

SIX PLAYERS FOR LIONS TOUR

1967-68.

Our captain was C. Howard Norris, and Gerald Davies his vice-captain. It was to be another season of remarkable events and achievements. There were a few disappointments. Howard joined the club in 1958-59 making his first team debut against Penarth on 24th September, and his last appearance on 6th November 1971 against Oxford University. He holds the club record of 415 first fifteen appearances and was yet another product of the prolific Rhondda Valley nursery to earn fame on the Rugby fields. From Porth Grammar School with a Secondary School cap, to Rhondda Junior Rugby, National Service, St. Lukes College Exeter, he graduated to Cardiff where he gained the highest honours. Over six feet and more than sixteen stone, Howard moved from the back and second row of the pack to become one of the best of Cardiff's post war 'props', and to gain his Welsh caps, and a British Lions tour to New Zealand with a club-mate D. Ken Jones in 1966. At Twickenham in December 1967 he led the pack of the Barbarians who held the Sixth All Blacks to a draw of six points all until the fifth minute of injury time when New Zealand, profiting from a miss kick of the 'Baa-baas' full back, S. J. Wilson, ran the ball out to score the most sensational of tries and gain victory by 11 points to six. Howard is now a member of the committee and serving very usefully as a coach.

Among those who made their debuts were Alec Finlayson who was one of our former Youth players, J. H. James the former Cambridge Blue, Maurice Braithwaite the former Pontypridd forward and Barry John, already a young but senior Llanelli player and possessor of three Welsh caps. To elaborate here on John's Rugby achievements would be 'gilding the lily', his main honours are listed amongst my statistical records, his fame has been written at length in the world press and his artistry on television in very recent times; his own "Barry John Book of Rugby" has been published. Like Cliff Morgan on the Lions tour of 1955, and Gareth Edwards perhaps in 1974, Barry appears to have reached the peak of his Rugby brilliance in New Zealand in 1971 where he was crowned so to speak—"King John", thus becoming royally superior to our great "Prince of three-quarters" Gwyn Nicholls, 1892-1910. The best of Barry John's Cardiff predecessors, P. F. Bush, J. Clem Lewis, Cliff Jones, W. B. Cleaver and Cliff Morgan, each had their own characteristic style of play, and to assess the best of them all would need comparing like with like. None of them had the benefit of an inside half anywhere near as incomparable as Gareth Edwards. But what Barry possessed, and they did not, was an elusiveness and deception born of apparently ample time in which to move, he was expert in the touch finding technique between the two 'twenty-fives', his goal kicking approach was simple, speedy and accurate; he was one of the club's best drop goal kickers and kicked four in one match against his old team Llanelli in November 1970. Undoubtedly, Barry John and Gareth Edwards were the greatest pair of half-backs in the club's history.

We got off to a very good start in September with eight wins, then a draw with Aberavon, scoring 222 points of which 57 were obtained in our match with Torquay when P. Lyn Jones got four tries. The second of our matches, against Neath on 6th September was a travesty of good football. Neath started off with very much robust intent and some rough play, which, after some repetition, invoked many calls and boos from the crowd to "send him off". The game deteriorated and Randall Davies was ordered off the field and later sentenced to three months suspension by the W.R.U. Fixtures were cancelled for three seasons. Up to the end of December only four matches were lost, to Newport (A), Ebbw Vale (H), Llanelli (A) and Neath (A), but we were suffering somewhat from injuries, and during the season four of our players were off for many matches, notably Gerald Davies, Maurice Richards, Tony Pender and our skipper Howard Norris.

We were at the top of the Unofficial Championship table for practically the whole season, but late in the season, we could not play six of our stars who were selected to tour South Africa with the British Lions, a record number then, Gareth Edwards, Gerald Davies, Barry John, Keri Jones, Maurice Richards and John O'Shea and lose two out of our last three matches, on tour in France. We suffered twelve defeats in all and lost the Welsh Championship to Llanelli who had beaten us home and away.

We scored two wins over Newport, 19 points to three, away, and 26 points to three at home, of which 23 were scored in the second half. London Welsh beat us on the morning of the England/Wales match at Twickenham, by 14 points to six in a match of 15-man Rugby well and truly eulogised by two London sports writers, one of whom reported that it was 'Rugby for the Gods', and another of the man with a half gallon can of beer under his arm who said "After that there don't seem any point in going to the international, does there".

One of our best wins was that over the Barbarians by 16 points to 11, we were weak, but the 'Baa-baas' were strong and included two French internationals, Gachassin and Lacaze. Two of our boys who came in for much praise were Billy Hullin and young Ian Lewis a former Porth Grammar School and Llandovery product, who had joined us from the training college. Lewis had a splendid game showing touches of class and much promise.

Our three match French tour to Lyons was disastrous. Such tours at the end of a strenuous season against strong and augmented opposition should never be undertaken. The results, particularly when we cannot send our strongest players, are most damaging to the club's reputation. The first match again a Lyonnaise Selection was lost 11-8, the second with U.S. Bressane lost 13-3, the third, against another Lyonnaise Selection was won by 12 points to nine. According to press reports, the accommodation provided for some of our players, officials and club supporters was of the very lowest category of quality, two in a bed and so on, and of "red lamp" standard. It should be—never again!!

