

# From battlefield to Rugby field!



BY Alan Wahid



Revan

Dylan

Photos Nemam

Earlier this year Revan celebrated his selection for the Rugby Football League's elite national training camps. Revan was born in the city of Kirkuk, the heartland of the Kurdish struggle, in the year 1990. After the 1991 uprising when the Iraqi government regained control of Kirkuk, they were forced out of the city by the Bathist regime in part of the Arabization program of the city.

In the year 2000 they came to the UK in search of a better life. Revan's understanding of London was only that it was a big city with plenty of opportunities, unlike back home.

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He had no knowledge of the game rugby, as the main sports in Kurdistan were football and volleyball. His progress in the sport was rapid and he managed to receive the call up for the national camp, which is for the top 40 players in each age group in the country. This process began for Revan just a year into playing and learning about the sport.

He said he was nervous when he first got the call, as he had to go away to camp and stay for a week; his first time away from his family. But he was also very excited and eager to make an impact. When he got there he did make an impact as he had wished, receiving praise from the Rugby League's development manager for the Southeast, who was quoted in the Guardian as saying “He has got a real ability as a second row especially when you think he is only slight and he has plenty of time to grow”.



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His brother Dylan who is older than him is also making an impression. They usually go training together and took up an interest in the sport around the same time. They both dream of playing in the Super League one day, but say they are consistently told by their father to study and then play rugby, so that they have something to fall back on if they become unsuccessful.

In my meeting with Revan and Dylan they told me about their dreams of becoming successful in order to go back to Kurdistan. They want to make a difference by introducing rugby into a society which has been deprived of development in leisure and sports as there have always been more important things to worry about. They talk as Kurdish patriots and dream of Kurdistan becoming independent and prospering.

Due to his outstanding performance, speedy improvement and his background, Revan has caught the eye of the media. He grabbed such headlines as “Kid from Kirkuk is making his mark” on the 23rd of March 2005 in one of the most respected broadsheet universities in the UK (the Guardian). On the same month he also attracted the attention of the BBC, who were fascinated by a person of his background making his mark on a sport that has always been dominated by the same social background

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Overall their progress has been astounding. It's great for Kurdish children to come so far in such an alien sports, especially in a country that is the world champion and has never struggled to find talent. It is an achievement for them and for their oppressed city, as they've shown that if people from Kirkuk and the whole of Kurdistan are given a chance they can be as good as anyone. We wish them the best and hope that they set an example for Kurdish children, not just in Kurdistan, but also those who are in exile and we will make sure to monitor their progress carefully.

Who knows, the next Johnny Wilkinson may come from Kirkuk.



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