

# Captaincy and Leadership in Rugby Union

HELP, Second Year

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## 1. Introduction

In this project, I am going to either prove or disprove two hypotheses:

- firstly, that the position of a rugby player will make a difference to what they think a great captain is; and
- secondly, that for a captain to be great, they do not have to be the best in their position.

I will prove or disprove these hypotheses through the following research:

- conducting semi-quantitative surveys
- reading and analysing 4 great rugby captains' autobiographies (qualitative research) and their views on leadership and captaincy
- and finally wider online research.

Rugby is a sport and subject that I am very passionate about, and I aspire to play at the highest level. Currently I play for Hampton U13 Bs and my club (Twickenham) first team. I find captaincy interesting as I think it takes great skill and certain characteristics to be a good captain let alone a country-leading world-famous great captain. My personal experiences of rugby captaincy have been periodically with my school team and regularly for my club. My personal view of rugby captaincy based on my experiences is that you need to be the hardest-working player on the pitch at all times – you may not be the most skilled, but you can be the hardest-working, and respect from your teammates and from your coaches comes from this work ethic.

This HELP project is not about rugby itself, but the basic principles of captaincy in rugby. It is not about captaincy in other sports, but these principles could be translated to other sports and to leadership throughout life.

Whilst this project is not focused on rugby, there are some basic definitions and principles about the sport that you will need to know and understand.

- There are 2 sets of players in the game: forwards and backs.
- Forwards are normally bigger physical players, and their role is to carry the ball forwards, gain metres, and turn over the ball to gain possession. There are 8 forwards in a rugby team. Some current famous forwards are Tom Curry (England), Ardie Savea, and Alun Wyn-Jones (Wales).
- There are 2 forward positions that are important in my project: **The Flanker** and **The Number Eight**.
  - The Flanker's job is to make the most tacklers and turnovers in order to minimise the opposition's possession.
  - The Number Eight's job is to gain the most metres and carry the ball towards the try line. They are normally the biggest and strongest player on the pitch.
- Backs are usually smaller physically, but are more athletic, quicker and have better footwork because their job is to find gaps in the opposition's defence, and exploit these to score tries. Backs will normally have much higher try scoring rates than a forward. There are 7 backs in a rugby team. Some current famous backs are Beauden Barrett (NZ), Faf de Klerk (RSA) and Jonny May (England).
- There are 2 back positions that are important in my project: **The Outside Centre** and **The Scrum Half**.

- The Outside Centre's job is to either pass the ball to their winger, run through a gap in the opposition's defence, or to make a carry towards the try line.
- The Scrum Half's job is to pass the ball every time someone is on the floor, and to control the speed the game is being played at.

Obviously, every player is fundamental to the teams' success, but these are the only positions that I directly reference in this project.

I have selected four national team captains:

- Brian O'Driscoll
- Richie McCaw
- George Gregan
- And Sam Warburton

Two of these players have captained the **British & Irish Lions**, a tour that takes place every 4 years. The Lions is a squad made up of who the coach believes are the best British & Irish players; these players then tour to either Australia, South Africa or New Zealand.

## 2. The Four Captains

### 2.1. Brian O'Driscoll



Brian O'Driscoll is a very successful rugby player with a 15-year career, including 9 years as captain. He is the highest try scorer for Ireland with 46 international tries, and is a four-times British & Irish Lions player.

As a rugby captain, O'Driscoll has an excellent record, attending 4 Rugby World Cups with Ireland, captaining 2 of them, as well as captaining the Lions tour of 2005: and is the longest-serving Ireland captain (2002 to 2012).

O'Driscoll plays in the 'Backs', at **Outside Centre**, traditionally next to the winger.

Born in 1979, O'Driscoll grew up in a rugby-based family. Both his parents worked as physicians. Interestingly, he was a Gaelic Football player in his youth, before switching to playing rugby at the middle-class Irish boarding school that he attended.

O'Driscoll made his debut for Ireland in 1999 aged 20 years old against Australia. He retired in 2014, aged 35 years old (his last game was against Italy in the Six Nations), and was the most capped player in rugby history at the time with 141 caps, with 8 awarded for the British & Irish Lions. As of today, he is the 4<sup>th</sup> most capped player in rugby history.

Brian O'Driscoll was clearly well thought of and appreciated by his rugby colleagues, as shown by his 3 times nomination for World Rugby Player of the Year, an award that the nominees are chosen for by past rugby greats.

Brian O'Driscoll is now an ambassador for the Temple Street Children's Charity, which supports Temple Street hospital, using his name and reputation to help raise awareness and money for the hospital.

## 2.2 Richie McCaw



Richie McCaw is maybe the most successful rugby captain in history, consecutively captaining 2 Rugby World Cups wins for New Zealand, and holds the record as the most capped Rugby Union player in history with 148 caps, and due to this holds the record for most capped Test Captain for his country after captaining New Zealand 110 times.

McCaw played as a Forward, primarily as an **Openside Flanker**, but could also play **Blindside Flanker** or **Number 8**.

McCaw was born in 1980 and played rugby when he was growing up due to him living in New Zealand, a very rugby-based and cultured country. He only started to take rugby seriously in High School when he was appointed Head Boy, so he was a captain off as well as on the pitch. He actually did not make the New Zealand school team, and only made the New Zealand U19s due to his perseverance and constant drive to become a better player.

He made his debut in 2001, aged 21 years old against Ireland. In 8 of his 14 years playing international rugby, he was either the winner or a nominee of the World Rugby Player of the Year award. He is also the first and only second-ever player to win the award in consecutive years. Clearly this shows how great a player he was given that this award is voted for by his rugby-playing colleagues. In 2019, he was inducted into the Rugby Hall of Fame, the most prestigious recognition a rugby player can be given.

Richie McCaw retired in 2015 against Australia in the Rugby World Cup Final, aged 35 years old. He flew several helicopter rescue missions during the NZ earthquake, demonstrating his leadership in personal life off the pitch.

### 2.3 George Gregan



Gregan was born in 1973 in Zambia, but moved to Australia at the age of 2 years old. He spent his childhood in an independent school that focused its sport on rugby.

