

## 10 Questions With Sebastian Pearson:

With news starting break regarding new Canadian signings overseas, The Rugby Canada Pro Report was able to catch up with flanker Seb Pearson, who has just signed a new one-year contract with Coventry R.F.C.

Our interview with Seb is just one in a series of pre-season features we will be running on Canada's professionals in the days and weeks to come.

Thanks for talking to us Seb!

JH: First off, congratulations on your new contract with Coventry R.F.C.! Can you talk a little but about what your aspirations were this off-season, and the thinking that led you to sign with Coventry?

SP: Well after my season at Stourbridge, which I really enjoyed, I had ambitions to move up the ranks and play the highest level of rugby that I could. Coventry were one of the clubs that I was talking to during the latter stages of last season. Unfortunately, they were relegated to National League One, but I still felt that it would be a good move for me to make, as the club is very well known and established, and I knew that even though it would be in a lower league, they would still be very professional and that is the sort of environment that I wanted to be involved in.

JH: Were you able to talk to Aaron Carpenter or Phil Mackenzie, the two Canadians who played for the club last year, and get a feel for what the experience might be like?

SP: I wasn't actually able to talk to either of those players. I did keep track of them in the papers (and of course The Rugby Canada Pro Report) about how they were doing and whether they were playing. I don't know either of them personally, but I do know Phil's younger brother Jamie who I played age-grade rugby with for Canada.

JH: As we know, Coventry R.F.C. is a club that was recently relegated from the English Championship. It was a difficult season for them last year, as they ran into financial difficulties, and were caught up in a bit of a relegation controversy. What has the management said about the club's aspirations for the coming year?

SP: I think the management team have done a fantastic job consolidating the club after a tough year. They have done very well considering the lost funding from the RFU that they no longer get, having dropped to National One. Obviously, everyone at the club has the ambition to go right back up to the Championship, and I think we will be very competitive this season. A lot of people outside the club aren't giving us much of a hope, but I know all the boys at the club want it really bad. All the players want to prove themselves and be the best players that we can be.

JH: With a very competitive season ahead of you, with a very classy organization, can we look back a bit at the years of experience that brought

you to this point? You are a young player who has seen a lot of elite overseas rugby already, having played for Leicester Academy and for the Canada Under-20's. Where in the process did you decide to dedicate yourself to pursuing a rugby career?

SP: Playing professional sport, I think, is a thing that always is in the back of a young athlete's mind. I think I really decided to go for it when I finished high school and I had come to England to play for a small club called Hinckley, where the Director of Rugby got me a trial for the Leicester Tigers Academy. When they said that they wanted to keep me on for the rest of that season I think then is when it hit me, that this is was a real possibility for me, playing professional rugby, and there was no way I wasn't going to give it my all.

JH: As we said, you were able to get a lot of training at Leicester Academy, but you were also able to start for Leicester in an actual Premiership match. You are one of the only Canadians to accomplish that in recent memory. Can you tell us something of what that felt like?

SP: I think it was one of the most surreal experiences of my life, at least being told I was playing was. To be 18 years old and to be walking around seeing the first team training and wanting to be a part of that so badly, to then be told before your own academy session starts that you won't be training because your involved with the first team on the weekend, That was just incredible, and to be honest, I told my academy coach to stop messing around with me.

The lead up to the game was a great experience as well, to see all the prep work and analysis that goes into it was something I had only ever seen on TV, travelling up the night before staying in a hotel, it was an incredible experience. And the game and game day itself was the single greatest experience I've had, other than maybe the U-20 World Cups. To walk into the changing room and see my name on the back of the shirt was amazing, and to have players like Sam Vesty, Ben Kay, Tom Varndell and Alex Tuilagi come over and shake my hand and wish me luck. Made me realize I was part of a very exclusive club. It made it all a day I will treasure forever.

JH: Having spent many of the last few years overseas must have been exciting, but I imagine it also made connections with family difficult. Can you speak a little about the support you've had from friends and family back home that has helped you to get this far?

SP: My family has been outstanding and very supportive of me pursuing my dream. I think it would be very easy for them to say I should have just packed it up and gone to university, but they have been supportive of me going after my dream. I think my dream has, in a way, become theirs as well.

My family has become a rugby family, and I think my parents watch it even more than I do. It hasn't been all on my own either, my mother is English so my grandmother lives here and so do my aunt and uncle, so they have been a big help as well.

JH: Having played a little for Ontario for the new C.R.C. team, and elsewhere in Canada, how would you describe the difference in atmosphere and level of play you've seen in England from what is available back home?

Canada's Atlantic C.R.C. team "The Rock" just beat a club from the English Championship on tour, so one would think the gap must be narrowing a little.

SP: Having played here and in Ontario the thing that I notice the most is just numbers really. Rugby fans in Canada are just as passionate as rugby fans in England. There are just more fans in England. I defiantly think that we are catching up with the rest of the top nations, we're taking the right step with the CRC, but I would like to see it with 4 teams from USA and 4 from Argentina. I think then we would have a really great base for a professional league like the Celtic nations have in the Magners league.

In terms of player quality as well we are gaining ground, and the quality will only increase as the player base and competition for places increases. Last season was a great example with so many Canadians in the Championship. So it doesn't surprise me that the Rock managed to get one over on an English side. Especially seeing how well the other CRC teams performed against the England Counties side this Summer.

JH: You play back row, mostly at flanker, a position in which Canada seems enormously blessed at the moment. You are a young player with enormous gifts, but how do you mentally approach your pursuit of a national team and World Cup spot, with so many great athletes already in the mix?

SP: I would love to be involved in the World cup squad. I think all I can do is play well for Coventry and make sure I am in the team week in and week out, performing as well as I can and then hopefully word will get back the coaching staff and I will get my chance.

JH: If you had to pick a player to model yourself after, someone you've been able to watch and learn a lot from, who would it be and why?

SP: I really like the way that Rocky Elsom plays his rugby. He's a great Captain who leads by example. I also really enjoy watching Sebastian Chabal for his ability to ball carry and the hits he puts in. If I can make an impact on a game like those guys do, I would be ecstatic.

JH: Finally Seb, having come so far already, and obviously having a bright future ahead of you, can you offer any advice to young rugby players in Canada who might want to follow in your footsteps and win themselves a pro career one day?

SP: I think if anyone wants to go for this they have to be willing to be far away from their family for long periods of time, even if they are young. I only ever see my family on Christmas and in the Summer for a couple of weeks. Also you have to be 100% committed and not make half-efforts.

You have to be sure that this is what you want to do, and make no mistake,  
that as much fun as it the job is, it isn't

Thanks so much Seb! Best of luck with Coventry this season!