

A day in the life...

Rugby international **Marlie Packer**, 35 – who has 108 caps for England – will be a key player in the Women's Rugby World Cup this summer

INTERVIEW **JANE YETTRAM**

🕒 7am

I get up early when Oliver, my four-year-old son, comes into my bedroom. I've split up from my former partner, Tash, but she and I have a very amicable relationship and share looking after him. When it's my weekend to have Oliver, he comes with me to my Saturday game for my club team, Saracens. Tash and I share weekdays and we live only 10 minutes apart, so it works really well.

Oliver changed my world when he arrived. My purpose changed. I'd always had tunnel vision, focusing on rugby, being professional, being the best, playing for my country. But now Oliver comes above everything.

As today is Tuesday – a high training day with Saracens – I have a high-protein and carb breakfast to fuel me. That means two pieces of toast, three eggs, avocado, bacon and orange juice. The England team's nutritionist, Aimee O'Keeffe, is always at the end of the phone for advice.



Marlie with son Oliver

I first played rugby aged five. I was always a bit rough and tumble, with mainly boys as friends, and then one boy's parents took me to a rugby training session. My mum thought I was going to watch rugby and packed me off in a nice pair of jeans and a red frilly top. I came back caked in mud and I've played ever since. I absolutely love it.

🕒 10am

I spend time with Oliver in the garden, having a kickaround with a football, playing rugby, or messing around with his monster trucks.

The Red Roses, England Women's national team, have training camps when we're away for several days. Oliver comes too sometimes. The girls love him and he loves being there – it's like he's got loads of aunties!

🕒 1pm

Lunch is a chicken wrap – so high protein again – before leaving for training and dropping Oliver off with Tash on the way. When I arrive I have a physio session before heading outside for skills and speed training.

There's been a massive change in women's rugby over my career. We're now paid as professional athletes. But before that, the girls were still completely professional in their



attitude, giving many hours to play for their country and their clubs while also doing a normal job. When we won the World Cup in 2014 we all had other jobs – police officers, teachers, vets, and I'd trained as a plumber. The dedication everyone put in to be at the top of their game was incredible.

Now, with professional contracts, life's much easier. We get proper nutrition, proper rest, proper analysis of our performance and of other teams. We even get a bit of time off! I'm so grateful to those pioneers in the 1980s when the Red Roses first formed. They smashed glass ceilings, pushed boundaries and fought to get us equality. We're now the most successful rugby team in the world – not even any men's team has a higher ranking.

🕒 3.30pm

Half an hour for recovery and some food before a gym session.

One thing the Red Roses often talk about is encouraging the next generation of players. I didn't even know there was an England women's rugby team until I was at college – now many young girls come to games. In my day there'd be two or three girls out of 200 kids at a mixed tournament. Nowadays you turn up to a girls' tournament and there are 200-300



Marlie lifts the trophy after winning the 2024 Six Nations tournament with the Red Roses

“Rugby is about inspiring everyone. It's a sport for all. Your size, colour, sex, age – it doesn't matter

girls playing rugby. I hope this summer's Women's Rugby World Cup will make it take off even more.

But it's not just about inspiring girls. It's about inspiring everyone. Rugby is a sport for all. Your size, colour, sex, age – it doesn't matter. If we can inspire someone my mum's age for example to go to a local club, pick up a ball and get active – whether that's contact rugby or not – that's so positive.

Rugby's certainly given me so much – travelling the world, meeting many people, playing for my country. Being a Red Rose feels very special, like a unique

family. Fewer than 300 women have ever played for England – I'm Red Rose number 150.

🕒 7.30pm

Time for team training. There are some very successful teams, including Saracens, in the Premiership Women's Rugby league, and all are used to winning! But this season the runaway teams haven't run away. There have been some upsets and it's been a really competitive league. That's good because you don't learn about yourself that deeply until you lose a game.

As for the Red Roses, we're really successful, but one thing haunts us. Out of the past 51 games we've lost only one – but that was the 2021 World Cup final. It was heartbreaking. That's sport, though. You can be number one in the world but still lose a high-pressure game.

🕒 9pm

Training ends and it's dinner time before going home. We have a rotating menu, from chicken fajita tacos to spaghetti Bolognese to curry – all with veggies and salads.

Once home I soon head to bed. I struggle with sleep, so I often go to bed early because sleep is massively important for recovery.

We're in a tough group for the World Cup, with the USA, Samoa and Australia. Although I'm at the latter stages of my career, I'm contracted to the Red Roses until June 2026, and for the moment I'm focused on putting in my best performance at the World Cup.

In the longer term, coaching is an option – I've just got my Level 3 coaching qualification, which I'm super stoked about. I want to give back to the sport that's given me so much. At the end of my career, whenever that is, one thing I'm sure about is I want to be able to drop off and pick up Oliver from school – he'll start in reception around when the World Cup finishes!

Oliver currently goes to Rugbytots, but I'll support him whatever sport he chooses. I loved all sport when I was younger, and truly found myself when I played well. Whatever he does, I want him to be able to find himself. And if it isn't sport but something else, I'll be behind him 100%.

If I could bottle the feelings of just one game, it would be when I was captain for the Six Nations final in 2023. It was a home game against France at Twickenham, with a world-record crowd – and Oliver was the mascot walking out with me onto the pitch. There had been a sponsor change so, as Red Roses captain, I was the first person ever to lift the brand-new trophy when we won. After the game the trophy was at the side of the pitch, and dinosaur-mad Oliver sat there putting all the dinosaurs he'd brought along inside it. It was such a special occasion – and so great that he could see me and the girls and know that it's not only men who play rugby.

You can watch live coverage of the Women's Rugby World Cup on the BBC. The first match – England vs USA – is at 7.30pm on Friday 22 August.