

MORGAN, CLIFFORD (Cliff) ISAAC (1930 - 2013), rugby player, sports writer and broadcaster, media executive

Name: Clifford (Cliff) Isaac Morgan

Date of birth: 1930

Date of death: 2013

Spouse: Nuala Morgan (née Martin)

Spouse: Pat Morgan

Child: Catherine Morgan

Child: Nicholas Morgan

Parent: Clifford Morgan

Parent: Edna May Morgan (née Thomas)

Gender: Male

Occupation: rugby player, sports writer and broadcaster, media executive

Area of activity: Sports and Leisure Pursuits; Literature and Writing; Business and Industry

Author: David Brayley

Cliff Morgan was born on 7 April 1930 at 159 Top Trebanog Road, Trebanog in the Rhondda Valley, the only child of Clifford Morgan (1901-1972), a coal miner, and his wife Edna May (née Thomas, 1907-1962). His father was a talented footballer who had been offered professional terms by Tottenham Hotspur in the months leading up to Cliff's birth, but rejected the offer. Although English was the language of the family home, Cliff learnt Welsh from his father and was a fluent speaker.

He attended Gellidawel Junior School in Tonyrefail before progressing to Tonyrefail Grammar School. From his earliest years, he had a passion for music, playing piano and participating in many school eisteddfodau. Aged 17, he became a second tenor in the Porth and District Mixed-Voice Choir, singing with his father who was a tenor. The choir were twice winners of the mixed choir prize at the National Eisteddfod, at Dolgellau in 1949 and Aberystwyth in 1951.

At Tonyrefail Grammar, Morgan initially played football and cricket for his school, but not rugby until the relatively late age of 16, when he came under the tutelage of rugby coach Ned Gribble. Gribble played Morgan in a variety of positions - hooker, wing and centre - before moving him to outside half, the position he would occupy throughout his career. Gribble became a significant influence on Morgan both on and off the rugby field. A quirk of Morgan's rugby career was that he never took a drop goal in international rugby after Gribble once dropped him from the school team for winning a game with one. The teacher's passionate belief in passing and running, never kicking, influenced Morgan's approach to rugby.

Morgan's progress in the school game was swift under Gribble and he won two Welsh Secondary Schools caps aged 18 during the 1948-49 season. In that same season, his progress was also confirmed by his selection for an unofficial Cardiff XV in a charity match at Porthcawl alongside international stalwarts Bill Tamplin, Des O'Brien (then captain of Ireland), Jack Matthews and Bleddyn Williams.

He left school in 1949 to study Botany, Zoology and Chemistry at the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire in Cardiff with the intention of becoming a doctor. Whilst studying he joined Cardiff RFC, but unfortunately never found the balance between his university studies and his rugby commitments which led to him failing Botany in his first year. The university insisted he resit the exam. However, Cardiff RFC had a fixture on the same day in which Morgan elected to play rather than resit the exam, and as a result he had to abandon his university career.

Having been rejected for National Service due to a shadow on one of his lungs, in the 1949-50 season, Morgan played 15 times for the Cardiff first XV. He was greatly influenced by scrum half Rex Willis and centres Jack Matthews and Bleddyn Williams, who - because of Morgan's short stature - looked after their protégé on the pitch. In the following season, regular Cardiff and Wales outside half Billy Cleaver retired, meaning that Morgan became Cardiff's first choice in that position.

On 10 March 1951, Morgan made his Wales debut aged 20 against Ireland at Cardiff Arms Park, replacing the dropped Glyn Davies. The Welsh team had been announced at 6.30pm on the previous Monday whilst Morgan was on the bus home from work as a management trainee at the Electricity Board in Cardiff. By the time he arrived back at Trebanog, a crowd of people with flags were waiting, cheering. Morgan always remembered that even the bus driver got off and shook his hand. The game ended in a 3-3 draw and Morgan kept his place for the next two matches against France and South Africa, with both ending in defeat.

Morgan's next appearance for Wales was at the start of the 1952 Five Nations Championship. Morgan inspired Wales to victories over England, Scotland and Ireland, but during the Irish game he suffered a leg injury. Unaware that he had actually broken it, he played on. Needing to prove his fitness to the selectors for the Grand Slam decider against France, Morgan played for Cardiff the Saturday following the Irish game, but was forced off by his leg injury. A visit to hospital revealed that he had been playing with a broken fibula, and Morgan missed the Grand Slam winning game against France the following week.

