

## SPORTING LEGENDS: GARETH EDWARDS

**SPORT: RUGBY**

**COMPETITIVE ERA: 1966 - 1979**

Gareth Edwards, born 12 July 1947 in Pontardawe, Wales, is a former Welsh rugby union scrum half, considered by many to be the greatest player in the history of the game. He is known in rugby circles merely as 'Gareth', such is his fame and the regard in which he is held.



Edwards was a miner's son from Gwaun-cae-Gurwen. He won a scholarship to the elite Millfield Public School.

In the young Gareth Edwards they enrolled an accomplished gymnast, a soccer player good enough to be offered apprenticeship by Swansea City and a Welsh schools long jump and hurdles champion. He was also a scrum-half whose skills had been honed by the former London Welsh, Cardiff and Llanelli first-teamer Bill Samuel.

At Millfield, Edwards survived intense competition and in his first season, the side was unbeaten. Returning to Wales as a PE student at Cardiff College of Education, he was invited to join Cardiff RFC.

At Cardiff, Edwards began one of the most famous half-back partnerships in rugby history with fly-half Barry John.

Together they were to play over 50 times for their club, in 23 internationals and five Tests for British Lions touring teams in South Africa and New Zealand. It was John who encouraged Edwards to overcome his lack of a long pass, by telling him, 'You pass it, I'll catch it'.

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Edwards was the pride of Welsh Rugby for over a decade.

He first played for Wales in 1967 at the age of 19. Between 1967 and 1978 Edwards won 53 caps for Wales, including 13 as captain. All his caps were won in succession, he never once had a dip in form or an injury that would allow anybody else to take his place. It was against the visiting All Blacks in 1967 that Edwards and John were paired internationally for the first time, and the following summer made their first tour together with the British Lions, to South Africa. The partnership was cut short after only one Test when John broke a collar-bone.

But Edwards established himself as a world-class scrum half in helping Wales to the Triple Crown in 1969. He himself scored a try against Scotland and assisted John to winning points against Ireland and England. They also scored all of Wales' nine points to clinch their first Grand Slam in 19 years with a 9-5 win over France in Paris in 1971. It was after this match that Edwards revealed that the pair baffled opponents by deciding tactics in Welsh.

He is Wales' youngest ever captain, gaining his first captaincy at the age of 20. During his era the Welsh side dominated the Five Nations Championship, winning the title seven times, including three grand slams. He also played ten times for the British Lions, playing for the legendary 1971 Lions team that was the only such team to defeat the All Blacks and for the unbeaten 1974 side in South Africa.

Edwards was blessed with extreme pace and married this with strength, agility and guile, scoring twenty tries in internationals. His try for the Barbarians against the All Blacks in 1973 at Cardiff Arms Park, often referred to simply as 'that try', is commonly said to be the greatest ever. The move starting deep with Phil Bennett inside his own 22, and passing through five other pairs of hands before Edwards finished it with a diving score in the corner.

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### Scott Burton's Final Thought

In a poll of international rugby players conducted in 2003 by Rugby World magazine, Edwards was declared the greatest player of all time.

This speaks volumes about the high regard in which Gareth Edwards is held.



Edwards was a dynamic player – always positive and always on the move.