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**Opening Extract from...**

# **Behind the Lions**

Written by Stephen Jones, Tom English,  
Nick Cain and David Barnes

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# CHAPTER 25 TWENTY-FIVE

## GLORY DAYS

1997

SOUTH AFRICA

**T**HIS ERA in rugby was both heady and dangerous. The Lions departed for South Africa less than two years after the game had been declared open, and therefore professional, at the famous International Rugby Board meeting in Paris in September 1995.

Rugby authorities had spent decades battling against the spectre of professionalism and so when it became a reality, very little had been put in place to deal with the profound changes in culture that would clearly now eventuate. Indeed, sometimes rugby appeared to be thrashing around desperately trying to catch up.

To a considerable number of people, the whole concept of Lions tours was now at stake, so wedded were they to the old years of amateurism. To some, the very concept of a professional Lions team seemed to be anathema, a contradiction in terms, however curious was their reasoning.

That is why this magnificent, ferocious and compelling tour was as important as any in Lions history. Not only did the Lions fight aggression with aggression, not only did they win where so few visiting teams had won, but they triumphantly re-emerged as a gleaming professional outfit and as the team which secured the future of the Lions concept long into the future. For that, the masterly Ian McGeechan, making his third tour as head coach, his steely assistant, Jim Telfer, Fran Cotton the manager, and the great English lock and tour captain, Martin Johnson, must all take vast credit.

Any cynics were put firmly back in their places when the tourists completed a memorable 2-1 series win over the reigning world champions in front of tens of thousands of travelling fans – yet another remarkable aspect of the more recent Lions tours has been the incredible numbers following; in red hordes in their replica jerseys they added an unforgettable backdrop to many of the games and especially to the Tests, which were mega-occasions played in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg.

Even the tour song suggested an updating, a break with a sometimes hoary past – it was not one of the grand old traditional hymns not, thank goodness, one of the raucous ‘rugby songs’ but ‘Wonderwall’, by Oasis. Another new development was that the team was followed by a fly-on-the-wall documentary team, and while not every traditionalist and not every player was entirely happy with this, one of the fruits was a vivid off-field DVD of the tour, including a speech by Ian McGeechan before the Second Test, which was so inspiring that it even moved great Lions such as Johnson.

Bookmakers in Britain had the Lions odds-on to lose all three matches against a Springbok side that contained several of the 1995 World Cup winners, including the likes of James Small, Joost van der Westhuizen, Mark Andrews and Andre Joubert. But shrewdly managed by big Fran Cotton, who

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*Opposite:* Scott Gibbs displays the defensive power that epitomised the '97 Lions.

*as a player knew what it was like to beat the 'Boks in their own backyard, and brilliantly coached by what could be called the good cop/bad cop double act of Ian McGeechan and Jim Telfer (whose scrum sessions became legendary and who saw the tour as the high point of a distinguished coaching career), they pulled it off.*

*On his retirement, Lawrence Dallaglio, who announced himself on the world stage during the trip and later won a World Cup with England as well as two Heineken Cups with Wasps, said the tour was the best experience of his career. There were stars all over the place but probably the signature player was Welsh centre Scott Gibbs who sent a shiver down spines all over South Africa when he smashed into the giant South African prop Os du Randt in the Second Test and sent the massive man tumbling to the ground. It was the defining image of the tour.*

*Elsewhere Irish hooker Keith Wood, Scotland's Tom Smith and Ireland's Paul Wallace formed a Test front-row that was expected to be hammered by the home opposition; but they burrowed underneath their huge opponents and McGeechan's innovative work across the park bewildered the inexperienced Springbok coach, Carel du Plessis. Du Plessis wasn't long for the job and was soon replaced by Nick Mallett.*

*The influence of a group of rugby league converts should not be underestimated. Players such as Gibbs, John Bentley, Alan Tait, Dai Young, Scott Quinnell and Allan Bateman had all spent time in league and brought their professionalism with them to the squad, to the aid of those still in the transition period who had begun their careers in the amateur years.*

