



OFFICIAL PROGRAM

Brynmawr Town Square

Saturday 21st October
event begins at 12pm

To be unveiled by
Jonathan Davies OBE
at 1pm

ROY FRANCIS MEMORIAL

FATHER OF MODERN RUGBY COACHING

The Roy Francis MEMORIAL TEAM

Ian Haywood

RUGBY HISTORIAN AND PROJECT ORGANISER

Councillor John Hill

PROJECT AND EVENT ORGANISER

Councillor Julian Gardner

PROJECT AND EVENT ORGANISER

Councillor Wayne Hodgins

PROJECT AND EVENT ORGANISER

Eifion Davies

HISTORIAN AND PROJECT ADVISER

Adrian Drew

PROJECT ARCHITECT

Richie Evans

STATUE DESIGN AND
ALL ASSOCIATED PROJECT ARTWORK

**Oliver Pitt Diamond
Precision Engineering**

STATUE BUILD/MANUFACTURE

Nigel Sullivan Groundworks

EXCAVATION, PLINTH BUILD AND STATUE PLACEMENT

Karen Williams

TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

Alyson Tippings

TOURISM OFFICER

Pictures by courtesy of
Geoff Francis, Simon Foster,
Neil Dowson, Robert Gate,
Phil Caplin
and Rugby league journal

Preserving the History of **Roy Francis** in Brynmawr

Let's have a walk around Brynmawr, pop into a few Pubs and ask the locals if they had ever heard of Roy Francis. The usual answers are, 'I might do', 'Where does he live?' 'Does he drink in here?' 'How old is he?' 'What does he look like?'

Roy Francis was possibly the most important Sporting Coach in British History. He was the first to actively video & record training sessions and games, took care of and looked after the welfare of players in the form of health and diet, and arranged travel to games for wives and families. He personally built a running track next to Hull FC's Stadium to improve the speed of players. This was before José Mourinho was alive.

Born in Cardiff in 1919, he moved to Brynmawr and lived with his parents Rebecca and Albert Francis. Roy became an accomplished athlete winning prizes at Swimming Galas in the Town's Baths, while also finishing 3rd in 120-yard sprint for Under-16's in August 1933 when he was only 14. In September 1936 The Merthyr Express wrote an article on Brynmawr's young Rugby Union Team who had a very promising Wing playing for them called Roy Francis.

For most of us, being good enough to play Rugby for your National Team just isn't going to happen, but during this period in time even when you were at that level, if you're race came into the equation it's was never going to happen. Rugby League in Northern England had a very close eye on South Wales in the 30's and Scouts were always picking up talented players and offering contracts. By the end of 1936 Roy went to Wigan where he started to become a successful player until the arrival of Harry Sunderland, an administrator from Queensland, Australia, who became the Manager. From then on, Roy mysteriously didn't make the 1st team and was signed to play for Barrow.

Both before and after the War he played for Barrow, during the War he served as Sergeant and played 57 guest games for Dewsbury Rams, managed by Eddie

Waring, and scored 57 tries. At the end of the 1940's, he signed for Warrington while the family lived in Wigan.

He played five times for Wales and once for Great Britain, scoring 2 tries, and becoming the first selected black player in any British International Sporting Team. He was expected to be part of the history-making Great British Lions 'Indomitables' team - the only side to take the Ashes from Australia in Australia; ever! Roy was overlooked because of the colour bar which operated down under at the time.

In 1949 he signed for Hull FG and played 137 games for the team before he became the first Black Coach in British Sporting History, winning the Championship in 1956, then again in 1958. Under Roy's supervision, the team also made it to The Challenge Cup Final at Wembley in 1959 and 1960; both games played in front of 80,000 spectators. Hull were runners-up on both occasions.

