

Goodall, Ken (Kenneth George)

by Turlough O'Riordan

Goodall, Ken (Kenneth George) (1947–2006), rugby player, was born 23 February 1947 in Leeds, England. Educated at Foyle College, Derry city, where he first encountered rugby, he played in the second row there and with Ulster schools. Playing junior rugby with City of Derry RFC from the 1965/6 season, he commenced a chemical engineering degree at Newcastle University in September 1965. His rugby career blossomed there and he declined an England trial and an offer to play for Gosforth. He played for both his university and City of Derry concurrently, and made his Ulster debut in their 6–6 draw with Australia in 1966. Given his youth and inexperience, he was a surprise selection for Ireland at no. 8 against Australia, 21 January 1967; he was aged 19 (the second youngest Irish forward, after Karl Mullen (d. 2009)), but imposed himself in a 15–8 victory. Playing against England, Scotland (scoring a try) and Wales in that season's five nations championship (Ireland won the latter two games), Goodall was selected for the Barbarians' Easter tour of Wales, before featuring in Ireland's loss to France in April.

That year he toured Australia with Ireland; playing blind-side wing-forward in the only test of the tour, he demonstrated his versatility in an 11–5 victory at Sydney Cricket Ground (13 May 1967), the first time a touring 'home nation' had beaten Australia. Playing for the Irish Wolfhounds in August 1967, Goodall suffered a flare-up of a recurring knee ligament injury in training and underwent surgery to remove cartilage. Returning for City of Derry, and then for Ulster against Munster and Connacht in the November inter-provincial series, he was again injured and forced to withdraw from the Irish trials. He continued playing for Newcastle University and for City of Derry when possible, as no. 8 or wing-forward.

After playing for Ireland against France and Wales in the five nations, he played for the Combined British Universities in their 6–6 draw against France. He ruled himself out of the 1968 Lions tour to South Africa as his final exams clashed with the first test (having already missed his exams the previous spring when he toured Australia, he could not delay them again). Upon injury to the Welsh back Barry John, the selectors called up Goodall (as a second no. 8), who arrived on 17 June in Johannesburg. He played in the 37–9 victory against Eastern Transvaal on 29 June; injuring his hand five minutes into the game, he was strapped up and played on, afterwards finding he had a dislocated thumb and multiple fractures which required surgery before returning home.

Playing for City of Derry and Ulster from September 1968, he was selected as wing-forward for Ireland against Australia (although wrongly listed on the official team sheet and official records as no. 8), with Mick Hipwell moving to no. 8, a position they both vied for at this time. Goodall's versatility, emanating from his agility and

athleticism, resolved the dilemma and he was selected at blindside wing-forward. He scored the second try in Ireland's 10–3 victory over Australia (26 October 1968).

Shining at the January 1969 Irish trials, Goodall was henceforth predominant at no. 8. Dominating at the back of the line-out and in the loose, Goodall was regarded as one of the best back-row forwards in world rugby, certainly the best in the northern hemisphere. He distinguished himself as Ireland's most effective forward in the 17–9 and 17–5 victories over France and England, returning to no. 8 in the latter, where he would remain in the Irish team. He injured his ankle in the 24–0 away victory over Scotland, and Ireland greatly missed him in their 21–11 loss to Wales, gifting them the triple crown. It was the only international game he would miss in four seasons.

Goodall was one of a number of especially talented Ulster players, including Mike Gibson, Syd Millar and Willie John McBride, playing for the province and Ireland. By now a certain selection for Ireland, Goodall shone as Ulster retained the inter-provincial title (the apex of the Irish domestic rugby season at this time) with a 6–3 victory over Leinster (20 December 1969). He was outstanding in the 8–8 draw with South Africa (10 January 1970). After Ireland's loss to France in Paris (26 January 1970), he withdrew from the Barbarians side selected to play South Africa in London that month due to a neck injury. After Ireland lost to England, Goodall played against Scotland in the wooden spoon decider, scoring a try in the 16–11 victory. The final championship game (14 March 1970) in Lansdowne Road, against a Wales team chasing their second successive triple crown, saw Goodall score a memorable try to seal the 14–0 victory. Catching a loose clearance from Barry John, Goodall ran fifty metres, chipped the Welsh full-back J. P. R. Williams, collected the ball, and then won a footrace against Gareth Edwards to the line. It was one of the finest tries ever seen at Lansdowne Road and epitomised his immense athleticism and skill. Indelibly marked in a generation of Irish rugby fans' memories, the try sealed Ireland's biggest win against Wales since 1925; it was Goodall's third victory over the Welsh.

