

CARDIFF'S PATRIOTIC LEAD.—A LADIES' RUGBY TEAM

At the Annual Meeting of 17th July 1914, R. F. "Bobby" Williams was appointed 1st XV captain for season 1914-15. Fred Spencer, another full-back, was to be captain of the Reserves XV. The war intervened and deprived them both of the honour of leading their respective teams. The war broke out on 4th August 1914, and there was a tremendous upsurge of patriotism in the land. Thousands upon thousands of volunteers besieged recruiting offices to enlist in His Majesty's forces, to answer Lord Kitchener's call to fight for King and Country. The Cardiff Rugby Club cancelled all of its arranged fixtures, as did most other Rugby clubs of amateur status. On the 31st August 1914 the Cardiff Rugby committee, its former player and now president, Mr. W. T. Morgan in the chair, met, and passed the following resolution:—

"That this Committee of the Cardiff Rugby Club unanimously resolve, in view of the present crisis in the history of the British Empire, to cancel all fixtures for the season 1914-15. Furthermore the Committee urge on playing and subscribing members of the Club, as well as footballers generally, and spectators of Amateur Rugby Football in the District, to do everything in their power for the good of the Empire."

The committee decided to hand over to the Marquis of Bute, with the consent of The Welsh Rugby Union and the Cardiff Cricket Club, all the structures on the Cardiff Arms Park, to be used in any way His Lordship might direct. Further, they agreed to offer his Lordship their services, individually and collectively, for any work he may invite them to perform.

On 2nd September 1914, the committee under its president decided to call, at urgent notice, a meeting to take place at only two days later, of all sportsmen, footballers, cricketers, baseballers, tennis men, golfers, hockey players, cyclists, oarsmen, bowlers, boxers, etc., to offer themselves for training in preparation for joining H.M. Forces in a sportsmen's battalion. At the meeting of 4th September, the president was supported by the Lord Mayor of the city, Alderman J. Robinson and high ranking military officers including Captain Masterman (brother of C. F. G. Masterman, former Cabinet Minister) who addressed the gathering. There was an immediate response and the first to offer himself for enlistment that evening was the club's 1913-14 captain, W. J. Jenkins. Others who followed him included Gus Lewis, Dan Callan, Dick Williams, M. Hourihan, E. Brooke, Rhys Davies, A. Hales, S. Sexton, D. Martin, A. Scott and J. John. On the very next day the club's office was opened as a recruiting station.

One of the early wartime charity events organised for the Cardiff Arms Park was an open air boxing tournament for 22nd May 1915. The organisers were Lieutenant James German, a prominent Cardiff dockman and Charles A. Barnett, editor of Cardiff's "Evening Express". There were many patrons of high rank who were already serving in H.M. forces. The top referees of Britain gave their assistance, including Eugene Corri, A. F. Bettinson and Major J. A. C. Partridge, known in the sporting world as 'Birdie'. Some of the boxers were already world famous, Sergeant Jim Driscoll who boxed Lt. H. L. Bassett of the 12th battalion Welch Regiment, Jimmy Wilde who boxed George Jones, young Fred Welsh, young Moody and J. T. Petersen father of Jack Petersen, who years later was to become British heavyweight champion.

Sports for wounded soldiers were held on the Cardiff Arms Park on 17th August 1917 and one who rendered valuable assistance to the organisers was Mr. Joe Rogers of Cardiff Hill's Dry Dock who was one of our club members and remained so until a ripe old age. There were two Rugby events of much interest. One to encourage recruiting and aid military charities was an 'international' match on 17th April 1915 between Wales and The Barbarians, who won the match by 26 points to 10. Four of our players were in the Welsh XV, Clem Lewis, R. F. Williams, Dan Callan and W. J. Jenkins. (The match was one of six organised by the Barbarian Club for charitable purposes during the war.) The other was quite an extraordinary event. A Ladies' Match, which took place on Cardiff Arms Park on 15th December 1917. The contestants were Cardiff ladies who were mainly employees of Hancocks Ltd. the noted Cardiff brewers, and Newport ladies who were employees at the Lysaghts works in their town. The Newport ladies won this novel match by 6 points to nil. Under the patronage of Mrs. "Ma" Rosser, the teams changed in the Grand Hotel, Westgate Street. Mrs. Rosser greatly assisted the cause of Rugby football in Cardiff for many years. A photograph of the Cardiff Ladies Rugby Team hangs in Cardiff Rugby Club's Museum. The Cardiff Ladies' captain, Miss E. Kirton was well known at the Grand Hotel later as an employee.

The armistice of the Great War was not signed until 11th November 1918, consequently, the season 1918-19 was not an official one and those matches played late in the season were to benefit wartime charities. There was however the tour of Britain of the New Zealand Army team which played 13 games in Wales including a match with Cardiff on 29th March 1919 and one with Wales on 21st April. Cardiff, captained by Frank Gaccon, drew the match in a no score encounter before a crowd of 10,000. At Swansea the tourists beat Wales by 6 points to three, Cardiff's Trevor Nicholas being one of the Welsh wings.

No records of the charity or inter-club matches played are available although some were undoubtedly played with a few Welsh clubs. John Billot's book on the "All Blacks in Wales" records the names of the Welsh clubs who met the touring New Zealand Army Touring team, they were: Abertillery, Abergavenny, Cross Keys, Ebbw Vale, Maesteg, Monmouthshire, Neath, Ogmore Vale, Tredegar and the unbeaten wartime team of the Pill Harriers Club, Newport.

In Cardiff's club-house, there reposes an excellent photograph of its wartime Charities XV and it is printed thereon that the sum of £1,942.7.7 was donated. The working sub-committee photographed are R. Fitzgerald, Jim Batstone, R. E. Dyer, with Frank Gaccon as hon. secretary. Most of the team formed the nucleus of Cardiff's post-war 1919-20 season, their names being: Tom McCauliffe, Crad Rees, Dai Llewellyn, A. Watts, Jim Birch, Arthur Hamens, Charley Oram, R. G. Stacey, Gus Hayes, Charley Bryant, Frank Gaccon (captain), S. Coleman, Wickham Powell, Johnny Coghlan, Joe Brookman, Fred Spencer, L. A. Pantlin and R. A. Cornish.

The club's annual report for 1914-15 (annual meetings did take place though very sparsely attended in wartime) showed that there was an overdraft of £2,080.7.10 with Lloyds Bank Ltd. The payments made during the season totalled £688.11.7, a goodly proportion of which related to expenses incurred before the war broke out. The only expenses incurred since the war started was the salary of the secretary who voluntarily asked for it to be reduced (£150 down to £100), and £78.18.1 wages for the attendant, the committee deeming desirable to retain his services to look after the ground and stands as well as possible during the occupation by units of H.M. forces.

The report on the statement of accounts for the first post-war season 1919-20 showed that the overdraft to Lloyds Bank Ltd. had been reduced to £1,182.12.3, a healthy sign of financial recovery.