

'A PRIDE OF LIONS' PRESENTED BY GENESIS PUBLICATIONS

“To tour with the Lions is the supreme prize.”

Willie John McBride (1974 Lions captain)



The Lions are the touring side of the British Isles. Players from all four of the Home Unions - England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales - can be selected. The side consists of the very best available players from these four proud rugby nations.

The Lions have a tradition and history like no other. Their tours of the great southern hemisphere rugby nations are eagerly anticipated and have provided some of the most memorable clashes ever seen. Off the field of play their impact has been just as strong.

To produce a full history of the Lions in a single exhibition would be impossible. Each individual Lions tour influenced the rugby world in its own way. Instead, 'A Pride of Lions' will pick out and examine the elements that make the Lions different and so very special.



*John Dawes,
Wales
(1971 Lions captain)*



*Willie John McBride,
Ireland
(1974 Lions captain)*



*Finlay Calder,
Scotland
(1989 Lions captain)*



*Martin Johnson,
England
(1997 Lions captain)*



FOUR COUNTRIES UNDER ONE BANNER

Lions tours provide a rare opportunity for the four Home Unions of the British Isles - England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales - to put their historic rivalries on hold. They come together to play and cheer side by side.

The very first Lions tour (1888) featured players born in all four of the home nations. However, only four of them ever played for their countries. The early tours could last for over six months and a player's availability was almost as important as their ability.

It was not until 1899 that a Lions tour featured at least one 'capped' international player from each of the four countries, and on a number of the early tours some countries were not represented at all.



Blazer badge worn by the 1899 Lions, depicting emblems associated with the four individual nations. 'A.A.R.F.T.' stands for 'Anglo-Australian Rugby Football Tour'

The tour of 1908 left out players from Scotland and Ireland. This was because of a political argument that season which had seen the rugby unions of England and Wales side against the other two.

Sometimes one nation has been heavily represented due to that country's particular strength at that time. In 1977, 16 of the 30 players were Welsh. In 2001, 17 Englishmen were named in a party of 37.



16 Welshmen in the 1977 Lions

Not all Lions have been born in the British Isles. The 1888 Lions suffered injuries and had to use local Australian players for two matches. Australian international player Tom Richards was working in South Africa in 1910 when asked to join the touring Lions. His inclusion in the injury-hit squad was justified by the fact that he had played for a season in England with Bristol. To qualify to play for other nations was much easier in that period.



Tom Richards in Australian jersey, featuring the Waratah flower, 1908



Tom Richards in Lions jersey, 1910

A modern player like South African-born Mike Catt qualifies for England and the Lions (1997 and 2001) through his English mother.



Mike Catt, 2001

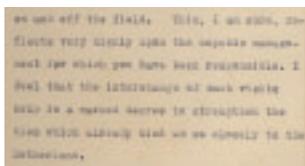
RUGBY MISSIONARIES

The Lions played an important role in spreading rugby football around the world during the game's early years. Once the game was established the Lions helped to sustain its further development.



The Lions take with them “the highest ideals of British sport and a keen desire that those ideals should be shared by other nations” John Raphael (1910 Lions captain)

The phrase ‘missionary’ was sometimes used to describe early Lions tours, but they were never forcing rugby onto an unwilling native population. The tours were always arranged at the invitations of southern nations. This very welcome ‘missionary’ work was used by locals to help in the growth of the game. It also provided the British Empire with a chance to ‘call in’ on its colonies.



Extract from a letter written by the Prime Minister of New Zealand in 1930

Lions tours helped to join the Empire together. The 1891 tour to South Africa was financially supported by Cecil Rhodes, Prime Minister of the Cape Colony. He saw the political advantages in maintaining close links with the ‘mother country’.

The ‘missionary’ function in the British Empire started to fade once the rugby pupils become the rugby teachers. South Africa first beat the Lions in a Test series in 1903 and New Zealand defeated them in 1904. From then onwards the role of the Lions in those major rugby nations altered. Rather than spreading the game they were now a side who were strong enough to offer serious competition and give the game a boost with every visit.



The Lions who lost in South Africa, 1903



1904 New Zealand cartoon: “How do you like your defeat eh?”

The original ‘missionary’ concept took the Lions on three successful visits to Argentina in 1910, 1927 and 1936. The 1977 Lions also made a detour to play a match in Fiji, showing that traces of their ‘missionary’ ideal survived. If these original principles were to be fully revived today the Lions might be touring countries such as Japan, Romania or the USA.



1910 Lions in Argentina



1927 Lions in Argentina



1936 Lions in Argentina



Brazil v Lions match programme, 1936

THE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

Until the 1960s, the Lions were the only regularly touring northern hemisphere side. They faced many challenges that would be unimaginable to professional players of the modern era.

The cost and difficulty of arranging a long-distance foreign tour in the 19th century was incredible. This explains why four of the first five Lions tours were scheduled for South Africa - much closer than Australia and New Zealand. Yet the 1896 tour to South Africa still cost the enormous sum of £3,300 - the equivalent of £2.5 million today.



