

BUSH AGAIN CAPTAIN

1906-07. P30, W25, L3, D2. Points 404-83.

After the astounding success of the previous season, it was not surprising that Percy Bush was elected for another term, and George Northmore again chosen as vice-captain. The scoring was not as prolific as in 1905-6, although, except for Ralph Thomas who elected to play for Penarth, nearly all last season's players were available, however, the captain was available in only seven of the first sixteen matches. A new forward, Jim Casey, from the Newport Pill Harriers Club joined us and gained a First Team cap.

The outstanding event of the season was the visit of the South African touring team, "The Springboks"; captained by Paul Roos, who played Cardiff on New Year's Day 1907.

They had conquered all opposition from club, county and international teams except Scotland, who had defeated them by 6 points to nil, and the Cardiff match was the last of their tour in Britain. Unfortunately perhaps, for these most popular tourists, the match was played in rain on an already wet and muddy ground, conditions more likely to favour Cardiff, who did however overcome the elements and achieved a most magnificent victory by no less than 17 points to nil. The great Arthur Gould of Newport one of the greatest threequarters in Welsh history said after the match: "On today's play, Cardiff would have beaten any team in the world".

In the atrocious conditions Cardiff rose magnificently to the occasion and played brilliantly at times, all four tries coming from the threequarters Gwyn Nicholls, R. A. Gibbs, J. L. Williams and R. T. Gabe; our full-back Bert Winfield scored the remaining points with a penalty goal and one conversion. Against a heavy South African pack, Cardiff decided to play seven forwards against eight, and used Percy Bush as extra half-back or rover. As befitted the times, the Press coverage was prolific, the "Western Mail" devoted six full columns of small print on the match, and its writer "Forward", said "Wales has redeemed her reputation". Amongst other eulogies, the secretary of the club, Charles S. Arthur, wrote "No Cardiff team ever played better or achieved so great renown, and the best man on the field, as had been so often before was Gwyn Nicholls. He never played a better game in his life nor scored a better try than the one which opened Cardiff's score. The South Africans took their defeat in a most sportsmanlike manner, and confirmed the opinion which had been formed that they were a great team of gentlemen and athletes. No visiting team to South Wales was ever thought so highly of as the South Africans, many of whom were carried off the field on various grounds in Wales, shoulder high."

After the match the teams dined at the Queens Hotel, and the visiting captain Paul Roos, and the manager Mr. Carden, spoke with magnanimity about Cardiff's play, the former stressing the greatness of Cardiff's veteran Gwyn Nicholls. South Africa's fine sportsmen left to take the 7 p.m. train for London, and at the Great Western Railway Station they were given a grand send off by a large crowd who sang to them—Auld Lang Syne. The gate on this atrocious day totalled 30,000 and unashamedly I quote the names of the teams, for posterity:—

SOUTH AFRICA: Full back, A. F. Marsburg; threequarter backs, J. A. Loubser, H. de Villiers, J. G. Hirsch and A. Stegman; half-backs, D. C. Jackson and F. J. Dobbin; forwards, Paul Roos (captain), H. J. Daneel, J. W. E. Raaff, D. J. Brink, W. A. Millar, D. Morkel, P. A. le Roux and W. A. G. Burger.

CARDIFF: Full-back, H. B. Winfield; threequarter backs, C. F. Biggs, R. T. Gabe, E. Gwyn Nicholls and J. L. Williams; half-backs, R. David and R. A. Gibbs; extra half-back (rover), P. F. Bush (captain); forwards, George Northmore, J. Brown, W. Neill, Jim Casey, Fred Smith, A. "Bobby" Brice and Jack Powell.

Referee: Mr Gil Evans. Touch judges: C. H. Carden (South Africa) and J. Davies (Cardiff).

As to the normal club fixtures, four of these were cancelled by frost, Old Merchant Taylors on 29th December, prudently in view of the South African match to take place three days later, Blackheath, Neath and Leicester. Our best results were gained over Moseley by 35 points to nil, and twice against the Barbarians 35 points to nil and 17 to nil.

In our team against the Barbarians on Boxing Day appeared Lt. Geoffrey Biggs who had been playing for United Services in the centre. He took the place of R. T. Gabe and played alongside of his brother Cecil Biggs, this talented member of such a great sporting family. Cardiff produced some brilliant back play and except for Lew George who scored one try, all the others came from our backs. J. L. Williams three, Cecil Biggs and R. A. Gibbs two each, Gwyn Nicholls scored one. The Barbarians' captain of the day was none other than A. F. Harding, Cardiff's former forward then with London Welsh. In Cardiff's big win over Moseley George McCraith scored four tries. During the season our captain dropped all the six goals. In the match against Devonport Albion on the 13th April he dropped two of them, and scored a try from a kick-off by running through the whole of the Albion's opposition.

Our three defeats were sustained in the first half of the season. The All Whites beat us soundly at Swansea in October by 14 points to nil, the great Willie Trew bagging two tries. At the Rectory Field, Plymouth, Devonport Albion scraped home against us by a converted goal to a penalty goal before a crowd of some 12,000. The remaining defeat was at the hands of Llanelli at Stradey by 14 points to 8 after Cardiff had led by 8 points at half time, this was one of Llanelli's best wins over Cardiff. The club's two drawn matches were with our rivals Newport, we had won the first two out of the four match series.

