

Fiona O'Brien: Waterford's latest rugby international



Ireland opened up their Women's Six Nations campaign with an excellent 30-5 victory away to Italy in Florence. They led 7-0 at halftime thanks to a try and a conversion by Niamh Briggs, the Abbeyside born player who was captaining the team for the first time. During the course of the second half an Old Belvedere player, namely Fiona O'Brien was introduced into the action and she performed superbly during her time on the pitch.

Due to the fact that Niamh Briggs was the main centre of attraction, and rightly so the appearance of Fiona went rather unnoticed by many, including sports lovers here in Waterford.

This was her first cap and there is no doubt whatsoever that it was the first of many for the prop forward.

During the build up to last weekend's game against France in Ashbourne Fiona spoke proudly about becoming Waterford's latest international. "I was bred born and reared in Viewmount and I went to school in the Ursuline. From an early age I always wanted to be a vet and I studied in UCD and I qualified in 2011. I have always had a love of animals so this is my dream job. I work at the Pet Hospital in Waterford and at the present time I also practise with Blue Cross in Dublin. Blue Cross is a mobile clinic which caters for animal lovers who are on benefit payments so it really is an enjoyable position" said Fiona who is the granddaughter of the legendary former League of Ireland soccer referee John Waldron who is a resident of College Green, just off Ballytruckle.

John later became a LOI assessor and he was employed for the majority of his working life with The Evening Press as a driver and he was a widely known all over the South East in that role and Fiona is extremely proud of her granddad. "John was a wonderful ambassador for soccer in Waterford and I am delighted for him and indeed for my grandmother. My mam rang me the day after the Italian game to ask me if I had received my cap because John wanted to see it. He was absolutely thrilled for me and he was very proud so it's been a wonderful week, it really has" admitted Fiona who has a really hearty laugh and an incredible sense of humour.



Prop Fiona O'Brien (bottom right) in action for Leinster.

In recent times John was hospitalised but thankfully he is now out and about once again and Fiona's accession into the international fold has given him another reason to be happy. Fiona went on to outline her career to date in the world of rugby. "I was studying in UCD and my brother approached me one day and asked me if I would think about playing rugby as a way of relaxing from my studies. I did just that and I loved it. That was in 2009. I was playing for Leinster a few years later but I then had to move to Lurgan to work for two and a half years and I played for Ulster. I came back to Waterford but when I signed for Old Belvedere I once again was selected for Leinster. We have a very good team at Old Belvedere and the fact that ten of us from the club are in the Irish squad has made it easy for me to adapt to the international setup".

Born on January 15th, 1988 Fiona wasn't totally surprised when she was selected for the current Irish squad by the new man in charge Tom Tierney as she explained. "I was involved in a squad of 32 for the World Cup last year and although I did not make the final cut I was involved in the strength and conditioning sessions which were staged before the team departed for the competition. I was very much on the periphery of the squad last year and I probably had an idea that I might get selected if I continued to play well and keep injury free so I was thrilled to get a bit of game time against Italy and get selected again for the game against France. The fact that Niamh Briggs is now the captain is great for me also because to have two Waterford players in the squad is fantastic and she gave me a special welcome when we met up for the first time as a squad this season. Niamh will be an awesome captain and she will once again play a major role for us this year. The Six Nations this season will be fiercely fought. We saw that on the opening day when Wales defeated England, the World Cup champions. I don't think anyone saw that coming so every game will be vital" concluded our latest international rugby star.