Lions on board ship, 1888

The journeys themselves were very hard for the players and an early Lions side could be away from home for over six months. Lions players in South Africa in 1891 made very long journeys between matches - mostly in horse drawn carriages. The train journey from Cape Town to Kimberley (approximately 550 miles) took two days and two nights.



1891 Lions travelling around South Africa by stagecoach

In 1904 two of the Lions party had to be carried off a boat on arrival in Auckland due to extreme seasickness!



The 1950 Lions relax on board ship



The 1955 Lions head for South Africa by aeroplane

It was not until 1955 that the Lions were able to make full use of air travel, making tours a more manageable three or four months long. However, rugby was only played by amateurs until 1995 and players had to have jobs outside the game. To take so much time off work was still very difficult to afford.



Flying home - the 1955 Lions waiting to board the aeroplane for home

PLAYING FOR THE FUN OF IT

Traditionally the Lions' intention was always to showcase the very best rugby. This did not always mix well with the 'win at all costs' attitude of some of their opponents.



"We are not after records of matches played and won - we want to see the game played for the game's sake and to give you good football. We will be only too happy if you beat us in a good

football match" Karl Mullen (1950 Lions captain)

This was a reminder of the Lions' original 'missionary' ideal. However, the opposition often had very different ideas. As early as 1904, the New Zealanders had been using a coach to train their players.

The Lions had a very different attitude and the nearest they ever got to a 'coach' was the bus that they travelled around on:

"In British Rugby... a coach is a means of transport" (1950 Lion, Bleddyn Williams)

(f) *Team talks:* Forty Team talks were held during the tour, including 15 on the rugby itself, and the remainder as tactical 'briefings' before all important matches. On the very odd, no attendance and even to facilities etc.

- (a) *General policy:* the playing of adventurous, open and clean football regardless of results.
- (b) *Basic plan:* for exploiting the above policy on the principle of THE LIONS MUST GO ON.

Extract from the tour report of 1950 Lions manager, 'Ginger' Osborne

The Lions sides of the 1960s lost by some large scores and the players were getting very down-hearted by the whole experience. Playing 'for the fun of it' was proving to be difficult when faced with such well-coached and determined opposition. It was at this point that the first Lions coach was employed.

- Coaching and teaching of correct Rugby principle and technique should be accelerated where it exists and introduced where there are no such schemes.

Extract from the tour report of 1968 Lions manager, David Brooks

At first, only the forwards were coached, with the backs left to play their own instinctive game. This new combination of powerful forwards and brilliant backs eventually led to the great victories of the 1970s.



Top row (l to r): JPR Williams, Fran Cotton, Gordon Brown, Gareth Edwards, Andy Irvine. Bottom row (l to r): Mike Gibson, Fergus Slattery, Mervyn Davies, Derek Quinnell, JJ Williams.

The introduction of official professionalism into rugby in 1995 changed everything. Every side is now trained and coached to the highest possible level. With so much at stake and so long to plan the Lions are perhaps the best prepared side of all. There will be no more training sessions wearing old club jerseys or losing balls over the side of ships...



1930 Lions training on board ship



1950 Lions take a break from training on board ship



2001 Lions in training

A WELCOME RETURN

With their blend of entertaining rugby and rich history, Lions tours are eagerly awaited in the southern hemisphere. The Lions players have a tradition of mixing with local people and the hospitality shown to them off the pitch is legendary.

Lions tours have always attracted local media interest and massive crowds. The 19th century public interest in the Lions came from a desire to maintain close contact with the 'mother country' of the Empire. The early tours offered a rare opportunity to mix with representatives from 'home' - as many settlers across the Empire still saw themselves as British. The Lions were offered a very warm welcome as a consequence.



Crowds watching the Lions in 1899

Very soon the reasons for wanting to maintain sporting contact with the 'mother country' changed. As early as 1899 in Australia there was a strong and openly declared desire to beat the Lions. This corresponded with Australia's push for greater independence from the Empire.

Australian cartoon from 1899 depicting a defeated Lion: "I didn't come out here to get licked"



The same desire to test themselves against the Lions was seen in 1903 in South Africa and 1904 in New Zealand. Both of these nations were also looking for greater political independence. The rugby tests provided an opportunity to prove their worth as independent nations. The warmth of the welcome offered to the Lions had not cooled, but the reasons for wanting them to visit had changed dramatically.



Crowds watching the Lions in 1904

Even after full political independence was attained in the great southern nations, the desire to play the Lions remained as strong as ever. The 'adopt a Lion' scheme of New Zealand schools in the 1950s, '60s and '70s showed how much the whole country was focussed on the visiting side.



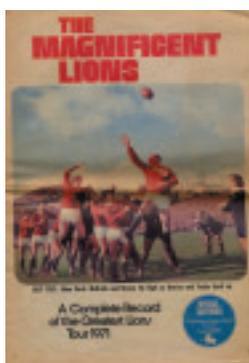
1930 Lions tour manager, Bim Baxter, is greeted by a Maori chief

'Welcome' to the 1950 Lions spelt out in apples



Jeff Butterfield - a Lion riding an ostrich, South Africa 1955

The reaction back in the British Isles was initially far less excitable than today. In 1910 the British public were probably aware that a tour was taking place in South Africa, but were not too concerned. In 1955 the first film coverage of Lions was seen in British cinemas. However, interest in that side only really grew because they were so successful. The real explosion in interest in the Lions came with the superb victories in 1971 and 1974. The British Isles rugby public have never looked back.