Goodall's capacity to dominate the line-out, hugely valuable within the prevailing rules of the game, was accentuated by his height, agility and innate athleticism. The use of outside arm and lifting in line-outs was prohibited; direct kicks to touch were allowed until 1970, with the ensuing line-out taking place where the ball left the field of play; after that date, a direct kick to touch was only allowed from behind the kicking team's '22'. Goodall's mobility (6 ft 3 in tall, weighing over 14 stone) made him perhaps the best line-out jumper in the world (when international games could feature between fifty and eighty line-outs), feeding quick ball to the half-backs as Ireland accrued possession and territory. A destructive wrecking force in the loose, harnessing his strength and speed, Goodall was the standout back-row member of an imposing Irish pack, and was very much the prototype of the modern no. 8. He featured in each of the three victories over Australia in twenty-one months (1967–8). Goodall was *Rugby World* magazine's international player of the year for 1970, the first Irish player to receive the award.

Goodall graduated B.Sc. (June 1969) and, struggling to find work in the chemical industry, took up a teaching position with Limavady Grammar School. On 1 January 1970 he married Wilma Lyttle, a teacher and international track-and-field athlete, in Waterside Presbyterian church, Derry. He was selected in May 1970 for the Irish autumn tour to Argentina. As speculation mounted that he was about to join the Rugby Football League, he signed professional papers with Workington Town on 6 July 1970; there was much speculation about his signing-on fee, but it was never disclosed. Having won nineteen Irish caps, and aged only 22, Goodall commented soon after making the switch: 'I have no real regrets but I feel a little sorry at leaving rugby union. I hope I have not given up my chances of international rugby. Given reasonable luck I might be able to make the grade in rugby league' (*Ir. Independent*, 7 July 1970).

He had moved from rugby union just as he was entering his prime, and started well in rugby league, scoring thirteen tries in his first eleven matches for Workington Town. However, his line-out skills and capacity to dominate broken play were almost useless in rugby league. Taller than his fellow forwards and more vulnerable to repeated tackling, he foundered upon succumbing to injury in a more aggressive, attritional environment. A knee injury during his second season limited his appearances. A compressed nerve in his lower back required surgery in January 1974, the lengthy convalescence left him sidelined, and he retired on medical advice at the end of his fourth season with the club. He worked as a physics teacher at Moorclose School while living in Workington.

Goodall had committed the greatest sin possible in the eyes of the rugby union establishment; the IRFU and International Board rules that opposed professionalism were sacrosanct and only ever directed at one sport, rugby league. At the time of his switch Goodall was living with his wife in his mother's home and struggling financially on a teacher's salary. At the close of his professional career he returned to Derry with his wife and young son, and took up a teaching post with Faughan Valley High School in Derry where he introduced rugby union.

Under the formal ostracism from the game he loved, the tenets and officious culture of rugby union's division from rugby league demanded that he be refused admittance to any rugby union ground in the decade or so after his move to rugby league. Goodall kept up friendships with former teammates and friends in the union game, and gradually the warmth in which he was held denuded the formal ostracism demanded by rugby union officialdom. He worked at weekends for BBC Radio Ulster covering club rugby in the province from the mid 1970s, and was part of the coaching staff of Irish Schools and Ulster Under-21 teams (c.2000).

In April 1989, Goodall, along with other converts to league, was formally reinstated to union by the International Rugby Board. He avidly took up his allotment of international match tickets from the IRFU, bearing no ill will towards the code or the

IRFU. He switched codes to earn a better living for his family and had no regrets, but admitted to missing the thrill of international fixtures.

Renovating a home at Killaloo, outside Derry city, he took early retirement as vice-principal of Faughan Valley High School. He was a co-founder of Foyle Hospice and an active volunteer there. Suffering from arthritis in his later years, he died, aged 59, on 17 August 2006 in Derry after a short illness, and was buried in Ballyoan cemetery. He was survived by his wife Wilma, son Gareth and daughter Gail. His untimely death was much mourned in Derry and Ulster rugby circles, and the Ulster branch of the IRFU instituted the Ken Goodall Award for the provincial club player of the year, presented annually by the City of Derry club. Goodall was selected at no. 8 on the 'greatest Ulster team' in 2005.

Ir. Press, 10 Jan., 21 Mar., 17 Nov. 1967; 11 Mar. 1968; 2 Mar. 1970; 3 Mar. 1978; *Ir. Times*, 15 May 1967; 20 Feb., 19 Mar., 28, 29 Oct. 1968; 27 Jan., 24 Feb. 1969; 2 Mar. 1970; 21 Jan. 1975; 6 Aug. 1977; 19 Aug. 2006; John Reason, *The 1968 Lions: the British Isles tour of South Africa* (1968); *Sunday Independent*, 12 Jan. 1969; 11 Jan., 15 Mar. 1970; 26 Jan. 1975; *Ir. Independent*, 2, 9 Jan., 16 Mar., 7 July, 6 Oct. 1970; *City of Derry Rugby Football Club centenary brochure 1881–1981* (1981); *Belfast Telegraph*, 19 Sept. 2000; *Sunday Times*, 13 Nov. 2005; Tony Collins, *Rugby league in twentieth-century Britain: a social and cultural history* (2006); BBC Sport online (obit.), 17 Aug. 2006, news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/rugby_union/irish/5260460.stm (accessed May 2013)