

Chapter 33
1950 – 1957
Cambusbarron / Stirling / Bannockburn
Home, School and Play – 1954-55 (iii)

The start of Year 4 at the High School of Stirling for me not only held out the prospect of increased specialisation in subjects to be studied, but also access to a wider range of extra-curricular activities at which a greater degree of ability and commitment would be expected if enjoyment and success was to be obtained. These latter aspects of school life offered me in the autumn and spring terms in particular, the challenges of, gaining and holding a place in the school's Saturday morning 1st Rugby XV normally dominated by Year 6 pupils, immersing myself in the joys of mid-week after-hours mixed-voice choir practices, and participating for the first time in the variety of nerve-racking speech-making and debating interactions programmed for early Friday evening meetings of the senior school Literary and Debating Society.

Attendance each week at the Debating Society meant a late return home after what had always been tiring, but usually enervating, five days of work and play. But it was well worth the effort as normally, with about sixty plus members, teachers as well as pupils, crammed into the 'chamber', the variety of intellectual and humorous verbal exchanges was not only great fun, but also a very stimulating way of learning 'to think on your feet'- all in direct contrast to the more passively absorbed knowledge provided during the daily diet of timetabled teaching periods.

I found out quickly about many 'tricks of the trade' like – indulging in specious reasoning, not allowing any questioner to put 'words in your mouth', answering a question with another question, circumlocution, making fun of an adversary instead of responding fairly etc. etc. But fundamentally, among all the hilarity and eloquence, these happy hours taught me how a meeting should be conducted, and how appropriate order could be maintained to allow members to express opposing opinions, civilly, peacefully and convincingly.

The choir experiences were mentioned in some detail in Chapter 21, but my rugby experiences recounted in Chapter 23 omitted reference to what happened between my Junior Years 1-3 and my climactic 6th Year leadership responsibilities in this field.

By the time the dust and dusks had settled over the pre-season practices and 'Trials' in late August/early September, 1954, I was confident that my name had been inked-in to partner the 1st XV captain, Brian Greatbatch at half-back. Still though, I will never forget my first appearance on the 1st XV list on the official School Notice-Board,

FULL BACK: Leslie Marshall (Class VI)

RIGHT WING: Glen Harrower (Class IV)

RIGHT CENTRE: Robert Main (Class VI)

LEFT CENTRE: Duncan Stewart (Class V)

LEFT WING: Jim Bremner (Class IV)

STAND-OFF HALF: John Henderson (Class IV)

SCRUM-HALF: Brian Greatbatch (Class VI)

LEFT PROP: Alan Somerville (Class VI)

HOOKER: Tom Harrison (Class V)

RIGHT PROP: Fleming Smith (Class V)

LEFT LOCK: Iain Murray (Class VI)

RIGHT LOCK: Ronald Dyce (Class IV)

LEFT FLANKER: Sam Waddell (Class VI)

No. 8: Noel Perry (Class VI)

RIGHT FLANKER: Robert Cruikshank (Class VI)

This season became an unbeaten year for the team. It was also a baptism of fire for me as I was playing amongst so many so much more physically mature than I was then. But I gradually toughened-up without ever gaining over-much recognition for bravery! Of course I tended to do my utmost in attack to avoid contact through dodging, weaving, change-of-pace etc. but, whenever I could, I allowed others to do the defensive/offensive tackling. However, as expected of me, my greatest talents lay in tactical kicking from hand, and precise, often long-distance, goal-kicking. This latter skill often meant the difference between winning and losing during the season and thus mostly gained forgiveness from team-mates for my occasional reticence in the more 'knitty-gritty' aspects of the game.

The end of the season in April 1955 also brought dramatic and unexpected success at the Stirling County RFC Seven-a-side Tournament in Bridge of Allan. Traditionally, between the adult semi-finals and finals, local schoolboys sevens' sides from, Dollar Academy, Alloa Academy, Grangemouth High School, and H.S of Stirling, played in a short knock-out competition for the Pullar Cup. Over the years that it was played for, Dollar Academy had always emerged as victors. That was until our team did the unexpected in 1955! How?

Well in this shortened version of the game, while the emphasis is still on ball-winning and retention, a crucial element is having at least one 'speedster' in your seven. Two regular members of our normal XV side, Dunky Stewart and Glen Harrower were almost 'evens' 100 yards sprinters. But we also imported our school athletics and national high-jump champion, George McLachlan, into our seven for the day And it worked well for us because the opposition knew of his prowess [*but not of his comparative lack of ball skill!*] and all spent too much time putting an extra-man out to mark him, and, in a sense underestimated in particular the outstanding abilities of our ebullient Noel Perry to fully exploit the extra space that this accorded his normally trenchant running. Dollar too, in the final against us had two pace-men. But when it came to the crunch, our last-minute victory gained by a simple try from 'wee Henderson', was really founded on our scrummaging and mauling providing the necessary possession to exploit our use of 'decoy', speed and ball retention. AND, the irony of it all was that throughout the tournament, our skipper's inspired selection of 'roly-poly' Alan Somerville (*who had trained religiously for months in the unlikely hope of making it into the seven*) paid rich dividends. Alan played like a man inspired. Never in his life had he been so effective and untiring in both confrontation and covering ... our previously unsung hero was thus worthily, if unofficially, voted by us, his team-mates, 'man of the tournament' during our [*underage!*] 'Babycham' toasts at a well-timed Scout Hall Dance later that evening.



**T. Harrison, G. Harrower, L. Marshall, R. Cruikshank
R. Main, R. Dyce, N. Perry, I. Murray, A. Somerville
F. Smith, S. Waddell, D. Stewart,
Stirling HS 1st XV 1954/55 B. Greatbatch, J. Henderson, J. Bremner**