The family settled in Beverley, East Yorkshire and took over a pub called The Gross Keys, which became very popular as fans wanted to see Roy. Not happy with just being a first-class Rugby League Coach and pub landlord, Roy and Irene bought a Café just across the road and named it 'Haveasnack', with plenty of room upstairs to build a fully functional gym where he trained Boxing. Nobody's quite sure how he managed to get a licence to train Boxers, but as a natural sportsman it was another string to his bow so to speak.

In 1963 Roy went on to Coach Leeds for five years until 1968. It was here that he was in charge of a highly regarded Leeds team that came up against Wakefield Trinity in the famous 'Watersplash' Cup Final 1968. Some people say that it wasn't possible to see how good Roy Francis's Leeds Team actually were because of the conditions of the pitch. However, the game was a great spectacle and is still shown on the BBC today. Leeds only triumphed in the end by the infamous 'last kick of the game', which was a missed conversion right in front of the posts by Wakefield's Don Fox. All in all, Roy Managed Leeds for 219 games winning 139.

1969 saw the brave move to manage North Sydney Bears, taking him half-way around the world. After giving it a lot of thought, Roy and Irene got on board the SS Ganberra and set off on their 6-week voyage which briefly stopped off in Capetown, South Africa, where they weren't allowed ashore due to apartheid that operated in the country at this time.

They then travelled onto Perth and finally Sydney. North Sydney Bears was a Club that was near the bottom of the League at the time.

Although the period wasn't a great success, Roy managed to raise them half-way up the League. The Club Chairman looked after the couple and they had a nice house, but Irene didn't feel comfortable mixing with other women due to their racist remarks.

Australian Television used to run a weekly Rugby League Chat-show Programme and Roy was invited on as a guest. Apparently, another guest made an under-the-table comment about racism, and that was it! Roy stood up and left the Studio, and then left Australia for good.

Back in the comfort of Yorkshire he had a second spell at Hull FC and a second spell at Leeds where he won the Championship in 1974/75.

In an interview with Robert Gate in 1985 Roy made it clear that Harry Sunderland obviously didn't like the colour of his skin as racist attitudes were rife in Australia at this point. Interestingly, since 1965 the 'Player of the Match' in Premiership Rugby Finals and the 'Super league Grand Final' receives the Harry Sunderland Trophy; with a great deal of discussion taking place within Rugby League as whether to change the name to the 'Roy Francis Trophy'.

With the help of his two sons Roy was still running two Cafés in Leeds, a Coffee Shop and a Pub near York well into his elder years, while enjoying a bit of golf when time allowed. Roy died in 1989 when he was 70 and his funeral in Leeds was attended by a plethora of peers and fans alike. At the funeral "The Great Redeemer" was played and his wider family in Brynmawr notified.

The patriotic Welshman that was brought up in Brynmawr certainly had a colourful life, from re-habilitating soldiers in the Second World War, to training/coaching and getting the best out of rugby players, (and the odd boxer) and employing dozens of staff within the hospitality trade. He needs to be recognised and honoured for decades to come in Brynmawr, the Town he always visited every summer and regarded as home.



Wales Rugby League

Rygbi Cynghrair Cymru

Roy Francis, one of Wales Rugby League's greatest head coaches of all time, will be immortalised in Brynmawr on Saturday 21 October.

The ceremony, organised by Brynmawr and District Museum, will take place on the square in Brynmawr on the 21st October 2023, it will commence at 12 noon and the memorial will be unveiled by Jonathan Davies OBE at 1pm. All are invited to attend.

Roy was born in 1919 and raised in Brynmawr. At the age of 17, he switched codes and signed for Wigan where his rugby league career began. He won five caps for Wales between 1946 and 1948, but that's just part of his story. He scored 225 tries in 346 club games, which also included spells with Barrow, Warrington, Hull FC and Dewsbury, but won just the one Great Britain cap, against New Zealand at Odsal where he scored two tries. It was thought that it was the colour of his skin that prevented him from ever being a Lions tourist due to a "White Australia" policy at the time.

