

BLEDDYN WILLIAMS CAPTAIN. HIS PROPHECY TO EAMONN ANDREWS

1953-54. P49, W37, L9, D3. Points 616—284.

The defeat of New Zealand at our fourth attempt overshadowed all other events of the season. In Great Britain the touring All Blacks captained by Bob Stuart suffered only one other defeat, to Wales, by 13 points to 8. Swansea had gallantly held them to a draw of six points each, and Ulster also at five points all. Prior to the match with Cardiff, the New Zealanders had beaten Llanelli on the previous Tuesday by 17 points to three, their captain sustained a leg wound and was unable to play against Cardiff. Bleddyn Williams, the greatest centre threequarter of his time, of world-wide Rugby experience was appointed club captain; Sid Judd pack leader was again appointed vice-captain.

Bleddyn had long planned tactics to defeat the All Blacks, he had gained much knowledge from his tour to New Zealand in 1950 with the British Lions. Simply, it was to "run at 'em", make their pack run about the field and tire them. To his own forwards he said, "give me two-fifths possession of the ball and we'll win". He had a grand XV to lead although his own pack was much lighter than that of the All Blacks, but he also knew that the atmosphere of the Cardiff Arms Park was worth a couple of points to the home team, and could be unsettling for a while to the visitors. A day or two before the match the well-known broadcaster Eamonn Andrews visited the club for some 'copy'! We took him from the old clubhouse bar under the north stand to one of our committee rooms. Pointing out a blank space on one of the walls (having been asked our chances for the match) Bleddyn said to Andrews "That is where we are going to hang a photograph of the Cardiff team that beat the All Blacks". It was a most confident prophecy, the victorious Cardiff players celebrate the occasion annually.

The great day came. The All Blacks duly performed "The Haka" much to the enjoyment of a 50,000 crowd, greatly partisan no doubt and eager to spur on the Blue and Black jerseyed men. The gates were closed. Cliff Morgan kicked off towards the Westgate Street end. Could we get enough good ball, could our pack hold the heavier All Blacks? The conditions were perfect, and to give readers some impression of the game itself, I now give the relevant extracts from the club's annual report for 1953-54.

The teams were:—

CARDIFF—J. E. G. Llewellyn. G. Rowlands, Alun Thomas, Bleddyn Williams and Gareth Griffiths; Rex Willis and Cliff Morgan; Stan Bowes, G. Beckingham, J. D. Evans, M. Collins, Eddie Thomas, C. D. Williams, Sid Judd and J. D. Nelson.

NEW ZEALAND—R. W. H. Scott; E. G. Elsom, J. T. Fitzgerald, R. A. Jarden and D. D. Wilson. L. S. Haig (capt.) and V. D. Bevan; H. L. White, R. O. Hunt, K. L. Skinner, W. H. Clark, G. N. Dalzell, R. A. White, D. O. Oliver and W. A. McCaw. Referee: V. S. Llewellyn.

All the scoring was done in the first half, Cardiff scored first. Cliff Morgan received the ball from Rex Willis, put in a short punt ahead, raced up and caught the ball on the rebound from one of the defenders. He passed it to Alun Thomas, who, after making some ground passed it to Gwyn Rowlands who cross-kicked towards the posts. Sid Judd, dashing up at full speed caught the ball and crashed over for a try underneath a group of All Black defenders. Gwyn Rowlands converted. The try was followed by a magnificent penalty goal from R. A. Jarden, from a range of 45 yards. With the score at five points to three in Cardiff's favour, the Cardiff pack was going great guns against its heavier opponents and our side doing the pressing, the excitement was intense. It reached fever heat when after another excellent pass from Rex Willis to Cliff Morgan, the ball reached Bleddyn Williams who put in a perfect short punt. The ball was gathered by Alun Thomas who raced up to Bob Scott the full-back before giving a long pass to Gwyn Rowlands who ran thirty yards and scored in the corner. The kick for goal failed. There was no more scoring and Cardiff were worthy winners by eight points to three, thus completing a wonderful record of having defeated all three commonwealth countries—South Africa 1906-07, Australia in 1908 and 1947, and now New Zealand in 1953.

Dave Phillips in the "South Wales Echo" wrote "For 80 minutes we saw the traditional skill and fire of what has rightly been termed 'The greatest Rugby Club in the World', countered by the all action enthusiasm of a determined All Black side who tried everything in their power to whittle down Cardiff's half-time lead of five points in a storming grand-stand finish."

J. B. G. Thomas in the "Western Mail" wrote, "What a game it was! How magnificent the players performed. The blood raced through their veins as they bent to their tasks in attack and defence. The voice was raised to cheer as Bleddyn Williams and his fellows split open the New Zealand's defence like a destroyer's bow ripping through the flimsy hull of a crippled submarine. The Rugby triumph which had eluded Cardiff since 1905 was achieved in a match full of excitement and glory accompanying a great sporting occasion."