In 1952, Chairman of Wigan Rugby League Club, Bill Gore, arrived unannounced at Top Trebanog Road. The strict amateur rules of Rugby Union at the time meant just talking to a Rugby League club could have professionalised Morgan ending his Cardiff and Wales career, so he initially hid upstairs. However, his mother invited them in for breakfast. They offered Morgan £5,000 in £5 notes in an attaché case plus a post-dated cheque for £2,500. Despite repeated offers, Morgan never 'went north', remarking in later years, 'I have two regrets in my life, that I never played for the Lions in New Zealand and that I never played Rugby League.'

In all, Morgan won 29 caps for Wales, from his debut against Ireland in 1951 up to his last appearance against France on 29 March 1958. Morgan's influence for Wales was such that he held the record for the highest number of caps as an outside half for Wales for another 37 years, until Neil Jenkins won his 30th cap on 16 March 1996.

Morgan scored three tries for Wales and his highlights included playing in the Welsh team which beat the New Zealand All Blacks in 1953, winning the Grand Slam in 1952, becoming joint winners of the Five Nations in 1954 and 1955, before captaining Wales to the championship outright in 1956.

In May 1954, for employment reasons, Morgan left Cardiff RFC and moved to Wicklow, south of Dublin, as a manager of Wire Ropes, Wicklow Ltd. There he joined Bective Rangers RFC helping them win the Leinster Cup in 1955, the first time since 1935. Morgan met his future wife, Morgan à Nuala Martin (1930-1999), an Aer Lingus stewardess in Dublin when delivering a parcel as a favour to a friend. They married on 17 December 1955 in Woking, and had two children, Catherine and Nicholas.

In 1955, Morgan was invited to tour South Africa and Kenya with the British and Irish Lions. Morgan's Wicklow company refused to pay him when away touring with the Lions, so he never returned as he felt they didn't value him. On meeting the rest of the Lions touring party in Eastbourne, Morgan was appointed tour choirmaster and taught the squad songs to represent all the four nations and South Africa, using a blackboard to write out the Welsh lyrics.

The tour was one of great personal achievement for Morgan and established his name in the pantheon of truly great international rugby players. He scored the first try of the tour after just two minutes, going over in the corner against Western Transvaal at Potchefstroom. Throughout the tour, Morgan delivered on his belief that you should play risk-taking rugby, 'because when you play safe the game is impoverished.'

Going into the Third Test at Loftus Versfeld in Pretoria, the series was delicately poised at 1-1. With tour captain Robin Thompson ruled out through injury, Morgan was appointed in his place and he led the Lions to a 9-6 victory. The final game in the series at Port Elizabeth was lost 22-8 as the Springboks triumphed over an injury ravaged Lions team to level the series at 2-2.

Despite being touted as the Lions Captain for the New Zealand tour of 1959, Morgan retired two weeks before his 28th birthday in March 1958. Morgan often cited lack of money as the reason. 'Rugby was important but it was not the most important thing in my life.'

His rugby career saw him score 38 tries in 202 appearances for Cardiff RFC between 1949-1958, helping them to beat New Zealand in 1953 and Australia in 1957 and, along with his 29 Wales caps, he added four for the British and Irish Lions.

Following his final match for Wales, Morgan met **Hywel Davies**, Head of Programmes for BBC Wales, who offered him the opportunity to consider a post at the BBC. Morgan had been working for A. Gallenkamp & Co as a salesman of laboratory equipment, a job he had never enjoyed, so accepted Davies's offer to, initially, become involved as a

non-staff member, to run alongside his sales role. But in 1960, Morgan was appointed to the full-time role of BBC Sports Organiser in Wales, beginning an association with the BBC that would last for much of the next 38 years.

Morgan's first broadcasting role was as presenter and producer of a Saturday night radio sports programme called *Going Round the World*, a forum that interviewed sports people from around the world in their own homes. Morgan soon created and hosted the first ever Welsh TV Sports show to be shot in a studio, although as there were only two chairs for his first guests, Max Rawlings and H. B. Toft, Morgan sat on a bag of cement and was only filmed from the waist up.

In 1963, he moved to London to become editor of *Grandstand* (having previously been a stand-in presenter) and *Sportsview*. In 1965 he left *Grandstand* and became a columnist for the *News of the World* and also a freelance presenter, reporter and rugby commentator for both television and radio, before moving to ITV in 1966 to produce the current affairs programme, *This Week* for Rediffusion for two and a half years. 1969 saw Morgan walk away from a lucrative contract as the *News of the World's* rugby correspondent in protest at their serialisation of the memoirs of Christine Keeler, before becoming the first team captain of BBC's iconic *'A Question of Sport'* alongside Henry Cooper.

