

Ted Woodward

Ted Woodward 1931-2017

*The death at 102 of town legend Monty Seymour understandably overshadowed the passing in the same week of another local icon, Ted Woodward. But at 85, he was a man who also deserves fulsome tributes in his own right as former Bucks Free Press Sports Editor **John D Taylor** describes.*

Butcher's boy to sporting icon

Born on April 17, 1931, the son of a butcher in Lane End, John Edward Woodward was – like Monty – a football nut as he proved by starring for Marlow Minors. But accepted into Wycombe Royal Grammar School in 1944, he was quickly converted to rugby. He doubled up school duties with games at Wycombe RFC before being snapped by Wasps, who he went on to captain. Within seven years he was an England international. Fellow RGS pupils Ron Syrett, Clive Ashby, Nick Beal, Nick Duncombe, Tom Rees and Matt Dawson went on to represent England. Woodward was the first.

Ted was not only a superb athlete, also excelling at athletics and cricket, he was fast and unusually big for a three-quarter. In the days pre-Jonah Lomu, a 151/2 stone winger was virtually unheard of. So his selection at the age of only 20 in January 1952 was big news. He made his England debut against South Africa, scored the first of his six international tries in the next match against Wales and was a regular for four years, earning 15 caps.

During his second season with England in 1952/53 he scored in wins against France and Scotland, and also played in a victory against Wales and a draw with Ireland. England finished as Championship winners, but Woodward didn't recall any great fanfare.

If that lack of public celebration was in keeping with a bygone era, then so was the day-to-day running of the England team. Back in the 1950s, there were no training camps, no performance analysts and no attack coaches. "We used to meet up on a Friday and run up and down the pitch at Richmond and that was it," he told me when I interviewed him years later for the RFU's Ruby Museum.

"The selectors weren't involved. We never had any policy of how we were going to play, we just went out and played the game and it was all off-the-cuff." The most coaching Woodward ever received during his time with England consisted of a few rather basic words from the Chairman of Selectors. "He said to me: 'Woodward, I want you to get the ball and when you get the ball, I want you to run as hard as you can to corner flag'. That was the only thing anybody ever said."

The modern phenomenon of players receiving a suitcase-load of personalised kit to go with their sponsored boots was also a long way off. "We were given a shirt and a pair of socks," recalled Woodward. "We had to buy our boots and shorts. We weren't given all our kit, like they are today." By now running the butcher's shop with his sister after the premature death of his father, it was hard going on and off the field.

His last international came against Scotland at Murrayfield – an 11-6 win in the final game of the 1956 Championship. At a time before overseas tours, World Cups and annual autumn internationals, 15 caps represented a lengthy international career. With his England career at an end, Woodward continued to play for Wasps, eventually switching to play a No 8 due to a series of hamstring injuries.

By now, Woodward had opened a sports shop with fellow Wasps player Louis Stalder. Woodward & Stalder became a mecca for local sports fans. With that and his young family - two daughters and a son - to look after, something had to give. So, at the age of 34, Woodward decided to hang up his boots. He had played for Wasps for his entire career, and as well as England, had represented the East Midlands, Middlesex, London Counties and the Barbarians.

Rugby has run in the family thanks to his involvement. "I've had a fantastic life, a good wife in Judy and three marvellous kids. I owe a lot to rugby. My son captained England Under-18s and played for the Navy and Rosslyn Park. My grandsons from my daughter's marriage – one has played for England Under-16s, Under-18s and Under-20s and is now at Bristol and the other has played for England Under-16s. My son's boys have both played for Cornwall. I've had a fantastic life. I've been successful in business. I owe a lot to playing rugby."

Sport in High Wycombe owes a lot to Ted Woodward.

- *Ted's funeral will take place at Amersham Crematorium on Friday, February 3 at 10.45 followed by a celebration of his life at Denham Golf Club. No flowers, but donations via a "Just Giving" page will go to the RFU Injured Players' Association.*

RGS memories of Woodward

Former Wycombe Wanderers player Dick Tunmer is someone who has fond memories of Ted Woodward. "We played in the rugby and cricket teams together at the RGS from 1944. He was outstanding even then. And not only at those sports. I jumped 18ft 10 1/2 inches in the long jump only to see Ted sail past that mark to set a school record that lasted for years!"

Dick is shown centre front in this 1947 RGS cricket team photo. Ted Woodward is on his right with best friend Ron Syrett next to him. Ron, brother of Wycombe goalkeeper Dennis Syrett, followed Ted into the England rugby team but won his 11 caps after Woodward's international career was over.

However, their connection was to last a lifetime. Both sons of butchers, Ron married Ted's sister Jean. They all lived together for some years and both men were in the sports shop business together. The friends were still great supporters of the Wasps and were special guests of the club only a few weeks ago. "Ted was a big chap with a larger than life character to match," said Ron. "I spent most of my life trying to emulate him. I looked up to him at school, we did National Service together, travelled up to Sudbury from Wycombe together for Wasps training and played together for all sorts of representative sides. I even followed him into the England rugby team. He was the life and soul of everything he took part in. A special man and a special friend."





Ted Woodward was a Wasps star for 15 years



Ted Woodward, fourth from the left, made his England debut aged only 20 in 1952 against South Africa and went on to win 15 caps in a four-year international career cut short only by injury



Ted Woodward was proud of his family's sporting success as well as his own as he showed when he revisited the RGS and met up with his grandson Jack Wallace (right) and Wasps England colleague Tom Rees – both former pupils of the school