

WAKEFIELD, DAD AND ME - A TRINITY

I've always had a bit of a soft spot for Wakefield Trinity. Thinking back over my time as a Saints fan it's perhaps not surprising, although, as Trinity have been something of a bogey side over the years, perhaps it should be.

Wakefield was the first visiting team I saw at Knowsley Road. I was a bit of a late starter because I didn't see my first game until I was nine. On November 27 1965, my dad, myself and 12,762 others saw Saints and Wakefield play out a 9 - 9 draw. Len Killeen scored my first Saints try and, like the South African winger, I was up and running.

How many people reading this were at Headingley on May 6, 1967? This was my first trip into Yorkshire to follow Saints and, being in the days before the M62, it seemed to be a real adventure. We faced Wakefield in a thrilling League Championship Final. I remember the weather - you name it, we had it - and the controversy. Saints were leading 7 - 4 thanks to Cliff Watson's first half try when scrum half Ray Owen was awarded an obstruction try to level matters before the end. "He wouldn't have got there on a motor bike," was the general consensus of opinion.

Dad and I were stationed on the wall behind the dugouts and the man on the Trinity bench was constantly up and down, unable to contain his excitement. My dad, never normally prone to such action, grabbed him by the shoulder and sat him down. "Do you know who that is?" asked a Wakefield supporter. It was Ken Traill, Trinity's coach and one of RL's legendary hard men. Oops!

The midweek replay was at Swinton, but Dad didn't want to take me because of the following day's school. He said he'd write the result on a piece of paper and put it under my pillow as soon as he got it, so I stayed awake waiting for the news. It was not good.

On April 7, 1979, the same teams met at the same ground to leave those of us with a knowledge of geography and a good road map wondering again how Leeds could be viewed as the most suitable neutral venue for a match between St Helens and Wakefield. This time a place at Wembley was at stake, and the game was just as tight and tense as it had been twelve years earlier. When a late Les Jones try put Saints 7 -

6 up it looked like it was to be our day but a long pass which went astray led to Dave Topliss combining with Andrew Fletcher for the winning try. I recall the car journey home for the fact that neither the driver nor his three passengers said a word.

1974 / 75 was a great season for Saints as they romped away with the first division championship finishing miles ahead of second placed Wigan and losing only three games in the process. One of the defeats was to a notoriously inconsistent team in November and that same team surprisingly put Saints out of the Challenge Cup three months later. I don't need to spell out which team it was, do I?

Dad saw his last game on April 2, 1978 before he sadly died two days later. It had to be against Wakefield, of course, but this time the bogey was exorcised as Saints won 36 - 5. My first try had been scored by Len Killeen, and my dad's last was by Peter Glynn, looking uncannily like the bloke from Chas and Dave.

But, despite - or, perhaps, in an attempt to ignore - some poor results over the years, thoughts return to my first season. In February Saints had a very difficult looking first round Challenge Cup tie at Belle Vue; Trinity had a formidable side and the week before they had beaten Saints there in a league match. When the news came through that Saints had won 10 - 0 Dad was really pleased. He explained to me what a great result that was and how he thought we'd now have a great chance of reaching the final. "If we get to Wembley this year, I'll take you," he told me.

He kept his word, I saw Saints thrash Wigan to win the cup and I was really on my way!

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