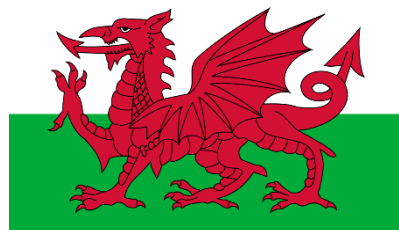
He made his rugby debut in 1994 aged 21 years old against Italy. He plays as a Back, as **Scrum Half**.

He holds the record for the most capped Australian player with 139 caps and is the fifth most capped player in Rugby Union history. He also holds the record for the most caps as captain for Australia with 59 appearances. He was the Australian captain from 2001 to 2007, and retired in 2007 against England in a Rugby World Cup quarter-final, aged 34 years old.

Gregan won a Rugby World Cup in 1999 with Australia, has played in 4 Rugby World Cups, captaining 2, and also holds a 2002 Bledisloe Cup win as captain (a yearly match between Australia and New Zealand), a significant achievement given that of the 52 Bledisloe Cups, Australia have only won 12 times. Only 3 years into his captaincy, Gregan was appointed as a member of the prestigious Order of Australia in 2004 for his services to Australia, recognising his contribution as a Wallabies captain. He has been inducted into the Australia Sports Hall of Fame in 2009 and into the Rugby Hall of Fame in 2013.

It is because of achievements like this that Gregan is included in this project, despite not having as many caps or playing years as captain compared to the other 3 captains I have selected. In 2005 he set up the George Gregan Foundation after his son was diagnosed with epilepsy. It has built all – access children’s playgrounds in hospitals, demonstrating his leadership off the pitch, through selflessness and understanding of people’s needs.

### 2.4 Sam Warburton



Sam Warburton is widely regarded as one of the greatest captains in Rugby Union history based off his achievements; he was the youngest ever Rugby World Cup captain in 2011 at 23 years old, and the youngest ever British & Irish Lions Captain on the 2013 tour, at the age of 24 years old. He holds the record for most Wales caps as captain with 49 caps; and one of the greatest achievements of his career, he was only the second ever man to captain the Lions twice.

He was born in 1988 and grew up playing football, not rugby, and in fact had a trial for a football team, Cardiff city, for which he was not successful. Like my other 3 captains, he displayed great sportsmanship in his youth. In school, he was picked by his rugby coach to play rugby and discovered a love for it, although in his first game for his school, he played truant because he was worried, he would play badly and get hurt and ridiculed. He went to a normal state school, and got a trial for the Cardiff Blues academy but purposefully played badly so that he wouldn't get selected. Luckily, he was then spotted playing well for his club by one of the parents who was a scout.

Warburton played as a Forward, primarily at **Open Side Flanker**, but could also play **Blind Side Flanker** (like **Richie McCaw**). He made his debut in 2009 at 20 years old against the USA, but due to injuries, retired early in 2018 at the age of only 29 years old, ending his career on the winning British & Irish Lions tour.

While it was the shortest rugby career of my four captains, Warburton's was just as successful, and he has many rugby titles, including two Six Nations titles both as Wales captain (one being a Grand Slam title), a British & Irish Lions tour win as captain in 2013 aged only 25 years old, and a 2017 Lions draw in the tour to New Zealand. He has been Wales captain for two Rugby World Cups, and has 79 international caps with 5 caps for the Lions tour.

Potentially the best Flanker in rugby, in the 2013 Lions tour, Warburton believed he had not done enough for the team, despite them winning, and that he didn't deserve the win, and therefore let the tour's vice-captain collect and lift the trophy with him. This is important because it shows, great leaders accept responsibility and know when you need to improve.

He now commentates and has supported many charities with donations such as a 2017 donation of his full Lions tour kit. As with all my selected captains, this demonstrates his selflessness and consideration for others.

### **3. The views of the Captains**

I decided to include views from my four captains in what makes a great captain or leader in rugby because that is the main aspect of my project. Their views did not surprise me because they aligned with my views of captaincy – it is common sense. There were some overlaps between how they all viewed captaincy, but also some separate areas. My research methods were biographies and online searches.

#### **Brian O Driscoll:**

Brian O'Driscoll believes 6 characteristics are important to becoming a great captain:

- Overall, O'Driscoll states that leadership is about **commanding respect**. O'Driscoll believes that part of this is about having raw talent and being a naturally skilled rugby player; but a leader then needs to go the extra mile, to not just be ordinary, because the ability to command the other players' respect will come with that.

Specific characteristics of his views of great captaincy are:

- You need to **always be working harder than everyone else** not just during a match, but in training, this then also increases how much your teammates respect you, another important part of captaincy.
- To **accept responsibility for your mistakes**; such as, if you miss a tackle and a try is scored, you need to be able to accept that and say that it is your fault. If you can't accept that you messed up and move on, then you can't improve due to you fixating on your mistakes.
- **To know what part of your game is that you need to work on**, and you need to own up to that and make it better. A coach always wants their players to improve and if you don't improve on the aspects of your game that need work then you can't show the coach that you know how to improve.
- Driscoll also believes that leadership is about having the **right attitude**: and that's about how you play on the pitch as well as how you act in training; are you ready to learn, are you really wanting to play rugby?
- Finally, leadership is also about **how you act with your teammates**, are you supportive, do you give them advice, and do you understand that people make mistakes and let them make those without making them feel bad about themselves.

### Richie McCaw

Richie McCaw thinks there are 4 characteristics to being a great captain. Like O'Driscoll, he highlights the importance of physical factors of being a captain such as leading from the front and good communication, but also includes some mental characteristics.

