

Gary's lucky 13 with the Crusaders

Aug 14, 2007, 11:39am

THE summer can seem a long haul for rugby and football fans, but broadcaster and author Gary Slaymaker has found a means to live through the sporting 'drought' by following rugby league side Celtic Crusaders for the S4C series Y Clwb Rygbi 13.

The well-known film columnist will again interview supporters, coaches and players on the touchline at the Brewery Field, Bridgend, this Saturday August 18th (kick-off 5.30pm) as the Crusaders face Keighley Cougars in an important league game. But he'll also be relishing the friendly match between Wales and Argentina at the Millennium Stadium, shown live on Saturday afternoon on S4C, and is relieved the Welsh Premier league football series Y Clwb Pêl-droed (also Saturday night) is returning.

"I'm a big fan of the two winter sports, rugby and football, but I don't have a lot of time for most summer sports, so the chance to follow rugby league has been somewhat of a godsend for me," says Gary, 43, originally from Cwmann, near Lampeter, but now a long-time resident of Cardiff.

"The speed and stamina of the game's players are incredible. I've always enjoyed following rugby league on the TV, but I appreciate the skill level and fitness so much more after watching live matches. The atmosphere is brilliant there: the enthusiasm of the fans is incredible, but they're polite too. They don't swear like football fans, and we all have something to learn from that," says Gary, who's a big fan of Cardiff City Football Club.

Gary believes the Crusaders have a good chance of winning the league and climbing to the First Division of the Co-operative National League by the end of the season.

"They have good players in every position, and the right mix of players from Wales, England and the Southern Hemisphere, a coach in John Dixon who has proven himself with big clubs like the Brisbane Broncos, and they're hitting a good patch of form at the right time. The play-offs are a definite, but they could even avoid them by winning the title. They could then go on to win Super League status – why not?"

He believes that S4C's broadcasts, produced by Nant, and presented by Sarra Elgan with commentary provided by Lyn Davies and Brynmor Williams, have helped put the club on the map. "The response from viewers has been brilliant and I believe it has helped attract new people to the Brewery Field to watch live matches. What has also been heartening is that rugby league magazines and websites have been praising the broadcasts."

He adds "My dream is to see the Crusaders promoted, the Bluebirds in the Premiership, the Welsh rugby union team in the World Cup final – and enough juicy films for me to review

Crusaders to take on wheelchair team

Aug 16, 2007, 8:14am

Promotion-chasing Celtic Crusaders rugby league club are preparing to tackle one of their toughest challenges to date - taking on the Welsh Pirates wheelchair rugby team.

The match will be a boost for the Welsh Pirates and the profile of the sport in Wales and

will take place at Bridgend Recreation Centre at 2.30pm on Wednesday, August 22.

Welsh Pirates club secretary Richard Vowles said: "It's an intriguing fixture as both teams will have their strengths and their weaknesses. We're used to using chairs which the Crusaders won't be - our arms are our legs in a way.

"But while I'm paralysed from the chest down and can't use my hands that much, they'll be able to throw the ball from one end of the court to the other. I hope it will be quite competitive but we'll be going out to enjoy ourselves."

Richard boxed for Wales for 11 years then turned pro before breaking his neck in a rugby match.

"I needed to take up a physical sport after my injury. A lot of our players did competitive sports before their injuries but we have people from all walks of life - men and women - and with different degrees of mobility. Hopefully this sort of high-profile match will help get other wheelchair users interested in playing."

Celtic Crusaders' community manager Dave McNally said the players know they would be up against it but are keen to try a new version of rugby.

"The Crusaders have made building partnerships in the community one of their top priorities off the pitch. It will be a very tough physical challenge against experienced wheelchair rugby players.

"The players are very keen to have a go at something new and they'll enjoy the challenge. They're usually in Bridgend Recreation Centre on Wednesday afternoons working with local kids, so hopefully there'll be a bit of a crowd."

The match is just the latest positive action by the Crusaders to get disabled people involved in rugby league. In April they opened a purpose-built stand for disabled spectators at their Brewery Field home ground.

And earlier this summer they appointed solicitor Eleanor Williams, a disability and employment specialist at Cardiff law firm Darwin Gray, as their equality and diversity officer. It was Eleanor that brought the two sides together for the fixture.

"The Crusaders hold the sportsmanship of the Welsh Pirates in high esteem and are keen to forge links with them. It's part of the club's overall strategy of opening up the game of rugby league to everyone in South Wales," she said.

The match will be played on the basketball court at Bridgend Recreation Centre in Angel Street, Bridgend. Admission for spectators will be free.

Back on the rugby pitch, the Crusaders face Keighley Cougars at the Brewery Field at 5.30pm on Saturday August 18 as they close in on promotion from Co-operative National League Two.

Crusaders make new signing

Aug 16, 2007, 2:50pm

Celtic Crusaders have completed the signing of former Cronulla Sharks centre Josh Hannay. He will remain at the club until the end of the 2008 season.

He is being considered for selection for the Crusaders when they face Keighley Cougars

this Saturday at the Brewery Field (kick-off 5.30pm), a match that will be shown live on S4C.

Hannay, 27, was released by the Sharks earlier this year having been paid for his contract until the end of 2008, and has since been playing for Sydney-based Cronulla League side GyMEA Gorillas.

Crusaders' coach John Dixon said: "We're really pleased to have secured Josh's services. He is a quality player and I'm sure that our supporters will enjoy watching him in action."

Chief executive David Thompson said: "Signing Josh is very much a coup for the Crusaders. Bringing in players of his calibre underlines just how far we have come as a club in our short history. It did take a little time to complete the signing but we are very pleased that Josh is now with us and training with the squad

Crusaders looking to have academy side in 2008

Aug 17, 2007, 2:12pm

Celtic Crusaders are hoping to have an academy squad to supplement their National League side in 2008. The side will be primarily selected from the best of the Co-operative Welsh Conference Premier players and hope to compete in the Academy under-21 league.

The squad will be introduced if the Crusaders win promotion to National League One. The Crusaders need to win their last four games to achieve this goal, starting with Keighley Cougars at the Brewery Field this Saturday (kick-off 5.30pm).

The potential future Academy side have already had their first training session and Crusaders' coach John Dixon was happy with the results.

Speaking in the official match programme, Dixon said: "The trial day was an encouraging sign for the long-term future of the Crusaders. We had 20 boys turn up and go through a series of speed and endurance tests, followed a series of minor games. As coach I was impressed by their effort.

"There was a lot to like from what we saw but I am certain there are more young men in this age group we haven't tapped into yet. The trial days for the academy will be ongoing and either Kevin Ellis or I can be contacted with names of young men who would like to be considered."