

DEBUT OF GARETH EDWARDS

THE LAST CRICKET MATCH ON CARDIFF ARMS PARK

The records of our teams for 1966-67 were as follows :—

	P	W	L	D	For	Against
First Fifteen	47	35	9	3	691	322
South African Tour	5	2	2	1	84	71
Athletic XV	38	34	3	1	977	227
Extras XV	23	17	5	1	292	109
Juniors XV	26	12	11	3	276	161

1966-67 was a most eventful season, an unfortunate one for our captain Keith Rowlands in his second term as he broke his leg in our home match with London Welsh on 31st December and did not play again. This was an unfortunate coincidence as Elwyn Williams had also broken a leg, playing against London Welsh at Crystal Palace on 10th September and it kept him out of the game until 18th March. Last season there were two broken jaws sustained by our two full-backs Alan Priday and Alan Drew. Our vice-captain Billy Hullin deputised for the captain until the end of the season and did the job well.

We had an excellent intake of some very promising players, Dennis Gethin the Cambridge Blue full-back, Phil Morgan to improve our outside half problem, Keri Jones the very fast wing from the training college, D. J. "Bill" Carling a Welch Regiment officer a rugged prop, and Gareth Edwards. Maurice Richards was now a class player, Gary Samuel was also available and was versatile. These players, together with the rest of the established ones, helped the team to play some really excellent running Rugby when at full strength.

Gareth Edwards was a nineteen-year-old young man from the village of Gwaun-cae-Gurwen, with a background of Rugby, developed at Millfield College where he gained Secondary School international caps, and at Cardiff Teachers Training College. He made his débuts with Cardiff Athletic XV—"The Rags"—which beat Briton Ferry (A) on 10th September by 30 points to 5, and Bristol Utd. (A) 14th September, a drawn match of six points each. In the former match he scored three tries, and in the latter, the six points, one try and one penalty goal. Three days later he made his 1st XV début against Coventry at home which was won by 24 points to six. I well remember entering these personal feats in the club's official records, and thinking, "We've got something here!" Gareth made his first overseas tour with Cardiff, to South Africa in May 1967, and was to make another seven—to South Africa, New Zealand, Canada and Rhodesia for the British Lions, Barbarians (Canada) and Rhodesia for Cardiff.

Having played with, and watched some of the club's great scrum halves for more years than I care to remember—Tommy Dean, Bobby Delahay, Maurice Turnbull, Haydn Tanner, Rex Willis and Lloyd Williams, I now rate Gareth as the best of them all. Present day Rugby has been revolutionised—for the better—and accepted coaching methods and law changes have involved the scrum half more than any other player of the team, particularly around the base of the scrum, the line out, and at—and in—the rucks. Gareth is superior in all the essentials, well built and strong, courageous and a most determined runner. He has the longest of passes, is a prodigious kicker of the ball and crafty touch finder. Many thousands of Rugby men and countless millions of sportsmen have been fortunate to see him in the flesh and on television, scoring two of the most memorable tries in Rugby history. The first, his 80 yards solo run for a try for Wales against Scotland at Cardiff in 1972, and the culminating try after a 90 yards movement by the Barbarians in their greatest and most brilliant victory over New Zealand at Cardiff in 1973. At the time of writing, Gareth has already captained Wales eight times, holds 35 Welsh international caps, and is currently touring as vice-captain of the most successful Lions of all time in South Africa; playing at the peak of his career as did Cliff Morgan on the Lions Tour to South Africa of 1955. He is now rated as the world's best scrum half, and I heartily concur. I would indeed like to see him as captain of the Cardiff Rugby Club before retiring from the game he has so much adored.

On 3rd September we received the West German XV, defeating them by 41 points to three, John Huw Williams scoring three tries and Dennis Gethin kicking eight goals. The Germans were a very sporting lot but lacking in basic skills. Cardiff were much the fitter team after strenuous pre-season training. The Germans must have noted a lot, and would benefit from more contact with British Rugby clubs.