McCaw thinks that the most important quality as a captain is your **mental strength and emotional discipline**. You need to be:

- **Calm under pressure** and be able to choose whether to take a penalty and thus drawing the game, or, going for the try in a last second decision to win the game. He says: *"if you can't trust yourself to take the winning penalty then you shouldn't be a captain, you need to be calm and collected when the whole world is watching you and your team is counting on you."*
- You must **make sure your team is always ready**: you do this by communicating lots and constantly making sure everyone is where they're meant to be on the pitch.
- However, you must also **trust your teammates no matter what** because if you always think 'he's not going to make that tackle, I should run back to make a cover tackle' then it's obviously going to be noticed by the coach and you're going to not just be dropped as captain but be dropped to a sub or potentially dropped entirely.
- Finally you must **lead from the front** and play like you want the rest of your team to play. You need to lead by example as you're going to be the person that your teammates are looking at; you're the person that your teammates are going to want to be like; you're the person that needs to make the first tackle.

### George Gregan

Gregan has 4 views on great captaincy, with all of them, surprisingly, being mental characteristics, and mental attitude.

- One of the most important things needed to be a great rugby captain is to **be able to bounce back after pressure and fight for the game**. To be able to help your teammates understand that the game isn't over until the final whistle is blown.



- You must be **calm at all times**, even when the whole stadium is waiting and watching. The Australian skipper says that when he was captain he would *“normally just take the points but if you’re under pressure and have a feeling that you can score, if, when all that pressure is on you, you take the scrum. That’s when you are truly a great captain. If you can make calculated decisions under pressure.”*
- He believes **the whole team is the captain not just him**. All of the members of the team contribute to the decisions he makes as a captain; so you have to make your decisions not just off what you think is the right thing to do but also based on what your players feel they can do. Eg, if your players don’t think that they can lock down the scrum or run through the gap, then don’t take the scrum because if they say they’re not up for it, then he says that you shouldn’t push them to do something they’re not ready for.
- Finally, you can’t ever be a good captain let alone a great captain if you don’t **accept your losses** and that if your team has an extremely high win percentage then you need to play other teams better than you so that you start to understand how to deal with a loss.

### Sam Warburton

Sam Warburton has 5 characteristics that he believes you need in order to become a great captain. He shares some similar views to Richie McCaw about your mental strength and the commitment needed in each game.

- Sam Warburton says that the most important quality for a captain is to **have amazing mental strength and mental discipline**. Throughout your life and your captaincy experiences, you will encounter losses, ranging from just a loss in a game to being dropped from a squad or being out for 5 months due to injury (something which Warburton dealt with a lot, retiring at a young age due to his extensive list of injuries). In order to deal with these, Warburton says that your mental strength must be even better than your physical strength or your skill.
- The other most important characteristic in a captain is **leading from the front** - being the first to make a tackle, the first to force a turnover and the first to make a carry. He emphasises that as he grew as a captain: his number one priority became not making better relationships with the other players but making sure every performance was outstanding. He lets his actions and his games do the talking instead of ‘chatting the chat’.
- He advises young captains that **sacrifice is the ultimate preparation**. From day one you need to be prepared to sacrifice things you love, like crisps, chocolate bars and your time. He spent 10 years preparing for his captaincy and this helped him become prepared from day one, not prepared once he had the captaincy. He says that this is why many people may view him as a great captain, because he was ready and prepared for the captaincy for ten years leading up to it.
- Warburton also thinks that as a captain, you need to be **skilled at reading the game, be an intelligent player**. Eg, when talking to the referee about a decision he or she has made, then you must pick your moment carefully and only challenge the important decisions that will properly affect the game. You need to think about how the referee is feeling at that moment or how many penalties you have given away and how many times already you have asked them to check a decision.
- Finally, Warburton says you must **always focus on the positives of your game** and not think immediately about what you could have done better.

#### 4. Comparing and Contrasting the Captain's Views

|  | Back             | Forward      | Back          | Forward       |
|--|------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
|  | Brian O'Driscoll | Richie McCaw | George Gregan | Sam Warburton |
| Hardest working player   | ✓                |              |               |               |
| Accept responsibility for your mistakes and accept your losses                 | ✓                |              | ✓             |               |
| Know what part of your game to work on but focus on the positives of your game | ✓                |              |               | ✓             |
| Supportive and trusting of your team mates                                     | ✓                | ✓            |               |               |
| Right attitude   | ✓                |              |               |               |
| Calm under pressure  |                  | ✓            | ✓             | ✓             |
| Make sure your team is always ready  |                  | ✓            | ✓             |               |
| Mental strength and emotional discipline                                       |                  | ✓            |               | ✓             |
| Lead from the front  |                  | ✓            |               | ✓             |
| Whole team is the captain  |                  |              | ✓             |               |
| Sacrifice is the ultimate preparation  |                  |              |               | ✓             |
| Be an intelligent player when you play and when talking to the referee         |                  |              |               | ✓             |

#### Overall observations

- There is very little overlap between the 12 characteristics.
- Surprisingly there is only 1 characteristic that more than 2 captains agree on: 'being calm under pressure'.
- 50% of all of the overall characteristics at least two captains agree on.

- 33% of the overall characteristics are physical attributes – 66% are mental characteristics. This tells me that captaincy is a lot about your mindset because if you're not mentally strong, how can you expect your team-mates to be.
- I assumed there would be a set of general rules to follow to be a good captain, but clearly there can be lots of different views on being a good captain, ultimately because people are different, and they bring their own personality to being a great captain.

#### My observations on how captaincy differs forwards vs backs

##### **Forwards:**

Both of the two forwards, Sam Warburton and Richie McCaw believe that the most important quality in a captain is **mental strength and emotional discipline** and being **calm under pressure**. The two forwards also agreed about **leading from the front** and **play like you want your players to play**.

I think this is because there is something quite inspirational to see your captain putting themselves on the line, making tackle after tackle, turnover after turnover on players that might be double their size. It makes you want to copy them, and make you think 'if they can tackle this 150kg man, then I can too'. One of the main parts of being a forward is this physicality and aggression.

##### **Backs:**

The two backs, Brian O Driscoll and George Gregan, agree that in order to be a great captain, you must be able to **bounce back after pressure** and after a loss or a try.

In rugby, this is very much what backs do - they are the players on the pitch that manipulate how the game is played and control what the other players do such as taking some tackles or giving it to the winger or the fly half.

