



Castleford Tigers Heritage Project

1969 Challenge Cup

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1st Round – Hunslet v Castleford, Saturday 25th January

The 1969 Challenge Cup campaign started in the same way as almost every other in the 1960s – with a wave of optimism and an away draw. Having become one of the best and most consistent teams in the league, Cas fans were ever optimistic that this year would be the year the team would reach Wembley for the first time since 1935. But in the Challenge Cup much depends on the luck of the draw, and Cas hadn't been drawn at home since 1963. Over the last six years their hopes of reaching Wembley had ended in hard fought defeats at places such as St Helens, Warrington and Wakefield. And 1969 was no different as the First Round draw produced a 12th consecutive away tie, this time at Hunslet. Although Hunslet had reached the final as recently as 1965 they were now in decline and most experts were confident of a Castleford win.

However, as Cas fans will know, nothing is ever straightforward. In a league match at Leeds the previous Boxing Day Alan Hardisty had suffered a broken arm, winger Alan Lowndes damaged ankle ligaments and Clive Dickinson suffered a head injury. Keith Hepworth was already out with a chest injury and Bill Bryant had been a long-term absentee with a broken leg. To make matters worse, winger Jack Austin then fractured his knee-cap in a home league game against Batley on 3rd January. Bryant had returned to action with the 'A' team and hopes were high that he would be fit for the cup tie. But his bad luck continued when he broke the leg again – for the third time in his career – only three minutes into a league game at Keighley just four days before the match. On the same day, the club's playing strength was further weakened when Peter Small, a mainstay of the team throughout the 1960s, was transferred to Hull Kingston Rovers just two hours before the cup transfer deadline.

So it was a weakened Castleford team that took the field at Hunslet. Hepworth and Dickinson had returned from injury, but Hardisty, Lowndes, Bryant and Johnny Ward, along with the recently departed Peter Small, were all absent. The three-quarter line included two young players, Derek Foster and Mick Day, who had made only a handful of first team appearances between them. But the Cas faithful needn't have worried. With young back-row forwards Mick Redfearn, Brian Lockwood and Malcolm Reilly in dominant form and Foster running strongly in only his fourth appearance of the season, Cas were in control throughout. Redfearn scored the first try and kicked four goals and further tries by Tony Thomas and Keith Hepworth secured a 19-7 win against a Hunslet team that included former Castleford favourite Johnny Walker and Alan Maskill, older brother of Colin who played for Cas during the 1990s.

2nd Round – Castleford v Wigan, Saturday 15th February



rounds of the cup. A weakened team, further handicapped by Dennis Hartley's international call up, lost 18-3. To make matters worse, Clive Dickinson broke a bone in his hand and Malcolm Reilly



suffered an ankle injury which required daily treatment in an effort to get him fit for the Wigan match.

The Wigan match was scheduled to be televised live by the BBC. However, the previous weekend the weather had taken a turn for the worse. Heavy snow between Friday and Tuesday, accompanied by freezing temperatures, put the match in serious doubt. The club took the decision to protect the pitch by covering it with straw which was left in place until the morning of the match. At that point an army of volunteers, along with workmen from Castleford Corporation Parks Department, moved in to clear the straw from the pitch to allow the game to go ahead. It was not until 90 minutes before kick-off that the pitch was cleared and the game given the go-ahead, the only one to survive the weather that weekend.

Clive Dickinson was absent from the Cas team, but Reilly was fit to play, Hartley was back and, against the odds, Alan Hardisty returned for his first appearance since Boxing Day. After his strong performance against Hunslet in the previous round, Derek Foster retained his place at centre.

Despite the reputation of both teams for open attacking rugby, the match was a tight, tense affair. The heavy conditions may have been partly responsible, but both teams were well aware of what was at stake. Wigan's opening try by Bill Francis was cancelled out by a Johnny Ward try to leave the teams level at half time, although Cas had a touch of luck when Wigan winger Keri Jones had a try disallowed when the touch



