



“... The jewel so far of this season’s televisual [Rugby League] feast, however, is a one-off programme called ‘Rugby Codebreakers’, which aired last Sunday on BBC 2 Wales. Promising “stories of racism that still shock today”, it must rank as one of the best Rugby League-related documentaries ever made”.

Richard de la Riviere, Rugby Leaguer & League Express

“... Amateurism’s Berlin Wall fell in 1995, leading to the landscape of today, where enormous beasts migrate all over the Earth to play rugby of both codes. However, with money, race, class snobbery, the hollowing out of the former industrial heartlands and the conflict between management and workers, this tale goes beyond which type of rugby some Welshmen were playing: it tells the story of Britain.”

Alan Tyres, Sunday Telegraph



“Really enjoyed it, great to see Jonathan’s Wembley try again. Covered a lot of issues, more than I expected.”

Peter Lush, Rugby League Publications

“I thought that the programme was excellent ... well done to all of you.”

Colin O’Neill

“Just a quick note to say thank you for asking me to be in such a magnificent production, it was a truly riveting and wonderfully put together hour – and thank you again Carolyn for the Forty20 article. I trust it will be up for a plethora of awards, especially if the twitter traffic is anything to go by.”

Phil Caplan

“Very grateful and impressed with the program tonight. Grateful for your sensitive depiction of the issues faced by all the Codebreakers. And impressed with all the information within the program. Carolyn Hitt, came across, as a very knowledgeable and caring presenter. You showed some true icons of the great sport of Rugby (both codes), I feel privileged to be mentioned in the same breath as the above icons. The facts and figures delivered by your experts, I found fascinating. Thank you for allowing me to take part in your Factual Documentary.”

Terry Michael

"I thought that was good. It all seemed to fit together quite seamlessly and told a good story. In the past, Rugby League always came across in a much more negative way outside Yorkshire and Lancashire. If only the Union authorities – unlike those in soccer and cricket - had not adopted such a confrontational stance in the 1890s, we'd have had a unified and much stronger sport. So, well done. I'm not sure many people up here will have seen it, though I managed to tell quite a few, and I saw a good piece on it in Friday's Daily Mirror."

Andrew Hardcastle

"I thought it was a very well presented program with a lot of honesty shown with regards to the treatment of Rugby League players. Carolyn Hitt's understanding of the game made the program more enjoyable. It was nice to see Tony Collins contribution as he is the Chairman of our Heritage Committee at Hull K R. Thank you for producing such an honest insight into the world of rugby (both codes)."

Bryan Leason

"Great programme last night. Spoke to my cousins uwp North. Their Dad Mel Tierney played for Salford. Went down like a lead balloon in the family but it was that or the coal mines."

Helen B.

"We watched the programme, really interesting. I didn't know about how long players did this. I know Paul Moriarty well and remember when he changed codes. He used to tell me what a difference it was etc. Ironically, now players who have the temerity to play abroad are sanctioned, ridiculous!! Once again, well done. Let me know the next one."

Gaynor G.

"Thank you for the excellent programme. Wonderfully put together. As an ex Huddersfield Grammar School boy banned by his school from playing for going to a Wakefield Trinity trial I felt you showed the hypocrisy so well. I must visit the RL archive next time I'm up there."

Nicholas B.

"I'm up in the North on the Wirral, Merseyside, with the Clwydian hills in sight, and I've just watched your most fascinating account about those who travelled "North". I was, to be frank, bracing myself for an unbalanced presentation about those "lost" to League, but I found it to be a highly well researched, chronological record of the thoughts and feelings of those involved. Having both lived between Denbigh and Ruthin for seven years, worked for Widnes RLFC, and organised and played in what I think may have been the first official game of Rugby League against, and hosted by a Welsh Rugby Union club (albeit at amateur rugby league level), being Ruthin RUFC (due to their open mindedness), the programme really resonated with me. Widnes RLFC subsequently invited Ruthin officials and players to attend a match against Hull KR in 1998, where Ruthin and Widnes exchanged club ties and both Chairmen made speeches. As a lover of both codes, I would like to congratulate you and your production team for the total professionalism demonstrated in Rugby Codebreakers, and where the programme title could have been set up to provide an opportunity to poke fun and dig at League, I felt that it fostered an atmosphere of complete mutual respect for each code. Yours in both codes of Rugby,

Andy H.

