

Ideal Business Show

Wales



Press Release for 22nd July 2008

EXHIBITOR GETS SUPER LEAGUE STATUS

Ideal Business Show exhibitor, Celtic Crusaders have been awarded a three-year licence to play in Super League from 2009.

The Rugby Football League announced their decision at a press conference in Leeds at 10am this morning.

This is the first time that Wales has ever had a side in Super League - the elite level for rugby league in Europe – in the competition's 14-year history and we are delighted that the Crusader has chosen to be part of Ideal Business Show in September at NIAC on the UWIC Cyncoed campus in Cardiff.

The Welsh team now will be locking horns with the best sides and players in European rugby league with the likes of Wigan, St Helens, Leeds and Catalans, along with their respective Great Britain and France international players, due to visit the Crusaders' Brewery Field ground in Bridgend on a regular basis.

It is also a massive boost for the international game as a whole.

A Super League club in Wales opens the door for Welsh players to play Super League and then represent Wales.

This will eventually enable a stronger Welsh national side to be built leading to more competitive European and World international tournaments.

The RFL's decision to give Wales' only professional side a three year licence is testament to all the hard work that Celtic Crusaders have done on and off the field to achieve their goal.

Crusaders' chief executive David Thompson said: "I am delighted to announce that from 2009 there will be a Welsh club in Super League.

"This is a remarkable achievement for a club that did not exist three years ago and is testament to the hard work, determination and belief of the people that have been associated with the club during this time. I would like to thank everybody involved.

"That said, we appreciate that we are just at the starting line and the hard work really begins now.

"This is a massive day for Welsh sport and rounds off an extremely successful year for Welsh teams. We are delighted to now be part of those teams playing at the very highest level in the UK. We are very much looking forward to playing the best English and French teams week in week out.

"It is also a great opportunity for the businesses in Wales and we look forward to welcoming the tens of thousands of new visitors to the principality next year."

Crusaders' Coach John Dixon, who was appointed as Welsh national team coach last month, was equally as pleased.

"When the club first formed in 2005, we all spoke about Super League and how this was the three-year plan," he said. "A lot of hard work has gone into not just this application but into all the work on and off the field leading to it.

"On the field, we worked hard to gain promotion to National League One so we could apply for the licence and I'm proud of every one of the players who have got us there.

"And off the field, we have a dedicated backroom and office staff who have insured that we have the infrastructure needed to be accepted. I'm really pleased that the plan has come to fruition and everyone is now looking forward to Super League next year."

Assistant coach / football manager Anthony Seibold believes that this decision will benefit the game in Wales as a whole from grass roots level right up to the full international side.

"This is a great boost to the game in Wales as a whole," he said. "Every player in Wales from juniors right up to seniors now know that they've got something positive to aim for when they're playing rugby league.

"There are hundreds of rugby league players in Wales right now and they will all want to play Super League in Wales and then play for the Welsh national team.

"We have already had 57 Welsh-born players turn out for the club for either the first team or the Colts in the last two years. We have seven home grown squads throughout Wales feeding into the Crusaders and with this decision today, this number will surely grow and the future of rugby league in Wales is now secure."

The decision has also been welcomed by leading sporting celebrities and political leaders.

Wales' first minister Rhodri Morgan was very happy at the news and has been one of the first to congratulate the club.

"Rugby League is a great game with a big following in Wales based on our long standing 'export' of our rugby union stars to go north to play rugby league," he said.

"Just think of the contribution that Jim 'Buller' Sullivan, Gus Risman, Billy Boston, Clive Sullivan, David Watkins, Jim Mills, John Devereux, Jonathan Davies and countless others have made playing for clubs or the Great Britain Rugby League team over the years.

"More recently top quality rugby league has come to Wales, while Wembley was unavailable from 2000-2007, with the Challenge Cup being played in the Millennium Stadium. Weekends of Super League club Millennium Magic have followed on after Wembley's rebuilding was finished.

"Now rugby league in Wales is moving into another phase with the Celtic Crusaders winning a Super League franchise.

