

Chapter 45
1958 – 1961
Bannockburn / Jordanhill College (iv)

The first term at the SSPE, from October until the middle of December, 1958, flashed past, not only amidst participation in an amazing variety of taxing physical education activities, but also in meeting interesting, though mostly undemanding, levels of cerebral challenges. However, amongst the latter, it has to be said that our introduction to the wonders of Anatomy did exercise my theoretical brainpower somewhat more extensively than did the other academic subjects. Its demands as they related to memorising, both literally and pictorially, a large amount of specialist vocabulary concerning the structure and functions of bones, muscles, joints etc., were totally new experiences for me. In addition, with my having an inherent weakness in visualising things in three dimensions, as well as suffering from a pitiable lack of artistic aptitude, these made such studies a real chore for me and less than satisfying. On reflection, the striking omission of practical laboratory work, then, and in subsequent theoretical Physiology sessions in the second year, was indeed regrettable.

Apart from the essential introductory exposure of each of our cohort to the discipline of ‘Commanding’ twenty-eight others in simulated gymnastics’ lesson contexts – and great ‘fun’ it eventually became as we strove to control, let alone interest, our peers in basic individual and pair activities that usually, at these early stages, only involved tennis balls, and, what became a legendary activity, ‘Pat Ball Bouncing’ – I now recall with great clarity, not so much the weekly diet of Swedish gymnastics, swimming and major field games, but rather the excitement of going to the notice board on a Friday afternoon to find out for which Saturday rugby team I may have been selected.

I was not alone in this as ambitions ran high among most in the school, and, rightly, or wrongly, many viewed progress into the College 1st XV or 1st XI as ‘a passport to stardom’. Most of my peers had been accustomed to being 1st team boys while in their own ‘wee puddle’ at school. Now we were competing for places in ‘a lake awash with talent’. Imagine my horror when I saw that my selection for Saturday 4th October, 1958 was to play full-back for the College 3rd XV versus Craigielea 2nd XV!

That match was indeed all too easy for us and I picked up a ‘barrowload’ of points from near and far with my trusty right boot. Mr Orr watched the whole game, and, with my selection on his recommendation for the 2nd XV v Gordonians 2nds the following Saturday, the first step on my ladder to senior rugby was on offer. I held my place for the Kilmarnock 2nd XV match on the 18th October, and then, **wonder of wonders**, I was chosen to play on the wing for the 1st XV versus local rivals Jordanhill School Former Pupils on Saturday, 25th October, 1958. There I kicked two distant penalties in our 9-0 victory and, proceeded to hold my place for the November 1st encounter with Dunfermline where I kicked one long penalty in our 9-6 win that day.



Then, anti-climax! My gymnastically injured back intervened, and an enforced four week lay-off saw me having to start again in the 2nd XV versus Walkerburn on the 29th November. After two weeks of frost had cancelled fixtures, imagine my delight on being picked on the wing to face unofficial championship side Langholm, at Milntown, on the 20th December! For this important occasion as our club eyed-up championship status, we were bolstered by the presence of the redoubtable Ron Glasgow – later to be capped by Scotland at the somewhat late age of 31 years – but we had a miserable day there in the Borders. We were out-gunned in the mud, and yours truly in particular, was out-classed in confrontations with Tom Elliot on the right wing and his internationalist brother Christie Elliot as his supporting centre. Then, in the dying minutes, I missed a tackle on Tom as he scored their winning try; our elegant full-back Ron Small broke his collar-bone trying to cover my error; and worse still, I had never even had a chance to kick at goal all day. I was promptly dropped, and did not return to that level of play until the next season on the 26th of September, 1959!

However, this allowed me to concentrate on the much more important challenge of our second term introduction to one day per week Teaching Practice in Primary Schools. Even in this I was not at my best, as, unaccustomed to the dense Glasgow ‘smogs’, I suffered much from strength-sapping sinusitis. However, apart from my severe baptism when being obliged by the less than understanding headteacher at Lochgoin PS, Drumchapel, to take NINE different classes each day that I attended this initiation, there were several amusing incidents in the first ‘zero visibility’ weeks of that practice. Not in the school, I might add, but in the getting there and back. For instance, on each of the first three practice days I caught a No 20 bus as it loomed out of the thick fog at the Botanic Gardens. It then crawled to some unseen destination about three miles out west in Drumchapel and I had only a vague notion where we had gone. I got off when the conductor told me to, caught a similar bus at 4 p.m., and returned to my digs as blind to my route as I had been when I had started! More hilarious perhaps was Alex Assiedu from Ghana’s escapade in trying to get home from a PS in the Alexandra Parade area out in the East End of the city. He caught the advised number of tram to get to the school in the morning. But for the return, totally disoriented by the thick gloom and darkness, he, although stepping into the correctly numbered tram, eventually found himself going out the Edinburgh Road and a further three miles east instead of west!

My next teaching practice days in early Spring were in the company of Struan McCallum and Omotosho ‘Omo’ Omolabi (Nigeria). We got on well at Bluevale PS in Dennistoun that was, once the young children there got over their fear that ‘Omo’, a thin ebony giant of a man with prominent ritual scars on his face, might round them up and pop them one by one into a witch-doctor’s cauldron!

