

BLEDDYN'S CAPTAINCY. CLIFF MORGAN'S DEBUT. THE BARD OF KENFIG  
WALES WIN THE TRIPLE CROWN AND SUFFERS THE LLANDOW AIR DISASTER  
1949-50. P47, W29, L10, D8. Points 523-243.

Our brilliant centre threequarter Bleddyn Williams was appointed captain. For him it was a rather disappointing season as in the final trial on 7th January he damaged his knee badly and played only two club matches afterwards, and a total of 24 for the season. Fortunately his fitness was restored towards the end of the season and he was able to share in the honour of selection of five Cardiff players to tour New Zealand and Australia for the British Lions; these great players were B. L. Williams and Jack Matthews (centres), W. B. Cleaver and Rex Willis (half-backs) and that popular prop forward Cliff Davies. On tour in the Antipodes, Cliff became known as the "Bard of Kenfig", and with much Welshness always asserted that Kenfig was older than Jerusalem; he was a lovable character of a man who always played his heart out in matches.

We had lost only two important players, Ray Bale a good prop, and Haydn Tanner whose mantle was taken over with great success by Rex Willis at scrum half. Paul Ash a local boy and centre threequarter came along, as did our gentle giant of a forward Malcolm Collins a 16/17 stoner. Cliff Morgan at stand-off half made his first team debut on 22nd October against Cambridge University. Cliff's half-back partnership with Rex Willis, 1949/50-1957/58, became Cardiff's most successful pair in its history, until there came along Barry John and Gareth Edwards 1967/8-1971/72 to establish themselves as the world's greatest pair.

Cliff Morgan was the stocky, cheeky, dazzling type of outside half, quite rubbery after tackles, an opportunist and a good kicker withal. Tutored by "Ned" Gribble the caustic and knowledgeable sportsmaster at Tonyrefail, he eventually gained all the highest honours the Rugby game offered—29 Welsh international caps, British Lions tour 1955, and two Canadian tours in Canada for the Barbarians whom he captained. He arrived at the peak of his greatest form in South Africa in 1955 when I was hon. secretary to the touring team. The South Africans took him to their hearts, and I remember one occasion when a South African daily cartoonist depicted two Rugby fans arguing after a match, a British Lion supporter and a South African who is depicted as saying "You give us Cliff Morgan, and we'll give you back Simonstown". Off the field he was the joker, the story teller (*he could stretch them*) strong singer and choirmaster, creating much enjoyment in which I happily shared. I think I should record here that Cliff, and another great outside half of the past, Percy F. Bush share a most unique Cardiff distinction, in that both appeared in winning teams against New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, namely:—

P. F. Bush 1905-06 for Wales v. New Zealand, Cliff Morgan 1953-54 for Cardiff v. N.Z.

P. F. Bush 1908-09 for Cardiff v. Australia, Cliff Morgan 1957-58 for Cardiff v. Australia.

P. F. Bush 1906-07 for Cardiff v. South Africa, Cliff Morgan 1955 for Br. Lions v. S. Africa.

But now back to Bleddyn's year. He was an excellent captain and got the best out of his team, although the results were not so good as those of the post war years, the number of changes, his injury, the calls of Welsh trials and internationals being mainly responsible. His own splendid ability remained when on the field, he could show, what so many of his admirers forgot, that his judgement in giving a pass to a colleague—however close, or at a distance from him, was perfection and made many tries. It was a bitter blow to Bleddyn, that, having been appointed captain of the Welsh team to play England, his injury in the final trial prevented him playing and he was unable to take part in the other remaining selections for his country.

We were most successful against our rivals Newport, winning three out of the four matches, but ten losses and eight drawn games dimmed the season's results. Yet we lost to only two Welsh clubs, Swansea twice and Newport once. We lost to Coventry twice, Northampton (A), Wasps (A), Cheltenham (A), Barbarians (H) and Penzance-Newlyn (A). None of our five British Lions were available after the 25th March, and of the remaining matches we won four, lost three and drew two. But the "Blue and Black magic" still drew record gates at home and away. Our home match with Swansea on 15th October drew a crowd of 35,000 who watched a game which was a spectacle of great Rugby football. The "All Whites" won by 18 points to 12. Swansea had a fine pack, and at half back Alun Thomas and Roy Sutton opposed our Billy Cleaver/Rex Willis combination.

Although playing in only 24 games the captain was top scorer with 23 tries. Our wings Terry Cook got 21 and Russell Burn 17. J. D. Nelson a fine back row forward scored eight. First team caps were awarded to Paul Ash, Malcolm Collins, Peter Goodfellow, Gower Jenkins another promising prop, Sid Judd and Cliff Morgan. Rex Willis made his debut for Wales against England to gain the first of his 21 international caps. In this match which Wales won, Cliff Davies scored a try from an opening created by the young Lewis Jones from half way. It was also the latter's debut, he was not then nineteen years of age.

