

COACH CLASS

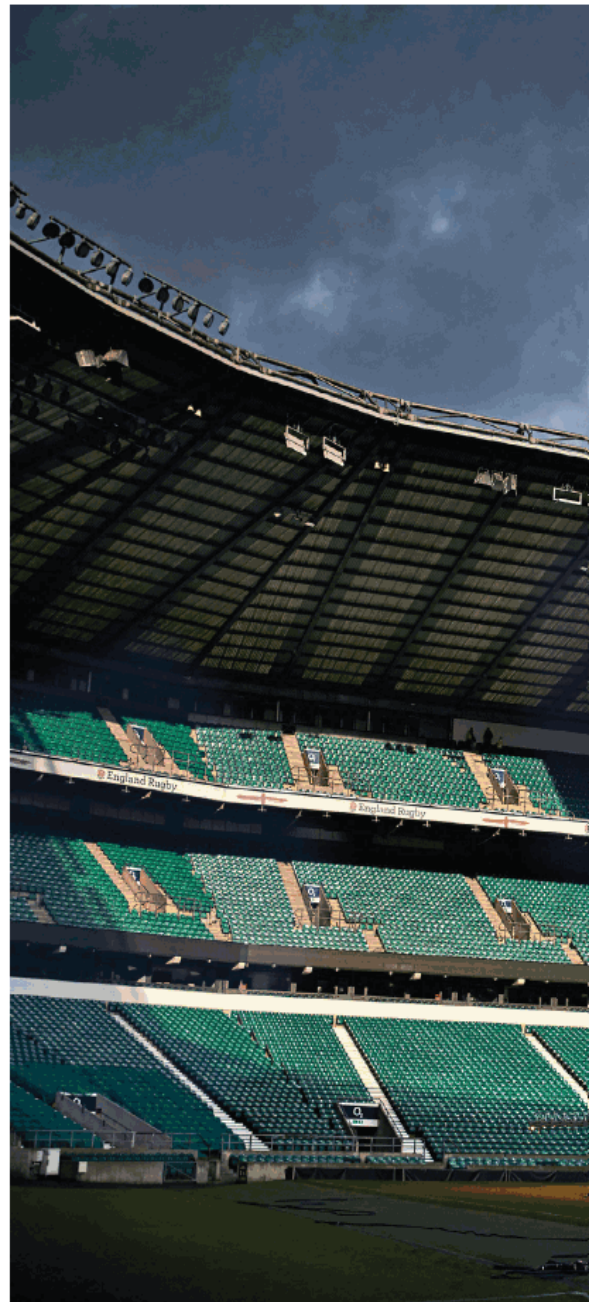
**He's the Aussie who helped
England regain its rugby mojo.
How did Eddie Jones do it?**

By Matthew Syed

Eddie Jones is sitting opposite me, small and unassuming, hands in his lap, unnoticed by other customers in a hotel bar in Brighton. Yet this is the man who has transformed English rugby. In 2015, England hosted the Rugby World Cup, only for the national team to become the first home side in the competition's history to be eliminated at the group stage. With essentially those same players, Jones, 57, has guided the side to an extraordinary winning streak.

England won the grand slam (winning all their matches) in last year's Six Nations Championship, completed an unprecedented 3-0 tour win over Australia, and made a clean sweep in the internationals, ending 2016 with 14 victories on the bounce. Who knows whether the run will continue this year but one thing is sure: Jones has cemented his reputation as one of the most formidable coaches in the world.

When he arrived in England they were





expecting a bruiser, a tough-talking, no-nonsense disciplinarian, the kind of man who could beat an underperforming team into shape. Australian coach Bob Dwyer, a former colleague of Jones, once said, "He calls a spade a shovel, Eddie. I consider myself a very direct Australian, but Eddie is more so than I am. He takes no prisoners at all." Certainly, his training camp in Brighton ahead of the current Six Nations stoush was, by all accounts, a bruising affair. Flanker Sam Jones broke a leg in a judo session, full-back Anthony Watson fractured his jaw and wing Jack Nowell suffered a torn thigh muscle. Their clubs, needless to say, weren't pleased.

