

CARDIFF PLAY FRANCE " B " IN TOULOUSE

MISS BABS FILER " SIGNS ON "

1930-31. P43, W27, L13, D3. Points 544—283.

This was the last season of the club's Two First XV's experiment. B. R. Turnbull, Cambridge Blue and holder of six Welsh caps, our strong running centre was the members'

choice of captain; Syd Cravos became vice-captain. Newcomers who were to make good with the senior team of Turnbull's were Geoff Babbage, ex-Cardiff High School at forward; G. V. Wynne Jones a young Westminster Bank official who had played previously for Bristol at threequarter; Emlyn Jenkins a brilliant scrum half from Treorchy who was tried also (and succeeded) at outside half, playing 16 consecutive first team games before turning professional much to the regret of his club and Rhondda followers; and L. M. Spence who was later to captain the club from the back row of the scrum.

H. M. Bowcott and Howard Poole, our half back pair were honoured by selection for the British Lions' tour to New Zealand and Australia and were not available for club games until November; Kevin Turnbull's services were lost because his business took him to London. But what might have been a very good season was marred by six defeats in succession from the 1st January at the hands and feet of France "B", Bristol, Aberavon, London Welsh, Gloucester and Newport; in this same period three matches were cried off owing to bad weather, namely with Bridgend, Plymouth Albion and Neath. Our best successes were against Blackheath (H) 25-0, Watsonians (H) 21-0 (seven tries unconverted), Plymouth Albion (H) 31-3, Coventry (H) 27-3 and Neath (H) 26-16.

Our leading try scorers were R. W. Boon with 23 (four against the Watsonians), Graham Jones 18, G. V. Wynne Jones 15, H. M. Bowcott 13 and John Roberts 11; Tommy Stone our diminutive full-back kicked 33 goals and got a couple of tries, one of them against our rivals Newport; in the match with the Barbarians which we lost by one goal, two tries to three tries, the visitors were helped by Jack Bassett, Penarth's full-back and British Lion on the last tour, and our former half-back Frank Williams, who played in the centre for them. Our defeat by Bristol by 28 points to 14 was the real surprise of the season, but three English caps in T. M. Barrington, Don Burland and the celebrated forward J. S. Tucker indicated strength. Senior club caps were awarded to Geoff Babbage, Emlyn Jenkins, G. V. Wynne Jones and L. M. Spence.

Alas for the Second (1st) XV, it was another dismal season with more points against us than for us, the actual record being P29, W12, L12, D5, points 147-169. The unlucky captain was Goff Retter, a baker who, after matches, had a penchant for bending pokers and the like wherever he clapped eyes on them. His task on the field was frustrating, there were eighty players tried in his team which he had to lead from the pack. Late in the season he resigned and Tom Burns deputised for most of the end of the season. We could not really field two so-called First XV's on the same day, and lost to Abertillery and Gloucester twice on the same days, to Bristol and Maesteg on the same day, also Llanelly and Cross Keys, and even Blaina at home and Swansea away. Only six tries were scored by the top scorers, namely G. E. Coupas and Iorwerth Evans. The only twelve goals were obtained by our P.C. full-back, Cyril Davies . . . a most friendly "cop" who, on the 14th March beat Penarth on his own by kicking a penalty goal, and dropping one in the very last minute, to the Seaside's solitary try, on the same day the Premier XV away defeated Plymouth. Another Glamorgan County policeman, Albert Cundy, suffered the indignity of being ordered off the field at Cheltenham by a referee who resided but a stone's throw from the ground!! The qualifiers for Second (1st) XV caps were P.C. Cyril Davies, Iorwerth Evans a wing from Pentyrch, George James a forward, Vernon Richards scrum half, and another wing, ex-Cardiff High School, H. Robertshaw.

During the previous season, the club had been invited by the French Federation of Rugby to play their France "B" team, "which was to become its international team", the invitation was accepted and Cardiff made the very long journey to Toulouse by train and boat and on New Year's Day 1931 became the first club to meet Franch "B". We were very well received, it was a really grand exhibition of Rugby, and France "B" won the game by one goal, three tries to one goal, two tries. This event, and the season, were unique. There had been rumblings of "professionalism" in French Rugby, and in fact, there was a break in international Rugby relations between the Home Unions and France which lasted until 1947, when, most happily, relations were resumed much to the delight of Rugby men, and I may say, to most all Welshmen in particular. As a young committee man with a dangerous smattering of the French language I recall the journey vividly, a most happy one in spite of a journey involving 1,800 miles from the 6.45 a.m. on Tuesday