In our match with London Welsh on Christmas Eve, two Welsh international wings were in opposition, H. T. Maddocks of London Welsh and Cardiff's J. L. Williams, both played for Wales on opposite wings against England and Scotland. Williams maintained his place against Ireland but Maddocks was dropped in favour of Pontypool's D. "Ponty" Jones. Cardiff had seven players in the international against Ireland which Wales won by 29 points to nil on the Cardiff Arms Park, and four of them were responsible for no fewer than 26 points. J. L. Williams scored three tries, Gabe one try, Percy Bush one try and a dropped goal, and Winfield our full-back kicked a penalty goal and converted two of the tries. A try from "Ponty" Jones made up the 29 points tally.

Of interest was Cardiff's first visit to Cork to play the Constitution Club of the city on 29th April, the last of our season's fixtures. It created tremendous enthusiasm and a vast crowd of 10,000 were present to greet the conquerors of the South Africans. Cardiff were represented by a very strong team; Cork regarded as the best club side in Ireland, they had won the Munster Cup the previous Saturday, and they had the assistance of the famous Irish international threequarter Basil Maclear of the Monkstown Club. The Cork Workingmen's Prize Band entertained the crowd with the march "Bond of Friendship", the overture "Morning, Noon and Night" (Suppé) (the latter was possibly a suggestion of festivities to come) the selection "The Belle of New York", the valse "Moonlight on the Rhine", and "The Mikado" selection by Sullivan. "The Marsdyke Grounds were seen to advantage on this spring day, verdant, fresh and green."

As the teams entered the field, the band struck up "Men of Harlech", followed by "St. Patrick's Day". The kick off was taken by the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Bandon, K.P., Lord Lieutenant of the City and County of Cork. Cardiff were too good for the Irishmen and gave a splendid performance of running Rugby winning by two goals, three tries to a penalty goal, all the points except for two tries by the forward Billy Neill, came from our backs. The Cork Press wrote that "Cardiff's play was clockwork and a revelation to Irishmen". Quite a number of sight seeing events were provided for the Cardiff party, including a trip round the harbour, and a visit to the Blarney Stone which was duly kissed by some of our most intrepid of players. The late C. S. Arthur wrote "The hospitality and kind feeling shown us from the time we arrived until our departure will never be forgotten, and will leave us deep debtors to our Irish friends".

The top try scorers of the season were: J. L. Williams 19, Geo. McCraith and R. A. Gibbs 13, Cecil Biggs 10 and the veteran Nicholls eight. Caps and blazers were voted to Jim Casey, Frank Woods and Geo. McCraith. Casey made 29 appearances, J. Brown 28, Joe Pugsley and R. David 27, R. A. Gibbs, Ernie Harding and Billy Neill 24. Wales honoured nine Cardiff men, seven of whom played against Ireland, namely: J. L. Williams, R. T. Gabe, H. B. Winfield, R. David, Percy Bush, J. Brown and W. Neill. The Reserves (captain Geo. McCraith) played 27, won 20, lost 4 and drew 3, with points 331 to 52. Caps were awarded to T. Flocks, Gerald Heslop, D. J. Davies, Geo. Yewlett, S. Gillard, H. R. Jennings, Lt. A. Oppenheim, B. Moon and W. A. Jones, and amongst these players the best try scorers were T. Flocks with 14, Gerald Heslop 10 and W. A. Jones eight.

The club also did well financially, the balance now in hand being £1,110. Nine charities benefited to the extent of £122.3.11d., the Schools Union and the Cardiff & District Union £65.12.6d. and local clubs £58.0.6d. It was decided to limit the number of workmen's tickets, still only 2/6d. per season, with a view to checking that those to whom they were issued were genuine bona fide working men. There were 1,303 members, and the secretary's salary was now £150. The club was regarded as the best team in Wales, and the players were to be presented with silver cigarette cases as a souvenir of the great victory over the South Africans. On a personal note, the officials of the club presented the infant son of Gwyn Nicholls with a silver knife, fork and spoon.

Footnote: Bristol v. Cardiff, 19th January 1907. The Cardiff party de-trained in good humour at Ashley Hill Station, bound for the County Ground. Most of the party had crossed the railway bridge over the line when the cry was raised "What about the basket?" It was the cry of the trainer Jack Nash whose face was a study. The train was now steaming slowly but surely out of the station. The president looked at the secretary, the secretary looked at the president, blankly, until someone suggested a wire to the Bristol Club to get "the basket" retrieved and returned to the ground by cab, which was done. New boots were sent for, and the team was just about to go on to the field when the basket of kit arrived, and, perforce the match started an hour late. The visitors met with anything but a hearty reception. Cardiff were lucky to scrape home with a 6 points to 3 win. The basket? Well, this had been labelled for Bristol instead of Ashley Hill!!! It was not the last time that "The Kit" was to be left behind in the course of the club's history.