And yet this diminutive figure (Jones weighs an un-rugby 79kg), sipping mineral water at the bar, doesn't seem to fit the stereotype at all. When I ask him for his most valuable experience as a coach, he surprises me by talking not about grinding practice sessions and endless tactical manoeuvres, but about raising his daughter, Chelsea, now 23. "I was brought up a certain way," he says. "You were given a situation and you had to fight through it. You had to work out a way. If someone told you to do something, you'd do it. You were taught to respect authority. I thought I could be tough on her, that I could impose my will. But as she grew up, I came to understand that you have to be more sympathetic. You have to engage with young people so they can make decisions for themselves. You can't make decisions for them."

This insight has directly influenced the way he has coached England. When the team crashed out of the World Cup so ignominiously in 2015, there was the feeling that the players may have been turning into spoilt prima donnas, exemplified by Wayne Rooney last November joining a wedding

party and getting plastered with the guests after the England-Scotland match. After that incident, there were yet again calls for strict rules about behaviour off the pitch, and sanctions for any breach by the national football team's wayward superstars. The kind of measures it was felt that Jones, the tough guy from down under, would introduce, taking the rugby side by the scruff of the neck and applying some strict discipline.

But he sees it differently. He argues that if you trust players and set clear expectations, they will step up to meet them. "This team are absolutely self-policing," he says. "We have nothing written down. We might make some mistakes along the way, but we will learn from them. If you have a lot of rules, you spend most of your time policing the rules and not enough time on relationships, which are everything. I am not teaching them how to play rugby; I am teaching them how to be a team."

These aren't the words you'd expect from the man who is reported to have castigated Ben Youngs, the England scrum-half, with the words, "You're too fat and not sharp enough," a wake-up

call that preceded a surge in form. But far from being the whip-cracking sergeant-major of repute, here he is coming across as a leader of nuance and complexity. "Under this regime, I'm enjoying it more than I have ever done," says flanker James Haskell. "The one-brush-sweeping-all policy, treating every player the same, doesn't work. We all have different emotional needs and Eddie understands that. I feel for the first time in my career that there is someone who knows how to talk to players and get the best out of them."

Dylan Hartley, the hooker Jones appointed as captain, not least to add a bit of snarl and grit to the team, has said, "I didn't hit the expected levels one day and I got told, 'Not good enough. You should be leading by example.' So the next day, you're thinking, 'I need to be exceeding expectations.' Eddie is always asking questions, always pushing me." Another player, speaking off the record, says: "He is a difficult man to read. There is warmth and humanity, but he doesn't tolerate anything less than full commitment. And that is the way it should be."

This capacity to read players of different backgrounds and temperaments may be a consequence of Jones's past. He grew up in Sydney to a Japanese mother and Australian father, excelled first at cricket, then rugby, before going into school teaching in his 20s. From there, he was invited to become a coach and, after forging a powerful reputation, was offered the job as head of the Australian rugby team in 2001, leading the host nation to the final of the 2003 World Cup in Sydney. (His record against England as Wallabies manager from 2001 to 2005 was two wins to seven defeats, including that World Cup final when England won after a Jonny Wilkinson drop goal in extra time.) Since then, he has coached in different parts of the world, most recently Japan. The victory of Japan over South Africa in the 2015 World Cup was one of the greatest upsets in the history of the sport and a reason for his call-up by England.

Asked about his formative experiences, Jones talks about his mother. "She had a tough life. Her family went to America and then, when World War II broke out, all the Japanese who had been working in the country, basically as Americans, were told they weren't wanted. They were put in internment camps. I have only recently talked to her about it. She went to one camp with her mother, while her father went to a different one. They exchanged letters, but these were censored by the government. When they went back to Japan after the war they were ostracised again. Outcasts. They never fitted in anywhere. So my



On the up: playing for NSW B (no 2), 1989; Wallabies coach, 2003

mother made a deliberate policy when she went to Australia that we would be brought up 100 per cent Australian." Did he ever experience discrimination as someone of mixed race? "When you are half and half, people don't treat you the same," he says. "But you have to be tough to survive. I never grew up feeling isolated, but it did make me think about what makes people tick."

