

Playing in a Varsity Match in Light Blue is the highlight of many players sporting lives, other former players have gone further. However, one of the joys of playing for the club is the variety of people you meet and the interesting things they go on to do.

Nigel Warburton is Philosophy Lecturer for the Open University, writing course materials, and occasionally television programmes. He also presents and contributes to Radio 4 programmes from time to time, and teaches regularly at the Tate Modern. He has written a number of books on philosophy, photography, art and modern architecture, including *Philosophy: The Basics*, and a biography of the architect Ernő Goldfinger. As important he also played for CUARLFC and was selected to play for British students. Although his boots and gum shield are safely tucked away he learnt from his league background and admits “perceptive observers might see a continuity in my tendency to go for the head-on tackle in debate”. He has kindly agreed to give an insight into the highs and lows of his playing days:

“I played a couple of seasons at hooker for the Cambridge Rugby League team while finishing my Philosophy PhD in the late 1980s. I loved the rhythms of the game, and had always been a strong tackler and keen on fitness, so it suited me well – it took me a while to get used to running backwards when the tackle was made, though. I toured Australia with the team (the Aussie journalists fed off the idea of a hooker who was studying Aesthetics). Our final game was against Sydney University in the Sydney Football Stadium.

This was the curtain-raiser for Australia vs The Rest of the World, so there was a huge crowd... I missed a key tackle through coming up to the opposing line too fast, and – just in case I didn’t appreciate my error – it was replayed on the huge screen several times. Great. I put it down to the concussion I’d suffered in the previous match – one of the few times that I’d worn a head protector (what I’d really needed was something to protect me from the knee rising into the cheekbone in the tackle).

I have three very vivid memories from the match I played for the British Students against France: half way up in the air, victim of a vicious two-person spear-tackle, I was thinking “no matter how much this hurts, get up quickly so they don’t think they’ve unnerved you” – time went very slowly before the crunch of contact with a sun-baked pitch. I was OK – but by some statistical quirk three players went off with dislocated shoulders in the same match. The second memory was of the full International French winger Cyril Pons running straight at me at top speed. If he’d only realised, with his pace, one jink would have left me bewildered, flapping pathetically at his heels, but he charged snorting like a bull. I instinctively grabbed, and by a fluke, pulled off one of the best tackles of my life, carried over by his momentum. It felt as if he’d tackled himself. My last memory was of how quickly time went: when the half-time whistle blew, I was convinced we’d only played ten minutes and couldn’t work out what was going on.

The summer after I finished my PhD I started training with what was then Fulham Rugby League Club, but realised almost instantly that I wasn’t going to be signed on for a small fortune – and probably not at all. I hung up my boots.”
