

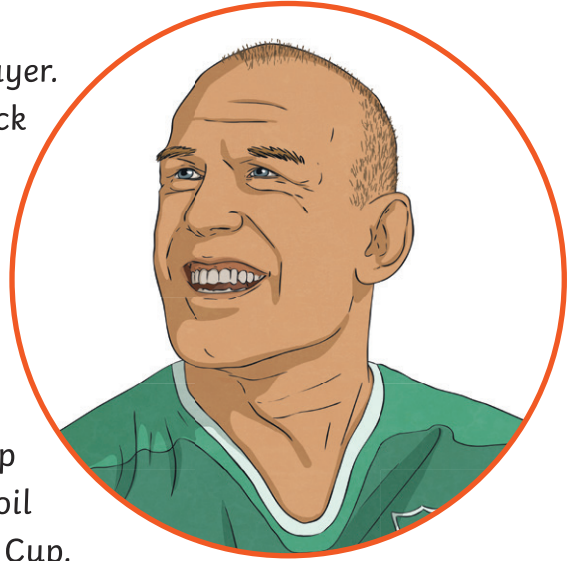
Paul O'Connell

Early Years

Paul O'Connell is a former Irish rugby player.

O'Connell was born in County Limerick on the 20th October 1979. Surprisingly, O'Connell was an excellent swimmer, spending up to fifteen hours a week training in the pool. He only began playing rugby at the age of 16, but his years of swimming provided him with the work ethic to become one of rugby's top players. He represented his school, Ardscoil Rís, in the Munster Schools Rugby Senior Cup.

Several other Irish professional rugby players have also played for their schools in the Munster Schools Rugby Senior Cup, including Ronan O'Gara and Simon Zebo.



Paul O'Connell completed 3 years of a computer engineering degree at the University of Limerick. He did not complete this course, instead deciding to concentrate on his rugby career.



Munster

Paul O'Connell signed his first professional contract with Munster Rugby. O'Connell stands at a massive six foot six inches tall. As one of the tallest players on the rugby pitch, O'Connell was a natural lock. They are the main targets for lineout throws. They are usually lifted into the air by other teammates to try and catch the ball. They also form the second row of a scrum.

Paul O'Connell made his debut on the 17th August 2001 in a clash against Edinburgh. He quickly became a key member of the squad. He played an important part in Munster's European Rugby Champions Cup success in 2006, defeating Biarritz Olympique in the final. O'Connell's consistent performances and natural leadership meant that he was named as Munster captain in 2007, succeeding Munster legend Anthony Foley. O'Connell led Munster to their second

European Rugby Champions Cup win in 2008. He also captained the side in their 2011 Celtic League victory over fierce rivals, Leinster.

Ireland

Paul O'Connell made his international debut against Wales in the 2002 Six Nations tournament. He scored a fantastic try following an Irish lineout. Surprisingly, he has no memory of scoring this try. Earlier in the game, O'Connell received an elbow to the head while attempting to make a tackle. This left him with a concussion. O'Connell was substituted before half-time after an examination by the team doctor. O'Connell became an important part of the Irish team and was part of the 2004 Six Nations team. Ireland went on to win the Triple Crown for the first time in 19 years, with O'Connell playing his part in a dramatic victory over England.



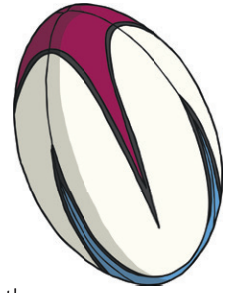
Paul O'Connell scored the last ever try at the Old Lansdowne Road Stadium before it was demolished and rebuilt as the Aviva Stadium. He also captained Ireland against France in 2007, the first rugby match ever played in Croke Park.

Paul O'Connell was vital in Ireland's 2009 Six Nations campaign. He was part of the team that claimed Ireland's first Grand Slam victory in 61 years. The Grand Slam is when one team wins every one of their matches in the Six Nations Championship. O'Connell was also named captain of the 2009 British and Irish Lions team. Paul O'Connell's reputation as a true leader led to him being named as the captain of Ireland at the beginning of the 2015 Six Nations tournament. O'Connell was crucial in Ireland's championship victory, retaining the trophy they had claimed the previous year. O'Connell received the Player of the Championship award. He was also voted as the Irish Rugby Union Players Association (IRUPA) Player of the Year for 2015.

A Career Ending Injury

Paul O'Connell announced that he would retire from international rugby after the 2015 Rugby World Cup. He also revealed that he would leave Munster following the World Cup and join Toulon, a French rugby team. O'Connell was named as the

captain of Ireland's World Cup squad. He played a key role in Ireland's opening three matches of the Word Cup; however, he suffered a serious hamstring injury in Ireland's fourth game against France. The injury required surgery, which ruled him out of the rest of the World Cup. The injury ended his international career. Following advice from medical professionals, Paul O'Connell announced his retirement from all rugby on the 9th February 2016. His injury meant he never played a professional game for Toulon. Paul O'Connell made an incredible 178 appearances for Munster. He also finished his career as Ireland's third most-capped player, having appeared in 108 international games for his country.



Paul O'Connell's autobiography is called *The Battle*. O'Connell recalls his development from a young talented swimmer into an iconic figure in international rugby. This book was named as the Irish Sports Book of the Year 2016.

Awards

Paul O'Connell had an extremely successful career, winning many trophies and awards. O'Connell won the European Rugby Champions Cup on two occasions, and won the Celtic League three times. O'Connell won the Six Nations Championship with Ireland in 2009, 2014 and 2015. The victory in 2009 also consisted of the Grand Slam, in which they were victorious over every other team in the competition.

Paul O'Connell married his wife, Emily O'Leary, in July 2013. They have three children, Paddy, Lola and Felix.

Coaching and Media Career

Paul O'Connell joined Munster Rugby's Academy in an advisory role in July 2016. O'Connell became assistant coach with the Ireland Under-20s in 2017. He is currently a coach with Stade Français. O'Connell has also enjoyed success in the media, joining BBC Sport as a pundit and commentator before the 2017 Six Nations Tournament.

Questions

1. When was Paul O'Connell born?

2. What sport was Paul O'Connell involved in before rugby? At what age did he begin playing rugby?

3. What did Paul O'Connell study at the University of Limerick?

4. What happened to Paul O'Connell on his debut for Ireland?

5. What two awards did Paul O'Connell receive in 2015?

6. How many appearances did Paul O'Connell make for Munster? How many games did he play for Ireland?

7. What French club did Paul O'Connell agree to join after the World Cup?

8. How did you think Paul O'Connell felt after injuring his hamstring in the 2015 World Cup?

9. What did you find most interesting about Paul O'Connell?

Answer

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Answers may vary.

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