

ST HELENS RLFC

MATCH

OF MY LIFE

DAVID KUZIO



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KEITH MASON



Keith Mason

PROP FORWARD 2003–05

HERITAGE NUMBER 1128

BORN: 20 January 1982, Dewsbury

SIGNED: 30 May 2003 from Melbourne Storm

DEBUT: 6 June 2003 vs Wigan Warriors

LAST GAME: 17 September 2005 vs Bradford Bulls

ST HELENS CAREER: 63 appearances (including 25 as a substitute), 4 tries

HONOURS: Challenge Cup 2004, League Leaders' Shield 2005

LEFT: 2005 to join Castleford Tigers

PLAYING CAREER: Wakefield Trinity Wildcats (2000–01), Melbourne Storm (2002–03), St Helens (2003–05), Castleford Tigers (2006), Huddersfield Giants (2006–12), Castleford Tigers (2013)

Keith Mason joined St Helens from Melbourne Storm in May 2003. He made his debut in the red V in a 34-38 home defeat to fierce rivals Wigan Warriors a week later.

The former Dewsbury Moor amateur player was part of the Wakefield Academy before graduating to the first team. His performances for Trinity soon caught the eye of NRL teams and he joined the Melbourne Storm in order to further his career.

St Helens: Match of My Life

Mason left England at the age of 20 to join the Storm and he played four times for them in the NRL; he has since admitted he left a boy and came back a man and he will always be grateful for the time spent in Australia.

During his time at St Helens he scored four tries, but he will be best remembered for his performance in the 2004 Challenge Cup Final against Wigan. Sean Long might have won the Lance Todd Trophy as man of the match, but Mason must have pushed him close with his direct running and strong defence.

A number of injuries curtailed his 2005 campaign and he struggled to hold down a first-team place. He left the Saints and had spells at Castleford Tigers and Huddersfield Giants before calling it a day. Following his retirement, Mason turned his hand to acting and script writing. He has written the first ever comic on rugby league and has plans to spread the name of the sport worldwide.

St Helens 32-16 Wigan Warriors

Challenge Cup Final
Saturday, 15 May 2004
Millennium Stadium, Cardiff
Attendance 73,734

Teams

St Helens

Paul Wellens
Ade Gardner
Martin Gleeson
Willie Talau
Darren Albert
Jason Hooper
Sean Long
Nick Fozzard
Keiron Cunningham
Keith Mason
Chris Joynt
Lee Gilmour
Paul Sculthorpe

Subs

Dominic Feaunati
Jon Wilkin
Ricky Bibey
Mark Edmondson

Coaches

Ian Millward

Tries

Gilmour
Talau (2)
Wellens
Sculthorpe

Goals

Long (6)

Wigan Warriors

Kris Radlinski
David Hodgson
Sean O'Loughlin
Kevin Brown
Brett Dallas
Danny Orr
Adrian Lam
Quentin Pongia
Terry Newton
Craig Smith
Danny Tickle
Gareth Hock
Andy Farrell

Stephen Wild
Mick Cassidy
Danny Sculthorpe
Terry O'Connor

Mike Gregory

Newton
Dallas (2)

Farrell (2)

Referee: Karl Kirkpatrick

The 2004 Challenge Cup Final was the 103rd time this famous final had been held and it marked the sixth time these clubs were the last two going up against each other.

Before this game kicked off, St Helens had recorded victories over Wigan in 1961 and 1966, while Wigan had beaten the Saints in 1989, 1991 and 2002. After the 80 minutes had been played, the record was now 3-3 and at the time of writing, they have not faced each other in a Challenge Cup Final since.

The Saints were unstoppable during the 2004 Challenge Cup campaign. They started their road to Wembley with a trip to Bradford Bulls in the fourth round and dispatched the cup holders with a convincing 30-10 win at Odsal. In the next round, they played at home against Leeds Rhinos and they advanced to the quarter-finals with a 24-14 success, where they then edged past Hull FC 31-26 to set up a semi-final clash with Huddersfield Giants.

St Helens were unplayable that day and ran out 46-6 winners, then found out they were going to face fierce rivals Wigan in Cardiff as the Warriors had defeated Warrington Wolves 30-18 at Widnes.