Interestingly though Brian O Driscoll agrees with one of the forwards, Sam Warburton, that as you grow into the captaincy you must **build better relationships with players** and **be there for people off the pitch** when they are going through things such as being dropped or an injury.

There is much more agreement in captaincy between the two Forwards than the two Backs. This may be because my two Forwards captains played in the same positions whereas my two Back captains played in very different positions with very different roles in the team's structure.

#### **5. Interim conclusion: part I**

As a reminder, my first hypothesis was, that the position of a rugby player will make a difference to what they think a great captain is.

After conducting my 'desk' research into four rugby captains (Sam Warburton, George Gregan, Brian O'Driscoll and Richie McCaw ) I have identified their main views on what characteristics you need to be a great captain. From this, I have learned that:

**5.1. The position of a player, whether they are a forward or a back, does not result in a difference in their views on captaincy.** You can see this as, out of the twelve characteristics, there are four cases of a Forward captain and a Back captain agreeing that a characteristic is needed to become a great captain.

These cases are:

- Brian O Driscoll agreeing with Sam Warburton that **you must know what part of your game to work on while focusing on the positives of your game;**
- Brian O Driscoll agreeing with Richie McCaw that you need to be **supportive and trusting of your teammates** no matter how the game is going;
- George Gregan, Sam Warburton and Richie McCaw all agreeing that it is critical that you are always **calm under pressure** at every point of the game;
- And finally George Gregan and Richie McCaw agreeing that you need to make sure your team is always ready, you do this by **communicating constantly.**

This 33% agreement between a forward and a back shows that there is not as much of a difference in your views of what makes a great captain depending on what side of this 7 (Backs)/8 (Forwards) split you are as I originally thought.

However:

#### 5.2. **There does seem to be a difference between your views on the characteristics of a great captain if you are a different forward to another captain in the forwards.**

- My two Forwards captains (Sam Warburton and Richie McCaw) have only agreed on three characteristics of a great rugby captain: be **calm under pressure**; have amazing **mental strength and emotional discipline**; and **lead from the front.**
- My two Backs captains (George Gregan and Brian O Driscoll) have only agreed on one quality of a great rugby captain: that it is critical for you to **accept responsibility for your mistakes and losses.**

Clearly from a 20% agreement in the Forwards ideas of a great captain vs the 8% agreement in the Backs views on a great captain, there is a surprisingly small amount of similarities between the two Backs captains and the two Forwards captains compared to the 33% agreement between a Forward captain and a Back captain.

My view on this: every player on the field has just as important but a different job to the other players: eg Open-side, Blind-side flanker and number 8 (Forwards) will usually be the best on the field at making tackles and gaining possession whereas a winger (Back) is not expected to make any turnovers but will normally beat most defenders and gain the most metres with each carry. This may be brought into their views on leadership: eg you would expect an Open-Side Flanker (Forward) to believe more in leading from the front and working harder than a Winger (Back) whose role doesn't require these characteristics as much.

Moreover, each player has their own individual beliefs on captaincy which is maybe a result of their upbringing and rugby career, both how successful their career has been (eg, Richie McCaw may subconsciously associate his qualities as a captain with being a great rugby captain due to his stellar career, including two Rugby World Cup wins) and by their personal career (e.g., Sam Warburton may associate resilience with great rugby captains as a result of him having to take long breaks and eventually retiring from rugby because of injuries).

Therefore ultimately, there **will** be differences in players' views of leadership due to their different roles in the team and due to their individual personalities and beliefs.

## 6. Quali-quantitative survey:

To help me with my second hypothesis, **that for a captain to be great, they must not be the best in their position**, I decided that I wanted to conduct a survey to get other peoples' opinions outside of books, the internet, interviews and my own opinion. I felt this is useful as it can help make this project more accurate allowing me to get to a better conclusion.

Quantitative research is a method of research, such as a consumer survey, which results in numerical data and/or hard, objective facts, which can be put into graphs, charts or lists. Quantitative research often involves a larger group of people taking part.

Qualitative research is research which involves gaining a deeper understanding of a persons' views, opinions and beliefs about a subject. It often involves a smaller number of people, even 1:1 interviews.

My survey is quali-quantitative research because I have "open" questions in my survey to gain opinions, and "closed" questions for a yes / no response.

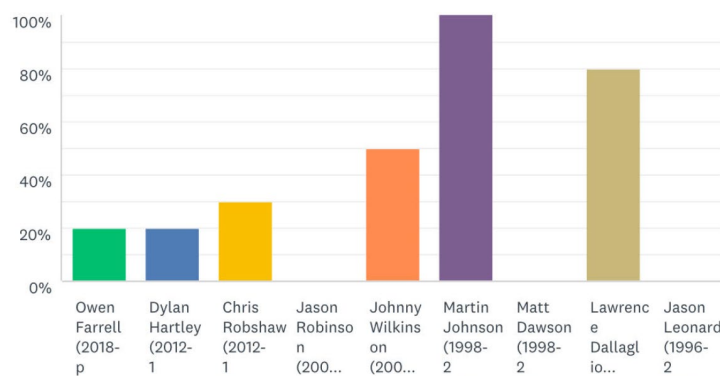
I chose SurveyMonkey (a website for creating and answering surveys) as I knew it would be reliable, quick and efficient to send out and gather responses. SurveyMonkey also allows a mix of different question types; and enables the user to analyse results. A copy of my survey is in the Appendix.

I sent out my survey to 17 people who I know have experience and expertise in rugby, and who I thought would be able to answer my questions. I had responses from 10 of the 17. All my respondents are rugby coaches, one is a professional rugby referee.

### Results

#### Q1 When thinking about what makes a great rugby captain, do you consider these English players to be great rugby captains?

- 100% of respondents felt that Martin Johnson was a great English rugby captain, second-rated captain was Lawrence Dallaglio (80%) ; and third was Johnny Wilkinson (50%). Note: open, multiple choice question.