judge ruled that he had put a foot in touch. Cas took a narrow lead for the first time after 53 minutes through a Mick Redfearn penalty before the match was decided by a typical piece of Hardisty magic. Wigan were attacking the Cas line when he intercepted a pass and sprinted 75 yards to score at the railway end of the ground. Jones chased him all the way and made a tackle as Hardisty grounded the ball. A second Wigan player, Bill Ashurst, was also chasing but was slightly later with his tackle, hitting the Cas captain after he had grounded the ball. This resulted in the tension boiling over with players from both sides exchanging blows. Redfearn added the conversion to give Cas a 12-5 lead, although Hardisty had to leave the field following the Ashurst tackle, having suffered another bang on the arm he had broken only a matter of weeks previously. Sparks continued to fly for a spell following the try until Wigan forward Hogan was sent off, followed a few minutes later by Johnny Ward. Malcolm Reilly then suffered a recurrence of his ankle injury and Cas were left to hang on to their lead as Wigan started to move the ball wide in an attempt to get back into the game. Nine minutes from time Francis scored his second try to make the score 12-8 but that was as much as Wigan could manage and Cas held on to a hard-earned win and a place in the next round.

3rd Round – Castleford v Leeds, Saturday 1st March

The draw for the Third Round provided Cas with a second consecutive home tie. This time Leeds would be the visitors. They had already beaten Cas three times earlier in the season, including a 2211 win in the Yorkshire Cup Final. They came into the Third Round on the back of 16 consecutive victories, having lost only two league games all season. The match took place just two weeks after the second round win over Wigan. With the cold weather continuing, the pitch was again protected by a layer of straw until the morning of the match, when it was cleared by an army of volunteers, including 105 schoolboys who were rewarded with free admission to the match. Cas were forced into team changes as Alan Hardisty had failed to recover from his arm injury, and Derek Foster was suffering with influenza. Derek Edwards moved from full-back to half-back, Trevor Bedford and Keith Howe stepped into the starting line-up and David Stephens came in as substitute back.

The Third Round match was just as tough and uncompromising as the Second Round had been. Castleford's Brian Lockwood, along with Watson and Hick of Leeds, received cautions from the referee during a first half which had very little open attacking rugby. This was illustrated by a 2-2 half time score. Then, in the 51st minute, Leeds made the first breakthrough with a try by Risman. Although he failed to convert his own try, Leeds had what seemed like a probable match-winning 5-2 lead. Mick Redfearn kicked a penalty to reduce the margin to 5-4 but Cas failed to capitalise on breaks from Edwards and Lowndes and were still trailing as the match entered its final ten minutes. Then with just seven minutes remaining came the match-winning score. Cas moved the ball quickly from left to right to create the space for Trevor Briggs to score the decisive try. Despite missing two kickable penalties earlier, Mick Redfearn converted the try from a difficult angle to put Cas 9-5 in front. Leeds threw everything at the Cas line in the closing minutes but Cas held on to secure the win that took them into the semi-finals for only the fourth time in their history.

Semi-Final – Castleford v Wakefield Trinity, Saturday 29th March

The semi-final provided a challenge just as difficult as the previous two rounds against Wigan and Leeds. Cas were drawn to face Wakefield Trinity, the previous season's finalists, beaten by Leeds in the famous "watersplash" final. They had been league champions two years previously and had won

the Challenge Cup three times in four years at the start of the decade. Coincidentally, their captain for those cup triumphs was Derek Turner, who was now coach of the Castleford team.

In the first semi-final at Wigan on Saturday, 22nd March, Salford had beaten Warrington 15-8 to reach Wembley for the first time since 1939. Cas were to face Wakefield Trinity at Headingley in the second semi-final the following Saturday, Grand National day. This gave one Cas supporter, Frank Parker, a difficult problem. He was the owner of a horse running in the big race and he finally decided to go to Aintree rather than Headingley. In the event his horse, named Hove, fell at the 19th fence as the race was won by Highland Wedding ridden by Eddie Harty.

Meanwhile, back at Headingley, Cas were able to select from a virtually full-strength squad. Alan Hardisty had overcome doubts about his injured arm to return to the team. Derek Edwards reverted to full-back, despite strong performances from Trevor Bedford during Hardisty's absence. Johnny Ward also took his place in the team. Fears that he would be missing following his sending-off against Wigan in the second round were allayed as his suspension was served thanks to two rearranged matches that had been postponed during the bad weather of the previous few weeks.

