

## FAME AND FORTUNE CHRIS WYLES

# I've found life after rugby — in the pub

The veteran Saracens and US player tells *Rebecca Myers* why he has started a lager company with a former teammate

Chris Wyles is more used to tackling 15-stone men than business problems, but he started combining the boardroom with the rugby pitch three years ago when he co-founded Wolfpack Lager. Wyles, 33, still plays on the wing for Saracens as well as running the beer company he set up with Alistair Hargreaves, a former teammate who retired from the game last October.

The idea, he says, was “staring them in the face” when they used to meet over a pint to discuss starting a business. Their beer, made in Suffolk, is now sold in more than 50 pubs and bars around London. They also run a double-decker bus and a Land Rover that function as mobile bars, providing refreshment for fans at Saracens' Allianz Park stadium.

Wyles was born in Connecticut and played for the US national side — known as the Eagles. He captained the team at the 2015 World Cup before retiring from international rugby last year.

He and his parents moved to St Albans, Hertfordshire, when he was 11. He began to play rugby here and turned professional after graduating from Nottingham University with a degree in politics. He lives with his wife, Amy, 32, and their one-year-old son, Finn, in northwest London.

**How much money do you have in your wallet?**  
I normally keep about £50, just for peace of mind or things like a car wash.

**What credit cards do you use?**  
A Mastercard and an Amex for air miles.

**Are you a saver or a spender?**  
By nature I'm more of a saver, but I'm definitely a binge spender if I get into a groove. I hardly ever buy clothes, but when I do, I'll buy all I need for a couple of years in one go.

**How much did you earn last year?**  
I make a six-figure sum. As well as your salary from the club, you can get ambassadorial roles and sponsorship

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**The head coach was supportive, even though we were setting up a beer business**



Brain power: Chris Wyles gained a politics degree after resisting the urge to leave university to play rugby. 'My dad made me stick it out, and I'm so glad he did'

deals. I have one or two but they're fairly small compared with the Lions and England guys' big sponsorship deals.

Because I've got a full-time job, I don't take a salary from the business at the moment — that all just goes back in.

**Have you ever been really hard up?**  
I went through the whole student loan situation while I was at Nottingham University. Once I graduated and became a professional rugby player, the early contracts were pretty small: about £15,000 a year.

**Do you own a property?**  
Yes, our three-bedroom house in Kensal Rise. I'm really proud of it.

**What was your first job?**  
Pushing trolleys at the Waitrose in Harpenden, Hertfordshire. Embarrassingly, I don't think I lasted that long.

**What has been your most lucrative work?**  
It wasn't technically work but I bought a one-bedroom flat in Maida Vale, west London, in 2011. It was my first

property. I did a bit of work to it and, when I sold it in 2015, I made a six-figure profit. My main criterion when I bought it was to be by the Tube, because I knew that for most people, property was about access and getting into town quickly. That helped me sell it for a good price.

**Do you invest in shares?**  
I have a stocks and shares Isa, but that's it.

**What's better for retirement — property or pension?**  
I have got a pension, which I've been contributing to since I started playing rugby. I fully appreciate the need for a balanced portfolio, which is why I have a pension, although I think the arguments for not having one are valid if you have good property and a business.

**When did you first feel wealthy?**  
When I first got my student loan! Even though it wasn't my money, I felt like I had some in the bank account.

**What has been your best investment?**  
The business — though a double-decker bus can cost up to £80,000 and it was a pretty big risk to begin with.

When you're starting a business, there's an element of fear that can put people off and there are hurdles you need to jump over. But Saracens were constantly supportive — even the head coach, despite the fact that we were setting up a beer business!

They said: “If you want to buy a double-decker bus, there's space for it here.” They trusted us. The bus is a big part of our business because there's always a game here, with 10,000 thirsty supporters. Most clubs just want their players to be players, but Saracens realised life after rugby was important.

Both Al and I had been knocking around ideas of doing an MBA or studying. But we wanted to learn by doing and I'm glad we took that route.

We were lucky that we could invest in it while still working; a lot of people take

huge risks with start-ups — remortgaging their houses and everything. I admire them so much; it can be so tough, working all kinds of hours. But I know there's a direct correlation between the work I put in and what I get out, as opposed to an investment in a stock or share, which would be out of my hands.

**And the worst?**  
Cars. The sensible thing to do when I started playing rugby would have been to buy a decent second-hand car. Instead I've been leasing — I currently have a Volkswagen Tiguan. But I have a 45-minute drive to training, so a nice, new, comfortable car is one of my luxuries.

**What's the most extravagant thing you have ever bought?**  
Holidays; we've done Dubai and the Greek island of Santorini, which were amazing. That's probably my main luxury, because when you get time off from rugby, you really want to go somewhere you can relax.