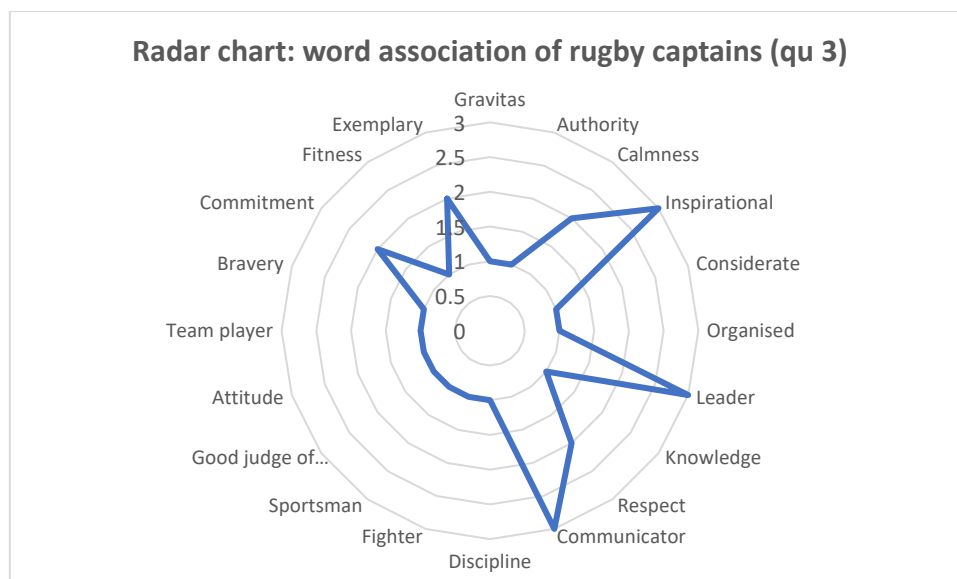
#### Q2: Please select the top 3 best captains from this list, and please give me your reasons why you feel they are good captains

- The reasons given by respondents for why their chosen rugby captain is great were:
  - Led by example (x5)
  - They inspired their fans to play rugby = great role models (x3)
  - Was an intelligent player (x2)?
  - Communicated well with team-mates and referee (x4)
  - Good game management (x1)
  - They captained successful English teams (x2)
  - Got the best out of the players he had (x1)



**Q3:** Please can you tell me the first 3 words that come into your mind when you think about what makes a great rugby captain?

- The most common 3 words that came into peoples' minds when they thought about a great captain were: **inspirational; leader; and a great communicator**. Overall, there are 20 characteristics that respondents offer, and 7 that are shared across the group. The results corroborated much of what the 4 rugby captains said about leadership and captaincy.



**Q4:** Here are some words that have been associated with great rugby captains. In your opinion, please rate how important you think this attribute is to a great rugby captain

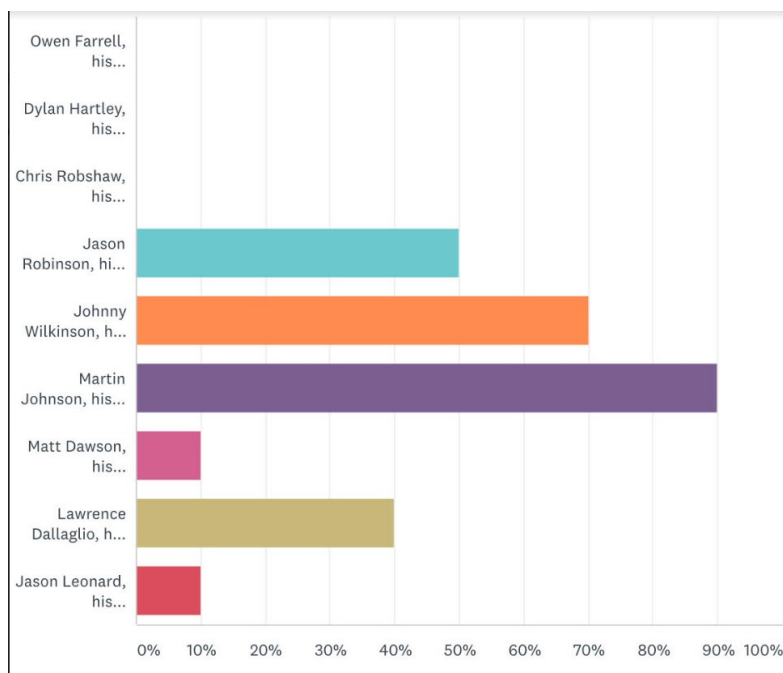
- When given a list of words which my 4 captains from hypotheses 1 said were needed to be a great rugby captain:
  - The most important characteristic was felt to be **supportive and trusting of your team-mates** (80% critical, 20% needed)
  - There were only two characteristics from my captains' list that any respondents said were not needed: these were **sacrifice things you like / love to become a better captain** and **an attitude of just wanting to play rugby and learn**. (Interestingly **sacrifice things you like, or love** had some respondents stating it was 'not needed' but some respondents stating it was 'critical'.)
  - Finally, every single characteristic had at least 1 respondent stating it was 'critical': this supports my findings in hypothesis 1 that individual people have their own views on rugby captaincy.

| Characteristic   | Not needed | Somewhat needed | Useful | Needed | Critical |
|--|------------|-----------------|--------|--------|----------|
| Hardest working player   | 0%         | 0%              | 30%    | 60%    | 10%      |
| Accept responsibility for your mistakes and accept your losses                           | 0%         | 0%              | 0%     | 60%    | 40%      |
| You know what part of your game to work on whilst focusing on the positives of your game | 0%         | 10%             | 40%    | 40%    | 10%      |
| Supportive and trusting of your team-mates   | 0%         | 0%              | 0%     | 20%    | 80%      |
| An attitude of just wanting to play rugby and learn                                      | 20%        | 0%              | 40%    | 30%    | 10%      |
| Always calm under pressure   | 0%         | 0%              | 10%    | 30%    | 60%      |
| Make sure your team is always ready  | 0%         | 0%              | 20%    | 30%    | 50%      |
| Have amazing mental strength and emotional discipline                                    | 0%         | 0%              | 0%     | 50%    | 50%      |
| Lead from the front  | 0%         | 0%              | 10%    | 30%    | 60%      |

|   |     |     |     |     |     |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Know that the whole team is the captain not just you        | 0%  | 30% | 20% | 40% | 10% |
| Sacrifice things you like or love to become a better player | 10% | 10% | 50% | 0%  | 30% |
| An intelligent player when you play and talk to the referee | 0%  | 0%  | 10% | 30% | 60% |

Q5: In your opinion, were these captains the best players in their position internationally, at the time?

