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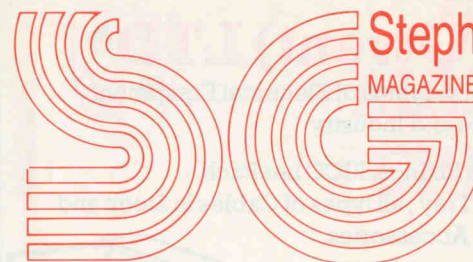
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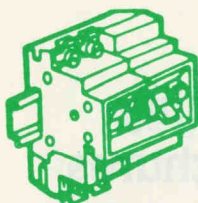
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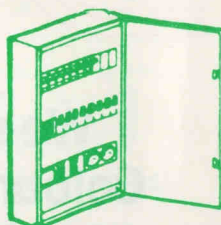
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Ian Watkins	IT	2	(Capt) Alan Phillips
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CLUB NOTES ...

When rugby returned to normality last Saturday it was noticeable everywhere that some rust had gone into the works. Players struggled to regain previous form after the lay-off, and lack of outdoor training, but one man moved smoothly into gear and scored all the points for Cardiff in their Cup quarter-final. The value of Gareth Davies to Cardiff was established long before last Saturday but it is still a major achievement for one man to kick penalties, conversions and drop goals AND score a try. But why didn't he drop a goal from a mark as well!

This afternoon's match is sandwiched between quarter and semi-finals of the Cup and it is clear that only established sides in terms of personnel and experience make their way through to the penultimate, and then final, stages. At Ebbw Vale there have been signs this season that some of the re-building work has been completed and approved by the "building inspector" Phil Gardner, who we recall leading Ebbw Vale to our last win at Cardiff in January 1983. More, much more, remains to be done if we are to start next season with the personnel and the experience required to restore what was our norm season by season.

Last Saturday the re-arranged game with Pontypridd almost brought defeat and after that outstanding display in the 24-22 defeat at Llanelli, it was disappointing and something of a let-down. However, it is easier to criticise from the side than play after a month of almost total physical inactivity, and full marks must be given to our defence and to the alert Mike Jones whose interception tries really settled an untidy, but occasionally, exciting game.

These notes were written before our mid-week game at Swansea, and we now enter a hectic scramble of fixtures that, following the freeze, makes a mockery of unofficial tables that seem to increase annually. Next Wednesday we are at home to Llanelli (7 p.m.), but as March 22nd is the semi-final day, Bridgend who were due here are otherwise engaged. Richmond agreed to come down if their scheduled opponents, Bath, were playing in their Cup but the RFU have not done us a favour by putting back their John Player semi-finals to April. At the time of writing we are trying to find an alternative on March 22nd but Bridgend will play at Ebbw Vale on Wednesday May 7th during the extended week of the season.

Memories of the great and much lamented Malcolm Collins are recounted on the back page but we take this first opportunity to extend our condolences to the Cardiff club on the loss of a great player and committee member. He captained Ebbw Vale nearly thirty years ago and we met him when we were at the Arms Park last November. Our Player's Reunion is on April 19th, and Malcolm will be talked about with great affection on that occasion, one he always enjoyed to the full.

Both our teams are playing against Cardiff sides today, and when the Athletic return from the Arms park they, and the 1st XV, will attend tonight's cabaret and dance in the clubhouse. That remarkable prop and entertainer, Phil Kingsley Jones, will be the 'star' as he always is, on or off the field. Tickets are £1.50.

COVER PIC:

September 6th 1958. Ebbw Vale, captained by the late Malcolm Collins (fourth Vale forward from the front), versus a Ken Jones XV. Behind Malcolm Collins the Ebbw Vale forwards Doug Ackerman and the late Billy Morgan.

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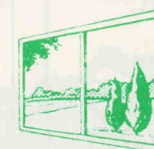
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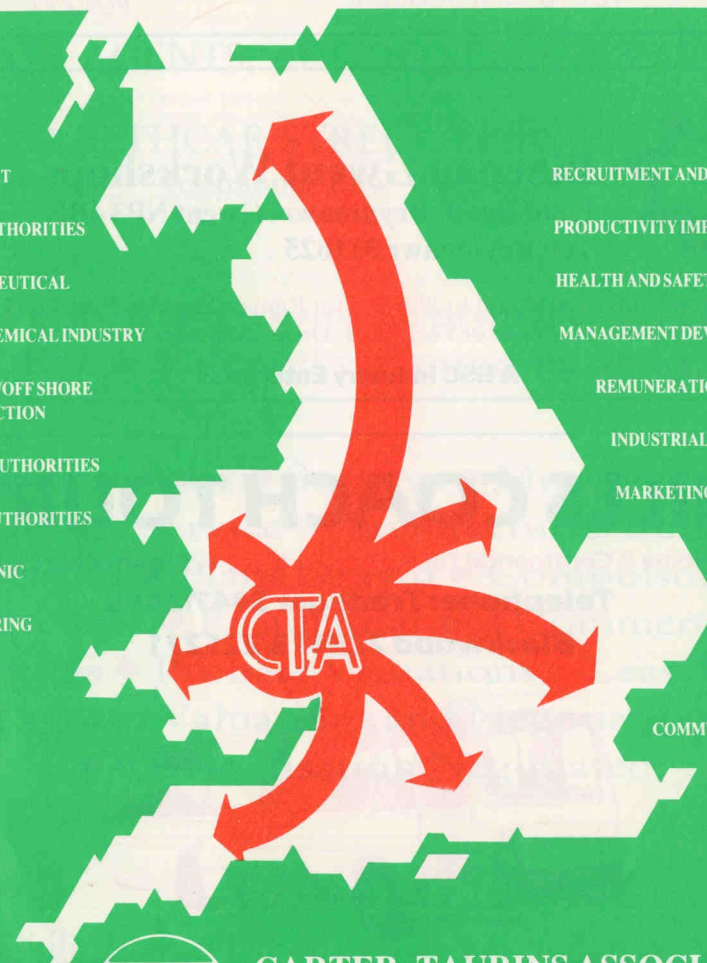
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IT'S A GAME, ONLY A GAME