Except in the matter of points, 1966-67 was exactly the same as 1965-66 in terms of results and we had many successes, particularly the victory over the Australians, and over our Newport rivals by 27 points to nil. At Christmas time we won four matches in eight days against Welsh Academicals, Liverpool, U.A.U and London Welsh. After the latter match, in which the captain had broken his leg, we lost two in succession to Aberavon and Coventry in January, but under Billy Hullin's acting captaincy, only two more were lost until the end of the season, although they were heavy ones—to Newport 17-0 and Bridgend 21-8. We won all of our April matches, the last three being on the Devon tour against Torquay, Newton Abbott and Paignton.

Our greatest achievement was beating the Australians on Guy Fawkes day, there were some fireworks, but they were set alight by Cardiff as we won by 14 points to eight and recorded our fourth successive victory over Australia, although New South Wales "The Waratahs" beat Cardiff in that isolated fixture of 1927. Roy Bish had coached our team well, they rose to the occasion and the pack played magnificently, denying possession to the Wallabies and harassing them sharply when they did have it. Keith Rowlands and Lyn Baxter were dominant in the lines out. Billy Hullin at scrum half was a match winner, out-smarting his opposite number Ken Catchpole, scoring a try and a drop goal. He also made the break for Ken Jones's try, which Ray Cheney converted and also kicked a penalty goal. S. Boyce scored Australia's try which was converted by their full-back J. Lenehan. P. Hawthorne their half-back dropped a goal. John Thornett their captain was absent being down with impetigo, but this popular team of his went on to beat England and Wales. A cheque for £9,113.4.11, the match proceeds, was sent to the W.R.U. Each affiliated club received a bonus of £50. Cardiff made a profit of £304 on the programmes.

We played Cardiff Training College in October and won 21 points to six, Ray Cheney who had joined us from Newport was a match winner with five goals. The college team included Gary Laycock, David Griffiths, Gareth Edwards, Roger Beard, all of whom were to join the Cardiff Club. For our match with Neath at home on 17th December they were very strong at forward (their pack being Ron Waldron, Morlais Williams, John Dodd, Brian Thomas, Jeff Pyles, B. Davies, Dave Morris and R. Williams) a neutral referee was appointed, Paddy D'Arcy of the Irish Football Union. He was wanted, and a close game gave us a narrow win by nine points to six. Ebbw Vale, Cross Keys and Bridgend were played in Floodlight Alliance fixtures but this tournament was becoming administratively unpopular. We lost to Newport in the final of the Welsh (Snelling) Sevens by 21 points to 15. David Watkins being in form with the good Newport Seven. Then came our tour to South Africa.

This was a huge success, and the tour party managed by Lyn Williams, club chairman, and Haydn Wilkins, honorary secretary, could never have been treated more hospitably than they were by their kindly South African, and South West African hosts. They were made very welcome in the highest of circles, and at the Rhodes Fruit Farm prior to the match with Southern Universities, lunch was taken with the South African Prime Minister Dr. John Vorster. Cardiff gave an excellent account of themselves and inflicted upon Eastern Province—conquerors of the British Lions on a number of occasions—a rather humiliating defeat by 34 points to nine, of which we scored 29 in the first half. Haydn Wilkins reported that our display was fantastic, tries being scored "the like of which I have never seen". Maurice Richards who had an excellent tour, contributed no fewer than nineteen points made up of three tries and five conversions. It was a tired team which arrived at Johannesburg for the last match, they had left Cape Town at 6 a.m. on the Thursday prior to the match with Eastern Transvaal. The refereeing was not understood, we made some foolish errors and consequently lost by 25 points to five. The 'Management' reported that the tour was both pleasurable and exacting, and that the behaviour of the players was admirable. Readers will find the results in the statistics of the club with South African teams.

The top scorers for the season, including the S.A. tour matches were: Ray Cheney 151 points from 61 goals, Maurice Richards 117 from 33 tries and eight goals, Keri Jones 23 tries and John Huw Williams nine. Lyn Baxter made most appearances, 43 matches, and John Hickey, Tony Pender, Maurice Richards, Billy Hullin, Gerald Davies, John O'Shea, W. J. Thomas and W. Clive Evans all played 30 matches or more. Gerald Davies, Billy Hullin, John O'Shea, Gareth Edwards and W. H. Raybould now of London Welsh, each gained their first Welsh caps.