30th December until arriving back at Bristol the following Friday about 9 p.m. to stay overnight at the Grand Hotel where we were privileged to meet one of France's brilliant entertainers of stage and screen, the late Maurice Chevalier. We were to meet Bristol and lose in a very close game the next day by two goals to two tries. The France "B" match was also unique for one of our brilliant young forwards Norman Fender who took part. He had made his debut for Wales against Ireland at Swansea in March 1930 aged nineteen-and-a-half years, and again against France at Stade Colombes in April 1930. In the latter Welsh team were also Archie Skym and Ronnie Boon, and these three players have the distinction of having played for Wales in a senior international *before* playing against France "B". The Cardiff team at Toulouse was: Tommy Stone, R. W. Boon, G. V. Wynne Jones, John Roberts and Iorwerth Evans. Howard Poole and H. M. Bowcott, forwards Norman Fender, Tom Lewis, R. Barrell, Archie Skym, Geoff Babbage, A. Clarke, V. R. Osmond and T. M. Williams. Our captain B. R. Turnbull was indisposed on the day and the popular John Roberts was appointed acting captain. A memorable day for Cardiff was this, and for France who also engaged their "B" team against Somerset County at the Stade Jean Bouin, Paris on the 24th January, and Devon County about the end of February or the beginning of March 1931.

Mr Ridgeway Fitzgerald, one of Cardiff's committee who was the South Wales representative of the Dunlop Rubber Coy. Ltd. was given permission to take a Cardiff fifteen to tour the Dunlop Rubber Works in Birmingham and play the Fort Dunlop Rugby Club on 28th April 1931. Amongst officials accompanying the party he included no less a personage than Cardiff's Lord Mayor, Alderman R. G. Hill Snook, and Mr. W. Forbes the city's transport manager and engineer. The "Western Mail" was represented by W. J. Hoare the popular Rugby correspondent well known in the Rugby world as "Old Stager". Hill Snook was a real dapper looking gentleman, a benefactor to our city and often admired by the townspeople (the citizens to be correct) as he walked erect, Edwardian bearded, and always with a splendid grey topper. On this occasion the topper was well and truly autographed and, somebody said, "baptised", but I am glad to say that all was done in banter, and a later Lord Mayor of the city, Alderman R. G. Robinson told me many years later "that it (the topper) was duly replaced". A happy day ended with a win for Cardiff by 29 points to nil, a few "jars", and a return home the same evening.

This is the season about which to refer to Miss B. C. Filer, known to this day as 'Babs', who, in her own right of service to the club established for herself, a part of its history. Our club's first bar was created from an oblong slice of the lofty gymnasium which adjoined the rear of our fine old pavilion and changing quarters of the Rugby and Cricket Clubs. A space beyond it was utilised by the caterers, Marshalls, for providing after match meals for players, it was large enough for a piano and to hold sing-songs. In its initial period, the bar had experienced four or five staff changes, until, in November 1930, "Babs" was appointed stewardess at the princely salary of £2 weekly. Quite a very young woman, in her teens in fact, tall, good looking, with a decorative taste and many other good attributes. She was to serve the Cardiff Athletic Club continuously until 1973, when, following a period in hospital and home with a nasty varicose ulcer, she retired from full time service on a very well earned pension from the Cardiff Athletic Club. During her service in the very first bar, its extensions, the old club house under the former north covered stand, and in the more palatial new clubhouse of ours opened in 1956, she established an unflappable control over her domain and staff. All sections of the club were well and truly catered for, but it was the Rugby club and its players and officials, naturally perhaps, which claimed most of her attention down the years. Consequently she became known to all Rugby football, and kindred sportsmen, at home and abroad. Her mail became larger than that of the greatest players of international reputation. During World War II with bombs and land mines dropping on the Cardiff Arms Park, Babs, in modern parlance, "kept her cool", when, owing to various war services, few officials were at hand in emergencies. Calmness and courage were needed then, she was surely worth a decoration of some sort. I wished I could have given her one. Throughout my long history with the Cardiff Club, I could always count on her immediate co-operation, we have been associated in very many happy occasions, our friendship is mutual. 'Babs' Filer made our club a

happy rendezvous for many thousands, she well merits the space I have given her in my effort to write the history of the Cardiff Rugby Club.

