



an excellent game with the Ireland team finally securing their place in history (and most of the Lions places too!).

Just enough time for a quick change into dinner jackets and myself, Rob, Nick Watson and Andrew Mead made our way round to the new Marriott hotel built into the stadium itself. This has now opened permanently and, from the areas we saw, promises to be a top quality hotel for many years to come.

At this point a theme started to be developing as we headed straight for the bar! Myself and Andrew had other ideas though, after all we'd fought our way through the Rugby Store to get the shirts for the Icing Ball, the time had come to add the signatures. Pens and shirts at the ready, get set....GO!

The list of current and ex-players was amazing. To list who politely put up with the harassment of having to sign the shirts is too long to mention. There were a few shocked looks from the likes of Graham Rowntree and Bill Beaumont when they realized we'd travelled 3,500 miles to be there though. Once again Richard Hill and Jason Leonard gave up their time to chat about rugby and share a couple of drinks and helped secure the vital few moments to get Martin Johnson's autograph.

Then to the dinner. Speeches, excellent food, good wine and the challenge from Andrew that I couldn't get any of the Scotland team to sign an England shirt! Thankfully this time I won and am grateful to Chris Patterson and the Scotland coach who resigned two days later, Frank Haddon, for signing the small England shirt for my 18-month old nephew. It is now hanging on his bedroom wall just outside Prague.

However, Andrew had found one final challenge. He noticed that the England player's bus had turned up and the players were slowly filtering outside under the guiding hand of Graham Rowntree. What better place to get some more autographs? It didn't quite turn out that way as the players already on the bus didn't want to be disturbed, I did manage to get the bus driver's autograph on the back of a shirt though. Then we spotted our final signature of the night, one that has since proved to be a surprise inclusion in the lions squad, I wonder if Simon Shaw knew he was going to be selected when he took the time to chat before he got on the bus?

Our day at Twickenham was slowly drawing to a close. Twelve hours of magnificent hospitality from BMI, new friends made and watching rugby, I've had worse!

This still left one more day in England before returning to Riyadh. Coincidentally it just happened to be Mother's Day or as it will now be referred to 'Mother's Day sponsored by BMI'. I was able to take my parents out for an excellent meal at a Tapas restaurant in Croydon (if you want the details it is well worth the trip, but take a taxi as the wine selection is superb).

Thank you to all at BMI who made me feel so welcome from the moment I arrived at Riyadh airport to the moment I arrived back. It was a very special few days and also made me a very popular son.

BMI is the official sponsor of the England Rugby Team and has 6 direct flights from Riyadh to London weekly as well as flights to Jeddah and Dammam.