Honours. Owing to a change in the administrative policy of the W.R.U., Cardiff were not allocated a match with the Sixth All Blacks, but eight of our players were chosen for the East Wales XV, namely Keri Jones, Gerald Davies, Frank Wilson, Barry John, Gareth Edwards (capt.), John O'Shea, Lyn Baxter and John Hickey; the All Blacks luckily escaped with a draw of one try each, that of East Wales was scored by Frank Wilson. A full Cardiff Club XV might have won?

Keri Jones, Gerald Davies, Barry John, Gareth Edwards, John O'Shea and Maurice Richards played for Wales. Gareth Edwards at the young age of twenty years and seven months was honoured with the Welsh captaincy against Scotland.

On Wednesday 14th February, Gareth Edwards was kidnapped by a group of seven students of Swansea University College, it was their "Rag Week". They demanded a ransom of £50 from the Cardiff Rugby Club, stipulating that unless the ransom was paid "It was to be presumed that Edwards would not be available to play for Cardiff against Newport next Saturday". The City Police were notified and on Friday 16th February Gareth was released and driven from a Swansea hideout to the Cardiff Teachers Training College where he was a student. He said he had been well treated and had signed fifty Rag magazines. No ransom was paid. Gareth duly played in the match which was at Newport, and contributed to a splendid Cardiff 19 points to three victory by scoring one of the tries.

Cardiff's top try scorer was Frank Wilson with 17. Wilson was a most promising wing and a local Llandaff North product, but he turned professional. P. Lyn Jones got 15 (four in a match against Torquay), Gerald Davies 10, Maurice Richards 9 and Barry John 9 with 9 dropped goals. Billy Hullin—one of our two international scrum halves, got in the act with six tries and a couple of goals. Dennis Gethin scored 157 points from 66 goals and a try. First XV caps were awarded to Maurice Braithwaite (the delectable tenor), Dennis Gethin, Barry John, Roy Morgan, Ian Robinson, John Uzzell and F. H.—Frank—Wilson.

The first team results were P46, W32, L12, D2. Points 703-314.

The Athletic team was captained by John Price our rugged but popular lock forward who had joined us in 1962-63 from Penarth whose team he had also captained. His "Rags" (he called upon no fewer than 69) produced one of the best ever Athletic seasons and the official record was as follows: P33, W30, L1 and D2 with 700 points scored to 140. One single defeat was at the hands of Taibach at Sophia Gardens on 11th November by the narrow margin of 5 points to 3. "The Rags" being very unlucky in losing scrum half Gary Samuel, injured, early in the game. But there was to be retribution. In the final of the Silver Ball Competition played at Bridgend on 25th April, John's men inflicted a most salutary defeat on Taibach by no less than 27 points to 3. Amongst 49 scorers, P. Lyn Jones got 16 tries, Alec Finlayson 13, John Uzzell 13, Frank Wilson 12, John Huw Williams and Roy Duggan eight each. The goal kicking being shared amongst four players, none of them, Ray Cheney, Bob Bassett, Ian Lewis and Dennis Gethin, were able to reach 100 points. Meirion Davies, John Evans, Mike Knill and Gerald Morgan, four of John Price's "Athletic Pride" were awarded caps. Blazer badges were awarded to players of the 1966-67 successful season.

The record of Cardiff Extras XV was a modest one, P22, W12, L8 and D2. Most of the matches were played at Sophia Gardens, Haydn Thomas the appointed captain gave way, for personal reasons, to one of the club's first team stalwarts Mal Gough. Fifty-nine players were called upon, mostly from within the club's existing four teams, our intake of new youngsters was poor and Stan Bowes and Lloyd Williams filled the 'missing breach' on occasions. Those who made most appearances for the Extras XV were Stan Thomas 17, Barri Evans 15, Terry Stephenson 15 (he scored seven tries), Tony Cosh 14, Mike Alexander and Alan Dent 13, and Mal Gough who was called to the fold played in twelve.

The Youth XV played 26, won 13, lost 10, drew 3, and scored 239 points to 219, rather a disappointing season, due to some injuries and a lot of changes. The strongest part of the team was in the pack where captain Gilbert Lloyd was leader.

Brian Mark was once again the excellent editor of the Rugby Club programmes, and those of 1967-68 saw the introduction of the "Know the Laws" series by A. D. 'Fred' Croster (the noted Welsh Rugby Union senior referee) an excellent feature for player and public alike. Fred, a schoolmaster, was an excellent "P.T." instructor, as I well remember from my Home Guard days, and it is good to record that he still continues to make his excellent contributions to the programmes of today.

On a jocular note, I can record that on the return coach journey from Coventry, where he had contributed two tries to Cardiff's excellent 27 points to 12 win, Gerald Davies lost possession of his most distinguished beard. His playing colleagues didn't like it, but they spared his upper lip. The month of September saw the passing of Rhys T. Gabe, who, with E. Gwyn Nicholls formed Cardiff's greatest threequarter partnership at the turn of the century. Both helped to make our club great, and two world wars were to pass before another great pair might be compared with them—Jack Matthews and Bleddyn Williams.

On the 3rd October 1967 Cardiff staged a match with a British Isles international team, for the benefit of the dependants of one of Rugby's most popular forwards, Cliff Davies.