There were a number of notable events during the season, one of which was the tour to France again to play our French friends at Cognac and Nantes. The Bridgend Club had lost their ground, the Rugby League were playing in the town. The Cardiff club assisted Bridgend by loaning them the Cardiff Arms Park for two of their "home" matches, namely, against Pontypool on 12th November and Newbridge on 18th February. Serious efforts were made to establish the professional game in Wales and one of the prime movers was the late Horatio Evans a businessman who had become somewhat disgruntled with the Cardiff and Welsh Rugby Union affairs. For some time matches were played by the Cardiff Rugby League Club at Penarth Road, Cardiff, and although professional teams were started in Bridgend, Llanelly, Neath, Ystradgynlais and a few other places, the efforts to establish professional Rugby in Wales failed, as it had done some forty years previously.

The Welsh Rugby Union in a five point plan to further interest in the amateur code, appealed to the senior clubs to establish junior or youth teams (itself had set up the Welsh Youth Rugby Union) and asked them to send "Missionary teams to smaller clubs". Cardiff promptly responded and formed its Junior XV which today is an exceedingly successful team. It responded again by sending the Cardiff team to play an Amman Valley and Llchwyr XV at Cwmamman Park, Glanamman. The Gloucester programme of 10th December described Cardiff as "the champion post-war team of the Rugby world", and Swansea's of 28th January bid "Welcome to Cardiff the greatest crowd drawing club in the game". Praise indeed. On Boxing Day 1949, the day of the match between Cardiff and the Wasps, the Gwyn Nicholls Memorial Gates were formally opened by Rhys T. Gabe who as the rugby world knows was a colleague of Gwyn Nicholls—prince of centres. The president of the Welsh Rugby Union Sir David Rocyn Jones, Gwyn Nicholls' son Ivor, Mr. Cliff Pritchard, were amongst the many admirers to the great sportsman at the ceremony.

On the 11th March Wales defeated Ireland in Belfast by six points to three to win the Triple Crown after a lapse of 39 years. Jack Matthews, W. B. Cleaver, Rex Willis and Cliff Davies shared in the victory. I remember well the last few minutes of the game, the Irish forwards seemingly berserk in their pounding efforts to save the game, and the courage of Rex Willis going down to the ball to stop them, as he did successfully. The next day, Sunday 12th March in the early evening a large crowd gathered at the Cardiff Central Railway Station to meet the victorious Welsh players and officials of whom I was one. Led by St. Albans Military Band, the Cardiff players were transported to our clubhouse where the tremendous enthusiasm was suddenly and tragically dimmed by the shocking news which came through that a large Tudor V aircraft with more than 80 Welsh supporters on board had crashed nearby at Llandow airport. They had been returning happily from Dublin laden with gifts and souvenirs, etc., of the Welsh victory. There were but three survivors and amongst those who died was the secretary of the Cardiff Supporters Club who had organised the trip in the charter aircraft. Many were the touching enquiries which came to our club from all parts concerning those who may have been in the aircraft. It was a never-to-be-forgotten sequel to the winning of the Triple Crown by Wales for the eighth time.

During the season, the question of professional Rugby football was considered following an approach to clubs by the W.R.U. and the management committee of the C.A.C. passed a resolution to the effect "That no person who is, or has been, engaged in the playing, administration, promoting, or fostering of Rugby League Football, or other Professional Rugby shall be admitted to the club either as a member or as a visitor." The Cardiff Athletic Club also extended honorary life membership to Sir David Rocyn Jones, C.B.E., K.St.J., D.L., J.P., president of the Welsh Rugby Union, and to Messieurs Henri Picherit and Marcel Pedron who had done so much to establish good fellowship between the Cardiff and Nantes clubs.

The Cardiff Athletic XV (a wag this season dubbed them "the bundle of rags", in a sporting sense of course) was captained by the Rev. Howell Loveluck, the season's results being: P33, W19, L10, D4 with points 258 to 141. Not very spectacular, but many good and promising players were fed to the First XV. Malcolm Davies was top scorer with 13 tries—including six in the match with Glynneath. The captain's five were the next in order. Gwyn Davies kicked 14 goals, Cliff Morgan seven and one try. New Athletic caps were awarded to J. Bladen, H. H. Cometson, Malcolm Davies, P. V. Davies, Mike Evans and a good prop from Treorchy, Arthur Hull. In its initial season our newly formed Juniors XV under the captaincy of Peter Owen played 22, won 17, lost 1 and drew 4 with points 497 to 52, a most successful debut which promised well for the future.