On the day of the match there was a stiff breeze blowing the length of the Headingley pitch and Cas opted to play into the wind for the first half. This tactic appeared to backfire as Wakefield winger Ken Hirst scored two tries to give Wakefield a 10-2 lead after 26 minutes, with the only Cas points coming from a Mick Redfearn penalty goal. But Cas gradually grew in confidence and managed to reduce the deficit just a minute before half time. From a scrum near the Wakefield line, the ball was moved quickly to the right and Trevor Briggs was able to squeeze in for a try in the corner. Against the odds, Mick Redfearn converted the try from wide out into the strong breeze. Sportingly, Wakefield kicker Neil Fox applauded the kick which brought the half time score to 10-7. With the wind at their backs in the second half, Cas went in search of the score that would get them to Wembley. But despite all their efforts all they could manage was a 67th minute Redfearn penalty goal. Then, with only three minutes remaining, Cas were awarded another penalty just a couple of yards inside the Wakefield half. With the wind at his back, Redfearn again calmly put the ball between the posts to put Cas in front for the first time, 11-10. Then, as Wakefield took risks to regain the lead, Keith Howe seized on a loose ball to provide a pass to Alan Hardisty who put the result beyond doubt with a try, again converted by Redfearn, to give Cas a 16-10 win. Ironically, the outcome might have been different if Fox, the highest points scorer in rugby league history, had not missed a simple penalty kick ten minutes from full time which would have given Wakefield a 12-9 lead. But that wasn't to be and Cas reached Wembley for the first time in 34 years.

Final – Castleford v Salford, Saturday 17th May

At the time of the semi-final win over Wakefield Trinity, Cas were in with a good chance of finishing in their highest ever league placing, with a top-2 finish looking likely. The Friday after the semi-final their good run in the league continued with another win over Trinity at Belle Vue, this time by 13 points to 4. Incredibly, this was the fifth time Cas had beaten their opponents during the season. In addition to a league double and the Challenge Cup win, Cas had won both games of a twolegged BBC TV Floodlit Competition tie earlier in the season.



Setting off for Wembley: The team preparing to leave Castleford for the final.

But, as the Wembley final approached, the team's league form dipped dramatically. A loss at Featherstone was followed by two home defeats at the hands of Hull KR and Hunslet, leading to speculation in the local press that some first team regulars might lose their places for the big game. However, a 23-2 win at Bramley in the final league game secured a 4th place finish. This guaranteed a home game in the first two rounds of the Top 16 play-offs used to decide the season's league champions. In the first round Cas struggled to a 14-10 win over Hull thanks to a Keith Hepworth try five minutes from time. Then they finally returned to top form in the next round scoring 50 points against a Swinton team that had finished the league season in 5th place. This was followed by an even better performance just a week before Wembley. An 18-6 win at St Helens in the play-off semifinal secured a place in the Championship Final for the first time since 1939. Leeds would be the opponents a week after The Challenge Cup Final. The win over Saints was achieved despite the absence of key forwards Johnny Ward, Brian Lockwood and Malcolm Reilly. One of the replacements, 22-year-old Dennis Harris, was outstanding and his performance brought him into the reckoning for a Cup Final place.

Off the field, the town was gripped by "Wembley Fever" during the weeks leading up to the final. The club's initial ticket allocation of 3,000 seating tickets and 8,000 standing tickets had been sold in double quick time. A further allocation of 4,000 standing tickets priced at 5 shillings (25 pence) received from Rugby League Headquarters were also quickly snapped up. Local printer Gideon Shaw produced a range of free car stickers bearing a number of different slogans celebrating the team's appearance in the final. Around 60,000 were printed and could be seen in almost every car and shop window in town, with some requested from places as far away as Portsmouth and Glasgow. Good luck messages were received from Castlefordians across the globe. They included messages from the widow of 1935 cup winner Leslie Adams from her home in Australia and 1939 Championship Finalist Ted Brindle who was by then living in South Africa. One man from Canada sent a 20 Dollar postal order (at the time worth £7 14 shillings and 6 pence) to go to the Castleford player who got most votes for the Lance Todd Trophy, and one man who had emigrated to Australia two years earlier arrived out of the blue at his mother's house in Airedale just five days before the final, determined

not to miss the match. But he said his greatest challenge wasn't the 12,000 mile journey he'd just made; it was getting his hands on a Wembley ticket!