*It seems strange to relate now, but at the time there was a lively debate about who should captain the squad with Ieuan Evans from Wales, Ireland's Wood and Rob Wainwright, the Scotland flanker, all being considered. England's captain at the time, Phil de Glanville, was not deemed worthy of a spot in the extended 62-man provisional squad but it was Johnson who was to justify totally his selection. Johnson, who admitted he was no big fan of the formal stuff that went with captaincy off the pitch, was picked as much for his physical presence as for his leadership abilities.*

*A 35-man squad – which would swell to 40 after the inevitable injuries – left Britain after some team-building exercises designed to get players from different nations to bond with each other. Cotton also organised some more traditional team bonding when, two days before the squad flew to South Africa, he laid on a free bar for the squad at a pub in Weybridge, Surrey. Nothing bonds rugby players like a few beers and by the time last orders had been called all national barriers had apparently been broken down and the squad were united.*

*The players laid down their own rules – and there were none about drinking, so if a Lion fancied a pint at lunchtime the day before a Test, he could have one. But as centre Jerry Guscott wrote: 'If someone was playing on Saturday, the chances of him having a drink after Wednesday were virtually nil.' The team also resolved to go out as a group at least once a week, for a meal, to watch a film or even, as they once did, a Harlem Globetrotters basketball exhibition match. Great care was taken by McGeechan to keep the party together, even after the Test team had been named. It worked triumphantly.*

*So, with what was estimated to be two and a half tonnes of luggage, the first paid Lions were 30,000 feet up in business class. The reason the excess baggage bill was so astronomical was the result of yet another McGeechan masterstroke. A year before the tour the Scotsman sought out the advice of John Hart, then the coach of the All Blacks who became the first New Zealand side to win a series in South Africa.*

*Hart's advice was that the Lions would get no favours from the 'Boks so they had to be self-sufficient. That meant the Lions should carry over their own training equipment, including scrum machines, tackle bags and even their own drinks bottles. Hart also advised that McGeechan should pick players who were similarly self-sufficient in that they should be able to make their own decisions on the pitch and not be fazed by the odd knock back. Talk about a meeting of rugby minds.*

*As usual with McGeechan-led tours the coaching staff had no preconceptions about the make-up of the Test side when they left Britain. Many thought Englishmen would dominate the pack but by the time of the First Test Johnson was the only red rose man in the front-five.*

*The first four games were all won – against Eastern Province, Border, Western Province and Mpumalanga – but the victories were not without incident. In the 38-21 victory over Western Province, Bentley was accused of gouging by winger Small, albeit to media men after the game, and the rivalry would simmer throughout the tour.*

*Infamously, second-row Doddie Weir was stamped on by Mpumalanga's Marius Bosman and his tour was over. Cotton was incandescent, saying the South African should have been banned for six months. As it was all the Lions received was a three-point penalty; but the disgraceful incident only served to knit the Lions together more tightly.*

*There was a hiccup with a 35-30 defeat to Northern Transvaal, but a week away from the First Test against the Springboks in Cape Town there was still no clear delineation between the midweek team and the Test side until McGeechan revealed his hand. With Paul Grayson injured, Scotland's Gregor Townsend was picked at fly-half with instructions to play flat in the South Africans' faces and with the aim of moving the big South African forwards around the pitch. The back-row was to comprise Lawrence Dallaglio and Richard Hill flanking the giant Tim Rodber, an inconsistent performer for England but who was monumental in that series.*

*As the home propaganda machine cranked up, McGeechan countered by compiling a video of tour highlights that was played on the eve of the Test and Cotton read out letters of goodwill that had been sent by rugby fans back in the United Kingdom.*

The 1997 tour party.



