

'Campo' showed genius over 15 years in test arena

CAMPESE, David

AUSTRALIA



It would be hard to find a player among the other 99 in this book whose career would begin to match that of David Campese.

"Campo," as he became universally known, had a long and magnificent career. But he was also a unique character, with a streak of individualism in a team game that helped produce the many highs he and his team-mates experienced – or the lows that also occasionally crept in because of the player's psyche.

The crowds flocked to see the gifted Campese use his many skills. This writer recalls, very early in Campese's career, arranging to interrupt a flight schedule from New Zealand to South Africa in 1983 so he could see Campese play against a touring United States team in Sydney. Campese did not disappoint, scoring four fabulous tries and displaying his trademark "goose-step" or stutter-step – a change of pace that threw would-be tacklers off their mark.

Campese had many other attributes. He was big at 1.77m (5ft 10in) and strong at 89kg (14st 5lb), had great pace and acceleration, sidestep and swerve, plus vision and enormous flair and originality. Add an ability to play fullback as well as wing, a booming punt and goal-kicking skills and one could appreciate what an extraordinary talent Campese was.

When he broke into international rugby in 1982 on the Wallabies' tour of New Zealand, he caused a sensation. He marked Stu Wilson, one of the All Blacks' finest wing three-quarters, in the tests. Wilson, who played 34 tests and scored 50 tries for the All Blacks overall, was coming to the end of his long and illustrious career but was still highly competitive.

Campese, aged 19, consistently outplayed him. Spectators were amazed to see the precocious Wallaby score two tries and provide Wilson with plenty of headaches on defence. He was the Wallabies' leading try-scorer on tour too. New Zealanders were calling him a rugby genius. Campese had been lifted from the Australian Under 21 team. It was a meteoric rise, but he never looked back and remained in the superstar category for a wonderful 15 years.

Though his individualism was sometimes the bane of his Wallaby coaches, Campese's brilliance took him to the world try-scoring record (64 test tries) and he became the second man, after France's Philippe Sella, to reach a century of tests played.

Campese often looked very relaxed on the field. But this trait disguised the fact he was one of the hardest trainers in the sport and one of the most competitive. His longevity among the world's finest outside backs would not have been possible without such dedication.

On the 1982 tour, the Wallabies were expected to struggle, especially after the withdrawal of a number of experienced players. But coach Bob Dwyer and captain Mark Ella employed innovative tactics and the young tourists almost won the Bledisloe Cup.

So began Campese's remarkable journey. He was irrepresible on the Wallabies' Grand Slam tour of Britain in 1984. During the 1987 World Cup, he surpassed Scotsman Ian Smith's world record of 25 test tries. Another high was his fabulous try against the Barbarians in Cardiff in 1988. In 1991, he was a star of Australia's World Cup-winning side.

He also played in the 1995 World Cup competition in South Africa. It was in this tournament, in Cape Town, that he produced his 50th test try.

Campese became even more unpredictable but also often more brilliant as his career progressed. He did not fear to take risks in order to unlock the world's best defences.

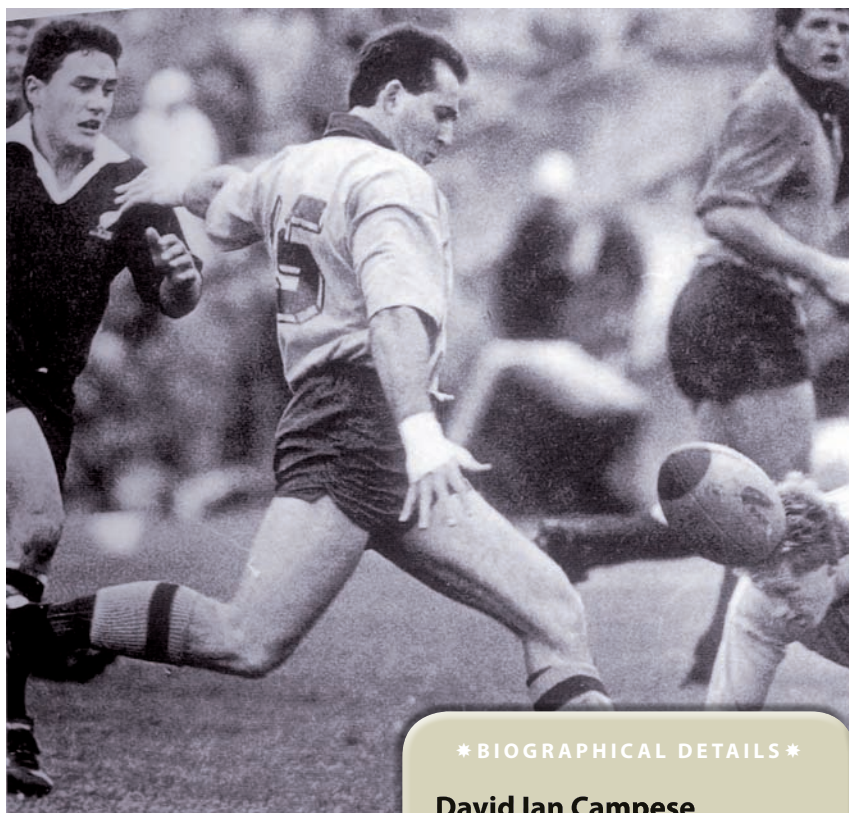
His improvisation did not always find favour with his coaches and he was dropped from the Wallabies in 1990. But he was back for the 1991 World Cup, when he produced perhaps his greatest string of top performances.

