

ST. ALBANS BAND AND HEAVYWEIGHT BOXERS

1919-20. P39, W21, L13, D5. Points 415-283.

The carnage of war was at an end, at a fearful cost in manpower, so many of them sportsmen, cut down in the flower of youth. After more than four long years Cardiff, like so many other clubs commenced its period of re-building. Frank Gaccon, one of our oldest forwards from pre-war years, capped for his club in 1908-09 was elected captain, but later in the season was succeeded by W. J. "Wickham" Powell, a very fast wing threequarter who gained four Welsh caps this season. Powell turned professional with Rochdale Hornets, later to return to Cardiff as mine host at the Cardiff Arms Hotel in Quay Street, and play bowls for the Cardiff Athletic Club.

About a dozen or so pre-war players were available, namely police sergeant Jim Birch, Dan Callan, R. A. Cornish, Dai Llewellyn, W. J. Jenkins (captain 1913-14), Jake Crowley, Joe Brookman, Willie Cornish, Charley Bryant, Fred Eames, J. Clem Lewis and Johnny Coughlin. Amongst the 54 first team players of the season, first team caps were awarded to T. C. Dean, scrum half, R. A. Cornish, Johnny Coughlin, centre and outside half respectively, R. "Dickie" Podd, scrum, Wick Powell, Tom Wallace, a versatile back, and the forwards Willie Cornish, Jake Crowley, Andy Dalrymple, P.C. Jack Prosser—an excellent line-out catcher, Crad Rees, and burly Idris Richards "the Bank". There was a very warm welcome for our pre-war players as they trooped on the field against Penarth on 13th September.

Fixtures had been arranged with nearly all of our traditional club friends; in addition The Army were entertained and beaten 22 points to 3, and the Welsh University Colleges who were beaten by ten unconverted tries to one try and one penalty goal; the latter match was arranged at the request of the Welsh Rugby Union with a view to the encouragement of Rugby football in the colleges of Wales. Our first home game with Newport on 4th October drew a gate of 20,000, and our oldest rivals secured three wins and a draw against us. Having available most of the Pill Harriers invincible wartime team, they were a tremendously strong and powerful team, they were to scourge the Cardiff team for the first five post war seasons. Under F. W. Birt's captaincy they amassed a total of 661 points to 86, they set the Rugby world alight in this post war season as did Cardiff under Jack Matthews' captaincy in post World War II season 1945-46.

We failed to beat Swansea with whom we had two drawn games and two defeats in very low scoring encounters. Our greatest successes were two wins over the Barbarians, whom we met on Boxing Day and Easter Saturday, prestigious victories indeed, and we pretty well slaughtered Old Merchant Taylors—by two goals, twelve tries to one goal, and Headingly by four goals, seven tries to one try. In our match against Headingly on 1st December, Charlie Bryant (club top scorer with 24 tries) notched four out of the eight unconverted tries scored, and got five in the match against Old Merchant Taylors, feats which evidently drew the attention of the Irish Rugby Union selectors. Against Headingly three of our players scored a hat trick of tries, Charley Bryant, Tom Wallace and Arthur Cornish, who obtained 21 in the season.

There was a rail strike at the beginning of the season and Cardiff travelled to Bristol by boat to Weston and charabanc to Bristol, where the game was played at Bishopstone and won by three goals 15 points to a try, 3 points. Guys Hospital arrived on the 10th April four men short and the vacancies were filled by Cardiff players, who subsequently and jocularly were called "doctor" by their own team mates, they were Dan Callan, Lew Jenkins and Dai Miller, forwards and W. "Billy" Affley at threequarter. The match, won by 15 points to three, was played on a muddy ground described as a "swimming pool". The Harlequins were one short on Easter Monday and they disguised the name of the replacement (probably one of the home team) as R. le. Quin. But perhaps the oddest feature of the season was the "ordering off" of our outside half, Johnny Coughlin, in our match with The Army on 13th December by the referee Mr. Beddoe Thomas of Newport, allegedly for kicking an opponent, a forward, who said he was kicked quite accidentally without any complaint on his part. Evidently the incident could only have been of an innocent character, but the referee had to be protected from the crowd as the teams left the field. The Army had no intention at all in putting Coughlin in the "Clink".

Uniquely, in this post war season, the club was honoured by the selection of three of its players for Ireland. They were Tom Wallace (captain), Charley Bryant in the backs and Doctor J. E. Finlay, in the pack. One player only, "Wick" Powell, played for Wales. W. J. Jenkins the veteran forward, the originally appointed captain of the Reserves, actually played in 29 of the first team matches. For many years he welcomed the great Harlequin player Adrian Stoop on the Quins' regular visits to Cardiff at Eastertime, very long after their retirement from the playing field.

Our Reserves XV had a very modest post-war season, and Fred Eames and Dan Callan, after the inclusion of W. J. Jenkins in the premiers, acted successively as captains. The official record is: played 30, won 17, lost 11 and drawn 2, with points in their favour by 251-156. Amongst many scorers, 31 of them, J. Butteridge was the top with eight tries. In a match with Talywain in February, Cardiff had the services of two local heavyweight boxers of repute in the persons of Bob Allison at full-back and Jack Tyrell in the pack, but their appearance did not appear to have deterred Talywain who won the match by 14 points to nine. Allison later became a trainer to the Cardiff City Club, Tyrell emigrated, successfully I believe, to the United States.

On an entertaining note, I must record the advent of the St. Albans Military Band who, from this season, have played at the Cardiff Arms Park in all weathers, for no fee other than that of a collection box at half time, which, quite often, is waived in the cause of charities. The brothers Tom and Ian Ryan were the original conductors who were succeeded by the present one, Mr. J. F. Williams, and an able secretary, E. Shanahan. In 1948, the band played the sentimental "Now is the Hour" to the delight of the crowd and the linked circle of the two teams after the match between the Barbarians and Australia, a most nostalgic occasion for all present. In 1958 they were appointed by the Welsh Rugby Union to play at international matches, and have done so ever since. I pay tribute today to their popular choice of musical items and anthems, played in resplendent scarlet uniforms to the capacity crowds of fervent Welshmen in particular, under the controlled conducting of its leader, J. F. Williams. They are unforgettable occasions.