

Flying winger upset the best plans of All Blacks and others



Speed to burn: Ken Jones was a remarkably versatile sportsman. He set a world record as a winger for Wales and won medals as a sprinter at Olympic and Empire Games

JONES, Ken

WALES



The High Street in Blaenavon came to a standstill and St Peter's Church was filled to overflowing as mourners honoured the town's most famous sporting son, Ken Jones, in April 2006.

Jones will be forever remembered in Wales as the man who scored the vital try that helped his country beat New Zealand at Cardiff Arms Park in 1953 – the last time Wales beat the All Blacks.

Jones took hold of a cross-kick from Clem Thomas with five minutes left on the clock and the likely 8-all draw became a famous 13-8 victory to the Welsh.

But this champion all-rounder is recalled for many other great feats. There was the try he scored for the British Lions in New Zealand, when he ran the near-length-of-field at Eden Park in the fourth test in 1950. There were any of the eight tries he scored to help Wales' grand slams in 1950 and 1952. Or indeed any of the record-equalling 17 tries he scored in the world-record 44 appearances he made for Wales between 1947 and 1957.

Jones was a member of Welsh sides that won two Grand Slams and six Five Nations championships.

But not only was Jones perhaps the best winger in the world at his peak – he was also a world-class sprint athlete who won Olympic and Empire Games medals. He was, in fact, an Olympic gold medallist for three days – until an appeal by the United States over a disqualification pushed the British relay team Jones was a member of, back into second place and the sil-

* BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS *

Kenneth Jeffrey Jones

Born: December 30, 1921, Blaenavon.

Died: April 18, 2006, Newport

Position: Wing.

Represented Wales and Lions: 1947-57; 47 tests – 44 for Wales, 3 for Lions.

Points for Wales and Lions: 57 (19 tries).

High school: West Monmouthshire Grammar School.

Other: Held world record for most tests after 43 successive tests for Wales; was a champion sprinter who won Olympic and Commonwealth Games medals. Was president of the Newport Athletic Club. Was the first Welsh sportsman of the year in 1955, ran the baton at the 1958 Commonwealth Games in Cardiff and was awarded the OBE in 1960.

Occupation: Was a high school physical education teacher; later a rugby correspondent for the *Sunday Express*.



Match-winner here: Ken Jones gathers the ball before setting off for the corner to score during Wales' victory over Ireland in Belfast in 1950. The win gave the Welsh their first Triple Crown title for 39 years

ver medal.

Jones' remarkable pace and flair made him a crowd pleaser whenever he played rugby. In a 293-game career for Newport, for example, Jones picked up 145 tries.

But it was his exploits for Wales and the Lions that gave him an international reputation. In the 1950 Auckland test, he ran 60 yards to score under the posts, chased all the way by Roy Roper and Peter Henderson, the New Zealand winger who had been an Empire Games sprint medallist himself earlier that year in the same city.

Jones' try to take the game against Bob Stuart's 1953-54 All Blacks was part of the first live broadcast of a rugby test in Wales. New Zealand seemed to have the match under control, until with eight minutes to go, Rowlands goaled a penalty to draw level and then soon after Jones got a kindly bounce from the Thomas cross-kick to beat Ron Jarden and score.

The long-legged Jones, who was 5ft 11in (1.80m) and 12st (76kg), had a lovely swerve, good hands and a sound tackle. He averaged a try in each of his 16 matches on the New Zealand tour of 1950, including two in the three tests he played. He was named "The Flying Welshman" and together with a crop of highly talented backs such as Jackie Kyle, Bleddyn Williams, Jackie Matthews and Lewis Jones, they made the Lions a most attractive, attacking side.

Jones played rugby from an early age and in the late 1930s, as a pupil of Monmouthshire Grammar School, was coached by Gilbert Granett, a former Pontypool player. In 1939-40, he was the school's first XV captain and made the Welsh schools team. In the 1941-42 season he was captain of the team at St Paul's Training College, Cheltenham. It

was then he joined the Royal Air Force, aged 21, playing forces rugby in South Africa and India.

After World War II was over, Jones joined Newport. He also attended Loughborough College and became a physical education teacher. He made his test debut against England in Wales' first post-war test match in 1947, aged 25. When he retired 11 years later, in his mid-30s, he was the world record-holder. He had scored 19 test tries in an era when expansive backline play was neither encouraged nor easy to achieve and wingers could languish, unemployed. His decade or more with Newport, which he captained from the wing, had brought many, many more tries.

Nowadays, in an age of specialisation, it is hard to imagine someone combining two sporting careers at such a high level for so long. Rugby's knocks and the conditioning training needed would slow a track sprinter considerably. But in an overhang of the Corinthian age, Jones was able to do both.

Jones had begun his athletics career during the war. He won the All-India 100yd title in 1945 and then the Welsh sprint titles in 1946. He would go on to take the Welsh 100yd title seven times in eight years – the only year he missed was when he was in New Zealand with the Lions in 1950. He also won the 220yd title eight times.

The 1946 victories got him picked as an Olympic possible and he battled his way into the British team for the 1948 Olympic Games in London. Jones was a semifinalist in the 100m and a silver medallist in the sprint relay at Wembley Stadium.

At the 1954 Empire Games in Vancouver, Jones took the bronze medal over 220yd and was sixth in the 100yd



Exploits galore: Cliff Jones shows a fend to match the swerve and sheer pace that allowed him to average a try in each of his 16 matches on the Lions' 1950 tour to New Zealand

final. He also competed for Great Britain in European meetings for many years and captained the British team at the European championships in Berne in 1955.

Jones once said that when he thought "back on my career as both a rugby player and an athlete, I would have to pick the 1948 Olympic Games as the highlight ... being among the 12 fastest men in the world, as well as winning a silver medal, topped the lot.

"It made me feel especially proud, as a boy from Blaenavon who had never competed on a cinder track before winning the Southern Counties title in 1948, to reach that level."

Jones spent his working life as a teacher at Newport High School. He also reported on rugby and athletics for the *Sunday Express* from 1958-85.

In 1995, he expressed his dislike for professionalism by resigning from the Newport Athletic Club, a club he had served for 50 years, after it incorporated a rugby league club in its ranks.

"If people think Wales will now have a wonderful team, they are mistaken. Wales will never have that again.

"Rugby union used to be a religion in Wales. Chapels have fallen down and rugby union is going the same way," he predicted.