"With rugby league mainly a summer sport and rugby union being a winter sport, the Welsh public will now be able to watch top flight rugby all the year round.

"Hats off and best wishes to the Celtic Crusaders."

Celtic Crusaders' club president Jonathan Davies, who scored 95 points in ten appearances for Wales from 1991-95, is very pleased at the decision and says that it is something he has been hoping would happen in Wales for many years.

"I'm really pleased that the RFL have made the decision to admit Celtic Crusaders into Super League," he said.

"This gives the Welsh public the opportunity to see top class rugby league in Wales on a week by week basis which is something that's never happened before."

"We missed the boat in both 1995 and 1998 when a Super League side could have been placed down here but this decision more than makes up for it. Now, more of an infrastructure is in place with teams at all levels in Wales from schoolboys upwards, which wasn't the case ten years ago.

"When teams like Wigan, St Helens and the like have visited Wales in the past for one-off Super League games, they've always been well attended. The Welsh public love top level sport and I'm sure that Celtic Crusaders will be a great success in Super League. I'd like to thank the RFL for giving us the opportunity and roll on 2009."

Mark Rowley, executive chairman for Wales Rugby League said: "Everyone at Wales Rugby League is delighted that Celtic Crusaders have their Super League licence. Crusaders in Super League will have a positive knock-on effect to the whole of rugby league in Wales from the Welsh Conference right up to the Welsh national side. This really is a great day for rugby league in Wales as a whole and a boost for the international game."

Sports Council for Wales Chair, Philip Carling said: "We would like to congratulate the Celtic Crusaders on their move into the Super League. It is a significant achievement for the club which has only been running for three years. We hope that this achievement helps to

underpin the sustainable development of rugby league at grassroots level in Wales."

Former dual-code Wales and Great Britain captain David Watkins said: "I'm delighted that the RFL have given this licence to the Crusaders. The game is spreading far and wide now and for the first time ever, the prejudices against rugby league in Wales are being removed. More people down here have seen rugby league over the last 10-15 years thanks to Sky, their eyes have been opened to the game and they appreciate it for the great game that it is.

"The facilities at the Brewery Field are excellent, everyone has done a lot of hard work behind the scenes to get this and I'm sure that the Crusaders will be well supported in Super League and will go onto bigger and better things."

Former Wigan and Great Britain star Shaun Edwards, now the head coach of London Wasps rugby union team and defence coach of the Wales national rugby union team was very pleased at the decision.

"This is really good news," he said. "I know a lot of the people involved at the Crusaders and I have a strong friendship with their coach John Dixon.

"I'm sure that everyone at the Crusaders will give it 100% to make sure it's success to replicate the excellent work that has already gone on in France."

Edwards' bosses at the Welsh Rugby Union have joined him in congratulating Super League's newest club.

An official statement from the WRU reads: "The Welsh Rugby Union is supportive of all sporting activity and we congratulate Celtic Crusaders on their achievement."

Carwyn Jones, Welsh Assembly Member for Bridgend and a Celtic Crusaders season ticket holder said: "This is wonderful news for the town of Bridgend, for south Wales as a whole and for the sport of rugby league. I'm looking forward to the Super League season next year. It's a real shot in the arm for sport in the town."

Janet Ryder, Welsh Assembly Member for North Wales and patron of the Welsh Rugby League was overjoyed at the development.

"It's fantastic news for the Celtic Crusaders," she said. "Gaining Super League status is a just reward for the hard work that has been put in by everyone at the club - players, coaching staff and support staff. The fans too have played their part in making this team such a success.

"It marks a new era in Rugby League in Wales - the game is now here to stay in Wales and gives all our very talented young players a team they can strive to join instead of having to "go north"!

"I am looking forward to being able watch the Crusaders beating the likes of Wigan and Leeds on Welsh soil and in so doing bringing forward those young Welsh players who will make Wales a nation to reign supreme on both the League and Union fields.

"Congratulations to all you Crusaders!"

The next home match for Celtic Crusaders is against Sheffield Eagles at the Brewery Field on Saturday 2nd August (kick-off 5.45pm). This game, like most other Crusaders home matches, is being shown live on S4C.