Jones's father, Ted, who died two years ago, met his mother while in Japan as an occupying soldier in the late 1940s. He must have been very proud of you, I suggest. There is a long pause. "He was a good guy," he says finally. There is another pause as he seeks the right words. "There is one thing I regret. I should have spent more time with him towards the end, but I was working in Japan. The greatest song is the one by Harry Chapin where he talks about bringing up his son. It is so true. The first bit is about him not having time for his son because he is working hard. But when he retires, and has plenty of time, his son has grown up and hasn't got time for him. It is so true about life, I reckon."

Jones's daughter works in an administrative role for the Australian Rugby Union, while he and his Japanese wife, Hiroko, live in Surrey. They met when she decided to leave her job in Japan as a TV researcher to go backpacking and ended up teaching in the same school where Jones, at the age of 33, had become principal. "If I wasn't a rugby coach, I would go back into teaching just like that," he adds, with a click of his fingers. "When you are a young coach, you think you know everything. The best coaches are the best learners. As you mature, you are prepared to give other people more credit. You understand how to unlock people's potential. When they start believing, you can do amazing things."

He says his time in Japan was a crucial learning experience. "Japan is all about the head coach. Everyone does what they say. They sit as if they are on a throne. And that is why they haven't traditionally produced teams that can perform under pressure. When the going gets tough, they look to the coach. So, I went around to all the most successful Japanese coaches: the swimming coach, the volleyball coach, the women's soccer coach, who won a World Cup. They all had one thing in common: they had got their teams to become self-reliant and resilient. I will never forget what the volleyball coach told me: 'When I am selecting the team, if someone in training is looking at me, I don't pick them.' It reinforced how important it is to create an environment where you allow players to make decisions. You can't develop leadership qualities if you don't allow people to make mistakes. It is a very difficult balance, but you have to allow it."

Grimmers: with England's George Ford; Chris Robshaw and James Haskell



This approach is the antithesis of the old "command-and-control" model, where players mutely follow orders. When players are on the field of play and the opposition do something unexpected, they must be able to adapt on the fly. "You need players who have the leadership qualities to make decisions for themselves."

I ask about the balance he has found between an acid tongue and a caring word in the ear. Fear, he says, should always be a last option. "Most of the time, when a player is underperforming, it isn't a lack of effort. Most top sportsmen give everything they've got. So if the effort doesn't seem to be there, it is probably something up here [he taps his head]. Nerves, for instance. When we played the grand slam game against France, we were terrible for 40 minutes. At half-time, I had to sharpen them up mentally a bit. They were more worried about the result than the process. That is probably the only time in 12 months when I had to speak in anything like a sharp way. Otherwise, it has been about getting them to understand what we need to focus on. Understanding their emotions."

Does Jones ever feel anxious? "I am anxious all the time," he says, smiling. "You always are in

coaching. Take this training camp. The players were in great fettle. Out of 100, we were at 95. There was a really good atmosphere in the team, and most of the top players are fit. By tomorrow, that could change. Two key players could get injured in training for their clubs, and then the whole dynamic of the team changes. That is why coaching is so hard. Relationships are so dynamic. The way people get their confidence is dynamic."

I ask Jones for his proudest moment as England coach and am not surprised that he picks a game in which the team showed their psychological qualities. "I was chuffed in the third Test in Australia," he says. "It was a game we didn't really need to win. We had already created history. England had only ever won three Tests in Australia in 100 years. We had won the tour 2-0 and Australia had everything to play for. We were physically fatigued... But the players fought and fought, and won the game convincingly. That was the point when I thought we had a chance of being a really good team."

Jones has said that he will leave the England job after the World Cup in 2019, when his contract expires. The team is ranked second behind New Zealand and, for the first time in many years, looks as if it might have the power and skill to overtake the All Blacks. His immediate consideration, though, is retaining the Six Nations crown.

Don't expect Jones to be reliving the side's glories on television, though. He has a reputation as a workaholic, but he doesn't take his work home. "I never talk to my wife about rugby," he says. "I don't have anything rugby-related in my house. If you walked in, you wouldn't know that I am involved in rugby. I don't keep anything. I give everything away; it means more to other people." ●