

Doddie's Grand Slam Team to cycle Edinburgh to Rome in nine days

Two teams of rugby fans began a nine day cycle to Rome from Scottish Gas Murrayfield on Wednesday – during which they will visit all the Grand Slam stadiums on the way.

These are just two of the 20 teams taking part travelling from their own locations all aiming to get to Rome the night before the Italy v Scotland match.

Some of the team members are former players like Scottish cap and British Lions winger Roger Baird who is Team Ambassador, former England fly-half Huw Davies and England flanker and Wasps legend Paul Volley. Others are just rugby mad and wanted to take on the charity challenge to raise money for the My Name's Doddie Foundation. Doddie Weir, OBE, died in 2022 after a diagnosis of MND in 2017. Since 2017 when he and his fellow trustees set up the charity, My Name's Doddie, more than £11 million has been raised to support research. Doddie Weir was capped 61 times for Scotland and also played for the British Lions.

Doddie's Grand Slam Team have responded to former Scotland captain Rob Wainwright who invited them to take part in the All Roads Lead to Rome 2024 challenge. This ride from Edinburgh to Piazza Navona in Rome by 5pm on Friday 8 March

aims to raise £1 million for research into Motor Neurone Disease.

The fundraising has already reached £100,000 before the group set off and now the team which is carrying the Match Ball for the Italy v Scotland fixture has just added a further stop on the way. They will visit the palace in Monaco where HSH Prince Albert of Monaco will treat them to a VIP dinner. There the team will hand the Match Ball over to former Italian international rugby player Marcello Cuttitta whose team will provide some extra pedal power and group morale for their final leg into Rome on 7 March.

Ian Barr, team co-captain and former SRU president, said: "I knew Doddie, I considered him a friend. He was just such an inspirational guy, a larger-than-life character. MND has affected quite a few high profile people in the rugby community, but it's not a rugby illness. It's in all different sports and walks of life.

"We did the ride last year and Rob Wainwright kind of threw it out there that the following year we'd potentially go to Rome. Then one of the other guys said they'd like to go around all the stadiums. Rob Boyns and I put our heads together and said, you know what, let's do it!.

"We're working very closely with Rob Wainwright and the My Name's Doddie Foundation. It's going to be challenging, particularly at the end of February, but I'm looking forward to it. What drives people on is to make that difference, to make it better for somebody else. So when we're feeling tired or sore, we have to remember that we're not suffering like some others with MND are suffering. If we can help raise some money, raise awareness and make their lives better, that's what will drive us on."

Rob Boyns of Doddie Aid Wales said: "The challenge for the majority of the team will not be the riding, but probably the lack of sleep. We're covering a huge amount of miles every day, with each pod doing between 60 and 70 miles, so it's

going to be tough.

"My ultimate aim is is to inspire young people, engage with communities, complete the ride, get to Rome and have lifelong memories and lifelong friends. And of course raise lots of money for MND research.

"MND has no barriers, it's an international disease. As Doddie said, some people say it's incurable, it's not incurable, it just needs funding. And I think raising money and asking people for sponsorship is one thing, but raising awareness leads to funding which becomes perpetual until we can crack it.

"By doing something and by engaging with the young people of today, if we can inspire them to either do something similar to what we're doing, become sports people of the future, or become scientists of the future, then we've achieved something."

For full details of All Roads Lead to Rome, to follow or donate to Doddie's Grand Slam Team or to take part in the Race to Rome home challenge, go to www.doddiesgrandslam.com

The route (28th February – 7th March)

Day 1: Scottish Gas Murrayfield Stadium – Biggar (50km)

Day 2: Biggar – Cairnryan Ferry Terminal (154km)

Belfast – Aviva Stadium Dublin (225km)

Day 3: Holyhead Ferry Terminal to Principality Stadium Cardiff
()

Day 4: Cardiff – Newhaven via Twickenham Stadium ()

Day 5: Dieppe – Auxerre via Stade de France Paris (372km)

Day 6: Auxerre – Grenoble (400km)

Day 7: Grenoble – Monaco (364km)

Day 8: Monaco – Livorno (399km)

Day 9: Livorno – Stadio Olimpico Rome (300km)

The teams will ride in four groups of four cyclists riding in relay against a strict timetable to reach ferries, stadiums and events planned along the route. The team has a support crew of 15 helping them all to keep going.

When the Match Ball is delivered to the stadium in Rome the team will join the crowds to watch Scotland play.