In March 1972, aged 41, Morgan travelled to Bad Lippspringe in West Germany to commentate on the British Army of the Rhine's rugby cup final. He suffered a stroke in Cologne on the night after the match resulting in him being confined to a wheelchair for three months, suffering slurred speech and temporary paralysis to the left side of his body. His recovery took nine months. Air Commodore G. C. Larry Lamb arranged recovery at Wegberg RAF Hospital on the Dutch border as Morgan had no savings or insurance to cover his illness. At Wegberg, Morgan received a letter from his friend, actor **Richard Burton**, which he treasured for the rest of his life. It said:

Dewch mas o'r lle na (Get out of that place). You will need time for recuperation after this ordeal. Have one of our homes in Gstaad, or Pays de Galles in Geneva. Everything will be provided including sticks and coal! Should you need anything as mundane as money, you have only to ask. Cofion, Richard.

After three weeks in Wegberg, Morgan was repatriated to Wrexham Park Hospital in Stoke Poges, which was arranged by his BBC colleague, David Coleman. He then spent four months at Farnham Park Rehabilitation Centre. Following his stroke, Morgan described his financial situation as 'in cash terms, we were destitute.' He and his wife sold their car and even his wife's engagement ring to make ends meet.

On 20 January 1973, Morgan returned to regular television commentary for the Ireland v New Zealand game at Landsowne Road. However, it was his commentary on a game involving the All Blacks a week later that assured Morgan's place in the history of televised sport. Regular BBC commentator Bill McLaren had been taken ill on the eve of the Barbarians v New Zealand game in Cardiff, and Morgan was called in as a last minute replacement. Without time to research the players taking part, and within a minute of the start, Morgan provided the commentary to arguably the greatest try ever scored in Rugby Union history - scored by Gareth Edwards - and certainly the most replayed passage of rugby of all time.

In early 1973, Morgan was offered a staff job at BBC Radio as Editor of Sport. Within 12 months he was made Head of Radio Outside Broadcasts, and by 1976 he had become Head of BBC Television Outside Broadcasts Group. Part of his duties saw him undertake the role of Head of Royal Liaison for the BBC. Amongst many state televised events, Morgan made the TV arrangements for Lord Mountbatten's funeral, the Queen Mother's eightieth birthday, the Queen's Silver Jubilee and the wedding of Prince Charles to Lady Diana Spencer - which was at the time the highest viewed live event in BBC history with over 500 million viewers worldwide. Morgan oversaw countless sporting events such as FA Cup Finals, World Cups and Olympics. Due to his experiences convalescing from his stroke, he became a keen supporter of disabled sport, and his documentary of the 1980 Paralympics was the first time the event had been covered by BBC Television. He retired from his role as Head of Outside Broadcasts in 1987, but continued to have a presence on radio, remaining as host of his popular *'Sport on Four'* show until 1998.

In 1991 Morgan was inducted into the Welsh Sports Hall of Fame and in 1997, he was one of 15 players to be inducted into the newly formed International Rugby Hall of Fame. He was also inducted into the World Rugby Hall of Fame in 2009. Morgan was honoured for his services to broadcasting with an OBE in 1977 and a CVO (Commander of the Royal Victorian Order) in 1986. Consistently revered by his broadcasting colleagues, confirming his rare achievement of attaining excellence in two separate careers, broadcaster Des Lynam said of Morgan, he was, 'one of the best broadcasting voices of all time. A brilliant broadcaster himself, his advice to those of us trying to make our way in the business was wise and invaluable. But underlying it all was his great sense of fun. 'Enjoy yourself' he would say, "It's not working down the mine, is it?"

Morgan spent his years of retirement on the Isle of Wight with his second wife, Pat, whom he married in 2001 after the death of his first wife in 1999. Latterly, Morgan had suffered with cancer of the vocal chords and had to have his larynx removed, cruelly robbing him of the distinctive voice that had given him his broadcasting career. He died on 29 August 2013, and his funeral was held at Holy Trinity Church, Bembridge, with speakers Max Boyce and the Barbarians' try scorer, Sir Gareth Edwards, who had provided Morgan with the opportunity to deliver the greatest ever passage of rugby union commentary:

"Almost on the halfway line, Kirkpatrick, to Williams, this is great stuff, Phil Bennett covering. Chased by Alistair Scown, brilliant, oh that's brilliant! John Williams, Bryan Williams. Pullin, John Dawes - great dummy! David, Tom David - the halfway line - brilliant by Quinnell! This is Gareth Edwards, a dramatic start! What a score! Oh, that fellow Edwards. If the greatest writer of the written word would have written that story, no one would've believed him!"

Author

David Brayley

Sources

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Further reading

Wikipedia Article: **Cliff Morgan**

Additional Links

VIAF: **4056149296238180670001**

Wikidata: **Q614928**

Published date: 2021-11-12

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