

MAGAZINE ▼

FEATURES

SPORTS

UPDATE

KITSTOP

VOX POP

LINKLINE

YOUR LETTERS

REVIEWS

SOLMART

ADVERTISE

FLASHBACK

CONTACT

SOLDIER SPORT

Dragon's den

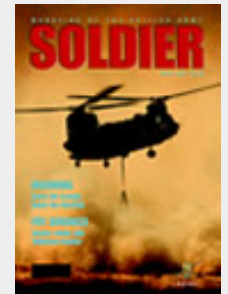


Interview: Richard Lenton

Pictures: Graeme Main

WHEN Wales took the Six Nations by storm in 2005 playing a typically Welsh

CURRENT ISSUE





Pressure position: Army Rugby Union's new head coach WO2 Andy Price (WG) accepts that losing to the Royal Navy at Twickenham on May 5 could cut short his reign.

Being a Monmouth man, Price's ideology is typically Welsh – he wants to see imaginative rugby that thrills the crowds. However, the new man at the helm is pragmatic enough to realise that walls need to be plastered before fancy decorative touches can be applied.

brand of entertaining, expansive rugby, it was supposed to signal a new dawn for the proudest of rugby nations.

However, when Mike Ruddock's Grand Slam-winning side attempted to repeat the feat 12 months later, the flair and artistry that made them such a surprise package had become all too predictable, and there was very little substance to their style.

Army rugby's new head coach, WO2 Andy Price (WG), is a proud Welshman who was brought up marvelling at the prodigious talents of fellow countrymen JPR Williams and Gareth Edwards.

While Price hopes that the Army play entertaining rugby during his tenure, his philosophy is

much more English by nature: "I want to win. I'm not doing this job to finish second."

And, when you consider that Price will ultimately live or die in rugby terms on the outcome of one match, it's an understandable objective.

"The England coach, Brian Ashton, has got five internationals in five weeks and he'll be judged on that," the 37-year-old former front row forward told SoldierSport. "I'll be judged on one game – the Army versus the Navy.

"It doesn't matter what else I do. It's our centenary year and as part of the celebrations we're playing the Barbarians, which is a fantastic honour. However, if I lose that game I won't be out of a job, but if I lose to the Navy at Twickenham then I'll be down the road.

"It's pretty rough to be judged on 80 minutes because if the other team is better than you then what can you do?

"But the pressure to win is understandable because we're the biggest Service numerically and therefore I've got a bigger pool of players to choose from."

The Army have won the last five showdowns with their Navy counterparts, and Price believes that he has enough talent at his disposal to make the very thought of losing the May 5 showpiece unthinkable.

"Where we're lucky is that we're a complete team," explained the former Army U21 coach,

who has been coaching in and around the Army's elite teams for the past seven years.

"The Army has a quality squad and quality back-up so we can play a complete, expansive game.

"We've got the people to do it and that's what will beat our opposition. I've picked a squad of 29 which gives me two players for every position and we've got a massive amount of quality."

Price compares the pressure he is under to maintain the Army's superiority over their great rivals to that facing England's football coach Steve McClaren, whose every decision comes under the microscope.

And, like McClaren, Price feels that he is also there to be shot at by a public who believe they could do a better job.

"Whenever you play representative sport someone will want to stick a knife in your back.

"Everyone can pick a different team because we're all experts. As soon as Steve McClaren announces his England squad everyone in the country immediately criticises," he said. "And in terms of Inter-Services sport, we're Manchester United – everyone hates us. The Navy and Royal Air Force want us to lose whenever we play.

"Therefore there's a lot of weight and pressure for success and, in my opinion, we're duty bound to provide it to those who are sat watching the game on operations. People in Iraq and Afghanistan will stop work to watch the game. If I can send them just half a teacup of morale

I'll have done my job.

"In my eyes soldiers are our shareholders and we're duty bound to provide what they want," he said. "Some people think that outlook generates too much self-induced stress but a lot of people pay a lot of money to watch us play."

Far from being overawed by the associated pressure the job brings, Price is revelling in his "dream" opportunity.

"I always thought about being involved in the Army set-up in a coaching capacity, but I never thought I would be in a position to front it and I'm honoured to have been asked to do so," said Price, who has drafted in Army Rugby League boss Sgt Sean Fanning (RAMC) as his defensive coach and WO1 Andy Sanger (RE) to hone the attack.

"A lot of people have asked me 'are you nervous?'. But, just like when I was asked the same question on my wedding day, the answer's no because I know what I'm getting into.

"In the past an absolutely fantastic professional set-up has been put in place and now I'm the man who's been asked to keep it going in the right direction. That's my challenge.

"I've got big boots to fill because the Army has enjoyed a period of unprecedented success, but I've come in with my eyes wide open.

"The secret of our success has been the quality of our players, not just in terms of skill but

their quality as soldiers and as men. They are fantastic people who are fiercely loyal to the Army and to their sport and invest a lot of their own time and effort. They do the hard work – I'm just the figurehead.”

While Price admits feeling empathy with McClaren, his sporting background is similar to that of former England boss Sven-Goran Eriksson in that he succeeded as a coach despite failing to hit the heights as a player.

“I was injured as a teenager and so didn't really play to a decent level,” he explained. “I turned to coaching at 22 and haven't looked back. But to succeed I've needed support from the Army.

“Being in the Welsh Guards has helped enormously. We're a proud regiment, and as Welshmen rugby is key. If you don't play it you watch it.

“The Welsh Guards gave me a sabbatical to further my coaching horizons. It allowed me to coach at the Celtic Warriors Academy and at Gwent Dragons, where suddenly I found myself dealing with professional players and people aspiring to be stars of the future.

“Coaching at that level and working with players of that ability, has accelerated me to where I am today, so I can't thank my regiment and commanding officer, Col Richard Stanford, enough.”

Book your seats for this year's Army v Navy clash at Twickenham by calling the ticket

hotline on 01252 334415 or visiting www.armynavymatch.org.uk

[Back to top](#)

[Home](#) | [Magazine](#) | [Linkline](#) | [Your letters](#) | [Reviews](#) | [Solmart](#) | [Flashback](#)

Site management by 