

A speech by HRH The Prince of Wales at a dinner for the Welsh Charitables RFC at Llandovery Rugby Club

5th November 2010

Foneddigion a Boneddigesau, diolch am eich croeso.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to begin by congratulating the Welsh Charitables R.F.C. on their tenth anniversary and thanking everyone concerned with organizing this tribute dinner this evening to one of rugby's true greats.

Apart from the immense pride I feel to be able to join you and celebrate the life and remarkable contribution of John Dawes, it was also worth coming just to hear Clive Rowlands speak - I don't think I have enjoyed myself so much for years! I'm not sure how I can keep up with such stories - I really don't think I can compete!

I played my rugby some time ago, in my youth, and I remember so well the names of some of the great rugby heroes who are here tonight. I played at both my first and second schools, in the second row. It was not a pleasant experience, I can tell you - especially as everyone wore Brylcreem at the time! I had my nose broken in a match up at my school in Scotland, playing against the Inverness Academy. I even found myself playing cricket for the 2nd XI against the Nairn Academy. I top scored that day with 15 - so you can imagine how bad the rest of them were! I didn't play rugby at Aberystwyth - they probably would have killed me! Some years later they dug up the rugby pitch to stop my helicopter from landing so you can imagine what they would have done if I had tried to play!

I remember at Aberystwyth it was bad enough going to lectures every day to learn Welsh - everywhere I went there were demonstrations against me.... There were also counter-demonstrations by busloads of middle aged ladies with their umbrellas and handbags...and believe me those ladies were dangerous! So I decided to take up polo instead!

I know people often think of polo as essentially "croquet on horseback" but it's actually quite dangerous and I have the injuries to prove it, including 12 stitches in my face. Indeed, when it comes to my time to pass on, all that will be left of me will be a few screws and a pin with "made in Switzerland" on it. Now that will confuse a lot of people in due course! I was also knocked unconscious when playing polo with my two sons. I made the mistake of being on the opposite side to them! They got their sticks between my pony's legs, and I landed unconscious on the ground. My youngest son thought I was snoring but actually I was dying! If it hadn't been for being quickly rolled onto my side...

It is a particular pleasure to be attending a dinner at this, the home of the Drovers, one of Wales's longest-established rugby clubs, whose proud Patron I became last year. The venue not only allows the people of Carmarthenshire to express their admiration of a towering rugby hero, but also highlights how important rugby is to communities the length and breadth of Wales.

We all know that the camaraderie and the shared passion for the game found in clubs like this have been a great source of strength for Welsh communities in good times and bad. The success of the national team, dare I say (knowing that their mettle is to be tested again tomorrow), depends critically on the grass-roots support generated in places like this and it is marvellous to be here witnessing that community spirit in good measure.

For me, one of the best things about Wales is this sense of community. As Prince of Wales for over 40 years I have come to know some wonderful local characters and, after many years of trying, I have finally ended up with a home of my own here.

Your President, for example, Phil "the Beast" Davies, whose friendly smile and elegant moustache has enchanted many an opposing front row. The Chairman, Handel Davies, also deserves a special mention. I have been informed that Handel's nickname is Semtex, because he is a slow burning firework with a spectacular display at the end of the night.

I am also learning more about the club's distinguished history and the perils of underestimating the team's prowess. In 2007, when Llandoverly were playing Cardiff in the Konica Minolta Cup at the Millennium Stadium, Cardiff were winning and had made two drop goals towards the end to ensure their lead. Just before the end, champagne was brought out with the Cardiff ribbon on it in preparation for the winning team and just at that moment, Llandoverly scored a try giving them the lead and winning them the game. There was a furious scrambling on the sidelines to change the ribbon over before presenting the winning team with their trophy. I can just imagine it!

And this evening, I hope, will also be fondly remembered in the Club's annals, as it hosts this tribute to John Dawes. As we have heard, it is nearly forty years since that tremendous occasion when the British Lions left our shores under his Captaincy and gained a series victory over the New Zealand All Blacks after which so many of the team became household names.

The respect and high esteem with which John is held is shown here this evening in the support he has from former international greats including seven former Captains of Wales. Indeed, I am indebted to Gareth Edwards who has filled in at last the background to that amazing game I attended in 1969. As always – I discover it was my fault!

But seriously, to hear the stories of John's playing career from his first international captain in Clive Rowlands, then his London Welsh Colleague John Taylor and finally finishing off with Gareth Edwards gave us all a much better insight to the man John was as a Captain, Player and Coach and I am sure we will all leave here this evening with a much better understanding of the warm fellowship that exists and remains within the rugby fraternity. And, of course, we must never forget that he holds as proud record as any Welshman; he never lost to – wait for it – an England side!

For the past 10 years a number of charities have benefitted from such special occasions like this, organised by the Welsh Charitables, and it just so happens that I am associated with two of them, as President of The Prince's Trust and Patron of Tŷ Hafan. This evening, I would like to thank the Welsh Charitables R.F.C. for their tremendous generosity in donating £5,000 to my Prince's Trust. With your continued support our charities can continue with their good work, so may I just on behalf of all the charities represented here this evening give my heartfelt thanks to everyone involved with the Welsh Charitables R.F.C. for their loyal support and, indeed, thank every one of you here for your support of the evening. Long may the Welsh Charitables continue to flourish!

Diolch o galon a Penblwydd Hapus!