The R.F.C. minutes record that two of the Second (1st) XV players were suspended for damage above horseplay in the saloon of the train returning home from Stroud; that : Ossie Male resigned from the committee as the result of a misdemeanour affecting the W.R.U.: that some of the lesser clubs were asking to be relieved of part of their guarantees outstanding with Cardiff. Hard times. A complimentary dinner was given on 8th November to welcome back home our two British Lions, Harry Bowcott and Howard Poole.

International Wagons-Lits Co.

Itinerary: France " B " v. Cardiff at Toulouse, 1st January, 1931

Tuesday, 30th December, 1930

- 6.45 a.m. Depart Cardiff. Breakfast on train.
- 9.45 a.m. Arrive Paddington. Transfer to Victoria.
- 11.15 a.m. Depart Victoria.
- 12.53 p.m. Arrive Dover. Lunch on Train.
- 1.15 p.m. Leave Dover.
- 2.30 p.m. Arrive Calais.
- 3.06 p.m. Depart Calais.
- 6.23 p.m. Arrive Paris (Nord). Transfer to Hotel Palais D'Orsay, Dinner, Lodging.

Wednesday, 31st December, 1930

- Hotel Palais D'Orsay, Breakfast.
- 10.16 a.m. Leave Paris (Orsay). Lunch/Dinner on Train.
- 10.21 p.m. Arrive Toulouse. Transfer to Hotel De La Compagnie Du Midi.

Thursday, 1st January, 1931

- Hotel. Breakfast-Lunch.
- Transfer by coach to ground.
- 3.00 p.m. Match, France " B " v. Cardiff.
- Banquet Hotel Terminus.
- 9.05 p.m. Depart Toulouse. Sleeping Car.

Friday, 2nd January, 1931

- 9.05 a.m. Arrive Paris (Orsay). Breakfast Gare Du Nord.
- 10.00 a.m. Depart Paris. Lunch on Train.
- 1.15 p.m. Arrive Calais.
- 1.40 p.m. Depart Calais.
- 3.00 p.m. Arrive Dover.
- 3.30 p.m. Depart Dover.
- 5.15 p.m. Arrive London (Victoria).
- Transfer to Paddington.
- 6.30 p.m. Depart Paddington. Pullman Car, Dinner on Train.
- 8.47 p.m. Arrive Bristol.
- Transfer to Grand Hotel for overnight.

End of Wagons-Lit Services

Saturday, 3rd January, 1931

- Match. Afternoon, Bristol v. Cardiff.
- Return. Evening on train.

In September 1925, the late L. C. Watters, General Secretary of Cardiff Athletic Club at a meeting of the Rugby committee made a suggestion that they should run two First Fifteens instead of one First Team and one Reserve Team. His views were prompted by the needs of finance resulting from the purchase of the Cardiff Arms Park, and the likelihood of first class players being available, particularly amongst the backs.

Committee opinion was very much divided, but after several meetings it was finally decided by a bare majority of seven votes to six to adopt his suggestion with effect from season 1926–27. The experiment was to last for five seasons.

To help the committee make up their minds, the opinion of clubs was obtained and some of those in the top flight had misgivings, but most of those in the lower bracket regarded the scheme as a good one, as, in their case, it meant having *Cardiff* on their fixture lists instead of *Cardiff Reserves*.

Fixture cards printed showed the matches for each team, for the given Saturdays in one consecutive form. 78 matches were arranged for the season 1926–27. Actually 81 were played.

For each season of the experiment a captain and vice-captain were appointed in the accustomed manner, the former by the members and the latter by the committee following the recommendations of the captain, but the experiment caused much administrative confusion with selections of the teams, match records including those players, and for cap purposes, and even the description of the teams selected.

When some experience had been gained with running two First Fifteens, the committee found it necessary to have a player to specifically captain Cardiff's "Other Team", consequently captains were appointed, namely Syd Cravos, Dr. T. J. Pittard and Goff Retter for the seasons 1928–29, 1929–30 and 1930–31 respectively.

The term "Other Side" had come into regular use both inside the committee, and with clubs and the public. There was much ire in selection from time to time as to the "best team" to play against any given opposition, and top class clubs complained at receiving Cardiff's second team, or its "Other Team", according to mood, thereby deceiving their members and supporters. The Leicester, Aberavon and Northampton clubs were cases in point.

