

# McGeoch urged to lead Lions tour

By Rob Williams

THE debate is set to rage until next year's RBS Six Nations Championship, but support for Ian McGeoch to coach the Lions in 2009 is growing.

Alec Robinson, the former England coach now in charge at Edinburgh, had no reservations in calling for McGeoch's appointment, which would give the former Scotland coach a player seventh Lions tour.

Robinson said: "Ian would be an outstanding choice. His depth of knowledge and understanding of the game, in all its facets – attack, defence, set-piece – is just phenomenal.

"The quality of any coach is that when he talks the players listen and the players respond, and I think that's an important part of what he's about. He won in South Africa in 1997, so I think he would be an outstanding choice."

McGeoch has yet to comment on whether he would be interested in taking the Lions to South Africa. An unofficial "survey" indicates that the three "hubs" will be played in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Durban. Cape Town would host two games against Western Province and a Junior Springboks team.

The British and Irish Lions committee has stated that no decision will be taken over the head coach until after the Six Nations Championship next April. Eddie O'Sullivan, the Ireland coach in charge of the Barbarians for Saturday week's match against South Africa, says the favourable mood will help his team's poor World Cup campaign.

That has prompted the speculation over McGeoch, 61, who could view the tour as a fitting end to a successful career that has included two Lions tours as a player (1974 and 1977) and as a coach (1989, 1983, 1997 and 2005).

The support from Robinson followed the backing of Martin Johnson, who was captain of McGeoch's squad which won the 1997 series in South Africa. McGeoch's short-term goal is to prepare Wasps for Sunday's visit of Newcastle, the Guinness Premiership match.

Price of places support for Ian McGeoch to coach the Lions again has come

Wasps, who have hit form in the past two weeks by defeating Munster and Llanelli in Heineken Cup games, are likely to face a Newcastle team without Jonny Wilkinson and Toby Flood. Both World Cup players continue to recover from ankle and groin injuries, respectively.

Lawrence Dallaglio and Mike Catt have been spared further censure for their provocative remarks after the World Cup about the work of England's head coach, Brian Ashton, in France.

The Rugby Football Union announced yesterday that no action would be taken against the pair after newspapers serialised extracts from autobiographies.

A statement from the RFU's management board said: "The RFU has taken into account the recent public comments made by both players, who accept that the timing of the release of the books was not ideal, and the widespread criticism the players and the book extracts, relating to the 2007, received, is causing."

The television thinking is that Catt and Dallaglio were given such a verbal battering by criticising Ashton that they had already been sufficiently embarrassed. Among the chief critics was

Dom Richards, the former England No.8, who said they had "spotted" out of context. The RFU statement said officials remained extremely disappointed by the pair and that their actions had undermined the fundamental trust between players and coaches.

The RFU also said they were continuing to look at ways of briefing players from publishing accounts for a period after forthcoming World Cups. Both players have since issued apologies, with Dallaglio admitting that the "timing obviously wasn't great".

Another player to be reprimanded yesterday was Doug Howlett, the New Zealand wing, who was criticised on a drink-fuelled spree at Heathrow Airport while waiting to return home after the World Cup quarter-final defeat by France.

Howlett has received an "appropriate sanction", through the New Zealand Rugby Union have refused to release details of the punishment.

The player has already paid for the repairs to the damaged cars, and issued a full apology.

# OUT RUGBY BRENDA CALLEJA

ONE of the abiding memories of the much-lamented, old-style *Rugby Special* – 5.20pm Sunday afternoon, collapsed on the settee, tea and toast to hand – remains their coverage of the charity game to honour the late Sam Doble, staged between his club, Moseley – then one of the powers in the land – and an International Rugby Writers XV that effectively combined the best of all three Lions teams from the Seventies.

Doble was the huge – and hugely popular – full-back who helped England to away victories over South Africa and New Zealand in 1972 and 1973 before suddenly succumbing to cancer in the autumn of 1977.

In those amateur days, the best of British reacted almost overnight to stage a fundraiser in which Gerald Davies scored the most memorable try in a spectacular 43-19 victory. Gareth Edwards arrived with a hamstring tear from the Cardiff game the day before, agreed to hobble through the first 10 minutes and enjoyed himself so much that he played the full 80.

# Quiz sells no dummies

COMPETITION winners: nobody was fooled by the hint of a dummy in the England question last week, proudly answering that it was Martin Corry, and not Phil Vickery, who captained England against Tonga in their recent World Cup game. Vickery was on the bench, coming back from his two-match lay-off tripping in the United States game.

Loads of correct entries, but the first three randomly

selected are from Sarelbein Gangakhedhar from Skelmersdale, John Marchant from Rednal and Martin Bradbrook from Creper. Your DVDs of the *England Inside Story* and the *World Cup Heroes*, both produced by Loose International and out this month, will arrive shortly.

There was no focus on either, on the Barbarians question, with all-keepers correctly stating that they had

Thirty years on, almost to the day, the Moseley Old Players Association have attempted to reinstate their squad from that day for tomorrow night's annual dinner.

"The organisers have managed to track down all but one of the side, and that is Clive Meanwell, the full-back, who is in the United States somewhere," Jan Webster, the former England scrum-half, says. "If they can get the other 14 there, they will have done a fantastic job. It will be marvellous to see everybody again. When Sam died, I think we all traumatised."

This column, incidentally, owes Webster a belated apology, having suggested in an article last season that he was one of the England players who withdrew on security grounds from their last tour against Ireland at the height of the "Troubles" in 1973. The splendid Webster, who shared those memorable England wins with Doble, was in fact injured – otherwise wild horses would not have prevented him from lining up at Lansdowne Road.

Enker Fergus Slater was the only non-Welshman to score a try for the Irish in their memorable win over the All Blacks in 1979.

First out of the crowd last was Brian Williams, who took in Humphreys, who wins a pair of tickets and return train travel for the Guinness challenge game. They now head to Johannesburg and South Africa next week, courtesy of Guinness.

# Mandela's passion plea

NILSON Mandela is honoured on the new Prince William Cup, which makes its debut on Saturday when it is contested by Wales and South Africa for the first time. Unofficially inscribed on the 23-carat gold plate is a favourite quote of the former South African president: "There is no passion in the one you are capable of."



Andition: New Wales cup Morgan Stadium with the Prince William Cup

# Dodders still going strong

HALI, the Dodders TRIC – which is neither a tour for the Rugby Football Union management committee nor a gathering of veteran journalists, but in fact a collection of diehards devoted to their nation's World Cup success in 2003.

Flushed by way too much champagne exactly four years ago, eight rugby fans of various ages from Stonehouse way, in Gloucestershire, vowed to start fighting the march of time by enjoying a regular tongs rugby session every Sunday morning. They now boast 60 members, mostly in the 50-plus category but not exclusively, with some and even grandmothers making up the numbers on occasion.

"They normally start at 8am sharp – it's well known the 'oldies' can sleep that well, so they might as well be up and doing – and they are home in time to counter all that fresh air and exercise with a full English breakfast.

Secretary John Simcock said: "It's a really enjoyable way to the opportunity to retain the love of participation in the game and all it has to offer in terms of camaraderie and fitness, long after the body has had enough of the contact version."

# Moon bans the mooner

EAST MIDLANDS Society referee Robert Tunlin has been suspended for dropping his shorts in a women's match between Peterborough and Bedford last month. Not good.

The East Midlands disciplinary committee was, would you believe, chaired by Richard Mounie.

