# Sir Billy Boston’s knighthood marks historic rugby league first after decades-long wait



Sir Billy Boston, a legendary figure in rugby league, has received a knighthood in a historic first for the sport, though his family expressed that the honour has come “a little bit late.” At 90, Boston was knighted by the King during a private ceremony at Buckingham Palace. His son, Stephen Boston, conveyed a mix of pride and disappointment post-ceremony: “It’s a really great honour. I think it has come a little bit late. It could have come a little bit earlier,” he remarked, highlighting the long wait for recognition in a sport that has shaped many communities.

Billy Boston's contributions to rugby league are monumental; he scored 478 tries in 488 matches for Wigan after switching from rugby union in 1953. His career not only showcased his exceptional athletic ability but also marked significant milestones in rugby history. Boston became the first non-white player to represent Great Britain on the rugby league Lions tour in 1954, where he made an impressive debut, netting 36 tries in 18 appearances across Australia and New Zealand, including a record four tries in a single match against New Zealand.

The campaign for Boston's knighthood gathered momentum over recent years, with prominent figures, such as Prime Minister Keir Starmer, advocating for the recognition he deserved. Starmer condemned what he termed a “historic wrong,” emphasising that Boston's achievements broke down barriers in a sport traditionally lacking diversity. “Billy Boston is a true trailblazer who has contributed hugely to rugby league,” Starmer stated, underscoring the enduring legacy left by Boston. He later expressed his congratulations to the rugby star in a personal letter.

Boston's long-awaited acknowledgement also reflects a broader movement within rugby league to honour its icons. Earlier this year, a statue was erected in Cardiff featuring Boston alongside fellow Welsh rugby legends Gus Risman and Clive Sullivan. This statue not only celebrates their athletic prowess but also acknowledges their roles as pioneers within the sport, aimed at inspiring future generations.

Despite his success on the field, Boston faced obstacles, including the unfortunate reality that he never earned a Welsh cap due to injuries sustained during international matches. His past accolades include an MBE awarded for his services to rugby league, and he has been inducted into the British Rugby League Hall of Fame as well as the Welsh Sports Hall of Fame.

This knighthood, while a significant milestone, highlights the systemic issue of recognition within rugby league and raises questions about how many other contributors to the sport may have similarly been overlooked. As public sentiment shifts towards acknowledging these historical injustices, Billy Boston's honour signifies not just the elevation of one extraordinary athlete, but also a potential awakening to the contributions of many underappreciated figures within rugby league.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/buckingham-palace-keir-starmer-stephen-wigan-boston-b2767211.html), [[2]](https://www.itv.com/news/granada/2025-03-07/end-the-scandal-mp-calls-for-rugby-league-legend-to-be-made-a-sir)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/buckingham-palace-keir-starmer-stephen-wigan-boston-b2767211.html), [[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Boston)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.itv.com/news/granada/2025-03-07/end-the-scandal-mp-calls-for-rugby-league-legend-to-be-made-a-sir), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/martin-offiah-mps-boston-wales-wigan-b1215092.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/buckingham-palace-keir-starmer-stephen-wigan-boston-b2767211.html), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2023-07-19/rugby-league-icons-of-the-game-immortalised-in-home-city-for-first-time)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://wrl.wales/wrl-announce-first-two-hall-of-fame-members), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crgl3819dj7o)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/buckingham-palace-keir-starmer-stephen-wigan-boston-b2767211.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.itv.com/news/granada/2025-03-07/end-the-scandal-mp-calls-for-rugby-league-legend-to-be-made-a-sir> - In March 2025, MPs called for a knighthood for rugby league legend Billy Boston, highlighting the 'scandal' that no player from the sport had ever been knighted. Boston, born in Wales, scored 478 tries in 487 matches for Wigan after switching from rugby union to league in 1953. The 90-year-old revealed in 2016 that he had been living with vascular dementia. Commons Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle campaigned on the issue, stating it was a 'major injustice' that no rugby league player had ever been knighted.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2023-07-19/rugby-league-icons-of-the-game-immortalised-in-home-city-for-first-time> - In July 2023, a statue was unveiled in Cardiff to celebrate legendary Welsh rugby players Billy Boston, Gus Risman, and Clive Sullivan. The statue, the first in Wales to feature non-fictionalised, named black men, honours these 'codebreakers' who switched from rugby union to league. Boston, born in Cardiff, scored 478 tries in 487 matches for Wigan after making the switch in 1953. The statue aims to inspire future generations and acknowledges their contributions to the sport and society.
4. <https://wrl.wales/wrl-announce-first-two-hall-of-fame-members> - In 1986, Billy Boston was awarded an MBE for his services to rugby league. The Billy Boston Stand at Central Park was named in his honour, and he is an original inductee of the British Rugby League Hall of Fame. Despite his achievements, Boston never won a Welsh cap due to injuries during international matches. He is also in the Welsh Sports Hall of Fame and Wigan Warriors Hall of Fame, recognised as one of the greatest players never to play for Wales.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Boston> - Billy Boston, born on 6 August 1934 in Cardiff, is a Welsh former professional rugby league footballer. He played 488 matches for Wigan, scoring 478 tries, and represented Great Britain in 31 Test matches, scoring 24 tries. Boston was the first non-white player to be selected for a Great Britain rugby league Lions tour in 1954, scoring 36 tries in 18 appearances in Australia and New Zealand. He was appointed MBE in 1996 for services to the community of Wigan, Greater Manchester.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/martin-offiah-mps-boston-wales-wigan-b1215092.html> - In March 2025, MPs called for a knighthood for rugby league hero Billy Boston to end the 'scandal' that no player from the sport had ever been knighted. Boston, born in Wales, scored 478 tries in 487 matches for Wigan after switching from rugby union to league in 1953. The 90-year-old revealed in 2016 that he had been living with vascular dementia. Commons Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle campaigned on the issue, stating it was a 'major injustice' that no rugby league player had ever been knighted.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crgl3819dj7o> - In July 2023, a statue was unveiled in Cardiff to honour Welsh rugby 'codebreakers' Billy Boston, Clive Sullivan, and Gus Risman. The statue is the first in Wales to feature non-fictionalised, named black men. Boston, who scored 478 tries in 487 matches for Wigan after switching from rugby union to league in 1953, attended the unveiling and described it as one of the 'highlights of my life'. The statue aims to inspire future generations and acknowledges their contributions to the sport and society.