*The match was not the easiest on the eye but an outrageous try by scrum-half Matt Dawson, in because Rob Howley had been injured out of the tour with a broken collarbone, where he dummied the entire South African cover defence, and a late try by Alan Tait got the job done in a famous 25-16 win. Tait celebrated his score with a gunslinger salute and the entire South African press went into firing squad mode as they criticised du Plessis.*

*Critically, the so-called dirt-trackers kept the momentum going, something they had failed to do in 1993. They had set the tour back on the road after the Northern Transvaal reverse with a great win over Gauteng, the leading province, in a match in which Bentley scored an amazing try, weaving his way over from long range.*

*Then after the Test, they thrashed Orange Free State by 52-30 – although the win brought a worrying incident when centre Will Greenwood swallowed his tongue after a collision and very nearly lost his life. The quick thinking of team doctor James Robson saved him.*

*The whole host nation was dreaming of the most ferocious backlash in Durban for the Second Test. It came. In an oppressive atmosphere the Springboks threw everything at the Lions, pounding them up front and scoring three tries, but missing out on extra points through poor kicking – with Henry Honiball, Percy Montgomery and Andre Joubert all trying their luck and failing miserably.*

*By contrast, the consistent Neil Jenkins, out of position at fullback, kept banging them over – scoring five soaring penalties in all, and gradually, incredibly, the Lions clawed it back until it was level going into the closing stages.*

*Cue Jeremy Guscott. Who else? There was always an element of great drama and even Hollywood about Guscott the player and he duly delivered the killer line. Keith Wood initiated an attack down the left, the Lions drove on and the ball reached Guscott to the left of the posts. His drop-goal boomed over.*

The brains trust: Fran Cotton, Jim Telfer and Ian McGeechan.





*Unlike most of Guscott's career it was not a thing of beauty, but it did not have to be. The hair-raising closing stages were played out under the Springbok hammer but the Lions held on to secure the series.*

*For the record, a Lions team savaged by injury lost the last Test match at Ellis Park 35-16. As the players eased themselves into their luxurious seats on the flight back from South Africa they may not have realised that they were already Lions legends.*

*As Telfer had said to his forwards before the First Test, 'To be picked for the Lions is the easy bit. To win for the Lions is the ultimate.'*

## JIM TELFER

I had given up coaching at Melrose when I became director of rugby at the SRU, so when Ian asked me to take up the Lions job in 1997, I hadn't coached for four years and I was actually quite frightened when I thought of all these guys like Martin Johnson, Lawrence Dallaglio and boys like that. They were professionals and I was an administrator – and I think they were a wee bit worried about my reputation as well. But I quickly got them together in the forwards and explained to them that we were in this together. They were the players, so, if they made a decision, we would agree on it, and go for it. There were a lot of experienced guys so I was honest with them. 'I haven't coached all that much for a while, so we have to decide on a way we were going to work, and once its decided I'm in charge.' And that's the way it was. They did everything I asked of them. I thought the Lions in 1997 were absolutely great blokes.

## FRAN COTTON

It was a unique tour because of it's timing at the end of the first season of pro rugby

Tour captain, Martin Johnson, secures the ball against N-E Transvaal.





in the northern hemisphere. It will never happen again in the same way. It was the first time a Lions squad was paid to go on tour, there were rugby league returnees to union selected, and all the players had been amateurs before and now they were professionals, so they were guys with a broader life experience. There was also a massive change because the tour was only played in the main centres in South Africa, so they saw less of the country.

**NEIL BACK** (England)

*Toured: 1997, 2001 & 2005*

I was in bed eating my breakfast when my wife, Ali, brought in the envelope. It was a letter from Fran Cotton congratulating me on my selection to tour South Africa with the Lions. For a moment I just sat there, staring at it. Then I let it fall to the covers and burst into tears, sobbing my heart out. A huge reservoir of tension and passion and desperation had built up inside me in my wilderness years in international rugby and those few words from Fran burst the dam.

**RICHARD HILL** (England)

*Toured: 1997, 2001 & 2005*

At the turn of '97, I was playing for England A and I felt that I was pushing for potential England selection, but you never knew. The thought of a Lions tour or a Lions Test series was certainly not something that was playing on my mind.

It's only after you've got one or two England games under your belt that you suddenly start thinking, 'Well, actually, I've played against two of the four teams that make up the Lions and I think I've fared okay, therefore I must stand a chance of getting involved in the squad at least.'

I found out by letter. It was in a hotel in Birmingham that we had to meet for the very first time. We gathered as a squad of about 60-something and all of a sudden you're looking around the room and thinking, 'This isn't a bad room to be in!'

