

## Inside Out – Kwaku Asiedu

**BIG, strong, fast and determined, Kwaku Asiedu tells Mark Forster how happy he is to be playing national league rugby with Cambridge, but that his eye is on a Championship debut with Coventry.**



WHEN Kwaku Asiedu was told he was going to play on loan for Cambridge this season he grasped the first opportunity to prove a point.

The pacy and powerful winger scored a thumping try against Coventry at Butts Park Arena to spoil his own club's 100 per cent pre-season record.

In the blood and sands team to gain valuable playing time, Asiedu hopes he can perform well enough to warrant a start for Coventry in the Championship – his main goal.

*"I was one on one, and I had to score. I knew (Coventry Director of Rugby) Rowland (Winter) was watching and I had to make a statement. I want to play for Coventry. For me it was a professional thing."*

Not that he was upset at being loaned to Cambridge, one of Winter's old clubs.

A schoolboy convert to rugby, he played himself into the ground and picked up injuries. Then, moving to Coventry, while enjoying a taste of first team life, he found a lack of game time a frustration.

Now, he's getting plenty of action at Grantchester Road and has hooked up with his old England Counties backs coach, Richie Williams.

*"It's nice being back with Richie," Asiedu says. "I was happy to learn that I would be out on loan there. I like their style of play. We're all on a learning curve but I think we will do well. The players played their heart out in the defeat to Chinnor, a game we should have won. That is good to see. This is a club that wants to be winning."*

At Cambridge he is a starter in National League One, something that was not a given at Coventry last season based on the form of Rob Knox and Max Trimble.

Asiedu is still very much part of the Coventry squad, despite turning out for Cambridge. A popular member of the dressing room he is keen to play his part in blue and white.

*“My goal this season is to make my Championship debut,” he says. “I want to play first team rugby for Cov, I want to stay here, be a part of it.*

*I missed out on game time when I was injured. I was not developing,” he admits, but is quick to point out. “I like the atmosphere at Coventry and I like the club – a lot. It’s like a family.”*

He knows his route to the Coventry starting line-up is even more difficult this term, given the summer signings of the Bulumakau brothers from Doncaster Knights and David Halaifonau from Gloucester, as well as the continued presence of Rob Knox, James Stokes and Max Trimble plus others from the development squad, including James Neal and Louis Roach.

But that hasn’t dented his ambition. In fact, kicking his heels last season as development squad games were called off, often at the last minute, Asiedu is relishing the opportunity to show his mettle – in games for Cambridge and training sessions with Coventry.

*“Junior and Andy B, Rob, Max, the wingers, we are all really close friends, although we are all in competition together. It’s a healthy competition to have. I think that helps us all, drives us all to be better.*

*It’s a very professional set up at Coventry. When the coaches speak, everyone shuts up and listens. If you want to be at the top level, you need to act top level. We’re very lucky to have Nick (Walshe, Coventry head coach) and Deacs (Louis Deacon, forwards coach). Deacs will tell you the effect of being in certain positions. I’m learning all the time.”*

Asiedu could have a completely different sporting career, having excelled as a sprinter at school.

He competed in the 100 metres event at schoolboy level against future sprint star Adam Gemili among others.

*“Yeah, I raced against him. I was really skinny but fast. I was always in the top tier of the event. My genetics meant I was always going to be fast. My dad was fast, my brother was fast.”*

It was that raw speed that gained the attention of rugby coaches at Chatham House Grammar School, where Asiedu was a pupil.

*“For me, rugby started at school. I was asked to play. My mum wasn’t really that keen, because of the contact. She wanted me to concentrate on athletics. It really picked up when I went into the sixth form. The school was really strong on rugby, they did a whole pre-season, which was something new for me. I really got into it.*



*I didn’t understand the rules back then, but they knew how to interest everyone, how to get everyone involved. I was on the wing to begin with but then they stuck me at outside centre, when I got to see the ball a lot more. That opened my eyes to rugby. It meant I had to test myself a lot more.”*

At Chatham House, the rugby season ended early, in December, which left Asiedu wanting more, but unsure of his next move.

