

DEMISE OF ANOTHER—THE GREAT GWYN NICHOLLS

1938-39. P42, W31, L5, D6. Points 512—188.

This was a remarkable season in many ways, it had the least number of defeats since 1908-09. Wilfred Wooller was the club captain and W. E. N. Davis his vice-captain. As yet but 25 years of age, this outstanding figure of a centre threequarter, about 6 foot 3 inches and weighing over 15 stone was already an experienced international having gained Welsh caps from Rydale, Sale, Cambridge University and Cardiff; he captained Wales in her three internationals during this current season. He was a dominant personality on the Rugby field, he was certainly not averse to horse play off it. With his powerful build he was a most difficult man to tackle as he accelerated through his overlap down the centre. A kicker of remarkable length—dropped goals in abundance, he scored 163 points in this season of captaincy. Wooller was a strong personality, a real leader of men, an all round sportsman. His cricketing fame at Cambridge and for Glamorgan County Cricket Club and elsewhere needs no further embellishment from me. Suffice to say that his efforts and leadership this season added another page to the glories of Cardiff Rugby Club history.

The captain had to contend with the depredation of professionalism. No fewer than five talented players "went North", the first being Gwyn Williams (after 17 matches), Eddie Watkins, who followed him to Wigan (after 21 matches), Jim Regan, our hooker (after 18) Alban Davies who had joined the club from Cross Keys, a brilliant full-back prospect, and our best wing Arthur Bassett after 17 games. D. E. M. "Archie" Coombs from Cardiff High School Old Boys replaced Jim Regan as hooker, Graham Hales joined us as a wing, and we were fortunate to secure the services of W. R. Davies quite a brilliant outside half from Kenfig Hill to replace Cliff Jones who was not available. W. R.'s brother Cliff was to join Cardiff in 1945-46, but in the interim W. R. had succumbed to the Rugby League.

Our successes included three wins and a draw with Newport and Llanelli; Abertillery beaten by 39 points to three, two wins and a draw with Pontypool, and 'doubles' over Coventry, Harlequins and Richmond. We had a successful three match Cornish tour. Of our five defeats Bridgend took the glory by winning two by a dropped goal to a try at Cardiff and a try to nil at Bridgend. Gloucester (A) beat us 8 points to 6, Swansea (A) by 19 points to 14, and we went down to the Barbarians by 11 points to 6. Arthur Bassett with 23 was the top try scorer, Wooller got 12, Gwyn Porter 11, and nine came from H. O. Edwards. Wooller's 163 points included 12 dropped goals, a record at the time of writing for the number kicked in any one season. Five 1st XV caps were awarded: the recipients being E. L. Bevan, D. E. M. Coombs, Alban Davies, W. R. Davies and Graham Hales.

Only Wooller had any experience of "Sevens" and he was able to arrange only two hurried practices before the event on part of the Cricket Ground in the evenings. Exempted until the fifth round, Cardiff, led by its captain struggled manfully to beat St. Mary's Hospital by 7 points to 6, Metropolitan Police by 5 points to 3, Birkenhead Park by 8 points to 5, and in the final the experienced London Scottish seven by 11 points to 6. It was to be the first of Cardiff's successes in winning seven-a-side tournaments at the first time of entry, and the Cardiff Royal Infirmary benefited to the extent of £96.3.11.

Amongst two newcomers to the Cardiff Athletic XV were two other members of the Williams family from Taffs Well, Brinley a centre, and also Bleddyn, who made ten and four appearances respectively for the "Rags". By a quirk of fate the season was notable for Wooller's debut as captain, and the demise of another, Gwyn Nicholls, two of Rugby football's greatest centre threequarters, Cardiff's best pair since the era of R. T. Gabe and E. Gwyn Nicholls. Gwyn, prince of threequarters, died at his home in Dinas Powis on 24th March 1939, beloved and mourned by all Rugby sportsmen. At his death he was serving on committees of both the Athletic Club and Rugby Club, and, in my Rugby Club contribution to our annual report for 1938-39, I wrote, 'inter alia': "In the annals of the game, no player stood on a higher plane, for he added glory and lustre not only to the Cardiff club and his country, but, above all to the game itself."

The captain of "The Rags" was Ken Street the prop forward who had gained his First XV cap in 1934-35. His team's record was quite a good one, being: P32, W21, L8, D3 with 317 points to 165. By far and away the top scorer was Jim Hickey with 15 tries, the next in order being Dr. Ron Tipple with five, then Gwyn Porter and E. Gwyn Lewis who each got 4. The new Athletic XV caps were Len Arnold (full-back), Stan Bowes, Jim Hickey, Tom Holley, E. Knapp, R. J. Morgan, Roy Prickett and Harold W. J. Westlake. Dr. Tom Wallace became the club's hon. medical officer.

After serving the Rugby committee for the two previous seasons, Hubert Johnson failed to gain re-election for 1938-39, consequently he joined the Glamorgan Wanderers Club and donned a jersey again. During his war service in the R.A.F. Regiment, he took part in some of Cardiff's Wartime Charity games, and during Cardiff's official post war season of 1945-46 was co-opted to its Rugby committee.