

Challenge Cup-2nd Round Replay 1967 Castleford 13 Hull KR 6

There have been many memorable games played at Wheldon Road but surely none so as the one played on 1 March 1967.

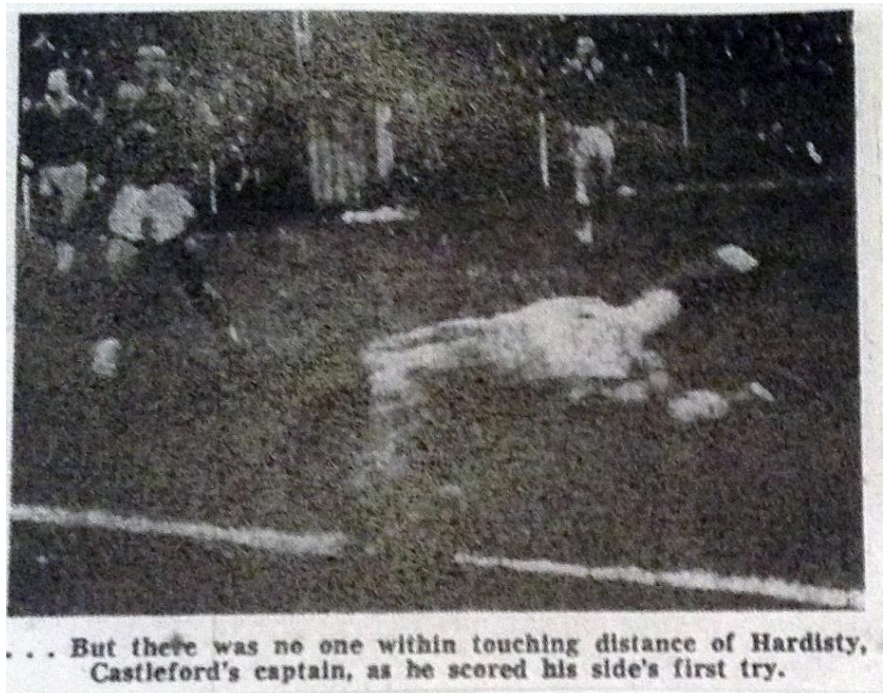
In the early sixties Castleford were becoming a force to be reckoned with in rugby league and were only beaten in a replayed Challenge Cup semi-final in 1964 by 7-5 by eventual winners Widnes after leading in both games early in the second half.

The following season saw Cas finish third in the league and the introduction of a top 16 play off competition to determine the champions. Unfortunately Cas were beaten at home in the semi-final to Halifax 18-26 after leading and again at the same stage in the following season in the Yorkshire Cup, this time to Hunslet by 17-10 at the old Parkside ground.

However cup success was just around the corner as following the inception of a competition for clubs with floodlights screened by the newly-established BBC2 channel Cas won their first meaningful trophy since 1935 on 14 December 1965 by beating St Helens 4-0 at Knowsley Road and retained the trophy by beating Swinton 7-2 at Wheldon Road on 20 December 1966.

Defensively Cas were becoming a very difficult team to beat and, with the mercurial half-backs Alan Hardisty and Keith Hepworth pulling the strings, a very attractive side to watch in attack.

The '63/64 season saw the start of a period of twelve consecutive away Challenge Cup draws, excluding the '64 semi-final



which was played on a neutral ground and including the '68 first round tie against the amateur team Hull B.O.C.M. which was switched to Wheldon Road, which only added to the frustration of many older supporters of the club whose last taste of success was the 1935 Wembley win.

I remember my dad saying “if they had a team on the Moon Cas would draw them away”.

After two first round away defeats in '65 and '66 against St Helens and Warrington respectively Cas were drawn away again in the first round of '67 against Leigh, a team who themselves were no easy beats and who Cas were to play in the final of the following seasons floodlit competition to complete a hat-trick of final successes.

A late Hardisty drop-goal, in those times worth two points, edged Cas through 10-8 and once again they were drawn away in the second round to face Hull KR at the old Craven Park, a stadium where they had a greyhound track around the pitch. Two more Hardisty drop-goals in the final 20 minutes pulled Cas level 9-9, a third attempt hitting the post forcing a replay at Wheldon Road,

the first Challenge Cup game to be played 'darn't lane' since the first round of 1963.