“Just wanted to say how much I enjoyed your programme about Welsh union players who turned pro. A fascinating watch. It broke my heart when Jonathan Davies turned pro in 1988. I was 15 at the time and was in mourning for several months. The words linked to turning pro really tell their own story - “defecting” to league for example. In the months after “defecting” Davies was told by the WRU he could not be interviewed by the BBC at the National Stadium. I couldn’t agree more that it’s about time the Union celebrated what those players did and in many ways “sacrificed”- your interview with David Bishop showed this sacrifice and was very moving. “

John Lovell

“Congratulations on a fabulously interesting thought provoking programme....you’ve unearthed Hidden dimensions of our social history.....which are uncomfortable but needed to be revealed.....the programme MUST lead onto formal recognition of those Welsh greats. Thank you.”

David M.

“Hello Alan and just to say I thought the Codebreakers was excellent and everyone I’ve heard from says same. Well done! Regards.”

Gary Hetherington, Chief Executive, Leeds Rugby



“I thought in general it was good but there wasn’t enough time in the programme slot to do it true justice. There is so much more that could be said and discussed that you could have a mini series. But the welsh players who went north were well thought of and played a very integral part in the development of RL. Plus for my education I didn’t realise that there were so many good black players who went north. For such a small part of England stretching the entire length of the M62 and also parts of Cumbria another RL stronghold RL did very well to compete on the world stage from down under where it is one of their top2 sports. Same more of the interviews.”

John Devereux

“I thought Sunday’s “codebreakers” was a very well constructed programme and got the iniquitous treatment message across very well but Brian Juliff (WRL chairman) and myself felt there was too many gaps and lack of detail in the information thread covering different eras of the game and it might be worthwhile doing a follow up programme addressing this.”

Mike Nicholas, Chairman, Welsh Rugby League

“Rugby code breakers”, “absolutely fantastic”, thank you.

Karen Freeman

“...I’d love to shower you with heaps of well deserved praise for your latest doc. I thought it was brilliant!!!”

Carwyn J.

“Thoroughly enjoyed it and hopefully the light that was shed on the brilliant Welsh players and coaches will be enough to get some sort of recognition for them in their home country. Well done.”

Paul



“A fascinating programme, well worth watching”

CrawshawPat

“The documentary was superb and so well produced and presented well done BBC Wales! Bravo!”

Stephen46360005

“A Must see on the iPlayer if you missed it earlier. Aswell as showing the hypocrisy of rugby union in the dark days”

steve_till

“Cracking programme on BBC Wales tonight, The RugbyCodebreakers. Great to see an interview with the legend who is @dbish09 talking about his Hull KR days. Cracking!!”

SolwayScott

“Congratulations on an incredible documentary. It has brighten up my day on a wet afternoon in Hamilton, NZ. The contribution Welsg RU players made to rugby league will never be forgotten”

dannyreuben

“The Rugby Codebreakers was brilliant on BBC Wales. Thought I knew the story but Carolyn Hitt told tales of 1st professional black coach of ANY sports team & 1st black captain of ANY British team”.

chorltonsain

“Watched a terrific program on BBC Wales called Code Breakers about Welsh RU stars going north to RL. I would love to see Leeds Rhinos recognise in some form the contribution...”

Melway42

“Absolutely fantastic and thoroughly enjoyable hour of my time. The King and Gareth Edwards could’ve played League, wow. Loving the story of Jim Mills and Dougie in the pub in Llanelli...”

hamowtid

“Excellent programme BBC Wales. Heartbreaking at times. The great honesty and dignity shown by the victims of this rugby ‘apartheid’ were incredibly moving”.

awright51

“Great program Carolyn Hitt, lots I didn’t know, very informative, well done, brilliant”.

jefftweetster



“Watched it! Really good”.

Rhian H.

“T’was a cracking programme. I still hate league to this day for what it did though, I’ll never forgive it, not the players, but the sport.”

Alun P.

“Thought it was very well made. I’ll try and get my father to watch it. Think he’d enjoy it.”

Craig H.

