

Van Dijk picks up top award

Oct 4, 2006, 12:38am

Celtic Crusaders' Jace Van Dijk picked up the LHF National League Two Player of the Year award in Leeds on Tuesday night.

Van Dijk has had a tremendous season with the Crusaders, who reached the Final Eliminator in NL2 this year and just failed to qualify for the Play-off Final after losing to a Golden Point extra-time drop goal against Swinton Lions on Sunday.

His nine tries and 52 goals made him third top scorer for the Crusaders in 2006, but it was his silky skills that created many a try for the new Welsh team during the season that earned him the award.

Crusaders coach John Dixon said: "The award was well deserved. He was the outstanding half-back in the competition this season so he earned the recognition as the best player. There couldn't have been much between him and Tony Duggan when it came to making the decision on who had won."

Duggan and Dewsbury's Richard Chapman were the other two contenders for the award. Both were included in the National League Two team of the year that was sponsored by Rugby League World magazine.

Michael Ryan to leave the Crusaders

Oct 5, 2006, 1:40pm

Celtic Crusaders' influential skipper Michael Ryan is leaving the club and returning to Australia.

Ryan had signed a new contract for 2007 and fans had even paid "shares" to sponsor him for next season. However, he has requested a return to his home country for personal reasons. His recently born daughter has been born with heart complications and this has meant that he needs to be in Brisbane with his family, supporting them every step of the way.

Coach John Dixon said: "This is a real disappointment for the club but we understand completely why he's going and fully support his decision to return to Australia. Michael has been a wonderful leader for the club both on and off the field. We'll miss his company, his friendship, his leadership and we wish him and his family all the very best."

Crusaders' Operations Manager, Gerald McCarthy said: "It's unfortunate that Michael has to go, but there was no problem in releasing him from his contract – family must come first in every situation. He will be greatly missed both on and off the field. He has become a good friend and has been a credit to the club. We hope that Michael may be in a position to rejoin us one day."

Ryan said: "I'd like to thank the fans for all their support this season – I'm just sorry that I wasn't able to stick around longer. I would also like to personally thank Leighton Samuel for the support he has given the coaching staff and players throughout season 2006 and I hope that his drive behind establishing rugby league in South Wales achieves its goals by the club eventually attaining Super League status. I would like to extend my thanks to the coaching staff and players for what has been a really enjoyable and successful first year and hope that now the Welsh public will jump on board and realise

that rugby league is to stay here in South Wales. I wish the boys all the best for 2007 and I hope they get up into National League One. I'll be looking out for the results every week from home so I hope to see some good results come through!"

Duggan picks up five awards

Oct 11, 2006, 10:56pm

Tony Duggan claimed five awards at the inaugural Celtic Crusaders End of Season Dinner at the Brewery Field on Wednesday.

The full-back has had an outstanding season – his 37 tries was the most any player in the UK scored this season at all levels of professional rugby league.

As well as picking up the trophy for Top Try Scorer, he also won the Try of the Season, Supporters' Player of the Year, Players' Player of the Year and Player of the Year awards.

On acceptance of the awards, Duggan said: "This is a great honour to win these awards in the Crusaders' first season. We may have just missed out on promotion this year but we'll be back to compete again in 2007."

Skipper Michael Ryan, who was not at the night as he had already returned to Australia, won two awards, for Hit of the Season (meaning hardest tackle) and Best Forward.

Jace Van Dijk, who last week scooped the National League Two Player of the Year award, picked up the trophy for Best Back, Geraint Davies won Young Player of the Year and Ian Golden won Clubman of the Year for his press officer work, for redesigning the club's official website and editing and designing the match programme.

Damien Quinn was also presented with a trophy for being the clubs' top points scorer. Quinn scored 18 tries and 85 goals in 2006 and would have probably been the country's top points scorer had he not handed over the kicking duties to Van Dijk mid-season.

Three players also announced their retirement from competitive rugby league. Anthony Seibold will be returning to Brisbane where he has accepted a coaching job in a local university, Carl de Chenu is going back to his native Ireland where he will also seek a change of career while Paul Morgan has re-signed for Bridgend Ravens RU for the remainder of the 2006-2007 season before hanging up his boots in both codes.

The 32-years old Morgan said: "It's been a fantastic season with the Crusaders and I've enjoyed every minute of it. Playing professional league for a year has made me a lot fitter and I hope that this can help the Ravens. I still hope to play alongside Iestyn Harris for Wales against Scotland in two weeks though, and that game definitely will be my last professional rugby league match."

Six Crusaders in Wales Squad

Oct 16, 2006, 6:50am

Wales have included four Super League and six Celtic Crusaders players in their initial 21-man squad for the Rugby League World Cup qualifier against Scotland at the Brewery Field on Sunday 29th October.