**JEREMY DAVIDSON** (Ireland)

*Toured: 1997 & 2001*

I never thought I would be able to play with my childhood heroes. I would watch people like Will Carling and Jerry Guscott playing on television, and then there you are meeting up with Jerry Guscott in the Lions hotel. It was a bit of a shock to the system but I always just looked at the next game every time and I think that might have helped me. Some people maybe looked too far ahead.

**JEREMY GUSCOTT**

I was really pleased to be selected because, although I had been playing well for Bath, I wasn't in the England team. I had seen Geech a few times before the squad was announced and he had hinted that not playing for England wouldn't damage my chances, but I didn't

know for sure if the Lions would pick me. Once the squad was announced I just wanted to get out there and start playing because the competition for a Test place was huge.

### **JOHN BENTLEY** (England)

*Toured: 1997*

To play rugby union was a huge step and I never expected to be called up to play for the Lions – it was a different world. To play for the Lions was never even a dream. It was a place where legends existed, not the likes of me.

I'd signed for Newcastle in September. My year was going to be spent playing eight months for Newcastle and four months continuing to play for Halifax in the Super League. Fran rang me in the January – I'd been under his guidance at Sale in 1988 prior to going professional – and he said, 'Are you available to tour with the Lions in the summer?' Technically, I wasn't but I said, 'Yes.'

Fran said they needed to look at me playing against slightly better opposition and that he'd contact England and see if they could get me a game for the second string. He rang me back and said, 'The news won't come as a surprise but they won't touch you.' So when I got selected for the tour, I think the majority of people had never heard of me.

But when people ask me if it was a surprise in the end, it wasn't because Fran had told me they were watching me. It was a great honour, though, and I had never expected to be involved at the start of the season.

John Bentley makes a break against Border, with Tony Underwood (left) and Mark Regan (right) following in support.



I sat down with my wife, Sandy, and we puzzled over how we would cover the direct debits while I was away. If I had played rugby league that summer I would have earned more than twice what I did with the Lions. There are some things in life that money cannot buy, but the payment for such a high profile event was very poor.

### **NEIL JENKINS** (Wales)

*Toured: 1997 & 2001. Kicking coach: 2009*

Just getting on tour was the biggest challenge for me. I broke my left forearm in the Five Nations against England and from that moment to passing a fitness test to make the trip to South Africa, it was the longest eight weeks of my career. I even resorted to putting my injured arm into a special magnetic coil three times a day to try to speed up the healing process. When we met up at Weybridge for a week of preparation I tweaked a calf muscle to heighten the tension and then had to go through a 40-minute full contact session the day before we got on the plane to prove there were no problems with the arm. To say I was nervous would be an understatement. I was within touching distance of achieving my dream of going on a Lions tour, but had to put my arm to the test with tackles, falling on the ball and getting knocked over.

### **RICHARD HILL**

There's no doubting that we had a mutual bonding around one fact: not only did the South African players, media, and public not think that we had the ability to win the Test series, many people in Britain and Ireland didn't think we could win it either.

There was a point to prove – an acknowledgement of the ability we had in our squad and of the fact that we could win. It would take a lot of hard work but the most encouraging part was that everyone was committed to that.

I think we did a good job in the first week. We had the set-a-side team-bonding activities as well as a couple of training sessions and the impromptu social. It was nothing staged. It wasn't like speed dating or anything like that!

### **FRAN COTTON**

We were written off from the moment our plane landed. They were world champions and the Super 12 was perceived as a vastly superior and more professional competition to anything in the north. That new generation of Bok players had possibly forgotten, or just didn't know, how big a deal an incoming Lions tour was.

Coming after their memorable World Cup triumph in 1995 and the excitement of those early Tri-Nations tournaments, it didn't resonate as loud as it should have. South Africa installed a new coach who had never worked at the highest level before – we just couldn't believe that – kept their Test players out of the provincial teams which gave us an easier run-in and then didn't select a first choice goal kicker. We even persuaded them to give us the first two Tests at sea level.

Perhaps the '97 Lions didn't boast so many huge names as '74 but my God they



made every last ounce of their ability count. Like '74 they were totally together as a unit and I have never seen a group train so hard. But they got the balance absolutely right: we relaxed when the opportunity presented itself and we enjoyed each other's company.

