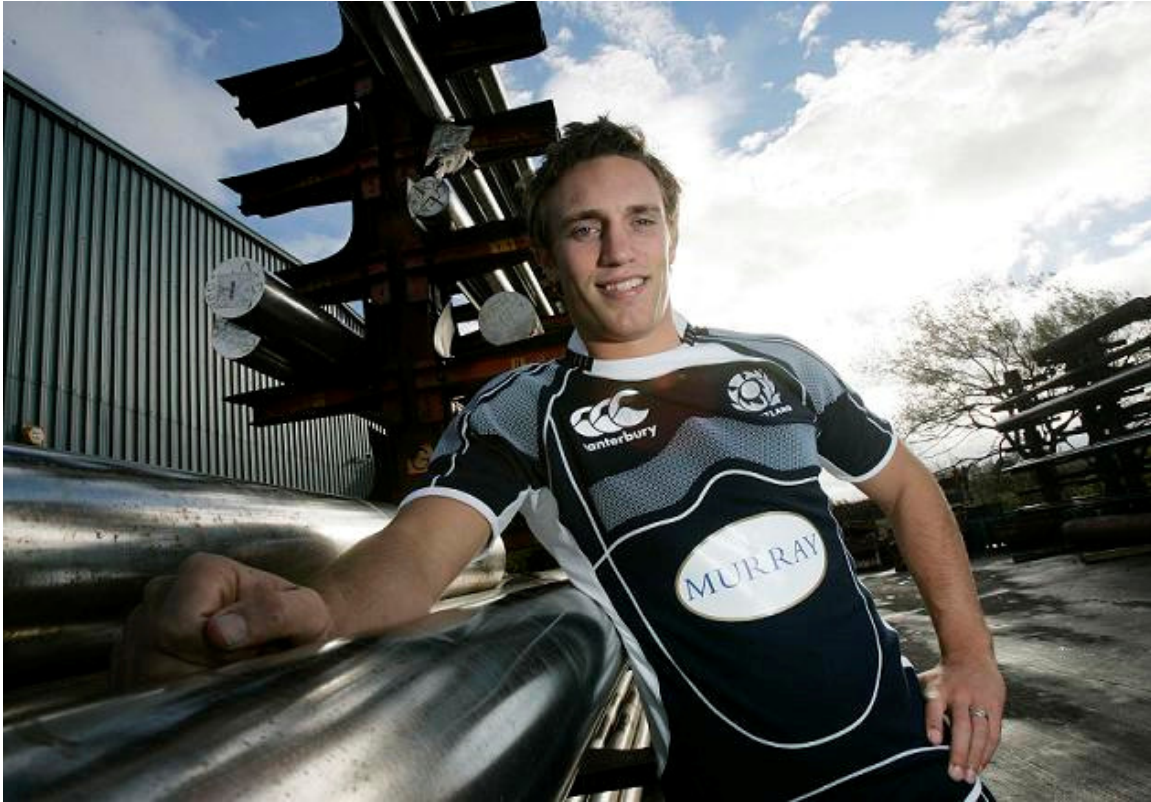


Sir David Bestows Cash and Honour, claims Blair

By Rob Robertson



SCOTLAND scrum-half Mike Blair last night hailed Sir David Murray as the ideal backer for the national rugby side following his £2.7million sponsorship of Frank Hadden's men.

The Murray name was officially unveiled on the Scotland team jersey yesterday during a ceremony at the steel factory on the outskirts of Edinburgh where the Rangers chairman's successful business empire began.

And Blair believes Murray could become Scottish rugby's very own man of steel by ploughing his cash and expertise behind the sport.

Murray has agreed to sponsor the national team for the next three years and has called on other entrepreneurs to help support Scottish sport in general to encourage youngsters to lead a healthier lifestyle.

Blair said Murray's first love was rugby and the game was lucky to have such an enthusiast in its corner.

'It's excellent that there is a backer who has a real interest in Scottish rugby and is getting behind us,' said Blair.

'Our previous sponsor The Famous Grouse did a great job over the past 17 years but it's great to have someone like Sir David able to step in.

'He has a real passion for the game and the team is delighted someone like him has put his money behind us. He is knowledgeable about the game and wants it to succeed.

'It's not just a case of getting the name on the jersey for him. It is more about putting money into Scottish rugby to help us develop the game.'

Blair then turned to more immediate aims as he prepared for Edinburgh's Magners League clash against Munster in Cork tomorrow (sat) - and said the intensity of forthcoming fixtures would guard against any feeling of anti-climax following Scotland's World Cup campaign.

'We have Munster this weekend and then Toulouse in the Heineken Cup so there is no drop in the standard of games,' he said.

'Munster is an international-standard match and the other squads in the Magners League are also of a very high standard which keeps everyone on top of their game.' Taking on Toulouse at home the following week in a European tie was also the sort of game he relished being involved in.

'They have been in our European group three out of the last four years and they are one of the most expansive French teams around,' said Blair.

'They have a lot of power, throw the ball around, and have an exciting back line and some big, solid, ball-carrying guys up front. They have a bit of everything and can be intimidating to play against. It will be a real test for us.'

Blair has been energised by the arrival of Andy Robinson as the new Edinburgh coach and is full of praise for the man who helped coach England to a World Cup victory.

'I have had some excellent training under Andy,' he said. 'He brings an extra level of enthusiasm to training which is good for the players and we are constantly learning. We are being coached as opposed to just being managed and he has a lot to pass on following his experience with England and The Lions.'

Meanwhile Scottish rugby chiefs have welcomed a new programme showcasing the game at all levels is to be launched on STV this month.

Scotsport Rugby Sunday will cover the professional scene - with footage of Edinburgh and Glasgow Warriors in the Magners League - club rugby with highlights from the Scottish Hydro Electric Premiership, and features on schools, age-grade, sevens and women's rugby.

Presented by former Scotland age-grade international player and coach, Richie Gray, the first half-hour show goes out at 6pm on Sunday 11 November.