

Daniel Hipkiss

Occold School has turned out some pretty remarkable young people in recent years. Children of utterly different backgrounds, temperaments, and aptitudes have succeeded in quite different fields. A few succeeded against considerable odds and today's hero certainly falls into that category.

About fifteen years ago I noticed that the ball that occasionally came over our fence from Tonweya next door was invariably oval rather than spherical. I also noticed that the polite young man who collected it seemed to take his rugby very seriously. Little could anyone have envisaged that this ambitious lad would grow into the muscled 'Tiger' which he is today. Producing spectacular rugby for Club & Country.

Daniel (Dan or Danny) was born in 1982 and lived in Dorking & Mendlesham but moved to Occold in 1988 where he promptly started playing rugby. He played for Hartismere High School and Diss Rugby Club. During this period he made his first appearance for his country in the Under Sixteens (U16). But this was no flash in the pan as he went on to play for the U17, U18 and U21. Leicester Tigers were so impressed that they not only took him into their youth programme, but also offered him a scholarship to Uppingham School in nearby Rutland.

Unfortunately at the age of 17 he developed a severe injury to his left knee (a torn posterior cruciate ligament), which would have ended a Rugby career for most people. Indeed his surgeons advised him not to play again, ever! Even during his long convalescence, the oval ball still held his fascination and he can now do ball spinning and other tricks which are normally reserved for the round ball.

Remarkably, after two years, 3 operations and plenty of hard work, Daniel triumphantly scored a try on his debut for the Tigers U21's against Leeds. Ten months later he did it again, scoring a spectacular solo try in his senior debut for Leicester Tigers. After this opening try Tigers went on to defeat Biarritz Olympique in Bayonne in the Orange Cup.

Unfortunately a few months later, in February 2004, injury struck again curtailing the rest of the season.

With the powerful line up, it was going to be an uphill struggle to find a regular place in the first team again, but needless to say Daniel has achieved just that and with style.

His frequent appearances in the England Sevens Team have taken him all over the world: Dubai, South Africa, Wellington and Los Angeles, Singapore, Paris and of course 'Twickers'.

While in South Africa the 'training' appeared to include a trip into the desert and swimming with sharks (Tiger Sharks?), a pretty harsh regime even for rugby!

Daniel is no saint, he has been known to clout the odd Frenchman (local farmers can insert their own comment at this point) but he's not too proud to take time out to encourage the youngsters at Diss United when they have appeared at the Leicester ground.

Recently Daniel has been out with further injuries but none the less returned briefly to the England Sevens to secure tries against Russia and France. The year was completed in style as he took his clubs **Try of the Year** award for another of his spectacular, opportunistic tries, securing a win in injury time, in their Heineken Cup game against the Welsh 'Ospreys' in December.

There are bigger men playing rugby, there are faster men playing rugby, there are certainly far luckier men playing rugby, but Daniel has a real talent for the game and his guts and graft are surely unsurpassed.



Photo courtesy of Leicester Tigers