From Kingsholm to Cardiff: Belief, Revival and a Warning for England

Adam Tugwell | 17 November 2026



Saturday may not prove easy for England.

Wales earned their victory over New Zealand and deserved every moment of it. The All Blacks may be rugby's perennial pace-setters, but no team owns that position by right. It has to be renewed every time they step onto a field, just as Wales renewed their own belief in Cardiff last weekend.

For Gloucester Rugby supporters, the result carried an extra layer of significance. Four Wales internationals who now call Kingsholm home have helped drive a Premiership resurgence that, only a few months ago, felt almost mythical in terms of possibilities.

What seemed impossible suddenly became reality, and with it came that rare feeling in sport when success arrives wrapped in disbelief.

Rugby, however, has never been about individuals alone. With fifteen players on the field, it is tempting to explain success and failure through the performances of one or two stars, or to assume that a squad packed with international talent will inevitably flourish. Yet the game repeatedly teaches the opposite lesson.

The difference is rarely found in individual brilliance. It is found in fifteen players becoming one team.

Every Premiership player operates at or near the highest level of the sport. The real challenge is creating an environment where talent works collectively, where players commit themselves to each other and to the moment rather than chasing personal glory. Success in rugby is not built solely by the player who scores the try. It is built by those who make the try possible.

That is what feels different at Gloucester today.

The influence of players such as Dewi Lake and Jac Morgan extends beyond their own performances. They have become part of a wider culture that appears to have united an entire squad behind a common purpose. The individuals matter, but the collective matters more.

Seen through that lens, Wales' victory over New Zealand becomes even more fascinating.

The same players who have helped Gloucester rediscover its identity returned home to join a Welsh side that suddenly seems to have found its own rhythm on the pitch. Given the uncertainty that has surrounded Welsh rugby in recent years, and the challenges that still exist within the WRU, there was something remarkable about seeing everything click into place on such a stage.

The catalyst, both at Gloucester and within Wales, appears to be belief.

Not blind optimism. Not hype. Genuine belief.

Belief that good players can become something greater together. Belief that momentum can be real. Belief that history does not dictate the next result.

And when that belief takes hold, strange things happen.

With seven minutes remaining and the scale of what Wales were about to achieve becoming clear, my thoughts drifted to a school friend born in Cardiff. He followed Welsh rugby with a devotion that survived every disappointment and every joke the rest of us threw his way. His birthday would have fallen on Friday. It has been several years since he left us.

As Wales edged closer to victory, I found myself hoping he was somewhere above, watching from a Red-Dragon-flag-draped cloud, enjoying the moment Welsh supporters have waited so long for and preparing to give a little of that relentless rugby banter back at last.

That is the thing about sport that statistics can never fully explain.

The match itself felt special from the outset. When the lights dimmed for the haka, the All Blacks stood beneath the sort of spotlight that normally belongs in cinema rather than rugby. Yet there was also something about the atmosphere surrounding Wales that suggested the script might not follow expectation. The red glow from the backlighting, the dry ice mist, the anticipation, the sense of occasion all seemed to point towards the possibility of something extraordinary.

The famous pedestal occupied by New Zealand is not imaginary. It has been earned through generations of excellence and remains worthy of immense respect. The same applies to South Africa and to any side that defines an era.

But rugby offers no permanent titles.

Respect is inherited. Dominance is not.

That is why it was disappointing to hear suggestions in some quarters that Wales' triumph somehow amounted to a "pity win". Such descriptions diminish a team that was simply the better side on the day. Wales earned their victory, just as France earned theirs twenty-four hours earlier.

As an England supporter, all of this brings me to Saturday.

There is a danger that England fans look at recent results and conclude that Wales have merely exposed a weakness in New Zealand. There is a temptation to view the Welsh victory as a low benchmark and assume England should comfortably clear it.

That would be to misunderstand both Wales' achievement and the nature of rugby itself.

The Wales win was not about New Zealand underperforming. It was about a team discovering what it could become when every part worked in harmony.

England undoubtedly possess the talent to beat the All Blacks. They also have Gloucester players capable of playing major roles in any success. Yet talent alone will not be enough against a New Zealand side that will arrive wounded, motivated and desperate to respond.

What Wales demonstrated was not merely a route to victory. They demonstrated the standard required to achieve it.

If England can find that same collective purpose, if they can play as one and see every action as connected to those around them, then they may discover the same belief that carried Wales through.

Because the lesson from Cardiff was never really about Wales or New Zealand.

It was about what becomes possible when a team stops thinking about itself as fifteen players and starts believing it is something greater.

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