

Former Wales flanker dies



■ Brian Sparks MBE

A FORMER Welsh international rugby player from Bridgend has died at the age of 82.

Brian Sparks from, Priory Gardens in Bridgend, was one of Neath's oldest surviving Welsh internationals.

He also had strong links with basketball after becoming founder-chairman in 1963 of the Welsh Schools Association.

And his services to basketball in Bridgend schools led to him receiving an MBE last year.

But it was at rugby that the Llanharan-born player really made his mark, joining the Welsh All Blacks in 1953.

A powerful flanker, the policeman became a member of an all-conquering Neath pack that contained three British Lions – Roy John, Courtney Meredith and Rees Stephens.

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The first of seven Welsh appearances came in 1954 against Ireland in Dublin with the final cap being awarded three years later during the Scottish clash at Murrayfield.

He also played for the Barbarians and an illustrious rugby union career also took in stints with Pontypool, Bridgend, Glamorgan Police and Torquay Athletic.

Brian later studied at St Luke's College in Exeter and during this period, he represented Devon County.

Having made over 100 Neath appearances, the next chapter in his sporting career opened in December 1957 when he accepted a professional contract with Halifax rugby league club.

But it wasn't until the barriers

eventually fell – preventing former rugby league players again being associated with the union game – that he once more became involved at The Gnoll.

Brian was heavily involved with Neath Former Players Association who stage regular reunions during the season.

It was through his post as headmaster at Tynyrheol Primary School in Llangeinor that he got involved with basketball.

And Bridgend Schools will forever owe a debt of gratitude to this respected and much-loved sportsman.

However, his loss will be felt most at Neath and they will pay final respects via a minute's silence at their next home game.

Brian is survived by his wife Beryl and the funeral was held on Monday at Coychurch Crematorium.