

# **Alex is following in the footsteps of a Liberton reared rugby great**

**When Alex Stewart ran out to win her first Scotland rugby cap in an eventual 20-18 win over Wales in Cardiff her selection spanned a 49 year gap.**

The last time Liberton High produced a rugby internationalist was in 1975 when Bruce Hay, subsequently a double British Lion, debuted against New Zealand in Auckland.

And one person particularly well placed to link the pair is Eric Jones who, as a young player, absorbed Hay's promptings at Boroughmuir before going on to coach .... Alex Stewart as a Corstorphine Cougars flanker.

Eric sees many parallels beyond the school connection, and said: "Some of Bruce's values and character have certainly helped shape Alex's rugby."

Recalling his formative rugby years, he said: "When I turned up at the Boroughmuir club in 1998 as a 17-year-old Bruce took a lot of the young players under his wing overseeing sessions maybe not the most technical but 'character building' alright.

"Fast forward 12 years and I had taken up a position with Inch Park Community Sports Club as a Multi-Sport Development Officer with a specific focus on rugby development within an area including Liberton High where there were a mere three

rugby players.”

Bruce was the inspiration showing it was possible to progress from Liberton High to the Lions.

Alas, Bruce passed away in 2008 but his sessions in the late 1990's shaped Eric as a coach.

“Alex has similar characteristics to Bruce, she's tough, demanding and will put her body on the line” he says, adding:

“From primary school she has excelled across a number of sports, the closest you're going to get to being able to say that from an early age 'she's going to go to the top'.

“Around 14 years old Alex was asking for her next block of conditioning, she completed the Developing Player Programme by attending sessions before school, out on the pitch at 7am doing conditioning. As well as this she worked on her fundamental skills and understanding of the game.

“Around 15-years-old she said that she wanted to play Premiership rugby and two years later Alex made her debut for Corstorphine Cougars.

“As Alex got older we had really detailed discussions on what she needed to do within her role technically, tactically, physically and mentally.

“We set a number of goals and one of the goals was to produce an international player.

“I thought 'this school has done it before; lets do it again'.

“Steven Kelly, former head teacher, probably thought I was mad but I'm glad to say that that was the last thing to be ticked off the development plan.”

Besides talent and determination Alex, Scotland internationalist, also has a rugby pedigree; dad, Breck, is a

former captain of the Leith club.



Alex Stewart has defied the odds to make it to the international rugby stage , , , , just like the late Bruce Hay.