**What are you worried about?**  
Like most sportsmen, my worry is leaving a decent income and going into

an unknown world once I stop playing. That's partly what I've been trying to do by setting up the business — to alleviate that worry — but it's still a concern.

Al retired early because of concussion. It's a big issue for sportsmen — you go from a decent income to starting again. I was close to leaving university to pursue rugby full-time, but my dad put his foot down and made me stick it out, and I'm so glad he did. At Saracens, the younger players in particular are encouraged to get their degrees and the Rugby Players' Association puts a lot of emphasis on players' studies.

**What's your money weakness?**  
Going out for dinner and having a good time, especially as I live in London.

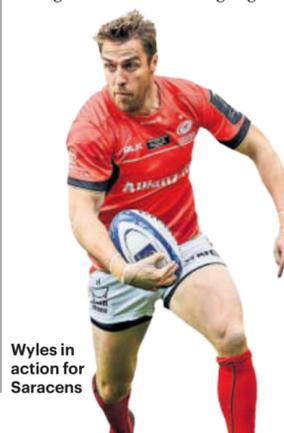
**What aspect of the tax system would you change?**  
I've just done my will and I have to say I find inheritance tax frustrating because you get taxed your entire life.

**What's your financial priority?**  
To look after the little man, Finn. It changes your perspective.

**Do you support any charities?**  
I have a role at the University College Hospital Macmillan Cancer Centre in London, including going on the wards.

**What would you do if you won the lottery jackpot?**  
I would take all my friends and family on a huge holiday; I would rent a massive chalet for six months and go skiing. I'm not normally allowed to ski [by the rugby club] — but I've just won the lottery, so it doesn't matter.

**What is the most important lesson you have learnt about money?**  
Ultimately, you shouldn't let money run your life but you should respect the value of it and appreciate it. Relationships and people are much more valuable.



Wyles in action for Saracens

## Another big government IT project, another fiasco

PETER CONRADI



Another government IT debacle. This time it is the Childcare Choices programme that appears to be descending into chaos.

The scheme, which offers 30 hours a week of free care for three and four-year-olds and raises the amount of tax relief on paid help, will provide welcome relief for the many parents among the ranks of the “squeezed middle”, “Jams” or whatever is the current buzzphrase.

As is so often the case, the problem lies in the execution. With days to go before the deadline to sign up for the extra hours of childcare, both parents and childminders have contacted Money to complain about problems with the system: a website that keeps crashing, access codes that do not work and helplines that do anything but.

What of those parents who, through no fault of their own, are unable to register by Thursday? When my colleague, Nina Montagu-Smith, tried to get an answer, she was batted backwards and forwards between the press offices of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) and the Department for Education, each keen to pass the

back to the other. The conclusion: there is not as yet a policy to deal with the problem.

We have been here before, of course: a Google search using terms such as “government”, “IT” and “fiasco” provides a catalogue of costly disasters.

Indeed, according to an analysis by theregister.co.uk, published last month, one quarter of the government's large IT programmes worth a total lifetime cost of £8bn are at high risk of failure.

The worst offenders at present, it says, are HMRC's £220m tax digitisation for business plans; the Home Office's £341m Digital Services at the Border programme and Ministry of Justice initiatives, including £380m spent on electronic monitoring.

They will struggle, though, to match the scale of the doomed attempt to upgrade the NHS computer system, which was launched in 2002 but abandoned in 2011. Ministers initially put the cost of failure at £6.4bn. The last time I looked, the bill had passed £10bn and was still rising.

No one is suggesting the problems with Childcare Choices are in the same league. Indeed, it seems reasonable to assume that all those who qualify will eventually be able to claim their entitlement.

That is scant consolation for those grappling with the system now, though. Juggling work and young children can be challenging enough. The last thing parents want to do is spend

hours on the phone being urged by a recorded voice to be patient.

### Don't get stung

Would you hand over £25,000 to a stranger who approached you on the street? Of course you wouldn't, not least because you are unlikely to be carrying that amount of cash. What if the stranger asked you to take them to your local bank branch and make a transfer to them? Again, I suspect you'd say no.

Yet, as Jill Inley, our consumer champion, reveals on page 14, that is in effect what one reader did after falling victim to an ingenious sting that began with an innocent-sounding phone call about the quality of his Sky reception and ended with him transferring almost £25,000 to the fraudster's account.

Barclays ultimately agreed to refund his money. But it was a close thing, and due not only to Jill's tenacity but also to the bank acknowledging it had reacted too slowly when alerted to the fraud.

Financial institutions should clearly do more to protect people, especially those who are elderly or vulnerable — for more on this, see page 13. But, ultimately, we need to look out for ourselves. Next time someone approaches you by phone or online and asks you to make a transfer, think of that stranger accosting you on the street.  
@Peter\_Conradi

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