“It was a wonderful programme which refreshingly pulled no punches. Our sport has much to be proud of, despite all our moans and groans. On a personal note; I had the pleasure of knowing one of those players who went north. He wasn’t featured in the programme last night but Frank Wilson was another black player from Cardiff frustrated by lack of opportunity in his native land who came to St Helens in the 60s. He is undoubtedly the finest and probably the most intelligent coach I’ve ever played under.”

Griff9of13

“Excellent documentary. I was impressed by their research. They even tracked down a clip from the BBC Sports Personality of the year for 1972 when GB won the RL World Cup with Clive Sullivan as captain. While showing a clip of some pompous presenter from SPOTY Carolyn Hitt says;”..... a Welsh man captaining a World Cup winning side and scoring in the final surely that would cause some ripples back home. Amazingly Clive’s achievement doesn’t even warrant a single mention.” Very satisfying to see the BBC’s prejudices exposed.”

Yosser

“So who watched last night’s BBC2 documentary “Codebreakers”? If you didn’t, you missed a treat... Carolyn Hitt’s fascinating show told the story of why hundreds of Welsh rugby union players, from the late 1800s up until 1995, went north to play rugby league. As you’ll find out, most went for money, some went because they believed they wouldn’t get into the Wales rugby union side due to their colour, whilst others went due to being ostracized for another reason, perhaps because of violent behaviour on the field.”

Ian Golden, Wales Rugby League’s Head of Communications and Historian,

“Just finished watching this on the iPlayer as I travel down from Leeds to London on the train. The part about the black players and how they were treated by the League clubs and the League community was very powerful. A couple of times I had to wipe a tear from my eye (maybe the glass of red wine helped!). I have always been proud of being a Rugby League man and tonight, as I listened to how our sport was the first to break down these barriers, I am a little more proud than ever.”

Dunbar

Having lived in Wales since '84, and having supported Bradford since 1945, I think that I do have some knowledge of what is happening between the two codes. Firstly it is very easy to criticise union for the wrongs and the way it has attempted to attempt to create hardships for those who turned away from union to then play League. I recall one of the greatest ever players, namely WHT Davies a schoolmaster from Swansea, and transferred to Bradford in 1939. As a schoolteacher he was forbidden to coach any sport because of his professional connections, many others who had similar roles were also affected. I find it hard to criticise Union for their treatment of coloured players, because I find many instances in League of colour bias. If anyone gets the opportunity to read the 'The Boys from the Bay' published by the Cardiff International Athletic Club covering 1946 to 2006 will find that Rugby League did not have clean hands, when dealing in international matters. The one issue I cannot forgive Union for is how it affected peoples actions when dealing with players who had become League players. One of the bravest and gallant individual was Eynon Hawkins, who in 1943 while serving as a naval gunner dived off his ship and saved at least 12 people of his colleagues from being burnt and drowned from burning fuel in the sea. Yes he was decorated, but I read a book covering Welsh sea heroes in the second world war, and he is not recorded in it. There are other instances on both League and Union players, which do not make savouring reading, and I find it tragic that great sports people should have been so shabbily treated.

indomitable

RESPONSE: How you can try to simplify and explain away pure racism from RU is below anything I've ever seen. I'm speechless. In RL you are/were accepted for who you were. In RU you were black and therefore not welcome. Hence no one, none, zip, zero, nil, sod all black players played until Chris Oti. Dont try to brush under the carpet this issue. Clive Sullivan 1970 captain of England.....vrs RU racist. No comparison.

Pie tries

I really enjoyed it. I was amazed by the hypocrisy of the WRU bloke that said he didn't blame anyone for turning pro and going North.....No, not much. The whole RFU for a hundred years were nothing but hypocrites. " You pretend you're not paying them and we'll pretend to believe you" and still the traitorous, tax dodging hypocrites have never offered one word of apology.

Bearman

Absolutely loved it. Made me proud, made me sad, made me furious. The Beeb do this kind of programme better than anybody else. They should put it on BBC1.

Stan Doffarf

This program shows how much of a gap in talent from Wales our game is missing, some match programmes had between 4 and 7 Welsh players in the line ups. The biggest slice were backs and since their game went open the game is poorer for their absence, I know fans will be quick to ridicule my opinion but the number of players who have graced our game says different.

ELBOWSEYE

Just watched it on iPlayer, very good documentary, should have been shown nationwide. The response to the program seems to be outstandingly positive.

Padge