

John Hayes returns to his rugby roots at Bruff

By **JEROME O'CONNELL**

JUST weeks after gaining promotion to the ranks of senior rugby, Bruff RFC have created a stir with their first major signing — Irish International front-row star John Hayes.

The triple crown winning prop linked up with the County Limerick club before departing with Eddie O'Sullivan's Irish squad to South Africa.

While Hayes has been attached to Shannon for most of the past decade, as he became a household name with Ireland and Munster, he started his career with Bruff.

This Saturday, the Cappamore native wins his 45th International cap as Ireland face the Springboks in Bloemfontein.

"We are absolutely



John Hayes . . . Bruff bound

thrilled, it is a great boost to us in our first year as a senior club. Rugby enthusiasts in county Limerick are thrilled", said Bruff President Davy O'Keeffe.

"He started with us as a 17 year old — his cousin John O'Dea was our captain at the time and brought John up to training one night and it started from there", recalled O'Keeffe.

"He played with us for a few years and then he moved to Shannon to play U20's and later went to New Zealand and then came back to play with Shannon."

Hayes, a past pupil of Doon CBS, made his international debut against Scotland in February 2000 in Lansdowne Road.

He scored his first international try in September 2002 against Romania.

This week Andrew McNamara, Shannon PRO confirmed the departure of Hayes from the All-Ireland League champions.

"He came to us in 1984 as an U20 and then went to New Zealand. When he came back he was part of our All-Ireland League successes", said McNamara.

"He started as a second row and Niall O'Donovan and Brian O'Brien nurtured him into a prop and from there his career has blossomed."

Such is the current standing of Hayes, he is being strongly touted for a place in the forthcoming Lions tour.

His switch to Bruff is a tremendous boost to the newly promoted side ahead of the new season, when they will compete in Division three of the All-Ireland League.

As well as Hayes, Finbarr Hogan and Richard Flanagan are also expected to bolster the Bruff squad, after returning from periods in the Southern Hemisphere.

Both are former Bruff players, but last played with Young Munster.

ful night, when Limerick overcame Waterford, 0-7 to 0-4, to capture a first Munster U21 football title.

Perhaps the occasion played its part as two nervous teams failed to reproduce the form of their semi final wins over Cork and Kerry.

As the game entered its 15th minute, both sides had kicked five wides.

Step forward Limerick wing-back Tommy Stack to break the deadlock.

"I often get a bit of a ribbing in training about it", he joked, of his scoring ratio.

"We would have been in control for the first half, but they took over in the second half", he recalled of the U21 final.

"You can see the benefit of our win — the loss might have set them back."

Stack has just completed the final year of his Bachelor of Education degree in Mary Immaculate College.

Results pending he will be looking for a permanent teaching position in a Primary School later in the Summer.

In the meantime, he has secured some "substitute teaching" and has the little matter of a Munster championship semi final to occupy his time.

"We are looking forward to it. They are a bit like us — they have a youthful team coming from recent U21 and minor teams. They have a lot of ability and that will transfer through to senior at some stage."

He recalled that the sides met in the first competitive game of the season — McGrath Cup semi final in January.

"They gave us a tough match and we would expect nothing different on Sunday. That day we led for most, but when they got into it, they really put it up to us", he recalled.

"They have nothing to lose. They will be underdogs and we will be favourites and we will have to see how the tag of favourites rests with us. They would be looking at this as their goal for the year."

Referring to the first round win over Tipperary, Stack stops short of saying that the team got a 'wake-up call'.



Eoin Keating, a likely starter for Limerick

points, we kept our heads and we never panicked. At the same time we can identify points we need to sort out.

While the winners on

Sunday, will book a place in the Munster final on July 11, the captain said that no one will looking past the Waterford challenge.

"The Munster final is not an issue, every game is a Munster final for us, or else we could be in for a big fall and find ourselves in the qualifiers."



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Local players in South Africa

By **JOHN O'SHAUGHNESSY**

JOHN Hayes will become the first from Cappamore to play for Ireland in a Test rugby match in South Africa on this Saturday.

He is included as tight head prop on the team which will be attempting to win for the first time in South Africa.

Paul O'Connell, Young Munster, is named at second row, while Killaloe's Anthony Foley will be winning his 53rd cap.

David Wallace, Garryowen, has been chosen in the back row.

Alan Quinlan, Tipperary, and Marcus Horan, Clonlara, are among the substitutes.

Peter Stringer (Shannon), takes his place at scrum half, and continues his long association with Ronan O'Gara.

Ireland, who travel as Triple Crown champions, are

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