Sometimes in sport, as in life, you get your just rewards for all the hard work you put in. South Africa 1997 was one of those occasions.

### IAN McGEECHAN

How much more momentous could that tour be? The Lions toured the Rainbow Nation of South Africa just a few years after the African National Congress came to power... And two years after South Africa had won the 1995 World Cup. The tour also took place less than two years after the sport had declared itself open... taking steps into the unknown. The 1997 Lions were the first professional Lions, the first tour when the players signed contracts. The old days of the tour allowances, the few pennies a day to be used for making telephone calls home, and the rest of the paraphernalia of amateurism had all disappeared.

### KEITH WOOD (Ireland)

*Toured: 1997 & 2001*

Was I thinking about my father all the time? I was, when people asked me a question about him and the 1959 tour. But was I the rest of the time? No, I wasn't. From his Lions time, Dad gave virtually everything away and before the South Africa tour I said that I had little or nothing of his. I'm not a great one for memorabilia anyway. But when I said it, a whole load of stuff came back to me. I got Dad's Lions cap, a guy

Rob Howley breaks away from Western Province's Percy Montgomery.



had minded it for years, wrapped it in tissue paper and looked after it reverentially. A guy sent a towel from the '59 tour which doesn't sound anything spectacular but this thing is a work of art, hand-stitched with the Lions and the silver fern, absolutely phenomenal. These were all things that Dad would have given to people. Jeff Butterfield gave stuff into the RFU museum and part of the collection was footage and the RFU cut it down to 13 minutes and gave it to me. It's colour footage of Dad from 1959. Incredible stuff.

You're trying to get rid of the Irish colour when you're on a tour like that. The Irish press kept bringing up, 'How many do you think we'll have on the Test side?' And I said, 'Who cares? That's not what we're supposed to be now. We're trying to get away from how many English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh are on the team. We're Lions.' There is an element of trying to condition yourself into that as a thought process. It's the most important element of a Lions tour.

### **GREGOR TOWNSEND** (Scotland)

*Toured: 1997*

I believe the Lions is a four-legged stool and if you cut one leg off it will affect the whole balance. We had five Scots and four Irish, and eight of that nine were involved in the Test matches – with the other one, Doddie Weir, being sent home injured.

Looking back, the core of England's World Cup-winning team was there. Richard Hill had only played a few games for England, Matt Dawson was third choice for them, and that was the first international rugby team Martin Johnson had captained – so I would imagine that was an important moment in the development of that English team.

### **NEIL BACK**

They chose my kind of captain. Martin Johnson was a surprise to some people, but not to me. I had followed him into battle with Leicester many times and never found him wanting. Selecting a 6ft 7in, 18 stone bruiser as a skipper sent the Springboks an early message of our intent. I also knew Johnno's personality – very straight, very fair, hard-working on the pitch and relaxed off it – would unite the side drawn from different nations. It was also important that the fans and the media would take to the captain. Selecting Will Carling, for instance, would have been a disaster because, rightly or wrongly, he was associated in too many people's minds with English arrogance. Everyone respected Martin.

### **ALAN TAIT** (Scotland)

*Toured: 1997*

It was the first time I had met Martin Johnson but I was immediately impressed with him as a rugby player and as a man. He didn't say much – he did all his talking on the pitch, and I'm a big admirer of that way of operating.

**JOHN BENTLEY**

Cautious and non-committal, Johnno showed no leadership qualities whatsoever on tour until he got into the dressing room or onto the pitch. Then what he said went. He commanded the respect that a captain needs.

**GREGOR TOWNSEND**

Making Martin Johnson captain was a masterstroke. He was a man with no ego and a huge determination to win. Him and Jim Telfer together – it was what you wanted leading a hard-working pack.

**IAN McGEECHAN**

The tour will always be remembered for its prodigals who were returning to their original code now the game had gone professional. We chose six, all of whom had been cruelly missed by their country. John Bentley, the Yorkshireman had a huge personality and ability which appealed to me – Bentos was to become a signature player on the tour.