The squad also includes Mark Lennon who plays for Manly Sea Eagles in Australia's

NRL and Phil Joseph from Hull Kingston Rovers who will be playing in Super League next season after helping his side win the National League One Grand Final on October 8th.

But the big news for Wales is, as announced two weeks ago, Iestyn Harris will play for his country in rugby league for the first time in almost six years when he runs out at the Brewery Field in just under two weeks time.

The Bradford Bulls stand-off last played for Wales in the World Cup semi-final match against Australia in Huddersfield on November 19th 2000. He made his Welsh international debut against Australia on October 30th 1994 and is currently the country's record points scorer for with 145 in his 17 games.

Since then, he has had a spell in union with Cardiff Blues and Wales and on his return to league, has been unable to play for Wales due to his involvement with Great Britain.

Warrington's Lee Briers will captain the side once again following his best season ever for Wolves where he scored nine tries and 105 goals leading them to the second round of the play-offs, and despite being in Australia with the Great Britain Tri-Nations squad. In a special arrangement with the Lions, Briers will fly back to Wales on October 21st before returning down under the day after the match.

There is no place in the squad for Crusaders' Paul Morgan meaning that he has now played his last game of rugby league following his retirement announcement last week, but there is a surprise inclusion for Richard Johnson who hasn't played since breaking his arm in the Crusaders' win over Barrow on July 16th.

Three potential debutants have been named – Geraint Davies and Hywel Davies from Celtic Crusaders and Widnes Vikings' Gary Hulse. Hulse will be extra determined to get into the 17-man matchday squad as, after being selected for Wales last year, missed out on his international debut due to injury.

The match is the first in a two-legged encounter for Wales for the winners qualifying for the 13th Rugby League World Cup Finals in Australia in October 2008.

Wales Squad 2006

Anthony Blackwood Halifax RLFC
Lee Briers Warrington Wolves (capt)
Geraint Davies Celtic Crusaders
Hywel Davies Celtic Crusaders
Gareth Dean Celtic Crusaders
Damien Gibson Halifax RLFC
Iestyn Harris Bradford Bulls
Paul Highton Salford City Reds
Adam Hughes Widnes Vikings
Gary Hulse Widnes Vikings
Aled James Celtic Crusaders
Jordan James Widnes Vikings
Richard Johnson Celtic Crusaders
Phil Joseph Hull Kingston Rovers
Mark Lennon Manly Sea Eagles
David Mills Harlequins RL
Chris Morley Swinton Lions
Bryn Powell Dewsbury Rams

Gareth Price Celtic Crusaders
Robert Roberts Leigh Centurions
Ian Watson Widnes Vikings

Team Manager John Devereux
Head Coach Martin Hall
Assistant Coach Anthony Farrell
Assistant Coach Kevin Ellis
Fitness/Skills Allan Bateman
Physiotherapist Ben Searle
Kit Man Tony James

Crusaders sign Welsh international

Oct 17, 2006, 1:08pm

Celtic Crusaders have signed Welsh international Anthony Blackwood from Halifax.

Blackwood made his debut for Wales last year against Scotland at the Brewery Field and is set to appear alongside Iestyn Harris when Wales face the Scots again at the same ground on Sunday 29th October in their first World Cup 2008 qualifying match. He played in all three Wales matches last year, helping to lead them to last year's European Nations Cup Final against France and scoring two tries against Ireland in Dublin.

Blackwood has impressed as a centre in two seasons, scoring 26 tries in 49 appearances for the National League One side. The converted back-rower captained the Leigh under 21's to Grand Final victory in 2004, winning man of the match in the process, before joining Halifax in November 2004.

In addition, the Crusaders have announced their retained list for 2007 with 13 players from their excellent first season. They are Chris Beasley, Phil Cushion, Geraint Davies, Hywel Davies, Gareth Dean, Tony Duggan, Grant Epton, Dean Fitzgerald, Richard Johnson, Damien Quinn, Jace Van Dijk, Neil Wyatt and Luke Young.

The club will announce more signings during the off-season to bring their squad up to the standard 25 players required.

Crusader captains Great Britain

Dec 4, 2006, 5:29pm

Congratulations to Lee Williams who captained Great Britain under-18s this Sunday against their Australian counterparts as they lost 38-8 in Doncaster.

Owen Lewis, who plays for Pontypridd and Abercynon-based Valley Cougars was the only other Welshman in the Great Britain side but his Cougars team-mate Sam Studley was in the 20-man training squad and failed to make the matchday 17.

Williams, who scored two tries in his three appearances for Celtic Crusaders last season, also plays for Aberavon Fighting Irish in the summer.

Wales Rugby League chairman Mark Rowley said: "I'm always proud to see Welshmen playing for Great Britain. I'm sorry that we didn't win but Australia are a tough side as we saw at Blackwood last week. All three of the lads have great potential and I'm sure they'll continue to do well next season."