He scored two tries against Argentina and another against Wales in the early matches. In the quarter-final against Ireland in Dublin, he produced a match-winning game. He scored two scintillating tries that had even the most hide-bound Irish supporters applauding his genius. Then, in the dying moments and with Australia facing defeat, it was his pass that reached Michael Lynagh and enabled him to score the winning try.

However, in the semifinal, against an All Black side that had seldom lost since winning the World Cup four

Shining star: David Campese (opposite page) looks about to execute his famous "goose-step" in this photo





Match winner: David Campese, here seen at fullback against New Zealand, became more unpredictable but often even more brilliant as the years moved on

pounced on the ball to score the winning try. The score was 19-18.

David Hands wrote of the incident in *The Times*: "That is Campese and you will never change him. Any other international player would have touched down, but in typical style he opted for the unexpected, which is frequently successful. However, it proved disastrous on this occasion."

Campese had fallen out with his first World Cup coach, Alan Jones, and described the topic in his autobiography. Even Dwyer, who had introduced him into big football and was his coach at the 1991 World Cup, eventually found his unorthodox approach annoying at times. He described "Campo" as having "a loose wire between his brain and his mouth" at times.

Though he could still surprise, Campese slowed in his later years and was overlooked by several Australian coaches. However, Greg Smith chose him for his 100th test in 1997, in Padova, Italy, the land of his father and where he had remarkably spent nearly every Australian off-season playing club rugby.

As the years moved on, Campese became a journalist's dream. His willingness to speak his mind, sometimes controversially, meant he was always "good copy." The journalists enjoyed interviewing him, because he was astute, challenging, often irreverent and always colourful.

But his outspoken views on opponents and even his fellow teammates and coaches caused controver-

sy. He often reserved a special criticism for England teams, which he found particularly boring in their style of play.

But Campese also gave much to the game, besides scor-

years before, Campese turned on his best. First, he outrageously ran right across the front of the defending All Black backline and behind John Kirwan to score in the left-hand corner. Then he produced a brilliant "blind" over-the-shoulder pass to send a looping Tim Horan into the right-hand corner at Lansdowne Road.

The Wallabies won 16-6 and went on to beat England in the final. Campese was awarded the Player of the Tournament.

Along the way during Campese's career, there were also a few disastrous moments. The one that will always be remembered was in the dying moments of the third and deciding test in Sydney during the British Lions' tour of Australia in 1989.

With Australia ahead, Campese ran the ball out from his own goal-line and then threw an errant pass to his fullback, Greg Martin, rather than kick for touch. It was from a miscued dropped-goal attempt by Rob Andrew. Ieuan Evans

* BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS *

David Ian Campese

Born: October 21, 1962, Queanbeyan.

Position: Wing/fullback.

Represented Australia: 1982-96; 101 tests.

Points for Australia: 315 test points (64 tries, 8 conv, 7 pen, 2DG).

High school: Queanbeyan High School.

Other: Was the second player to reach a century of test matches; holds the world record for most test tries; played in the first three World Cup tournaments.

Occupation: Called himself a "rugby millionaire" several years before the game went professional. Ran Campo's Sports Store in Sydney; coached in developing countries; was manager of several Australian sports personalities. Moved to South Africa in 2005 and was involved with the Natal Sharks. In 2007, was writing newspaper columns and working on radio.



ing tries. He worked with up-and-coming players and could be seen signing autographs for youngsters long after his fellow players had departed the arena.

Campese was the son of an Italian immigrant winemaker. He was a better golfer than a rugby player at high school but began to blossom on making the Queanbeyan Whites first grade side. It was from there that he made the Australian Under 21 team.

He also became a superb Sevens player later in his career. Named player of the tournament when Australia won the 1988 Hong Kong Sevens, he was still good enough to help his country win a bronze medal at the Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur in 1998. It was after Campese's test career had ended.

Campese spurned rugby league offers throughout his career. Instead, he enjoyed the "lifestyle and reimbursements" available in Italy. He became a cult figure there and spoke the language well. He played for the Petrarca club from 1984-88 and the Amatori Milano club from 1988-93, helping each win two national championships. He often played flyhalf, controlling the play.

Cup runneth over: "Campo," as he became universally known, is pictured during his sensational debut tour of New Zealand in 1982, and with Wallaby assistant coach Bob Templeton and the William Webb Ellis Cup after the Wallabies won the World Cup tournament in 1991

In international rugby, he made up a trio of world-class backs that the Wallabies produced in this era. The others were Nick Farr-Jones and Lynagh.

Keith Quinn, in *A Century of Rugby Greats*, rated Campese "on the same pedestal as Gareth Edwards, Danie Craven and Colin Meads among the game's great personalities."

Campese moved to South Africa in 2005 with his South African-born wife, Lara, and in 2007 they were living in Durban. They have two children.

He described his time with the Natal Sharks' Super 14 team as "the most frustrating time in my life."

He still owned his sports shop in The Rocks district, Sydney, and worked on radio and newspaper assignments in South Africa and overseas.

In July 2007, Campese told the author he was "doing a bit of coaching around South Africa" and was "trying to find a coaching job in France or England."