*“The local club, Thanet Wanderers, didn’t have a youth team, but Canterbury did. I contacted them and they asked me to go down for training. I got selected for a game against London Irish and I never got the chance to go on. They didn’t know me enough, but the second game, against a team from Portsmouth, I scored four tries.*

*The Under 19s coach was the first team captain. Literally, from there I was involved in the first and second teams at Canterbury. From that December to the end of the season I played rugby whenever I could. I just wanted to play.*

*We got to the semi-finals of a cup competition, just getting beaten by Halifax, but it was a great time.*

*I went to university at Canterbury, which meant I had the chance to continue playing for the club. They were in National League Two at that time. I really wanted to be involved. I sat down and talked with my mum. She wanted me to do well and be happy.”*

Rugby took over Asiedu’s life. He played for the university team, continued at Canterbury RFC, got picked for Kent and played or trained almost every day of the week.

*“Looking back, I wonder how I did it,” he laughs. “I was young and energetic and just wanted to play. I tore my hamstring and the physio looked at my schedule and told me I had to stop doing so much.*

*That first year I played about 10 league games for Canterbury. I learned a lot. They had some really good coaches there.*

*In my second year at university, I chose to focus on Canterbury. I got selected for England Students, then England Counties U20s.*

*We played against Hartpury College and beat them. That was the year they got promoted from National League One. Then on the Wednesday I got the call, asking me if I could turn out for England Students against Wales.*

*Three weeks later I was playing for England Counties U20s. It led to a lot of opportunities for me. At that point, I knew I wanted to take rugby seriously. It was a really big honour for me.”*

Progress came to a shuddering halt when his anterior cruciate ligament went. Still, rugby filled his thoughts.

*“My England Students coach contacted me and I told him I wanted to do a Masters, but didn’t know where. He asked me if I had plans for after university, in terms of rugby. He said that Hartpury might be interested.*

*I went to Hartpury on a scholarship. I was really grateful for that, because I was injured. I was out for the equivalent of two or three seasons. I had complications, because I’d also broken a bone. That needed surgery.*



*When I started playing again, my shoulder went. I was doing a lot of watching of the game, learning that way.”*

To make matters worse, Asiedu also suffered a broken eye socket. For a time, it seemed his mum’s concerns were being proved right.

He refused to give up.

*“It’s all about knowing your limits. After I came from the knee issues, I think I had a mental problem, I didn’t use my speed like I could. I had to work it out.”*

What he did do, with a professional rugby career in mind, was to head to the gym, going from 95kg to 107kg, while improving his speed.

He points to the help of the Coventry backroom staff and the facilities the club boasts.



*“Hartpury had a top end gym for rehabilitation. Now we have a quality gym at Coventry. (Strength and conditioning coach) Max (Hartman) used to joke that he never saw me in the gym, but I’m in there all the time now.*”

*‘You have to be strong and fit to play rugby. We do stretching exercises, gearing ourselves up for the weekend. Max’s job is to make us ready for the game. It is all individual, so we know what we each have to work on. I’ve got the size and strength and I want to get faster. I just want to be playing for Coventry in the Championship.’*”

It could have been so different. Had injury not marred his time at Hartpury, he could be part of the Gloucester outfit now, but for a bit of serendipity.

*“I’ve known (Coventry second row) George Oram for years. I played Under 18s and Under 20s with him in Kent,” he says. “I tried to recruit him for Hartpury but he said he had signed for Coventry and suggested I contact Rowland.*”

*I found Coventry Rugby on Twitter, then Rowland. I sent him a message asking for his email. The next week I was meeting him. I must have come across him when I was playing for London and South East in the English county set-up. I was lucky he remembered me.*

*I knew as soon as I had the opportunity at Coventry that I had to make the most of it. I had never been to Coventry before that, but I saw the stadium and thought this was the real deal.*

*A guy at work used to play for Leicester Tigers and he told me about Coventry’s history. I knew I wanted to be a part of it.*

*The club also has the best fans I’ve ever come across, the noisiest, even when we lost to Ampthill. I had to go on the Supporters’ Club coach to apologise for our performance. No-one was bickering, they were just cheerful, just happy to support the club. Even in defeat. That was so good.”*

In recent months, he’s also turned out for Tigers’ A team, one of a number of Coventry players guesting for the Welford Road outfit.

His rugby journey has led a fascinating trail. But for now, there is one destination.

And Asiedu has shown the love of rugby, of improving and determination that means few would bet against him achieving a starting spot.