Keith Mason admitted that the team he played for in 2004 were a special bunch of players, and they proved that by beating four quality sides on the way to the Challenge Cup Final. On the day in Cardiff, St Helens were too strong for the Warriors and they outscored them five tries to two in a 32-16 victory. Mason revealed it was a boyhood dream to play in a Challenge Cup Final and says he will never

forget his time with St Helens, while he goes into detail about his friendship with movie star Mickey Rourke, and the amazing plans he has for the future, which could provide much needed publicity for the sport of rugby league.

I signed for Saints in 2003 from Melbourne Storm. when I came over, I think there had already been 11 or so games in the league and my debut game was on a Friday against Wigan. It was quite a tense game to be thrown straight into, but I loved my time at St Helens, it was just brilliant. We had a bit of success there as well, winning the Challenge Cup Final against Wigan.

That final against Wigan, I would have to say that is one of the best games I have played in during my whole career. Not just for the game itself, but the way we actually reached the final was kind of special too. We had to play pretty much all the form teams in the country before even getting to the final, which is pretty unheard of when you are playing in a competition like the Challenge Cup. You tend to get one or two easier rounds before going up against the big boys.

We played against Bradford Bulls first off and were pretty much written off in that one, with them being the Challenge Cup holders and reigning Super League champions; then we played Leeds Rhinos before having to face off against Hull in the quarter-finals. Then we played Huddersfield Giants in the semi-finals, Huddersfield were playing well that year. Ultimately, we

made it to the final against Wigan, in what is probably the biggest derby in rugby league.

That was a really special moment for us as a team. To just get to that final, considering the route we were handed and how hard it was to get there, that is a special achievement. We finally got there in front of a full crowd at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff and to win it was a boyhood dream of mine come true. The game was in Cardiff because Wembley was being rebuilt, but that didn't take the gloss off it.

I remember the week leading up to the final, I mean obviously the team we had back then was amazing. We had Sean Long at half-back and Jason Hooper had an outstanding season, then we had Darren Albert on the wing and Willie Talau in the centre, also don't forget we had Paul Wellens at full-back.

Then in the forwards we had me, Nick Fozzard, Keiron Cunningham, Chris Joynt, Lee Gilmour, Paul Sculthorpe and the likes of Mark Edmondson coming through as well. I was a young kid; I was only 22 years of age. We went down a few days before, on Wednesday or Thursday, and stayed near Cardiff. We were so relaxed and I just felt so confident and for a young man playing at prop in such a fantastic team, although I was about to play in a massive final, I never really felt any pressure.

It was like a dream come true for me to just get to the final, all the hard work I had put in as a kid, who wasn't really supposed to make it, flying to Australia

and then St Helens coming in for me. Basically, it was a dream come true for me to go to the NRL at first and play with Melbourne and then it was another dream come true to play for St Helens in such a talented team.

The good thing about St Helens is that we enjoyed each other's company and we enjoyed the football. It's probably the most I've enjoyed my rugby league, to be fair, in my whole career and that was really down to the talent in the team and how good we were.

On the day of the game it felt so relaxed, we were all just chilled out and ready to go. We went to the stadium the day before. It's an unbelievable stadium, we went in and it was empty obviously, but the next day when we walked out it was packed full of people and it was just amazing. To actually play Wigan in a final like that and go on to beat them was brilliant, but coming out of that tunnel knowing my family, my mum and people who loved me were up in the stands watching me – I felt proud. Not many people go on to win Challenge Cup Finals, so I felt very privileged.

When I was out there playing, I just had a feeling at the beginning of the game that I'd done all the hard work and I was ready and I was fit and I was going to get over my opposite number, which was Quentin Pongia and Craig Smith. I think I did my job. To be honest with you in a game like that it feels like everything is in slow motion. There may have been 80,000 people watching the game in the stadium, but it's a weird feeling, a lot of

players will tell you, you are so locked in the game you forget everything around you. The atmosphere was just amazing and we topped it off by winning it.

I remember I made a break early in the first half, I gave an offload to Keiron Cunningham, but Ian Millward took me off in the first half and then brought me back on again. When I came back on, I can remember the ball going through a few pairs of hands. It went through Jason Hooper's hands, Scully, Willie Talau, Lee Gilmour and then Scully back to me again. Wigan captain Andy Farrell came across to take me out and I just tipped it on to Wello [Paul Wellens] to put him under the posts. I think that try was a killer blow to Wigan, I think they were ten points down then or a try down, something like that, but that made it two or three tries ahead and we were in control just before half-time. That really hurt them and set us on course to lift the trophy.