The week before the final, coach Derek Turner announced the names of the Wembley squad. The starting thirteen from the semi-final plus substitutes Trevor Bedford and Frank Fox were joined by Dennis Harris, Ron Willett and 20-year-old half back Glyn Jones in the party which travelled south on Thursday, 15th May. Hundreds of supporters turned out to see the team leave the North Eastern Hotel on Station Road at 9am. After stopping for lunch in Cambridge the team arrived at their home for the next two days, Crystal Palace National Sports Centre, later that afternoon. This was where both Featherstone Rovers and Leeds had stayed prior to their cup final wins in 1967 and 1968, which everyone hoped would be a good omen. The team trained on Thursday evening and were taken to visit Wembley Stadium on the Friday morning to prepare for the big day.

Meanwhile, back in Castleford, the supporters were starting their journey south. A fleet of 150 buses and seven trains were on hand to transport the 15,000-strong army to London. Virtually every pub and club in the area had arranged trips to the final and many local businesses closed on match day so their employees were free to watch the match.

When the team for the final was announced there was one surprise selection. The starting thirteen was to be the same line-up that beat Wakefield Trinity in the semi-final, but there was to be a change on the substitutes' bench. Despite faultless performances in two of the earlier rounds, Trevor Bedford was replaced by Dennis Harris. He had not appeared in any of the earlier rounds, but had performed strongly when deputising for more senior players in the weeks leading up to the final. He was also able to play in either the three-quarters or the forwards, and this versatility was the factor that gave him the edge over the unlucky Bedford.

And so at shortly before 3pm on 17th May the teams from Castleford and Salford made the long walk from the Wembley dressing rooms to be greeted by a capacity crowd – the first for a Rugby League Challenge Cup final. Beneath their black tracksuit tops the Castleford team wore white shirts with a

black and amber 'V', the same design as those worn by their predecessors in 1935. The Cas team was made up mainly of local players signed from local junior rugby. Only Tony Thomas and Dennis

Hartley had needed transfer fees to be paid, to Wakefield and Hunslet respectively. In contrast, the Salford team had been assembled at great cost. In addition to big money signings from other rugby league clubs, such as Burgess from Barrow, Hesketh from Wigan and Dixon from Halifax, the cup final team also included big signings from rugby union. Ex-British Lions captain David Watkins captained the team and a second British Lion Mike Coulman partnered Dixon in the second row.

Many pundits were predicting a fast, free-flowing match as both teams had a reputation for playing open, attacking rugby. However, as the game got underway it was clear that both teams were more intent on victory than losing with style. Both sides conceded early penalties and ex-Castleford player Ron Hill gave Salford an early lead by converting one of them. Then came the only try of the first half. From a scrum, Malcolm Reilly and Alan Hardisty combined to create the space for Keith Howe to reach the try line. However, Mick Redfearn failed with the conversion attempt and shortly after Hill kicked a second penalty to give Salford a 4-3 half time lead. Having come from behind in earlier rounds, Cas were still confident of victory. And within ten minutes of the start of the second half they were back in front. Reilly took a short pass from Hardisty and made one of many charges at the Salford defence. He broke a couple of attempted tackles, including one from Salford scrum-half Brennan which resulted in him being catapulted over Reilly's shoulder, before a well-timed pass back to Hardisty sent the Cas captain under the posts without a finger being laid on him. Redfearn's conversion gave Cas an 8-4 lead. Although Salford threatened the Cas line they didn't manage to cross it. They only managed a third penalty by Hill before Johnny Ward baffled the Salford defence before disguising a pass to Keith Hepworth to score a third try for Cas. A few minutes later the fulltime whistle blew and Cas were 11-6 winners, finally ending the 34 year wait. Malcolm Reilly's all action display earned him the Lance Todd Trophy as man of the match – and, presumably, the 20 dollars from the supporter in Canada! Alan Hardisty was presented with the trophy by Sir Denis Blundell, the High Commissioner for New Zealand, before the team set off on the traditional lap of honour.

