

H.M.S. CARDIFF ENTERTAINS AT PORTSMOUTH

1925-26. P44, W26, L14, D4. Points 486-354.

I was honoured with the captaincy and nominated W. J. "Bobby" Delahay our scrum half as vice-captain. It was a season of many changes in selection as the result of retirements, etc., involving experienced forwards D. G. Davies, Stan Davies, Arnold Rickard, Wally Palmer and Jim Brown. Dr. Tom Wallace had retired, and two of our international backs, Arthur Cornish and Tom Johnson were available for only half of the matches. But we were to be indebted to the Glamorgan County Police Force which, during the season, supplied the club with no fewer than twelve Rugby players, they were Sid Hinam, W. Ireson, J. H. John, the brothers Fred and Trevor Lee, Tom Lewis, Ernie Marsh, W. Ould, T. Parry, Cliff Williams (ex Llanelly) and Dai Thomas, and an inside half for a couple of games, Gwyn Williams. Two wing threequarters John Roberts and B. R. Turnbull were available when not at University of Cambridge, where they were destined to win their Blues and play for Wales, Kevin Turnbull a fine prop and dribbling forward was also to develop, and a young outside half from Bryncethin, Gwyn Richards, whose nephew Ken Richards was to assist Cardiff during the late fifties, also joined the club.

However, we started off fairly well and were unbeaten after twelve matches, until, on the 7th November we travelled down to Portsmouth and were beaten by the United Services by one goal and a try to nil in rainy and muddy conditions which the Services men overcame better than ourselves. On the morning of the match we were entertained on board the cruiser H.M.S. Cardiff. This was the ship which after the war of 1914-18, led the surrendered German fleet across the North Sea to Scapa Flow, where, subsequently, this fleet scuttled and sank at moorings. Unhappily to relate, it was the United Services who saw to it that the Cardiff Rugby Club was to be scuttled on 7th November 1925.

We lost only one more match—to Swansea (A)—before Christmas, and suffered a rather undeserved defeat at home on Boxing Day to Coventry by 11 points to 9 (scored by myself), mainly through some nervous play by one of our backs. Our best triumphs were over our closest rivals Newport and Swansea as we won three out of the four fixtures with them. Spectacularly perhaps, the wins over the Barbarians on Easter Saturday—8 points to 4, and over Blackheath the Saturday after our Easter programme by 23 points to 20 were most satisfying to player and spectator alike, and the author was much praised for his share in the two victories. But the Easter programme was heavy, and injuries and changes were the main cause of the rare defeats by the Harlequins by six points to five on Easter Monday, and by Northampton the day following by eight points to nil. For our match with Northampton we had three guest players, partly out of necessity, one of them, W. E. Crawford the captain of the Barbarians and Ireland's full-back, begged me on the tour to give him a game "in the Blue and Black jersey, I'll die happy". Ernie's request was granted, he was a very popular player whenever he appeared at the Cardiff Arms Park. Alas, his performance left much to be desired and even the great ones have their off days; the other two guests were John Durr a forward of Guys Hospital who had played for the Barbarians against Penarth and scored a try and kicked six converted goals out of seven attempts. Later in life, I was to meet Doctor Durr in Capetown during my tour to South Africa with the British Lions in 1955. Happy days! The third guest was Flt. Lieutenant J. S. Chick of the R.A.F. and the Harlequins, who, incidentally had played for the club against Coventry, Boxing Day.

In this rather low scoring season, I was top try scorer with twelve to my credit, Arthur Cornish and Tom Johnson each got eleven and Sid Hinam the forward did well with ten. New First XV caps were awarded to Cliff Williams, Jim Burns, A. V. Harding, Fred Lee, Gwyn Richards, John Roberts and Tom Parry. Club ties were also awarded to twenty players. 1925-26 was the last season for which our second string were named Cardiff Reserves and whose captain was Sydney Cravos, son of Steve Cravos who had played for the club in the 'nineties'. Syd had played for Dinas Powis and lived in "The Gables" in the village, almost abutting on to the Common there. We worked together very harmoniously. Syd's team played 28, won 15, lost 12 and drew one, scoring 396 points to 209. His top try scorers were T. R. Brown with 13, Henry (or "Enrico") one of a well known local family of Rugby players named Corsi, scoring seven, there were six players next in order with four each, namely Fred Lee, I. Smith, Charles R. G. Harris, Jere Blake (son of Jerry Blake, 1895-1902), Mortimer Evans and J. H. John.

The minutes of the club record that (1) the cost of high tea for the players was 3/- per head with four "dockets" for refreshment at 6d each (2) that a request for a donation for General Booth from the Salvation Army was turned down, but they were allowed to take a collection on the ground, at a match, (3) the use of the Cardiff Arms Park for a comic match to be played during Rag Week was granted provided that the students behaved themselves and did no damage, (4) the appointment of Trevor Preece as groundsman to the club. He proved to be an almost perfect one, and he served the club until the outbreak of World War II. Trevor for some time had a terrier dog whom he had trained to bump and dribble a Rugby ball by his nose from one goal post to the other during matches, at half time. "Jock" was popular.

Our secretary Charles S. Arthur died in December 1925, a passing much regretted by very many friends in the Rugby world, he had served the club as a player and captain and administrator from 1885. As secretary of the club, many of its meetings took place at his offices at 32 Park Place, Cardiff. As a young player arriving at the south stand side of the ground for a match, I was most regularly greeted by this bowler hatted gentleman of genial character with a friendly quip, and, sometimes, advice. He greeted members alike and I am glad to have known this cheerful man who did much to guide our club's destinies. L. C. "Jack" Watters succeeded Charles Arthur and served the club as a most able administrator until the second world war broke out, when, as an army reservist he was "called up" and served in Normandy in a Pioneering Battalion. He survived, and returned to the country to take up the post of secretary of the Cardiff Arms Park Greyhound Coy. Lts, and died in 1952.

Our rugby programmes of 1925-26 were of exceptional value for money—2d. per copy, which contained seven and eight pages of written matter alone. One of its issues referred to the paper back History of the Cardiff Club 1876-1907 written by the late Charles Arthur which was on sale for 1/- per book, wonderful value for any sportsman, and the proceeds in this instance were to assist in the running of the Cardiff Supporters Junior Rugby Team under the auspices of the club.