The first-ever black professional head coach in Great Britain and often uttered in the same breath by rugby league fans that Garwyn James is thought of by those from rugby union, Roy was one of the most innovative coaches ever.

His man-management, coaching methods, which included gymnasium work and video analysis, both a rarity for that period, and use of psychological techniques were considered years ahead of their time. He was also the first coach to embrace players' families and offer them transport to games.

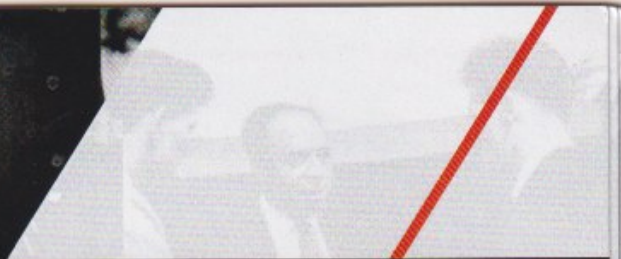
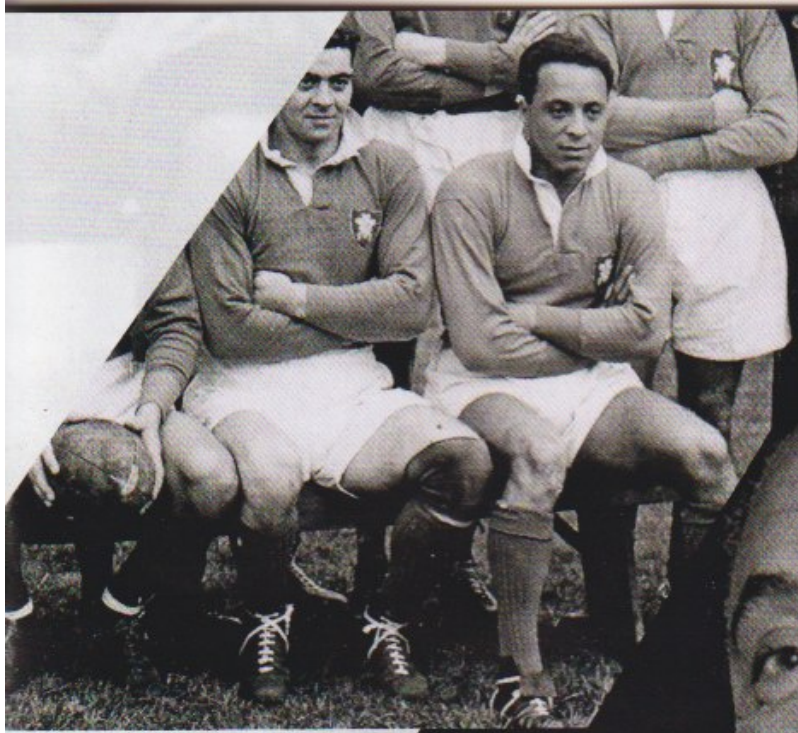
He coached Hull FC from 1955-63, Leeds from 1963-68, North Sydney Bears from 1969-70, Leeds again from 1974-75 and Bradford Northern from 1975-77. He also spent three years as team manager of Hull FC from 1970-73.

When coaching Hull, he led them to the League Championship in 1956 and 1958, and at Leeds to the title in 1974 and a Challenge Cup win in 1968 in the match commonly known as "The Watersplash Final". Sadly, his spell in charge at North Sydney was less of a happy one due to the racism he encountered.

A legend in the game, Roy died on April 6th 1989 in Leeds, aged 70.

IAN GOLDEN

COMMUNICATIONS AND PROFILE MANAGER WALES RUGBY LEAGUE



“

“Along with various other innovations such as a clip-board and stop watch were his trade marks. He saw before anyone else the value in having Forwards running like three quarters and the Backs tackling like Forwards.”