- For my final question I asked my respondents to tick the England captains that were or are the best players in their positions internationally at the time that they played. Surprisingly my respondents only said that out of the 10 captains, 6 of them were the best in their position; the captain that the most respondents agreed was the best player in his position was Martin Johnson who 9 out of the 10 respondents thought was the best in their position; the captains that had at least 1 respondent say were the best at the time but then had the least votes were Matt Dawson and Jason Leonard with 1 vote each.



## 7. Interim conclusion: part II

To help me prove or disprove my second hypothesis, that **for a captain to be great, they do not have to be the best in their position**, I am now going to cross-reference the answers to questions 1 and 5.

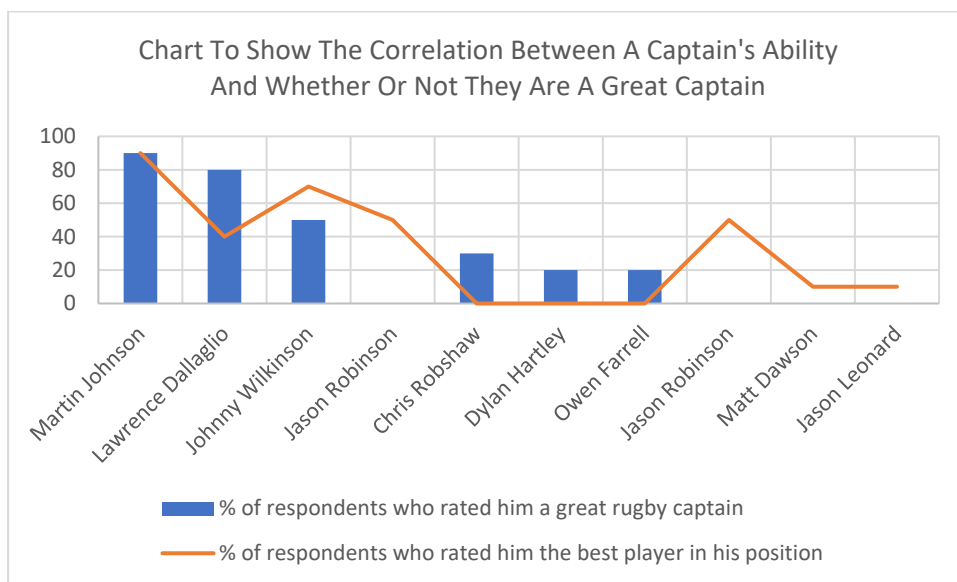
- Martin Johnson is perceived to be a great English rugby captain and also the best player in his position internationally, at that time. If I only looked at Martin Johnson, you would assume my hypothesis is correct; i.e., a great rugby captain must be the best in their position; however in



the table of results below, I have excluded all players who received <50% endorsement on either question 1 and 5:

| Player             | % of respondents who rated him a great rugby captain | % of respondents who rated him the best player in his position | Supports my hypothesis (>50% agreement)  |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| Martin Johnson     | 90   | 90   | Yes  |
| Lawrence Dallaglio | 80   | 40   | No   |
| Johnny Wilkinson   | 50   | 70   | Yes  |
| Jason Robinson     | 0  | 50   | An anomaly, which suggests that to be the best in our position, you don't have to be a great rugby captain |

- Looking at the data in a different way, helps me to see the anomaly seen in Jason Robinson's data across all the players:



Therefore, there does not seem to be a simple conclusion. The only player that disproves my hypothesis is Martin Johnson as my respondents agreed he was a great captain and the best in his position. Whereas the rest of the results showed a mixed picture: on the one hand, the other 2 great captains (Dallaglio and Wilkinson) were not viewed to be the best in their position; however on the other hand, the other two players viewed to be the best in their position were not viewed to be great captains. I do not feel there is enough data or correlation to reach an accurate and correct conclusion<sup>1</sup>.

I believe that whilst a great rugby captain does not have to be the best in their position, I think it helps if they are because they may achieve more during their career (because they are the best player on the field), and many people may associate success in rugby with great captaincy. To illustrate this point, when talking about a great captain, I often find myself not talking about softer skills such as how they lead their players on the pitch, but instead judging them by 'harder' measures such as number of trophies etc. It is often not visible to observers what happens within a team on the pitch: e.g., what the captain says, how he acts when a try goes against them, how he encourages his team-mates.

*NB: flaws in my quantitative survey are: it needs a greater number of respondents and I could have included captains outside of England (e.g. SA, NZ). This would have helped to make my data more robust and more accurate.*

*Please see Appendix 2 for my SurveyMonkey questionnaire.*

## 8. Leadership in Life

This section looks into whether or not I can apply the leadership qualities that my rugby captains believe in to aspects of leadership in life. I felt this would be a good addition to my project as it would include more aspects of leadership rather than just a rugby-dominated project. Everyone can relate to being a leader in life but not everybody will be a rugby captain.

I selected 4 people who I know to be in leadership roles in their profession:

- Mrs Owen, Head of Second Year (Hampton School)
- Mrs Kirby, Second Year Form Tutor (Hampton School)
- Mr Nicholson, Head of Safeguarding and Deputy Head (Hampton School)
- H. Tarragano, Innovation Lead (Reckitt Benckiser)

I asked 4 short questions that explored their views on leadership and their opinions on the leadership qualities that my rugby captains had identified in the context of their profession.

### What is a great leader?

For my interviewees, the idea of a leader involved **being approachable** so that people and teams felt able to ask questions and not feel intimidated. There was agreement that a leader should **create a vision that inspires people** so that they feel they are on board and feel like they are part of something. Interviewees said that a leader should **motivate people to do their best**; and there was agreement that a leader should set a **great example to yourself and others** because people look up to leaders and want to copy how they behave and what they do.