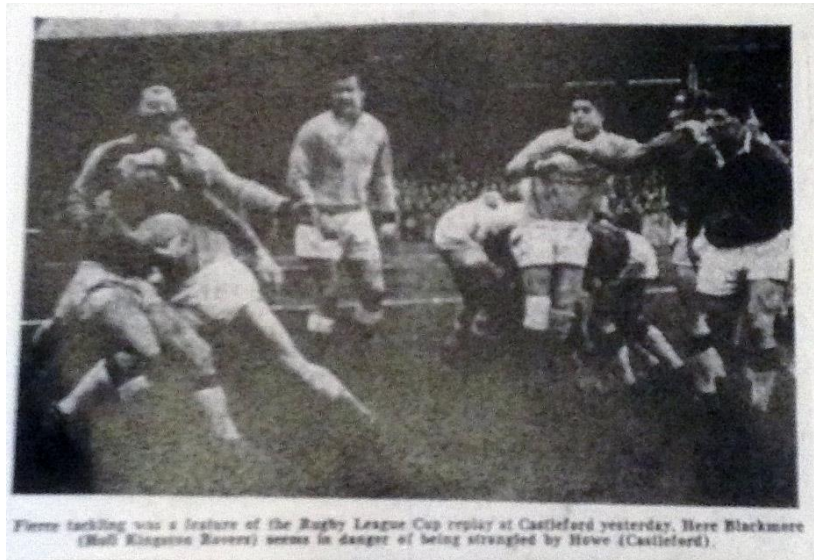
Due to Castleford's success under floodlights and the fact that Hull KR didn't have their own

floodlights Hull KR wouldn't agree to Castleford's request to play the game at Wheldon Road the following Wednesday evening and so it was agreed to play the match at 4pm that day.

It is ironic that the match programme recites “ Also a great pity is that today's match is not being played under floodlights, when there would without any doubt have been a capacity crowd to see the continuation of this epic struggle.”

I was a twelve year-old Castleford Grammar School pupil at the time, the smallest lad in my year, and as we didn't finish school until 3-45pm I resigned myself to missing the match which was very disappointing as I had hardly missed a local match or cup game since the '64 semi's having started watching Cas around 1960.

However luck was on my side as the school decided to close around 3pm on the day and dressed in my school uniform and carrying my satchel I made



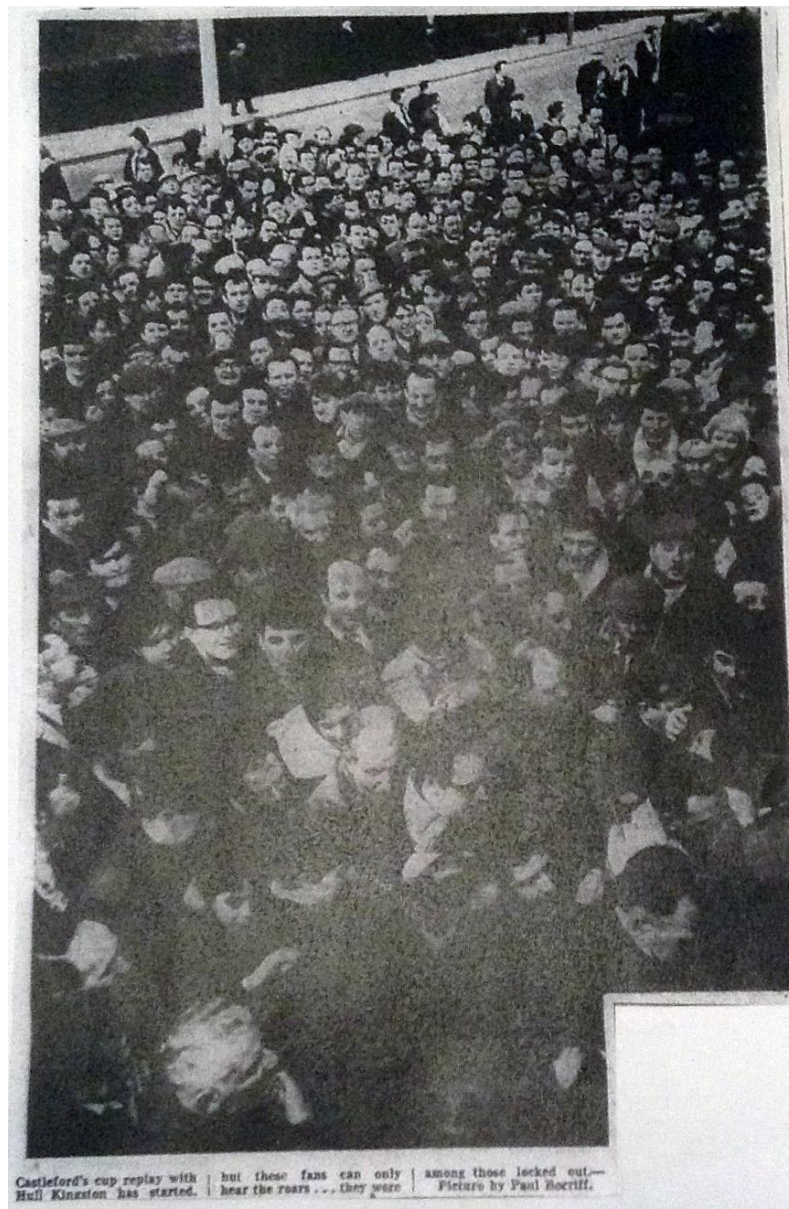
Fierce tackling was a feature of the Rugby League Cup replay at Castleford yesterday. Here Blackmore (Hull Kingston Rovers) seems in danger of being strangled by Howe (Castleford).

my way down to the ground along with what seemed like all the rest of the school, then kids from the other schools in town and, as I was later to find out, all the local factory workers who had all be let out early to see the game.