Leicester complained that Cardiff sent its "Other team" to play them on 10th November 1928, when, on the same Saturday date Cardiff played Newport at the Cardiff Arms Park, including in that side both the captain B. O. Male and the vice-captain Kevin Turnbull. The Leicester v. Cardiff match was rather unfortunate as both the Cardiff captain, Syd Cravos and Donald Macarthur another forward were ordered off the field for what was described in Cardiff circles as "trivial complaints".

Leicester's complaint may have been tinged with a measure of 'sour grapes'. They won the home match by only 8 points to 5, whilst at Cardiff Arms Park, Newport were beaten by 12 points to 6. On the return fixture at Cardiff Arms Park on 16th March 1929 Leicester were beaten by 8 points to 5 (the same score they had inflicted on Cardiff in November 1928) and Cardiff beat Gloucester at Kingsholm by 10 points to 5 on the same Saturday. Regrettably however, fixtures were broken off between the Leicester and Cardiff clubs and not resumed until 1945–46.

Northampton complained that for our match on their ground 12th January 1929, Cardiff had "fielded a weak, inexperienced, and unrepresentative side" and they would have to cancel the 1929–30 fixture. Cardiff had suffered defeat, heavily, by 29 points to nil, but on the Arms Park on the same day Cardiff succeeded in beating Swansea by five points to three. Happily in this case, Northampton apologised to Cardiff and fixtures were not broken off.

Aberavon's complaint was that for their match with us on 24th November 1928 "Cardiff's

best side was not being sent to Aberavon", and in this case the Cardiff committee hurriedly decided "that B. O. Male's side should be sent to Aberavon instead of playing Guys Hospital on the Cardiff Arms Park."

Cardiff's second First Fifteen (the "Other Side") fared disastrously in the 1929-30 season winning only five matches out of 27, with three drawn. It had now become evident to the Rugby committee that the two First Fifteens experiment was not a success, and it was decided that with effect from season 1931-32 the club would revert to running one First Fifteen and one Reserves Fifteen the latter to be called Cardiff Athletic Fifteen which Syd Cravos dubbed as "The Rags".

In the last season of the experiment, Cardiff's "Other Team" won only 12 out of 29 matches.

SOME EXAMPLES OF FIXTURE CLASHES

DURING SEASONS 1926/27-1930/31

1926-27

Oct. 23—Blackheath	(A) L 3-5	Maesteg	(H) L 0-14
Dec. 11—Abertillery	(H) L 6-8	Llanelly	(A) L 3-6
Mar. 12—Llanelly	(H) L 7-8	Maesteg	(A) L 7-22
Apr. 20—Northampton	(H) L 6-18	Ebbw Vale	(A) L 13-22
Apr. 23—Swansea	(H) L 10-13	Pill Harriers	(A) L 5-8

1927-28

Oct. 22.—Penarth	(H) W 6-3	Blackheath	(A) L 7-16
Nov. 19—Utd. Services	(A) D 0-0	Neath	(H) D 3-3
Feb. 11—London Welsh	(H) L 3-12	Llanelly	(A) L 9-15
Mar. 31—Llanelly	(H) L 3-6	Maesteg	(A) L 3-8
Apr. 9—Harlequins	(H) L 11-19	Torquay	(A) L 3-16

1928-29

Oct. 20—Blackheath	(A) L 10-14	Pontypool	(H) L 4-5
Dec. 8—Llanelly	(A) L 13-14	London Welsh	(H) L 10-14
Feb. 9—Llanelly	(H) W 19-3	Cross Keys	(H) L 3-9
Mar. 9—Plymouth Alb.	(A) L 6-12	Northampton	(H) L 8-11
Apr. 20—Skewen	(H) W 25-8	Maesteg	(A) L 5-23

1929-30. The Second First Fifteen (the "Other Side") had the most disastrous record in the club's history winning only five matches out of 27 with three drawn. From January 1930 until the end of the season not one solitary match was won, and losses were sustained successively against Bristol United, Cinderford, Edgware, Briton Ferry, Pontypridd, Skewen, Maesteg, Abertillery, Pill Harriers, Stroud, Treorchy, Bedford and Cheltenham, most of these against second class opposition.

1930-31

Sep. 13—Bristol	(H) L 14-28	Maesteg	(A) L 0-11
Oct. 18—Gloucester	(A) L 10-17	Abertillery	(H) L 3-11
Feb. 14—Gloucester	(H) L 4-6	Abertillery	(A) L 0-14
Mar. 28—Llanelly	(A) L 6-10	Cross Keys	(H) L 6-12
Apr. 11—Swansea	(A) L 5-8	Blaina	(H) L 3-6