“The brilliant Team of the late 1950’s that Roy created is still referred to this day in the City of Hull”

”

BILL DALTON
HULL FC HISTORIAN

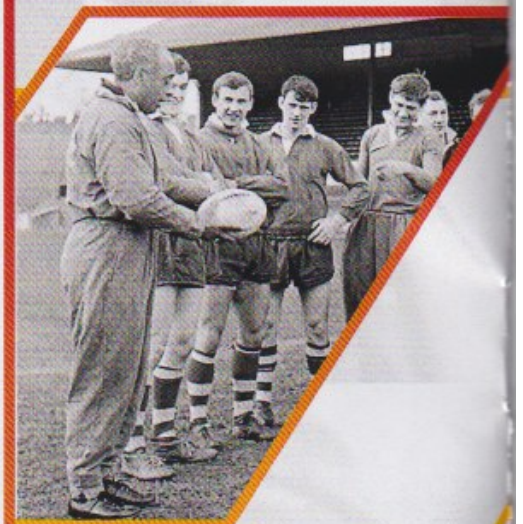


“

“Roy enjoyed considerable success at the Leeds Club in the 1960’s and introduced new methods and a different approach, which had a very positive effect on both players and fans of the game. He is still fondly remembered and celebrated in Leeds.”

”

GARY HETHERINGTON,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, LEEDS RHINOS



Epilogue

Roy Francis born in Cardiff in a nursing home across the River from the Millennium Stadium then brought to Brynmawr.

Brynmawr in the 1930's had ideal facilities for training: big hills and traffic-less roads and an outdoor swimming pool. Roy Francis was already shining in local running and swimming championships and local press was picking him out as a promising wing for Brynmawr Rugby Club. Then, quite possibly a scout from Wigan slapped down the region of £400 cash on the table and Roy was off. He would have known being black, the chances of progressing to International Rugby Union for Wales was never going to happen.

Roy went on to play for Barrow, Dewsbury as a guest during wartime, Warrington, Hull FG, Gt Britain, Wales, Northern Command, and Lancashire scoring a career total of 688 points from 354 appearances and would have been more if not for the second world war.

Around about the time Roy played for Gt Britain Geoff and Ian Francis would spend their summer school holidays at Grandma Rebecca Francis's in Brynmawr, Geoff recalls that there used to be a coal delivery for her dumped in Well Street and the boys had to shovel it up and store it for the winter months.

In 1949 he signed for Hull FG and played 137 games before he became the first black coach in British sporting history, winning the championship in 1956, then again in 1958. The team also made it to the Challenge Cup Final at Wembley in 1959 and 1960; both games played in front of 80,000 spectators, Hull were runners-up on both occasions.

In 1963 Roy moved to Headingley to coach Leeds and started to put together a side that would become the hardest team to beat in the League in the second

part of the sixties finishing as League leaders twice, Challenge Cup winners, Yorkshire League Winners twice, Yorkshire Cup winners and having a winning percentage of over 80% three seasons running.

Roy's success was down to his innovative coaching techniques which started how sport is coached, tackling, building, running tracks timing and how fast players sprint, specific diets for players, filming of games, taking personal care of injured players to get them back to fitness.

Essential reading: "Ahead of his time" Roy Francis and Rugby League, by Peter Lush.

'The memorial monument of Roy' was kick-started by the documentary "The Rugby Codebreakers", directed by Tariq Ali and presented by Carolyn Hitt for Hoi Polloi Pictures, and broadcast on BBC Wales and BBC Network.

Tariq and producer Alan Golding had been trying to get their documentary commissioned for twenty years being inspired by the books 'Gone North Vol 1 and Vol 2' by Robert Gate and the work of historian and author Tony Gollins.

Pictures by courtesy of Geoff Francis, Simon Foster, Neil Dowson, Robert Gate, Phil Caplin and Rugby league journal



**BRYNMAWR AND DISTRICT MUSEUM WOULD LIKE TO
THANK THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR HELP AND SUPPORT**