**JEREMY GUSCOTT**

John Bentley was one of the tour characters. ‘Bentos’ had the hearts and minds role for the Lions as social secretary – and he was a good one – but, make no mistake, he wanted that Test profile for himself more than anyone.

**JOHN BENTLEY**

The last thing I wanted as social secretary was to be suggesting options for the lads and having Guscott sat at the back taking the piss out of them. So I approached him to come onto the entertainments team. He burst out laughing and gleefully accepted, knowing full well why I had done it. In meetings we would spend 20 minutes mulling over a certain plan and then he would wade in and write off the whole thing, refusing to do it. To make matters worse he would instantly come up with a better scheme. That’s Jerry for you.

I thought about co-opting Rob Wainwright but decided against it because his idea of fun wouldn’t have gone down well with the rest of the team. One day he took a lot of them out for a two-hour ramble! Falconry was his scene and myself and Dai Young used to make budgie noises when he walked past. I don’t think he sussed it.

The job was quite easy. All we had to do was to keep a constant flow of activities available. Golf, go-karting, cinema... Very little was compulsory – only a team trip to a restaurant every Thursday night. The traditional tour court session also sat, though in a less alcoholic fashion than in the amateur days, with Judge Keith Wood delivering summary justice in an appalling wig. Only the coaches suffered with alcohol – poor old Geech had to down the largest whisky you’ve ever seen in one gulp. Fran, who was accused of giving the same speech too often, was tried and found guilty for being boring on tour after some poor work from his defence counsel, Mark Regan. Austin Healey was tied up with tape and had an apple stuffed into his mouth – for being Austin.



On previous Lions tours they seemed to have proper singers but as we didn't, we had a tour tune – 'Wonderwall' by Oasis – which we could all wail. It was an okay song and it helped to bring us together, but we could have chosen a better band. I hate Oasis. They seem to think everybody owes them something. Who do they think they are? They don't give a damn. In my opinion they could do with a right good hiding. Rather like James Small.

### **JEREMY GUSCOTT**

When we got to Johannesburg airport we were greeted by Louis Luyt, the South African RFU president, and he gave an awful speech. It was a very disrespectful, 'Thanks for coming, but we'll win 3-0 and wave you goodbye' speech. It was also fantastic for us. We knew we were better than that, and didn't pay much attention to the media talk. If you get the right blend of harmony with sheer willpower and determination it is a very powerful concoction, and the 1997 Lions had that blend.

### **JIM TELFER**

When we arrived in South Africa we had a function, and at the top table was Fran Cotton, 1974 undefeated Lion; sitting next to him, Ian McGeechan, 1974 undefeated Lion. You could see how much that meant to the Springboks. They couldn't seem to get away from the fact that they had been beaten by the Lions in 1974, and the victors were there in front of them. They really respected that pair – so they were great choices as manager and coach. It was important psychology.

We played some superb rugby on that tour. Rugby I've never seen from a Lions team before. The way we cut defences apart... We could get beaten in the forwards, but the quality of our back play was just superb.

Scott Gibbs used to intimidate his opposite number. They'd be lined up for a scrum or lineout and he'd be lined up shouting at their inside centre, 'I'm going to get you. I'm going to rip you apart.' And the rest of the team lifted, because he was on their side. The rugby league guys – Quinnell, Bentley, Young, Gibbs, Bateman and Tait – brought a professionalism to it. Not through telling everyone what to do, but just by the way they conducted themselves. It was a magical ten weeks. There were never any rifts.

### **ALAN TAIT**

All the rugby league guys had a head start. I'm sure we were picked on from first and foremost but Geech would also be aware that he was going to get a lot of professionalism from us. They had just turned professional whereas the likes of myself, Scott Gibbs, Allan Bateman and John Bentley had been professional for eight or nine years, so we definitely added an edge. But we mixed in really well. There was no divide because the rugby league guys appreciated that they were rubbing shoulders with class players like Jerry Guscott, Lawrence Dallaglio and Martin Johnson. The determination of the group was the key to our success. People talk about defence winning you matches, and guys like myself and Gibbsy knew about defensive

structures, about how to hold the line, and how to put pressure on the attacking team. There were just a lot of good players there showing a huge amount of desire.

