

Willie John McBride

William James McBride, **CBE**, better known as **Willie John McBride** (born 6 June 1940) is a former **rugby union** footballer who played as a **lock** for **Ireland** and the **British and Irish Lions**. He played 63 **Tests** for Ireland including eleven as captain, and toured with the Lions five times; a record that gave him 17 Lions Test caps. He also captained the most successful ever Lions side, which toured South Africa in 1974.

Willie John McBride				
CBE				
Birth name	William James McBride			
Date of birth	6 June 1940			
Place of birth	Toomebridge , Northern Ireland			
Height	1.92 m (6 ft 4 in)			
Weight	102 kg (16 st 1 lb; 225 lb)			
Rugby union career				
Position(s)	Lock			
National team(s)				
Years	Team	Apps	(Points)	
1962–75	Ireland	63	(4)	
1962 , 1966 , 1968 , 1971 , 1974	Lions	17	(3)	

Youth

McBride was born at Toomebridge, County Antrim. Owing to his father's death when he was four years old,^[1] he spent most of his spare time helping out on his family farm.^[2] Because of this he did not start playing rugby until he was 17. He was educated at Ballymena Academy and played for the school's First XV. After he left he joined Ballymena R.F.C..

Playing career

In 1962 was selected to play for [Ireland](#). His first Test on 10 February 1962 was against [England](#) at [Twickenham](#). Later that year he was selected to tour South Africa with the [British and Irish Lions](#).

McBride continued to play for Ireland throughout the 1960s and played for Ireland when they first defeated [South Africa](#) (the *Springboks*) in 1965, and when Ireland defeated [Australia](#) in Sydney — the first time a [Home Nations](#) team had defeated a major southern hemisphere team in their own country. He was again selected for the Lions in 1966, this time touring New Zealand and Australia. He toured South Africa with the Lions again in 1968.

He was selected to play for the Lions in their 1971 tour of New Zealand. Despite being criticized by some as being "over the hill", McBride was made [pack](#) leader and helped the Lions to a Test series win over [New Zealand](#); their first and last series win over New Zealand. He received an [MBE](#) in 1971 for services to rugby football.^[3]

1974 Lions tour to South Africa

McBride's leadership qualities led to his appointment as captain of the [British and Irish Lions](#) in their [1974 tour to South Africa](#). The Test series was won 3–0, with one match drawn; the first Lions series ever won in South Africa. It was one of the most controversial and physical Test match series ever played. The management of the Lions concluded that the Springboks dominated their opponents with physical aggression, and so decided to match fire with fire.^[4] Willie John McBride instigated a policy of "one in, all in": that is, when one Lion retaliated, all other Lions were expected to join in the melee or hit the nearest [Springbok](#).^[5]

At that time there were only substitutions if a doctor agreed that a player was physically unable to continue and there were no video cameras and sideline officials to keep the punching, kicking and head butting to a minimum. If the South Africans were to resort to foul play then the Lions decided "to get their retaliation in first." The signal for this was to [call "99"](#) (a shortened version of the emergency number in Ireland and in the United Kingdom: 999). This was a signal for the Lions to clobber their nearest rival players.

Retirement

In 1975 as his international career was ending he played his last game for Ireland at [Lansdowne Road](#). The game was against France, and near the end of the match he scored his first test [try](#) for Ireland. It was the crowning moment of a great playing career. His last international game was against Wales on Saturday 15 March 1975.^[6]

After retiring from playing the game, McBride coached the Irish team and was manager of the [1983 Lions tour to New Zealand](#). Despite the test results being mainly poor, team camaraderie was high and some good wins were recorded in other games. In 1997 he was an inaugural inductee into the [International Rugby Hall of Fame](#). He lives in [Ballyclare](#). He has been asked to present Test jerseys and give motivational speeches to Lions players prior to matches. In 2004 he was named in Rugby World magazine as "Rugby Personality of the Century". He is a major supporter of the [Wooden Spoon Society](#).^[7]

McBride was awarded a [CBE](#) in the [2019 New Year Honours](#) list for services to Rugby Union.^[8]

References

1. *The Story of Willie John McBride* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvHqA7CoR64>) , retrieved 13 March 2021
2. Matthews, Joe (1 November 2003). "Whatever Happened to Willie John McBride". *The Independent*. p. 9.
3. [McBride 2005](#).
4. [Great Lions rugby moments: Willie John McBride's '99' call](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/rugbyunion/international/britishandirishlionsrugby/5177598/Lions-greatest-moments-Willie-John-McBrides-99-call.html) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/rugbyunion/international/britishandirishlionsrugby/5177598/Lions-greatest-moments-Willie-John-McBrides-99-call.html>) Telegraph. Retrieved 20 October 2011
5. [Small talk: PR Williams](http://sport.guardian.co.uk/smalltalk/story/0,,1888496,00.html) (<http://sport.guardian.co.uk/smalltalk/story/0,,1888496,00.html>) The Guardian. Retrieved 20 October 2011
6. [Willie-John McBride](http://www.espnscrum.com/ireland/rugby/player/6667.html) (<http://www.espnscrum.com/ireland/rugby/player/6667.html>) ESPN Scrum.
7. "Happy Birthday" – Willie John McBride (<http://www.woodenspoon.com/regions/1132.php>) WoodenSpoon.com. Retrieved 21 October 2011
8. "New Year Honours 2019: Willie John McBride and Harry Gregg recognised" (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/northern-ireland/46702826>) . BBC. 28 December 2018. Retrieved 29 December 2018.

External links

- [Willie John McBride](http://en.espn.co.uk/scrum/rugby/player/6667.html) (<http://en.espn.co.uk/scrum/rugby/player/6667.html>) at ESPNscrum

Bibliography

- McBride, Willie John; Bills, Peter (1995). *Willie John: The Story of My Life*. Piatkus Books. ISBN 0-7499-5024-2.

- *Encyclopdea of World Rugby* published 1995.

Preceded by Tom Kiernan	Irish national rugby coach 1983–84	Succeeded by Mick Doyle
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