### Comparing leadership qualities with the qualities from my rugby captains'

I asked interviewees to tell me what they thought were the 3 most important leadership qualities from the total list of qualities that my rugby captains had talked about.

There was a lot of consensus from my interviewees around the most important qualities. They also matched well with what my rugby captains had rated as important qualities.

My 3 teachers all said that being **calm under pressure** (or appearing to be calm under pressure) was the most important quality of a great leader. This perhaps reflects the importance of always being calm in front of a class of students, and calm when dealing with children's' problems. Being calm under pressure was the most popular quality from my rugby captains.

All 3 teachers said that **emotional strength and mental discipline** was very important. Again this perhaps reflects the importance in their jobs of dealing with and looking after students. This quality was also rated an important quality by my rugby captains. One of my interviewees also talked about overall emotional intelligence, empathy and understanding with your team and being supportive of the people you work with.

Three out of four people agreed that you need to **accept responsibility for your mistakes**, another important quality of my rugby captain.

#### The importance of mental vs physical qualities in leadership

All 4 of my interviewees agreed that **emotional and mental qualities** are more important in a good leader than physical qualities. This is similar to my rugby captains, where 66% of the characteristics they thought were important were mental/emotional.

People said a lot **depends on the role they do**: Mrs Owen phrased it well by saying *“I think it depends on your role because for me personally mental strength is very important as my role often involves emotional problems and also I need to stay calm, but in other roles such as [rugby captain] you need more physical characteristics, to be physically strong for your sport and team.”*

There was discussion about how in the past it was more important to be physically big and strong whereas nowadays it is more important to be emotionally strong. This makes sense to me because in the past, leaders tended to intimidate people into doing what they wanted whereas nowadays it is about creating a dream, connecting with people, motivating people because people have more choices in their life about what they do.

My interviewees also talked about leaders from past or present who they felt showed great leadership qualities. Examples were Winston Churchill, knowing the right thing to say to motivate the English during World War II and Ernest Shackleton working hard to give his team the impression of being calm under pressure during his expedition to the Pole. Great leaders (in life and in rugby) are memorable and inspire people.

*Please see appendix 3 for interview questions.*

### **9. End conclusion**

My two hypotheses were:

- firstly, that the position of a rugby player will make a difference to what they think a great captain is;
- and secondly, that for a captain to be great, they must not be the best in their position.

I found that **the position of a player, whether they are a forward or a back, does not result in a difference in their views on captaincy.**

My view on this is every player on the field has just as important but a different job to the other players, which may then be brought into their views on leadership: e.g. you would expect an Open-Side Flanker (Forward) to believe more in leading from the front and working harder than a Winger (Back) whose role doesn't require these characteristics as much.

Moreover, each player has their own individual beliefs on captaincy which is a function of their upbringing and rugby career, both how successful their career has been and by their personal experiences.

Therefore ultimately, there **will** be differences in players' views of leadership due to their different roles in the team and due to their individual personalities and beliefs.

For my second hypothesis, I found **that there does not seem to be a simple conclusion between a player's skill in position and their leadership abilities.**

My view on this is that whilst a great rugby captain does not have to be the best in their position, I think it helps if they are, because they may achieve more during their career (because they are the best player on the field), and many people may associate success in rugby with great captaincy, e.g., when talking about a great captain, I often find myself not talking about softer skills such as how they lead their players on the pitch, but instead judging them by 'harder' measures such as number of trophies etc.

Finally, I took my conclusions and applied them to aspects of leadership throughout life. The main thing I found was that mental and emotional qualities are more important in life and in leadership whereas it may be that physical characteristics are equally as important, and so it depends on the role an individual has in their life.

### **10. What have I learned?**

I have enjoyed this project because I have enjoyed learning about my topic: reading biographies of players I like, going back over the biographies and pulling out specific details, doing all the various research, and thinking about new skills such as defining a survey.

The aspect I have enjoyed less about this project is having to do a certain task / tasks when I don't particularly want to. I have learned both that sometimes I just have to get on with it, but also that I benefit from having some kind of motivation to get on with it (e.g., having some junk food at the end of completing a task, or even the threat of having my phone taken away if I don't do the work.)

The main thing I have learned about myself is that I work better when I have a timetable or schedule that sets a deadline for a task linked to this project. This gives me a time-frame to work within. It also gives me smaller tasks to do which makes me feel like the project is not as hard or as much work as I thought at the beginning. This is something I can apply to any project or task now or in the future, e.g., if I want to become better at certain rugby skills, I can divide up the task into smaller steps, and work on each at a time; the same for an essay which I can divide into a certain number of paragraphs, and complete a set of paragraphs per day.

I have also learned that I think I'm fairly good at 'research and analysis: i.e., extracting details from a chapter of a book, analysing my survey results and identifying trends. I have also found I am good at implanting my own views on a subject that I am knowledgeable about, to a piece of data I have found, in order to get to a new conclusion.

What would I do differently? I found the last few weeks hard in terms of keeping up my motivation, so what I would have done differently is worked quicker (more tasks, done more quickly) in the first few weeks of the project. This would have helped me finish earlier and might have stopped the last few weeks dragging.

Ultimately though, I have learned about leadership and great captaincy. I chose this topic for my HELP project because I am obsessed (my parents say) about rugby, and I would like to think that I am very knowledgeable about current and past players and teams. I am also interested in leadership in rugby in the context of me being a regular rugby captain for my club. I almost saw this project as a

way to become a better captain because I would learn skills from genuinely great rugby captains, and could apply my findings to my own game.

Before this project, part of me thought a captain would be based on being the best player on the pitch, but I have learned that this is not at all the full story. I have learned that being a captain is based on your qualities as a leader and individual as well as your skills on the pitch.

I think being a captain is a prestigious position, it is an honour to be the captain of your club or school, but it is also a position of responsibility to you, your players and your club and school.

