

THE SECOND ALL BLACKS TOUR OF BRITAIN

1924-5. P42, W30, L9, D3. Points 507-253.

Thomas Albert Johnson with the nick-name of "Codger" was appointed captain and he nominated me as his vice-captain. Johnson was a schoolboy international from Cardiff's South Church Street Docks School, and after a season with the Penarth club he joined Cardiff in 1920-21 with a good reputation as a wing threequarter. He was not powerfully built but stocky and strong of muscle, a most determined and aggressive runner, a little selfless perhaps, a very strong tackler, assiduous in his training, and he earned for himself the mantle of 'Johnson the lion hearted'. This man who earned his living as a marine store dealer at Cardiff Docks, had learned to work and play the hard way, he was one of the best wings in his time, and another "character" of the Rugby game. He played 187 games for the club and twelve times for his country—at wing threequarter and at full-back.

With a run of ten victories in the first ten games, the season augured well, but ill-luck befell us, and owing to injuries and the defection of Arthur Cornish, we suffered four defeats in the next five games, on 25th October to Blackheath (A) by 26 points to 3, then to Aberavon (A) 11 points to 3, Newport (H) 6 points to 3, and to New Zealand at home by 16 points to 8, a result which flattered the All Blacks. The captain, injured, missed two of these vital games, as did I with a broken tendon in my wrist, suffered in the Aberavon game which kept me off the field for practically the rest of the season, whilst Arthur Cornish (all three of us were backs) after a disagreement with the club, transferred his services to Newport after four games in September. I was happy to have played a part in coaxing him back to Cardiff and he took part in the match with New Zealand, after having played against his old club for Newport only two matches earlier.

We were really out-played by Blackheath, mainly owing to the brilliance of Tommy Lawton at half back who was later to figure most prominently for New South Wales (The Waratahs) who, in 1927 defeated both Cardiff and Wales. Lawton kicked five goals against us, adding to my misery as I stood underneath the cross bar whilst he did so. But the club recovered from these early losses and were undefeated again until meeting Gloucester (A) on 21st February losing by 8 points to 6. In late March until 4th April, we had another treble lapse, losing to Bristol (A) 8-3, Swansea (A) 17-12 and Newport (H) 4-3, and the last but one match of the season was also lost to Llanelli (H) 13-11. In this quite a good season however, we achieved some very fine victories, particularly a most enjoyable one over the Barbarians by two goals, five tries to 3 goals, two tries 25 points to 21. The "Baa-baas" were captained by that still well known and popular forward A. "Jock" Wemyss who played for his country prior to and after World War I during which he served in H.M. forces and lost an eye.

But the match of the season of course was that against New Zealand on 22nd November before a gate of 40,000. These Second All Blacks proved to be invincible and were to win all 32 matches by 838 points to 116, but they were flattered by their win over Cardiff by 16 points to 8 as a try by Porter their captain converted by Mark Nicholls was allowed after a couple of palpable knocks on with some of us hesitating for the referee's whistle to blow; and again our pack—which had a really magnificent day and out-fought the All Blacks in the second half claimed a push-over try, but referee Captain A. S. Burge of Penarth was of course the sole judge. Our backs somehow lacked penetration, I remember mainly two items of mine, a dropped pass after a most promising heel from the pack; and tackling George Nepia the famous All Black full-back, frontally, as he was charging through to convert defence into an attacking movement, a tackle we both really felt. "Bobbie" Delahay our scrum half scored Cardiff's try and Dr. Tom Wallace converted it and kicked the penalty goal.

Easily the top scorer was our captain Tom Johnson with 25 tries and four penalty goals. Nineteen tries were scored by Arthur Cornish and ten by Trevor Nicholas. Players who gained their caps were Dan Collins, full-back, Danny Herlihy at outside half who had taken my place, two other backs in Percy Rayer and Trevor Nicholas, and forwards Jim Brown, Tom Lewis, Con O'Leary and "Ted" Spillane. The latter was the humorous master of the rhyming slang e.g. 'up the apples and pears' for 'upstairs' and so on. Ted was to give much service to the club as a player and attendant. "Codger" Johnson played for Wales against the All Blacks at Swansea, at full-back, W. J. Delahay our scrum half, and Marsden Jones, now of London Welsh, were also selected. But New Zealand avenged the 1905 defeat and won by 19 points to nil.

In addition to those of the fixture list, six additional ones regarded as special or unofficial scratch/charity games took place, they were mainly in the cause of finance and the W.R.U. had extended the official season into May. One of the matches was with Penarth, to open their new grand stand, but the most sparkling one from a player's and spectator's point of view was a mid-week one between Rowe Harding's Varsity XV and Cardiff, won by us by a mere one point, 26 points to 25. Two of the wings in opposition were our own captain and Rowe Harding himself—now Judge Harding, who gained all the Rugby Honours in his career, Cambridge Blue, Welsh international, British Lion to South Africa 1924, and in later years an able administrator at the Swansea club and the W.R.U.

Economy was still very much in mind with our club officials, for example, the away match with Newport expenses totalled but £72.0—"lower than ever before"; money was still owed in connection with the debenture holders for the purchase of the Cardiff Arms Park, but other needy clubs were not forgotten; the Harlequins pleaded for extra guarantee for the Easter Monday fixture and a cheque for £100 was despatched.

Another member of the Cornish family, Willie E. Cornish was appointed captain of our Reserve XV whose results were P31, W23, L6, with two drawn and 342 points scored, against 158. Willie Cornish was getting towards the end of his career with 157 first team matches to his credit when a promotion with his employers took him to Ireland, where, in Dublin subsequently, he often welcomed some of his old Rugby friends from Cardiff and Wales. His team's best results were scored over three local clubs, Cardiff G.W.R. 29-3, Whitchurch 27-0 and cup winners Cardiff Gasworks by 24 points to nil. The top try scorers were Reg Leon with nine tries, Trevor Nicholas eight, Percy Rayer six, and five for Tommy Burns the pugnacious brother of Jim "Ocker" Burns who were making their presence really felt in Rugby circles.