An opera is not an opera unless there's a large woman belting out an aria and dying of consumption at the same time. A clubhouse is not a clubhouse unless there's a large prop moaning about his back and dying for a free pint. A lot of props end up selling beer, but how they hate buying any! They also feel their age and look back to their early days when men were men and some were even three-quarters. The recent announcement by the WRU that they were supplying thermal undies for the players in the Wales-France game, was received with derision by ancient props who modelled themselves on fast moving, tough, macho, perfect runners and passers of the ball — like Denzil Williams, John O'Shea, Howard Norris and Len Dimmick. But a glance at the records surrounding the blackest day in Celtic history — January 19th 1963 — shows that the old guys weren't so John Wayneish after all. And Denzil was a leading actor in the saga about to unfold.

The 1962/63 season was messed up something horrible by the bitter weather and eleven weeks of club rugby were lost. The Wales-England game went ahead though and the WRU said they were buying warm underthings for their side, which included six new caps, Denzil, Clive Rowlands, Dai Watkins, Dai Hayward, Brian Thomas and Roger Michaelson. England had seven new internationals so what with home advantage and the Arms Park like a skating rink, it looked as if Wales would win again. England, though, had their greatest post-war wing, Peter Jackson, in their side and they won that black, bitterly cold and bloody awful afternoon. Mind you, that was their last win at Cardiff and as we have been told that John Scott is a gentleman and not prone to attacking writers with evil intent, we feel secure in trotting out a favourite line — the English have yet to watch a film of a win by them at Cardiff IN COLOUR!

We know John Scott is a tidy chap because during the ice age we have spent time reading spicy rugby memoirs and he is mentioned in one of them. When he stops playing maybe he will write one, too, but unlike Denzil he was never issued with special winter issue to warm the cockles of parts the freeze must never reach. It just shows how the dear old WRU cares for its players and how they haven't changed much, except for the waistcoats, pork pie hats and watch-chains. But we don't know what they wore in 1963.

There were big forwards around in those old days, and some of the second row men were also No. 1 goal-kickers, Ewart Tamplin, Ben Edwards and Malcolm Collins to name but six. These were giants in stature and performance and we were very distressed to learn that Malcolm died just before Christmas for we had met him when we played at the Arms Park a month earlier. He played 306 1st XV games for Cardiff from 1949-1957 and then he joined Ebbw Vale. Five months after that he was made captain, and the photo on the front page of this programme shows him at a lineout in a match to celebrate the new clubhouse and south 'stand'.

Malcolm knew the taste of defeat and disappointment. When Cardiff played against the 1950 British Lions in their 75th Anniversary game they scored a late try which levelled the scores at 14-14. Malcolm had the easiest of conversions but missed it and a great game was drawn. A month later Cardiff played the magnificent 1951/52 Springboks and were leading right to the end when a speculative kick ahead found Cardiff's full-back, Frank Trott, carrying an injured leg as he covered it. The sprightly and unforgettable Chum Ochse got there first and the South Africans won. No doubt someone said to Malcolm Collins and Frank Trott that it was only a game, and no doubt they had to agree but were disappointed.

Normal club games can be disappointing as well, especially if victory seems inevitable as the clock ticks away into injury time. When we played at Cardiff last November we led 12-7 in the closing stages and a night on the Brain's Dark was hastily planned. Then came the penalty award, then the tap move, then the try by Mike Rayer, then the conversion by Chris Webber, then it was 13-12 to Cardiff, then the final whistle. After someone said, "It's only a game" the pint that refreshes helped and the after match gathering conquered all as usual. It was just a game.

Of course it's just a game, and Marilyn Monroe was just a girl, the Queen Mary was just a boat and Red Rum was just a horse. But those hinges of fate get a bit monotonous as we later found at Swansea in the Cup and at Llanelli a fortnight afterwards. Maybe the young recover quicker and one who hopes to do well today is Arwel Parry who played for Cardiff Youth and Wales Youth and who, in November 1984, stepped into the Cardiff first team No. 15 shirt at Ebbw Vale.

Arwel has found a home here after transferring from Newport in December 1985 and in his first game against his original club would like to share a win similar to our 22-13 success on Cardiff's last visit.

The four props on view today will not be the handsomest of men, but as Edward G. Robinson once said, "Some people have youth, others beauty, I have menace." The front rows will play their usual decisive parts in today's final result, and they never need thermal unmentionables for they generate their own atomic power as strong silent men John Wayne would have loved to have alongside him at The Alamo, Little Big Horn and Fort Apache.

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