

With increasing demands from his job and decreasing energy, Alastair Hignell has retired as a Radio 5 Live sports presenter.

Moving On

By Alastair Hignell, Patron of MSRC

Alastair Hignell, 53, was diagnosed with MS in 1999. Married to Jeannie, they have two sons and live in the Cotswolds. He has been a sports commentator since the 1980s.

A sporting legend, in the 1970s he played rugby for Bristol, Cambridge University, Gloucestershire, the Barbarians and England. He also played cricket for Cambridge University and Gloucestershire.

The final day of my career as a BBC commentator began with a steward querying my pass and ended with two doormen carrying my buggy down 20 steps from a function room with no lift. In between, a man in a yellow jacket attempted to prevent me from accessing the floor from which I had broadcast for the last five buggy-dependent years.

Over the last few years the job had become even more demanding and the practicalities of broadcasting when you've got MS were becoming a nightmare for me: trying to lever myself into inadequate and dangerous commentary boxes; assembling and disassembling my buggy, lugging broadcasting equipment up flights of awkward stairs and through unforgiving crowds.

But while these demands were escalating, my ability to cope with them was going in the opposite direction.

In journalism, when a story needs covering, you work until it's done even if it means working 16 hours days for weeks on end or travelling not just the length and breadth of the country but halfway across the world.



In the commentary box

You hope there'll be a chance to slow down, catch up and restore your energy. Except, with MS –or at least my form of MS– there's not. I was increasingly discovering that I lacked the reserves of energy to push myself to the absolute limit at times of greatest demand, and I was starting to lack the resources to put myself back together again during rest periods.

The "Wow" Factor in My Job Was Becoming More of an "Ow."

I loved my job and wanted to do it the sort of justice I believed it deserved, that I had managed to deliver so far, and that was in danger of being compromised by my dwindling energy levels.

I had found myself spending increasing amounts of time lying in my hotel room in an attempt to summon up the energy to attend press conferences. I wasn't sleeping well, and I was struggling, for the first time,



England's Phil Vickery with Alastair

to forget the problems of being disabled.

The “wow” factor in my job was starting to lose its first w. If it were to lose another consonant it would end up as one tiny insignificant zero.

All the time Jeannie, my wife, my rock, my shield and my friend, was also lying sleepless in England, trying to keep our life together and knowing that when I got back I would be more of a wreck than I had been the time before and that the time to recover- the brunt of which she always took- would be longer.

The seven weeks of the Rugby World Cup in France confirmed my worst fears. The last two weeks, when England reached the finals, created unprecedented demands. I got through, but only just, and only

with fantastic support from my closest colleagues.

I knew that when the next big rugby event came along the gap between the demands of the job and the supply of my energy to do it would have become a chasm.

The BBC very kindly allowed me to bow out on my terms, at a big occasion, while I was still able to do my job reasonably well. And what an occasion, and what a day, and what an amazing display of warmth from so many people!

Now to the future. I'm not giving up work, just this particularly demanding job, and I don't feel in any way that I am giving in to MS.

I'm just finding a better way of living with it.



Always a great supporter at MSRC events