**A LAST TRY?**

It is near the end of our last training session of the season and we are playing some unopposed rugby with the boys to practise their moves ahead of their final game. A scrum is called and those of us that are providing the opposition get into our places in order to defend our line. We are made up of two of the coaches and a few of the boys who will not be in the first choice of players on Saturday. Our job is to make things awkward for the others though there is meant to be no tackling tonight as the ground is hard and we cannot afford any injuries before, what will be, only a friendly on Saturday. I look across at my fellow coach Rob and he has that glint in his eye that I recognise and love, it is that glint that says that the fire in his belly has been rekindled even though we are both in our forties now and should know better. Normally, when playing together we seem to have an almost telepathic understanding of where the other will be but tonight we don't seem to have quite clicked and I am feeling frustrated. I want the ball in my hands and I want to make something happen.

I look across at the man boys opposite us as their features are lit by the glowing late evening sunlight and for a brief moment I think that possibly some of them will become more handsome than they are tonight but surely they will never be as beautiful again, but this thought doesn’t last long before it is crowded out by trying to guess what they will do so close to our line. The one who is playing fly half tonight, is out of his normal position and indicates much too early that he is going blind side and I then know with absolute certainty what is about to happen. He is a wonderful talent combining courage, pace and a devastating side step but his passing can be wayward so I get up onto him quickly causing him to pass too soon and the ball bobbles along the ground and is then knocked forward by one of the other players. That should cause the play to stop as they have made a mistake and we, like the sparring partner in boxing, are only the opposition and not the main act but I am on the ball in a flash and hack it forward with my foot. I hear the whistle go as one of the more officious coaches wants to call an end to what we are doing because it has not gone according to plan but I do not want to stop, I want to make something happen and besides one of the other boys is racing me for the ball. I reach the ball first and kick it again and rather than bounce into touch it carries on straight down the pitch and I realise that the try is on even though we are not yet in their half. The sounds of cheering from the side just about enters my consciousness as a crowd has gathered to watch what will happen next although I am largely unaware of them as the principal thing in my mind is that I am racing a boy who is a third of my forty nine years and I want to score. At the time I do not know why this is so important to me, some of it is certainly pride, I was extremely fast and even now am quicker than the large majority of the boys so losing a race is something not to be contemplated but later I wonder if it could be because I think that this will be the last time that I ever score a try on this pitch. But maybe, for tonight at least, there is something even more profound going on and that is that I want to defy and humiliate age as sat by my Father's hospital bed these last few weeks I have seen far too much of its terrible power. I hear the boy’s footsteps behind me but again I get to the ball first and kick it one last time and this time through an arcane law of physics on its third bounce it leaps straight up into the air, and without me having to break my step it lands in my hands as neatly as if I have been presented with a gift and I dive for the corner and score.

My opponent collects the ball and with the benefit of youth jogs back easily the length of the pitch to the others while I lie in a crumpled heap gasping for air. I finally collect myself and as the sun sets I walk back to the others and Rob looks at me and smiles again. He understands, maybe more than anyone, why I have done what I did. He had seen the fire rekindled in my eyes earlier and without knowing Dylan Thomas’s poem understood that we both, on this field, rage against the dying of the light.