I somehow managed to find my way around to queue to get into the boy's entrance next to the training pitch but because I was so small remember feeling claustrophobic as the throngs of people queuing to get into the ground obscured my sight of the turnstile to such an extent that I became disorientated. Luckily an older female pupil from my school came to my rescue and made sure I got into the ground safely and we made our way to one of the crush barriers at the Railway end of the ground where we had a decent view of the action albeit being tightly packed in.

The spectacle that confronted us was astonishing. There were people everywhere. In those days the Wheldon Road end wasn't covered and behind it was an unmade walkway, to enable people to climb a dozen steps or so in the middle or to walk around to the Princess Street stand, boarded by a wooden fence built in 1927, with barbed wire on the top. In their anxiety to get into the ground in time part of the fence was torn down enabling people to get in for free. There was a turnstile at the Railway end entrance to the Princess Street stand which was housed in a wooden box and there was people sat on top of it. Every vantage point was taken and if memory serves there were people sat at the side of the pitch itself.

The record ground attendance is 25,499 versus Hunslet in the Challenge Cup quarter final in 1935 but the official attendance on 1 March, 1967 was



22,582 with an estimated 8,000 or so witnessing the match as a result of the torn down fence and eventually the gates being thrown open as a safety measure. Hundreds more were locked out of the ground.

The kick off was delayed to give people a chance to get in and when the game got underway fierce defence, particularly from Cas, was the feature of a bruising encounter.

A 4th minute penalty by Cas fell short before ex Castleford player Roger Millward ran three parts the length of the field only to be stopped by a last ditch tackle from Cas left winger “Cowboy” Jack Austin. Then Hull KR fullback Cyril Kellett, from Featherstone, failed with an angled penalty.

In the 16th minute second rower Peter Small broke beautifully to send skipper Alan Hardisty over but his pass was ruled forward.

Two minutes later centre Ron Willett kicked Cas into the lead but skewed a second penalty, four minutes later, wide.

Cas appeared to be getting on top and should have increased their lead after 26 minutes after fine passing by loose forward John “Bostick” Walker and Hardisty but scrum half Keith Hepworth's pass fell well behind the unmarked Austin.

In an isolated visit to Castleford territory Hull KR loose forward Frank Foster levelled the scores after 32 minutes with a drop goal, which in those days were worth two points, from 25 yards out.

Hull KR were now in the ascendency and only

a brilliant tackle by Cas fullback Derek Edwards prevented visiting centre Alan Burwell from scoring a try. However Kellett kicked a penalty for Hull KR to put them 4-2 in the lead which they held on to at half time despite Hardisty and “Big” Bill Bryant, the giant international second rower, going close.

Clive Dickinson, the Castleford hooker, replaced ex Hull KR prop forward John Taylor, for the second half with previous hooker Johnny Ward moving to blind side prop.

Hull KR held out against four towering assaults by Bryant, who was winning his personal battle with opposing internationals Foster and Bill



Holliday but on 48 minutes Hardisty, surrounded by defenders, put in a short grubber kick on the visitors 25 yard line, enabling him to beat two defenders, regathered and evaded Kellett's tackle to score to put Cas 5-4 in front, a try being only worth three points then. Willett again missed the conversion.

The score stayed at 5-4 until 12 minutes from the end when Cas struck the decisive blow. Hull KR had the ball in their own 25 and Millward, realised that a breakout was essential if his team was to win, if only to set up the position for a winning drop goal. Millward took a chance on joining a passing movement when travelling at full speed but the ball shot out of his grasp and Castleford

pounced with deadly effect. The loose ball was sent out to Bryant who with Hardisty's help sent Austin over near the left hand corner at the railway end to be engulfed by a tide of delirious amber and black scarved schoolboys.

Willett again missed the difficult conversion but at 8-4 Cas were well on top. A penalty apiece by Willett and Kellett made it 10-6 but Small scored another try just before the end to make the final score 13-6 to put Cas in the last eight and to make it 15 matches without defeat.

The vast majority of the estimated 30,000 crowd went home very happy and with dreams of an overdue trip to the twin towers of Wembley Stadium.

Alas those dreams were dashed as first all three Castleford players selected to play for Great Britain against France at Wigan the following Saturday, Hardisty, Hepworth and Bryant, sustained serious injuries in that game only a severely restricted Hardisty was able to play in the quarter final at Featherstone which was lost narrowly 8-7.

In the aftermath of the Hull KR game it was revealed that new fencing at the railway end had been torn down, there were great gaps in the Wheldon Road barricades and huge holes in the wire-netting.

The Castleford chairman Ronnie Simpson said as he examined the damage, "It looks like Glasgow Rangers and Celtic have been playing here" and he estimated it would cost £200 to repair the damage.

Secretary Len Garbett said "I hope the thousands who got in for nothing will send us conscience money".

Steve Poole

Acknowledgements: Castleford Challenge Cup Campaigns by Dr John Davis
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