

Joe Schmidt

Irish rugby has either produced or recruited many excellent coaches and perhaps none more accomplished than those currently in place across the country. Of them all, Joe Schmidt has been outstanding.

Joe was born in 1965 in Kawakawa, on New Zealand's north island, and grew up near Palmerston North. Like most New Zealand boys he played rugby, and quite well by all accounts. He represented his province Manawātū in 29 games before injury cut short his playing career.

Meanwhile, Joe had qualified as a teacher and, when in 1990 he arrived at Napier Boys' High School to teach English, the rector, Dave Syms, told him that had to include an extra-curricular activity. Joe opted to coach basketball and Syms replied, "Perfect, that won't affect you coaching the under 14 boys rugby team on Saturdays". And so began his coaching career, as it did for many of his contemporary young teachers.

Many youthful New Zealanders and Australians have wanderlust. In 1991, with leave of absence, Joe and his wife Kellie landed in Ireland to Mullingar Rugby Club where Joe became player/coach for 18 months. He also coached Westmeath's oldest school, Wilson's Hospital, to win the section "A" Leinster Schools Cup for the first time in their history.

Joe and Kellie are remembered with great affection and admiration and they returned home leaving a lasting legacy and carrying forever friendships.

His career-ending injury happened shortly after returning home and he concentrated on coaching his school's 1st XV from 1994 to 1998, reaching national finals in 1996 and 1998.

His early promotions at Napier Boys' High School as assistant principal and to Tauranga Boys' College as deputy principal were for education merit, but he was also invited to take their first XV's too. When he went with the 1997 NZ Schools team to Australia as assistant coach, he still didn't see his future as a rugby coach.

Things just snowballed thereafter with assistant coach roles for him: to Bay of Plenty provincial team, then to the Auckland Blues Super Rugby team before moving in 2007 to Clermont Auvergne in France for two years, staying three. He came to Dublin as Head Coach at Leinster Rugby for two years too, with no intention of coaching a national team, and has been here since 2010.

Following Leinster's first Heineken Cup win in 2009, the then coach, Australian Michael Cheika, signalled his intention to step down at the end of the following season. Led by its CEO, Michael Dawson, Leinster conducted a systematic trawl in search of a replacement. Gradually the name Joe Schmidt started to emerge strongly and he was invited to Dublin for an interview. As it turned out, apparently, it was Joe who interviewed the Leinster panel and he was appointed in 2010. In his first season with Leinster they won their second

Heineken Cup and repeated that success in 2012, a double achieved only once before.

Unsurprisingly, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) came calling and Joe was appointed Head Coach for 3 years in 2013. In his first match, Ireland defeated Samoa and two weeks later were within a few minutes of overtime of defeating the powerful All Blacks for the first time. In his first season Ireland had won the Six Nations Championship and repeated that success a year later. Another three years was added to Joe's contract.

Apart from the deep disappointment of losing a quarter-final of the 2017 Rugby World Cup with an injury-ravaged team, the successes of the Irish team under Joe have far outweighed the losses. Two historic victories over the All Blacks along with a Grand Slam in 2018 propelled Ireland to 2nd place in World Rugby rankings.

It is not possible in the time available to spotlight all the successes and list the trophies won by teams that Joe has coached nor the accolades and awards that Joe has received for his work and leadership. I also am aware that Joe would be uncomfortable with that. It suffices to mention the award of World Rugby Coach of the Year in 2018.

Joe is a humble man who shuns the limelight. He hastens to redirect the praise and honours he receives to the players and management teams around him. Yet, behind the quiet exterior, he is an ambitious, dedicated and driven individual with an extraordinary work ethic. His values are those that he demands of his players: humility, discipline (on and off the pitch) and relentlessness.

Family and strong family values are central to Joe's life and foremost in his decision to leave the world of rugby coaching after the up-coming World Cup and return to New Zealand. In doing so, he leaves behind his Irish "family" — friends, colleagues and communities that have been part of his life for many years.

Joe's work away from rugby is largely unheralded but much appreciated by the charities he has supported — particularly Epilepsy Ireland — and the many events that he has unselfishly attended. The Schmidts have contributed enormously to Ireland and Irish Rugby and the reciprocation was acknowledged by Joe in thanking the IRFU for their patience and support and "so many people who have adopted my family and me, making us feel part of the community in Ireland". Joe became an Irish citizen in 2015.

Joe Schmidt, at this event today, DCU recognises your distinction and accomplishments, the tenets and standards that you bring to your twinned professions of teaching and coaching, and the strong leadership that you demonstrate in your work. DCU seeks to foster such traits and qualities in its students, so it is fitting that the University bestows its highest honour upon you today.

A Uachtaráin, I ask you to confer on Joe Schmidt the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (*honoris causa*).