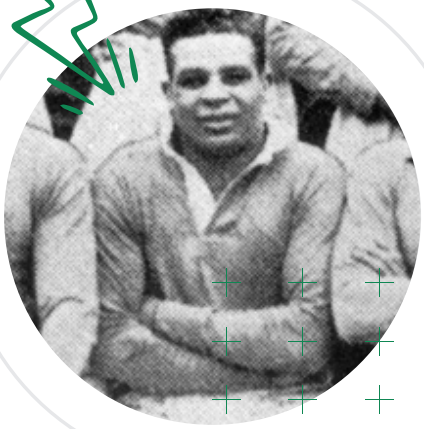
THE CODEBREAKERS: DEFYING RACISM IN RUGBY



GEORGE BENNETT: THE DREAM THAT WASN'T ALLOWED

George Bennett loved rugby. Born in a small Welsh village in 1913, he dreamed of wearing the red jersey and playing for Wales in rugby union. But there was a problem–George was Black, and at that time, racism was everywhere in Welsh rugby union. No matter how talented he was, he wasn't given the chance.

At just 17, George made a brave choice. He left rugby union and joined Wigan to play rugby league, where he was accepted for who he was. He became a star, playing **383 games** and scoring countless tries. In 1935, George made history as the **first Black player to represent Wales in rugby league** and the first Black player to play for any British international rugby league team.

But even then, racism followed him. In 1936, George was left out of the Great Britain team touring Australia. The reason? Officials said they wanted to "avoid criticism" because Australia had a strict colour bar. George's talent didn't matter–his skin colour did.

George Bennett's story is one of courage and resilience. He didn't let racism stop him from playing the sport he loved, but it did stop him from achieving his biggest dream: playing rugby union for Wales.

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ROY FRANCIS: AHEAD OF HIS TIME

Roy Francis was born in 1919 in Brynmawr, Wales. Like George Bennett, he faced racism in rugby union, so he switched to rugby league.

At 17, he joined Wigan and later Barrow, becoming one of the best players of his time. In 1947, Roy made history as the **first Black man to play for Great Britain**, scoring two tries against New Zealand.

Roy's playing career was incredible–**229 tries in 356 games**–but his coaching career was even more groundbreaking. He became the **first Black head coach of a British top-tier team**, leading Hull and Leeds to major trophies. Roy was a pioneer: he filmed games to help players improve, created special diets, and even invited players to his home to make sure they ate properly. These ideas were decades ahead of their time!

Despite his success, Roy faced racism and was often overlooked. Today, monuments and awards finally honour him, but for years his achievements were forgotten.

Roy Francis proved that talent and innovation can break barriers—even when society tries to hold you back.

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BILLY BOSTON: THE STAR WHO NEVER PLAYED FOR WALES

Billy Boston was born in Cardiff in 1934 and grew up loving rugby. He was fast, strong, and incredibly talented–everyone could see he was destined for greatness.

But Billy faced a huge barrier: racism in Welsh rugby union. Despite his skill, he was never picked to play for Wales in rugby union. Why? Because he was Black.

Billy didn't give up. He switched to rugby league and joined Wigan in 1953. From that moment, he became a legend. Billy scored **571 tries in 563 games**, a record that still amazes people today. He won trophies, played for Great Britain, and became one of the greatest rugby league players of all time.

Fans adored him, but Billy never forgot the pain of being denied the chance to play for Wales in rugby union. He once said, "I wanted to play for Wales with my whole heart." That dream was stolen because of racism.
Today, Billy Boston is celebrated with a statue in Cardiff alongside other greats. His story reminds us that talent should never be judged by skin colour–and that racism robbed Wales of one of its finest players.

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CLIVE SULLIVAN: BREAKING BARRIERS AND LEADING A NATION

Clive Sullivan was born in Cardiff in 1943. As a child, he loved rugby, but injuries and racism made his journey tough. Despite this, Clive fought through every challenge.

He became a star in rugby league, playing for Hull and Hull Kingston Rovers, and scoring **250 tries in 352 games**.

In 1972, Clive made history. He became the **first Black man to captain a British national team**–in any sport! Under his leadership, Great Britain won the Rugby League World Cup. Clive even scored a try in the final, helping his team lift the trophy.

At a time when racism was common, Clive's achievement was groundbreaking. He showed that leadership and talent have nothing to do with skin colour. Sadly, Clive died young in 1985, but his legacy lives on. In Hull, a main road is named **Clive Sullivan Way**, so everyone remembers the man who broke barriers and inspired generations.