Rejoicing in the British Isles, 1971

CONTROVERSIES

Despite their enduring popularity, the Lions have not been immune to controversy or criticism. The role of the Lions tour manager has always been vital - smoothing out potential problems in a calm, diplomatic manner.

Warfare

The Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902) features heavily in early Lions tours. The 1896 Lions visited Pretoria Gaol to see two of the prisoners from the infamous 'Jameson Raid'- an attempt to stir revolt against the Dutch settlers, the Boers. The planned 1899 visit to South Africa had to be cancelled (and the Lions went to Australia instead) because war had broken out. The next tour, in 1903, took place only one year after the end of the war. Many of the South African sides were loaded with British-born players to reduce the tension and to increase the illusion that normality had returned to the country. Those 1903 Lions also made controversial visits to Boer War battlefields.

Violence

Many Lions players over the years returned home expressing surprise at the rough play they had experienced, especially in New Zealand. In 1966 the Lions had had enough and decided to respond. The team captains had to be called in to see New Zealand's Governor General to calm the situation. The 1974 Lions are infamous for the '99 call' that saw them all join in if a fight broke out. According to the captain, Willie John McBride, the call was supposed to be '999' - for emergency - but he never had time to shout out the third '9'!



*Other examples of violence:
Sandy Carmichael's face following the Lions v Canterbury match, 1971*



*Other examples of violence:
The second test match in Australia, 1989 - 'The Battle of Ballymore'*

South African Apartheid

In 1974, the British government wrote to ask the Lions not to go to South Africa. Their hotel in London was stormed by protesters prior to departure but they still toured. By 1980, the situation was even more politically charged and there was great pressure on them not to travel. However, the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan moved political and media attention away at the last minute and the tour went ahead. By 1986, the pressure was now too great to resist. With a Lions squad and management team already selected South Africa spared the Home Unions a difficult decision by withdrawing their invitation to tour.



Anti-Apartheid demonstrators on the pitch in South Africa, 1974

Lions in action versus the Leopards in South Africa, 1974 - the first time the Lions had ever played an entire side of black players in South Africa. They played two such games in 1974 - South Africa's attempt to silence the protesters



SUCCESS ON FOREIGN SOIL

The Lions are the only side from the British Isles to have won Test series in all three major southern hemisphere nations: New Zealand, South Africa and Australia.

Early Lions tours were very successful on the pitch. The 1888 side only lost two of their 35 matches and the 1891 Lions only conceded one try in 19 games. Although there were some well established clubs and great players in the southern hemisphere at the time, Lions tours were their only exposure to the latest tactics being developed in the British Isles. It did not take long, however, for the southern hemisphere nations not only to catch up but to start leading the way.



1888 Lions in Australia



1891 Lions in South Africa

For the majority of the 20th century the Lions struggled when playing against New Zealand and South Africa. A low point was reached in the 1960s when none of 12 test matches played against those two southern hemisphere giants were won by the Lions.



Yet another New Zealand try in the 1966 test series

When Lions success came it was very influential in those other countries. The 1971 Lions series victory in New Zealand altered the defeated All Blacks' style of play. Before 1971 New

Zealand had relied on their forwards, but now started to move the ball wide - paving the way for their superb open play of the 1980s. A very different reaction followed the 1974 victory in South Africa where the beaten nation struggled to accept defeat.



Memories of the 1974 tour



Lions fly half Barry John accepts the praise following the 1971 victory in New Zealand

Australia was once far from being the Rugby World Cup-winning powerhouse of recent decades. They failed to win a Test series against the Lions until 2001. Until that point, they had only defeated the Lions in three out of the 17 Test matches played. In fact, the 1966 Lions, who were ripped apart in New Zealand, were still able to travel through Australia undefeated.

Just how difficult is it to win a Test series in South Africa or New Zealand? South Africa has only ever won one series in New Zealand (1937) and only one New Zealand side has won a series in South Africa (1996).

LIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Lions tours have managed not only to survive, but also to prosper in the modern professional age. They successfully join together the modern need for a professionally run operation with a traditional touring sensibility.

The Lions are the last team to retain the traditional touring schedule and beliefs. Modern international sides generally fly into a country to train for a single Test match. They play and then leave. The Lions still play matches against local and provincial sides as well as playing international tests. They still mix with the local people and they still involve themselves with cultural events.

However, the Lions are no longer teaching rugby skills, demonstrating an open style of play or even acting as a bond to a wide-spread empire.

So what is their role in 2005? What do you think?

Please take a moment to fill in one of the forms below. If there are no forms remaining please inform a member of staff at the Museum desk who will be happy to provide you with one. We will publish the results of this poll on our website (www.rfu.com/microsites/museum) after the exhibition has finished in September.

Win, draw or lose, long may the Lions continue...