And I have learned that leadership shares many of the qualities of captaincy; and so leadership in rugby and in life to me means the following qualities:

- Standing up for your players, team-mates and friends
- Conveying your points and your other players' points to the referee, friends and teacher/boss
- Passion, talent and skill
- Endurance, stamina, pacing yourself
- Getting on with all the players in the squad, class or group
- Leading by example and being able to create a vision that people can relate to, either winning the game or getting an A\* in your project

## **Appendix 1: Sources**

- SurveyMonkey
- Biographies:
  - Sam Warburton, “Open Side”
- A variety of websites including: [samwarburtontestimonial.com](http://samwarburtontestimonial.com);  
[georgegreganfoundation.com.au](http://georgegreganfoundation.com.au); [irishtimes.com](http://irishtimes.com); [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com); [pro-motivate.com](http://pro-motivate.com).
- My own experiences

## Appendix 2: SurveyMonkey quantitative research

### Recipients:

- Mr Studt
- Mr Gray
- Mr Thomson
- Mr Sutton-Edwards
- Mr Elsworth
- Mr Stebbings
- Mr Beattie
- Mr Rigby
- Mr Moore
- Miss Singleton
- Mr Dixon
- Mr Keenan
- Mr Hardman
- Mr Slater
- James Loizos, rugby coach, (Twickenham Rugby Club)
- Gary Povey, Qualified Rugby Referee, (Twickenham Rugby Club)
- Peter Goff (Twickenham Rugby Club)

### Email invite

Dear all

I am taking part in the Hampton Second Year HELP project, and I am investigating the qualities that make a good rugby captain. I would be extremely grateful if you could take this short survey which will help me with my studies and hypotheses. Your opinion matters to me as I feel you have experience in rugby and so you will firstly know these players, but also have a view on what makes them a good player or not.

The link below should take you through to my survey. Would it be possible for you to complete it by 16 March, which is 2 weeks' time?

| Qu 1                           | When thinking about what makes a great rugby captain, do you consider these English players to be great rugby captains? |     |    |
|--------------------------------|---|-----|----|
|                                |   | Yes | No |
| Owen Farrell (2018 - present)  | Back, Flyhalf   |     |    |
| Dylan Hartley (2012-18)        | Forward, Hooker   |     |    |
| Chris Robshaw (2012 - 2017)    | Forward, Flanker  |     |    |
| Jason Robinson (2004 – 2007)   | Back, Winger  |     |    |
| Johnny Wilkinson (2003 – 2007) | Back, Flyhalf   |     |    |

|  |  |     |    |
|--|--|-----|----|
| Martin Johnson (1998 - 2003)   | Forward, Second Row  |     |    |
| Matt Dawson (1998 – 2001)  | Back, Scrum-Half   |     |    |
| Lawrence Dallaglio (1997 - 2004)   | Forward, Number Eight  |     |    |
| Jason Leonard (1996 - 2003)  | Forward, Prop  |     |    |
| <b>Qu 2.</b> Please select the top 3 best captains from this list, and please give me your reasons why you feel they are good captains |  |     |    |
| <b>Qu 3.</b>   | Please can you tell me the first 3 words that come into your mind when you think about what makes a great rugby captain?   |     |    |
| <b>Qu 4.</b>   | Here are some words that have been associated with great rugby captains. In your opinion, please rate how important you think this attribute is to a great rugby captain on a score of 1-5, where 5 is critical, 1 is not needed |     |    |
|  | Hardest working player   |     |    |
|  | Accept responsibility for your mistakes and accept your losses   |     |    |
|  | Know what part of your game to work on but focus on the positives of your game   |     |    |
|  | Supportive and trusting of your team mates   |     |    |
|  | Right attitude   |     |    |
|  | Calm under pressure  |     |    |
|  | Make sure your team is always ready  |     |    |
|  | Mental strength and emotional discipline   |     |    |
|  | Lead from the front  |     |    |
|  | Whole team is the captain  |     |    |
|  | Sacrifice is the ultimate preparation  |     |    |
|  | Be an intelligent player when you play and when talking to the referee   |     |    |
| <b>Qu 5</b>  | In your opinion, were these captains the best players in their position internationally, at the time?  |     |    |
|  | Position   | Yes | No |
|  | Example of contemporaries  |     |    |
| Owen Farrell (2018 - present)  | Back, Flyhalf  |     |    |
| Dylan Hartley (2012-18)  | Forward, Hooker  |     |    |
| Chris Robshaw (2012 – 2017)  | Forward, Flanker   |     |    |
| Jason Robinson (2004 – 2007)   | Back, Winger   |     |    |
| Johnny Wilkinson (2003 – 2007)   | Back, Flyhalf  |     |    |
| Martin Johnson (1998 - 2003)   | Forward, Second Row  |     |    |



|                                  |                       |  |  |   |  |  |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--|--|---|--|--|
| Matt Dawson (1998 – 2001)        | Back, Scrum-Half      |  |  | George Gregan, Joost Van Der Westhuizen |  |  |
| Lawrence Dallaglio (1997 - 2004) | Forward, Number Eight |  |  | Richie McCaw, Martyn Williams           |  |  |
| Jason Leonard (1996 - 2003)      | Forward, Prop         |  |  | Gethin Jenkins, Adam Jones              |  |  |
|                                  |                       |  |  |   |  |  |

### **Appendix 3**

#### **'Leadership in Life' interview questions**

### **HELP Project Interview Questions.**

Q1. Could you tell me a bit about the leadership role that you have?

Q2. What does the idea of a leader mean to you?

Q3. What words do you agree with from the following words about leadership and which do you think are the most important three and why?

- Work ethic
- Accept responsibility for your mistakes
- Know your strengths and weaknesses
- Supportive and trusting
- Good attitude
- Calm under pressure
- Prepare your team well
- Mental strength and emotional discipline
- Lead from the front
- Whole team is the captain
- Sacrifice your time to become a better leader
- Intelligent leader.

Q4. I've noticed that my captains either believe in many mental characteristics or many physical characteristics. Do you think that emotional and mental characteristics or physical characteristics are more important?