Then from a leading article in the "Western Mail" on Monday 23rd November 1953, we take this extract: "We do not think that the passing of the years will ever dim for us the gleam and glory of the historic encounter at the Cardiff Arms Park on Saturday, or tarnish the memory of Cliff Morgan's darting and swooping across the turf and skimming past every obstacle like a swift at play. There was greatness in that clash of bone and sinew wherein the impenetrable object that was the Cardiff pack successfully withstood the supposedly irresistible force of the New Zealand 'terrible eight'."

The Cardiff team had played magnificently and towards the end of the game appeared stronger and fresher than their opponents. Out of the profits of programme sales the club donated the sum of £250 to the Welsh Youth Junior Union as the latter had lost a good gate through the cancellation of its match with Munster.

The season's results were very good. We had lost W. E. Tamplin, but Sid Judd was now an excellent pack leader and vice-captain. Sid Judd, Gareth Griffiths, Rex Willis and Cliff Morgan each played three times against New Zealand, for their club, Wales and the Barbarians. The vice-captain also scored a try for Cardiff and Wales against New Zealand. Gwyn Rowlands, Alun Thomas and the captain also played for Wales, and it speaks well of our reserve strength to record that against Swansea on Wednesday 7th April we had no less than ten of our players involved in the following Saturday's international match with France, as players and reserves. Yet we succeeded in beating Swansea 13-10. Our best successes were over Newport—three wins and one drawn game; all three Easter time matches were won as were the three on the Cornish tour the following week end. Surprisingly amongst our defeats were those at the hands of Combined Services (H) by 18 points to 9, Northampton (A) 22-9, Old Belvedere and Bective Rangers in Ireland on tour in February 9-3 and 21-8, and to Cheltenham in a mid-week match by 12 points to six. But there was a splendid flourish towards the end of the season and only one match of the last nineteen was lost.

Bleddyn Williams with 17 was top try scorer, Gwyn Rowlands got 16 and kicked 33 goals to amass a total of 127 points, Sid Judd 10 tries, Cliff Morgan 9, and seven each by Colin Bosley and Derek Murphy. Club caps were awarded to Colin Hewitt, Glyn Morgan, Howard Nicholls and D. J. Walsh. Stan Bowes had been appointed captain of the Athletic XV, but his form was such that he commanded a place in the First XV to the extent of 36 first team matches, a fine performance by this alleged veteran. Peter Goodfellow succeeded him and the record of the "Rags" was P35, W26, L6, D3, points 531 to 161. Peter made a good job of his captaincy and was to go further in this field. He called upon 68 players, and those who scored most tries were Derek Murphy 10, Colin Hewitt and Bryn Mapstone 9 each, J. M. Griffiths—brother to Gareth, and Howard Nicholls 7 each. John Dodd, Mike Evans and J. H. Thomas were amongst the rest of the scorers with five each. Alan Priday was the leading kicker with 38 goals, Bryn Mapstone was also successful with 22. Six new Athletic XV caps were awarded: to Colin Bosley, John Dodd, J. M. Fitzgerald, E. Forster, Colin Howe and Lloyd Williams.

Our Youth XV (Cardiff Juniors) played 28 matches, won 18 and lost 8 and drew two, with points 221 to 95. The Juniors were now beginning to feed the two senior fiftens.

Television was widening its field. Coverage of Rugby football was now becoming a matter of much concern to the Home Unions. The Welsh Rugby Union issued a circular to all of its clubs to ascertain their views. The majority of Welsh clubs were in favour of television, but not all the senior ones. Our own club was in favour. The gates of the senior clubs were to suffer as seasons passed but television had come to stay and entice countless thousands of Rugby sportsmen away from the playing fields. The late Lloyd Lewis, sports writer and broadcaster was much in favour of TV and after an annual general meeting of the W.R.U. we had a conversation together. His ideas were not finalised but one of them suggested that a fabulous payment might be made to the Home Rugby Unions to cover the gate losses of clubs, provided that the media could exercise some form of control over club fixtures. Pigs can now fly, and we have landed men on the moon.

The Cardiff Rugby Supporters Club (president Percy F. Bush and G. B. Jones, hon. secretary) held an annual dinner in the Royal Hotel. The players who had triumphed over the All Blacks, club officials and the press were invited to a happy function. Amongst those who spoke at the gathering were Rhys Gabe of 1905 fame and Billy Cleaver. On the menu card was printed "Cardiff's victory over the All Blacks was and will ever remain one of the finest games of all time."