The celebrations continued afterwards with a banquet at the Piccadilly Hotel in central London. In addition to the players, club officials and their wives, the function was attended by the Mayor and Mayoress of Castleford and the Chairman of the Rugby League Council, Mr J Jepson. After a day of recovery on Sunday, the team returned to Castleford on Monday, 19th May. They travelled up the A1 as far as Barnsdale Bar before transferring to an open-topped bus for the final few miles of the journey through Pontefract and on to Castleford. After encountering large crowds of supporters in



The morning after: Alan Hardisty, Keith Hepworth, Clive Dickinson and Johnny Ward taking the cup for a taxi ride.

Pontefract the route took the team to Airedale and along Queen's Park Drive and Ferrybridge Road into Castleford town centre. At this point the size of the crowds brought the bus to a standstill. The journey along Carlton Street took 30 minutes, followed by another 20 minutes along Bridge Street and Pontefract Road. The bus finally turned into the grounds of Castleford Boys County Secondary School, where a Civic Reception was to take place. An estimated 10,000 supporters had gathered here to welcome the team, and the players and officials left the bus to emerge on the school roof where a



Returning home: The team bus on Pontefract Road on its way to a reception at Castleford Boys Modern School. Alan Hardisty and Keith Hepworth holding the cup.

number of them made speeches as they displayed the trophy. The entourage finally disappeared inside for the Civic Reception. One nice touch was the attendance at the reception of eight of the nine surviving members of the 1935 cup winning team. After so much effort to win the cup, the club were determined to keep it safe. So as everyone finally made their way home, the cup was taken to the local police station where it was locked up for the night!

So while the rest of the world was watching and waiting for the Apollo 11 moon landing, which eventually happened on July 20th 1969, ask any Castleford supporter of a certain age what they remember most about 1969. They will always say that was the year Cas finally won the Challenge Cup again.

Unfortunately, the season didn't have the happy ending everyone was hoping for, as Cas lost to Leeds in the Championship Final at Bradford the following Saturday. With shades of their narrow loss to Salford in the 1939 final, Cas led for most of the match before losing to a late try. The try, scored by John Atkinson and converted by Bev Risman, gave Leeds a 16-14 win.

Personal recollections:

I remember going to the Hunslet match with my dad. We stood on the covered terrace behind the posts at the old Parkside ground, but to be honest I don't remember much about the game. I think we thought at the time it was just another first round match and something was bound to go wrong between then and the final! I remember more about the two home matches. I remember the freezing weather and the piles of straw all around the touchlines that had been used to keep the frost out. I can also still see Alan Hardisty's interception try against Wigan and the fisticuffs that followed it. I seem to remember Keith Hepworth squaring up to Bill Ashurst. He was giving away about a foot in height and four stones in weight, but this Cas team never took a backward step to anybody! I also remember the Leeds game as being a bit brutal and the excitement when Trevor Briggs scored near the corner at the railway end to win the match. I went to the semi-final on a supporters' bus with a mate from school. We stood on the East terrace at Headingley where the big

new stand is now. I remember fearing the worst when Wakefield scored two tries early on and then getting more and more excited as Mick Redfearn kept kicking the goals. I also remember the pandemonium that broke out at our end of the ground when Alan Hardisty scored right in front of where we were stood. But mostly I remember the emotion of it all. I've never seen so many grown men cry – including one or two of the players.

I went to Wembley with my dad. I don't think my mum trusted me to get to London and back without an adult! My memories of the day start with turning up at Castlefields car park which was just jam packed with buses. I've no idea how we found the one we were looking for! This was my first visit to Wembley and I remember seeing it for the first time from the bus and how big it looked. Once inside the ground we had to climb several flights of steps to reach the upper section of the terrace. I remember coming out of the gloom into the bright sunlight of the terrace and how green the field looked. I don't think there was much grass left on the pitch at home after the winter we'd had so it was a bit of a surprise. It felt a bit surreal to actually be there. This was what teams like Wigan, Wakefield and St Helens did almost every year. It just wasn't something that happened to teams like Cas. As for the match, I have clear memories of the Cas tries, particularly those scored in the second half as they were at the end where we were standing. And I remember seeing Alan Hardisty lifting the cup with the other players lined up behind him in front of the royal box.

As a 14-year-old schoolboy my dad had been at the 1935 final with his dad. Now weirdly, at exactly the same age, I was there with him, exactly one generation later. As I have grown older, 34 years doesn't seem such a long time after all. But for a 14-year-old boy it was two-and-a-half lifetimes. And that is a very long time

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