

19th October 2020

Challenge

“When we least expect it, life sets us a challenge to test our courage and willingness to change; at such a moment, there is no point in pretending that nothing has happened or in saying that we are not yet ready. The challenge will not wait. Life does not look back.”

Chinese Proverb

Today I pay tribute to a remarkable man, a former Rugby League player, Rob Burrow, who is living life with Motor Neuron Disease. Rob Burrow had an outstanding sixteen-year career with Leeds Rhinos in the English Super League. Capped for England and Great Britain, Burrow is 5 ft 5 in tall, and was often known as “the smallest player in Super League”. But, despite this, he became one of the most successful players in the competition’s history, winning a total of eight Super League Championships and two Challenge Cups. Since the news of Burrow’s MND diagnosis broke in 2019, I have been both moved and astonished at how this “little” man has risen to the challenge of facing his life-limiting disease.

This past weekend, the Coral Rugby League Challenge Cup Final was played at an empty Wembley Stadium. Burrow was to be the guest of honour, but was unable to attend because his MND had further debilitated him. On display were advertising banners encouraging the viewing public to donate to the MND charity as a tribute to this remarkable man. Rob Burrow may have been guest of honour *in absentia*, but his courage in dealing with the challenge of his disease was there for all to see.

Does Rob Burrow think he’s remarkable? A recent BBC documentary would indicate his answer would be “No!” When he least expected it, life set him a challenge, bigger than any Challenge Cup Final. There was no point in pretending nothing had happened. It would have been futile to say he wasn’t ready. But he has risen to the challenge that “will not wait”. And, in doing so, is an example to us all.

For Rob Burrow, life is still for the living. It’s not about looking back or wondering what lies ahead. It’s about dealing with the challenge of now. At five feet five inches, Rob Burrow has become a giant in my life.

A prayer for today

Let your prayer today be spoken silently as you make a donation, in honour of Rob Burrow, to <https://www.mndassociation.org/get-involved/donations>

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon
Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>*