I really enjoyed the final – it was fantastic, just amazing to be part of something like the Challenge Cup Final. I believe I contributed well in the game. I think overall I came third in the ratings for the man of the match – the Lance Todd Trophy. I think Longy [Sean Long] won it that year and Willie Talau was second. It was just fantastic; I remember the final hooter going at the end and Sean Long coming over to me and jumping in my arms. It's something I will never forget, I'm very grateful and blessed to have gone and won a final of

that magnitude against a world class team in Wigan. Actually, it was two world-class teams going at it that day and I think we were just that little bit more clinical than they were.

That game gave me a lot of confidence for the rest of my life; it has made me go out on a limb. If there is an opportunity, I just go out there and grab it with both hands and that's what we did as a team that day. We all had parts to play in that game and we all did our jobs very well. We stuck by each other and we got the win; it wasn't an easy Challenge Cup Final. I can remember going and picking up the trophy. I was stood near to Keiron Cunningham and when I lifted that trophy, it was just a surreal moment. It was such an amazing day. We came back for a homecoming and some of the players were more than worse for wear. The coach trip on the way back was probably more memorable than the game itself and that's saying something, you know. But they are memories that will last forever in my mind. I'm still good friends with a lot of the guys from that team and I always will be.

I really enjoyed my time at St Helens. I signed in 2003 as a young prop at 21 years old. I went to Australia as a boy and I came back a man. I really enjoyed my time with Melbourne, but I loved it at St Helens. Knowsley Road was one of the best stadiums I've ever played in and ever will; unfortunately it's gone now but I was glad I was there at that time and in that era. I feel very

grateful to have won something with St Helens and to have carved my name into history.

I honestly loved my time at St Helens. I would like to have stayed a lot longer but a new coach came in and I wasn't part of his plans, but that was never going to derail my career. I went on to have seven good years at Huddersfield, and I finished off at Castleford Tigers and I got to play for my country as well.

I'd never been involved in a derby game as such before I signed for St Helens. I came back from Australia and landed on the Saturday before going to watch Saints versus Warrington on the Sunday. You've got to remember at this time in 2003 St Helens had a great team; Darren Britt was starting at prop, Scully had won the Man of Steel twice and Keiron Cunningham was coming back from his injury. Coach Ian Millward just decided to put me straight in. They were struggling with front-rowers and he offered me a deal and I came back for three and a half years.

We were playing Wigan and I obviously knew the rivalry the two had with each other, but I suppose I didn't really know the magnitude of the rivalry. I knew it was a derby and to be honest I didn't have too much time to think about it before my debut. The boys were saying before the game, 'It's a massive match, Keith, and you are going to really enjoy it.' That night, there must have been over 20,000 people at Knowsley Road and it was a red-hot evening and I thought, 'This is brilliant,

wow this is fantastic, I've never played in front of a crowd like this before.' It was good to just get thrown in the deep end really as they say. I've played in some cracking derbies against Wigan and I'm actually going to go out and say it is the biggest derby in rugby league. I believe I can say that because I played in it.

During my career, I was lucky enough to play in three Challenge Cup Finals. In 2009 I made the final with Huddersfield Giants and we had a really good year that year. I think I got player of the year and the club's Man of Steel award at their annual dinner, so it was a good year personally.

Going ahead to my relationship with Mickey Rourke, this happened while I was at Huddersfield. We had played Warrington in the Challenge Cup Final in 2009. We had a few players who were a little bit inexperienced and we made too many errors. Warrington capitalised on that and they went on to lift the trophy. That game was another actual boyhood dream of mine because it was played at Wembley. A lot of my childhood memories were at Wembley and I remember going there to watch Great Britain in 1994 when Jonathan Davies scored a try to beat Australia, so for me to play on that pitch was fantastic.

We were at the Park Lane Hotel, my mum and my son were there with me. I can remember Shamu being there. Shamu was a friend and he got us an invite to Stringfellows – the strip club in London. Myself, Scott

Moore and a few other players went down to the hotel bar and I can remember Kris Radlinski was there and Danny Orr, there were a few Wigan players there. Mickey Rourke walked past me, this was in 2009 and he had just made *The Wrestler* movie. It was his comeback film, and I saw him and said, 'That's Mickey Rourke.' The rest of the team were like, 'Who?'

