and I was down 'ere. I've never met anyone like Roy Francis in my life. I've met every type of person but not one like Roy Francis. Colin Hutton, who coached Great Britain and a good side [Hull KR], we both together, unanimously, agreed there's never been another Roy Francis.'

Whiteley, who had been capped in 1954 for Great Britain, became captain of FC for the 1956 and '57 seasons as Francis's team really came together. The likes of Workington-born prop forward twins Bill and Jim Drake, talented second row Michael Scott and Welsh hooker Tommy Harris, along with Whiteley, built a fearsome and legendary reputation as a pack of forwards.

Yet, the side had plenty of skill, as full back Peter Bateson, centre Colin Hutton and prolific winger Ivor Watts feasted on the opportunities, the platform that pack created. Whiteley himself, while being a presence in the creation and prevention of tries, also proved prolific in scoring three pointers, the amount then awarded for a try. He never failed to score more than ten tries a season for ten years, his most impressive season being when he crossed for 22 in 1955/56. In total he bagged 156, placing him seventh on the all-time Hull FC try-scorers list. It's a phenomenal total for a forward in the era of muddy, heavy pitches, with an old-fashioned leather ball which would soak up the mud, sweat and water.

Unfortunately, the side didn't quite achieve its full potential, although they still challenged consistently for honours, never falling out of the top ten league placements for eight years.

They also reached nine cup finals in nine years, although only walked away victors in two of them. In 1956, Whiteley's most formidable year, they beat Halifax 10-9 at Maine Road in Manchester, Colin Hutton kicking a last-minute penalty to secure the league championship. Whiteley himself was praised for an all-action, disruptive performance against a quality Halifax team.

After losing a year later final against Oldham, they bounced back to win it in 1958. It was a complete performance against Workington

with a 20-3 triumph. According to newspaper reports from the time, the writer's name unfortunately lost, the rugby and manner of victory was highly praised. 'The open-style, classical handling, which Roy Francis brought to the Boulevard, was too much for the bewildered Workington, whose vaunted defence crumbled gradually,' it was written.

Unsurprisingly, Francis was beginning to be linked with moves away from the team, with lucrative offers allegedly coming from the likes of Halifax and even Hull KR. He remained, however, and came close to adding more trophies to the cabinet.

The Challenge Cup, the Holy Grail for every rugby league player, was to elude them all, however. It was let slip as they lost consecutive finals in 1959 and 1960. First came Wigan, in a game they underperformed in, crashing to a 30-13 loss. The following year, a team badly ravaged by injury lost out 38-5 to Wakefield.

The 1959 season also saw the emergence of a rival to Bateson's full back spot in 20-year-old Arthur Keegan. Keegan was signed out of West Yorkshire's amateur rugby scene, originally hailing from Dewsbury, and would constantly compete with Bateson for the key position, as one would have a run of games before being replaced by his rival. Keegan was to provide a valuable link from the 1950s era into the '60s.

It's worth pointing out that during this era, the 'coach' did predominantly that, he coached the players on the training field, while a board of directors or the chairman would make final decisions on selection. Francis's innovative, professional fitness regimes and intelligent teasing out of a player's best qualities was well suited to this method to a certain extent. But, reading back over first-hand accounts of the period, there was clearly a degree of tension between Francis and the board, headed by Ernest Hardaker.

Fans of the period, as in modern-day sports, often held the coach accountable for all the losses and bad performances, rather than the board that would ultimately decide the 13 who would take to the field. This dynamic would prove to be difficult for the forward-thinking Francis as the seasons marched on and create serious issues for his eventual successor as the club and the city entered the 1960s.

While that glorious side of the '50s were growing old together, new players were recruited. One of the most exotic was a Tongan centre named Nan Halafihi, who would make his debut late in the 1959 season.

The club also signed a young stand off, locally born and bred Terry Devonshire. Devonshire would go on to play centre to Clive Sullivan, and the pair became firm friends off the field, Devonshire acting as Sullivan's best man. Devonshire's signing heralded the start of a new crop of young players making their way into the professional game who would go on to play major roles in the 1960s Hull FC side.

'I started playing rugby at school,' Devonshire, still lively and witty in older age, recalls. 'Then [I] played at Craven Street Youth Club. We won everything. Hull got in touch, when I was 17, asked me to go training with them. Craven Street had a cup final, before Hull vs Wigan [played at the Boulevard.] We got beat, 10-9. They kicked five goals and I got three tries. We were all sat at the side [afterwards] and Roy Francis came round and said, "Which one is Terry Devonshire?" He said, "See me after the match."'

Devonshire signed, and, in the first season of the new decade, David Doyle-Davidson, another player who would have a long association with the club, also joined as a junior. But the player who was to have one of the biggest impacts on both sides in Hull did not come from the most obvious of sources.