### **LAWRENCE DALLAGLIO** (England)

*Toured: 1997, 2001 & 2005*

There were times when our coaches would stand aside and let Gibbs, Tait and Bateman tell us how they defended when playing top-level rugby league... it was clever of our coaches to tap into these lads' expertise.

### **GREGOR TOWNSEND**

Geech led all the team meetings and he was very inspirational in how he painted a picture of what we needed to do. It was quiet motivation. Telfer dealt solely with the forwards and he really had a grip of what made them tick. That was Jim at his best – they would have done anything for him by the end of the tour. Before the tour they were not as open to Jim as they needed to be. I remember the guys at Northampton had heard stories about Jim and how he coached – they would have been exaggerated or even apocryphal stories – but the likes of Tim Rodber would say that there was no way anyone could do things like that with us. But as soon as he started coaching them they realised that he was so knowledgeable and passionate, and that he was there to improve them and win – and they got right behind him.

### **JIM TELFER**

They knew that if we were going to survive then we all had to be on the same wavelength, and they had to make their contribution. It was early in the professional era – but they were professional. And I was lucky that the core of Englishmen in that team were rugby nuts, like Dallaglio, Johnson and Rodber. Eventually I was dictatorial, but not initially – by the time I started shouting the odds I knew that they were with me.

### **JASON LEONARD**

The first game of the 1997 tour was against Eastern Province in Port Elizabeth and I was chosen to captain it because of my previous Lions experience. It was an important game as you have to get tours off to a good start and I knew that I had been selected because they needed someone who understood what they were doing, to get out there and ensure us a win. Even though it was the first game of a long tour, I knew that for the sake of the rest of the tour it was vital that we came away with a victory.

I was pleased with the way I had captained the side. We stuck to our guns and had played the sort of rugby that we believed would beat the South Africa side in the Test matches.

### **JIM TELFER**

We got badly beaten in the scrums during our third game against Western Province, and we were due to play Mpumalanga on the Wednesday, so we decided that the

guys who played in that match wouldn't be asked to come back and do a scrummage session. But the guys on the bench would, alongside the Saturday team.

So, after the game we all went back on a minibus to Pretoria, where we were based, and did this absolutely brutal scrummaging session. Tom Smith must have been about 5ft 10inches when we started that session and 5ft 8inches when we finished, because the machine didn't move – but they didn't want to give in, and they didn't want me to beat them. We got beat in the next game, but that didn't matter, we had set the scene.

I mellowed a lot before the 1997 tour. I was a real bastard beforehand, but I learned that I had to delegate – so I did and I got my reward from the players.

### **RICHARD HILL**

I think we also bonded on the training pitch. Sometimes it was done through extremely hard work. Having someone like Jim Telfer as your forwards coach, a man who doesn't take any stick and doesn't accept standards below the best, meant that when we had a couple of scrummaging performances that were below par in the first three games, we received a severe scrummaging beating.

It went beyond scrummaging technique. It turned into scrummaging technique, scrummaging fitness and a severe beating, but that's a way of bringing people together. You live people's experiences. You live their pain and you live their joy when it's over.

You knew that they had the capacity levels for hard work. You knew that everybody that was there was prepared to go to the last breath, because you'd seen it. You knew how far they could go and you also knew that if you weren't putting it in, you were letting them down.

### **SCOTT GIBBS**

When that squad was announced in '97, I think there was an element that this squad was different, this management was different, and all those elements came together to create one playing entity.

There was never anyone who felt alienated in any way. That's a true strength of a squad, that inward support from everybody. That was there in abundance in '97 and that was why it was so successful on the field and off the field. We made a lot of friendships and there was never one clique.

I've got my lists of Lions laws, and togetherness was on it. There was never any question of us against them. It was all 35 preparing to beat the Springboks. Everybody played their part in that and that's why everyone can share in the delight that we won the series because it wasn't done by just the team on the day.

I think the Lions has meant more to the rugby fraternity than any other team because it brings people together and there's a common goal. It galvanises and brings all the Home Unions together. It's the best of the best.

### **NEIL JENKINS**

I was playing at fullback for Wales at the time and got picked in that position for the