The Athletic XV had an extraordinary season. Dai Hayward the captain was injured in the third match and was out of action for the next twelve. On recovery he led his team with drive and vigour, exhorting them always to "move it"—and play running Rugby. His team of young and experienced players responded well and the result was the achievement of the best record of any of our reserve teams in our history, amassing the colossal total of 977 points in 38 matches, an average of 25 points per match with the try value at three points. The Athletic XV won the Silver Ball Competition winning all of the stipulated twelve matches, beating Aberavon Quins in the final, at Bridgend, by 27 points to nil.

A scoring record was created by Robert Bassett the young full back from Kenfig Hill. He is the nephew of the brothers Bassett who played for Cardiff prior to the war. The record was made up of 101 goals and four tries for the Athletic XV—228 points, six goals, one try for the 1st XV—18 points; eight goals, one try—21 points for the Extras XV, in all 267 points. For "The Rags" the 'men of the year', Hayward and Bassett. P. Lyn Jones was top try scorer, his 28 included six in the match against Old Penarthians on Christmas Eve, they were beaten 36-6. Steve Hughes got 24, Frank Wilson 15, John Uzzell 14, Roy Morgan a splendid back row forward 13—with three for the first team in addition. The youngsters Brian and Bernard Evans each had 10. Amongst many of Bob Bassett's feats was kicking 10 goals and scoring a try against Cardiff High School O.B. He made most appearances, 26 times. Roy Duggan, Steve Hughes, Tommy McCarthy, Gwyn Thomas each played 24, Dai Hayward 23, Ian Robinson 22, and P. L. Jones and Gary Samuel 21 each. Athletic XV caps were gained by Robert Bassett, Roy Morgan, Gary Samuel and Peter Thomas "Pies", whose 16 appearances with The Rags and eight for the 1st XV qualified him.

Peter Thomas, R.A.F., captained the re-formed Extras XV and the results were the best of the three seasons to date. Fifty-two players were called upon of whom sixteen took part in matches for the three Senior teams, and most of the rest had played for the Extras and "The Rags". Peter Thomas did a good job. He already held an Athletic XV cap for 1957-58 and had toured East Africa with the Combined Services, having, like Lloyd and Cenydd Williams, Alan Priday and others, done National Service the withdrawal of which was not, nor has been, in the national interest of our country.

Our Junior XV was captained by R. Geddes, but it turned out to be rather a mediocre season and only twelve of the matches played were won. No player won an international cap but the team was successful in winning the Cardiff & District Youth "Sevens", and had been rather unfortunate with a crop of injuries in the early part of the season.

First XV caps were awarded to W. J. Carling, R. Cheney, John Hickey, Keri Jones and Phil Morgan, Billy Thomas our hooker was to retire, Graham Davies went to Bridgend, and Phil Morgan, who, after one season with us and a South African tour, decided to turn professional.

The annual report of the C.A.C. revealed a surplus of £4,552 which included TV fees of £329. The Rugby Club made a donation of £250 to the Aberfan Colliery Tip Disaster Fund. Alan Priday was still editing our Rugby programmes and was again captain of the Cardiff Cricket Club from whose report I quote: "The last match played on Cardiff Arms Park was on Sunday 16th September, 1966, and appropriately enough, our visitors were Glamorgan Nomads. The match was concluded by Mr. Norman Riches and Mr. W. J. Evans umpiring the closing overs and by the drinking of a toast in champagne to the future at Sophia Gardens". Cardiff Cricket Club was founded as far back as 5th May 1845 and after renting a field at Longcross for three seasons, became associated with "The Park", which is the Cardiff Arms Park of today—see my "Story of the Cardiff Arms Park". In the very earliest period of its history, the Rugby Club was privileged to change in the hut of the Cardiff Cricket Club, whose removal to Sophia Gardens in 1966 saddened the hearts of many cricket and Rugby sportsmen. With the erection of the new huge gaunt concrete stands for the club and the Welsh Rugby Union, the Cardiff Arms Park lost its original character of more than a century. It was no consolation that the sale of the cricket turf realised the sum of £684. The pitch was re-seeded for the Rugby ground and for some months pigeons fed well.

Two of our great prop forwards passed away, Ted Spillane of the early twenties, and Cliff Davies of the post war two period. Both loved our club and gave much sterling service for many seasons. They were very well known and beloved by all Rugby men.