Obviously, none of them knew who he was; he was a kind of old-school actor, but to me I was like 'Wow, that's Mickey Rourke, *The Wrestler*.' I asked his bodyguard could I say hello to him, he said 'sure, go ahead'. So, I went up to him and I shook his hand, he was sat down and I had this suit on, the Challenge Cup Final suit. I said 'Hiya Mickey, nice to meet you. I really enjoyed your movie *The Wrestler*, is that like a comeback movie for you of your life?' He looked at me like I was strange, and said 'Yeah, pretty much man. What are you, a gangster, an athlete?' I went 'No, no, I'm a rugby player Mickey, in fact I played today at Wembley.' He then said 'I fucking love rugby, in fact I watched you today at Wembley. Great, listen kid, take my number and let's link up.'

It was so strange, one minute I'm talking to him and the next he's giving me his number. So, to cut a long story short, I got his number and a couple of weeks later, when I was at the awards night at Huddersfield – I'd just won pretty much all the awards that night which I was very grateful for – he sent me a message inviting

me to the GQ Awards and told me to write these details down. Basically, what he did was, he paid for a hotel for me in Knightsbridge to go down there as his guest to the GQ Awards, which was an annual event for all the celebrities. I went down there with Scott Moore and I took my shirt from the Challenge Cup Final and I threw it at him [Rourke] as he came out of the elevator. He had just won the 'Man of the Year' award, Jason Statham had presented it to him. I gave him my shirt, which had 'Mason' on the back. He was there with Guy Ritchie and it was simply crazy.

We just became friends from there; he invited me over to New York to see him and stay at his place. He invited me over to Beverly Hills, it was just a friendship. Something different for me, from my background. It was quite surreal, but he is just a down to earth guy. I think he liked me because I was a sportsman, he had a lot of time for sportsmen, he doesn't really respect actors in that sense. So, I think that's where his boxing background comes into it. Over the years, every time he would come to England I'd go to London and we'd link up. I'd go to TV shows with him, I went to *The Jonathan Ross Show* with him, which I think had David Beckham and Jackie Chan on there.

Then we got together and wrote a script called *The Welshman* which I helped him with; it was going to be about Gareth Thomas, the former rugby player who is gay. Mickey was interested in doing a life story on him.

I was helping with the script, but it never really got off the ground because Mickey wanted to play someone who was 36 years old and obviously Mickey was in his sixties. It was a crazy time; he took a lot of time out for me and I'll always be grateful for that.

I had a highly publicised court case which I ended up winning against Huddersfield. Mickey rang me a week later and said, 'Hey kid, how are you doing?' I said 'Yeah, I'm good, I've just won my case.' He said, 'Listen, I'm in London next week, I'm shooting a film. I'd like, you to play my bodyguard in the film, can you make it? Can you come and do a screen test?' I'm like 'Sure Mickey.' So, I went down to London and ended up doing a film shoot, which ended up being a speaking role. It was a film called *Skin Traffik (A Hitman in London)*; basically, Mickey opened the door for me into the acting world, which I have been pursuing ever since.

He allowed me to have the screen test and I got the part. Since then I have learned to screen-write and I have brought out the first ever rugby league comic in history. This is going to be massive, also I will be doing *Rugby Blood* the film. I am just finishing the script on that, and I'm in talks with Pinewood Studios. For me as an actor, I want to learn. I don't want to be a good actor, I want to be a great actor. I've been learning about directors, producers, screen writers and being able to sell and distribute a film. All these things I have picked up

in the last few years. I've done about seven or eight films now and I've done some TV work as well.

I've got a lot of things planned. *Rugby Blood* the comic is the actual prequel to the film. It tells the story about David King, the main character, he's a rugby league star and entrepreneur. The Russians spot him playing a game of rugby and he's worth a lot of money. What they do is, they use him as a target to take his wife for ransom to get a lot of money out of him. He goes to Monte Carlo on a trip and his wife is kidnapped. He then has to hunt down the bad guys and save his wife. It's basically like rugby league meets James Bond and it's going to be fun.

I've also just finished writing a TV pilot called *Players*, which is about an agent for rugby players. The stuff I have been doing is very original, most of the stuff is what I have experienced myself. Whether I am acting or writing, I am putting my own experiences into each project. Having played at Super League and NRL level for 14 years, I can add quite a lot. In *Players* the TV pilot, I am dealing with a lot of underlying issues in the game, whether it's drugs, pain-killers or players getting sacked. It's got a lot of drama in it as well. I'm just getting my fingers in a lot of pies at the minute in the film industry.

Watch this space.