

BUT HICKEY'S "RAGS" CREATE TWO NEW CLUB RECORDS

1974-75.

Results including three W.R.U. cup ties were P51, W33, L16, D2. Points 870—561. Mervyn John who had joined the club in 1967-68 was the captain and Paul Evans our centre was nominated vice-captain, Mervyn was the best flanker since Dai Hayward although international honours eluded him in spite of trials and county games. Already he had amassed a total of 70 tries, and, in 1971-72, jointly with Roger Lane, scored 16 to overtake Les Spence's record of 12—for forwards, in 1936-37. John's season was to be a disappointing one, it did not auger well at the beginning, two players had been disciplined for the first two matches because of indiscretions at the club's annual dinner, and to make matters worse, Lyn Baxter, at odds with the selectors for having been dropped, mistakenly in my view, for the Barbarian match last season, left the club, joined Penarth and was made captain.

Ian Robinson, being injured, played in only half of our first twenty matches, and his partnership with Lyn Baxter in the power house, rucks and lines-out, was to be much missed, in spite of Kallonas and the youngsters John Luff and Peter Rawlins trying hard 'to plug up the gap'. Trevor Worgan, one of the club's best intake of young forwards for many years decided to 'retire' to less exacting Rugby with his local club, Llanharan.

The club faced a heavy burden of two matches per week up to 6th November, by which time we had suffered defeats in eight matches, to Bristol, Pontypool, Aberavon, Northampton, and in succession to Harlequins, Bridgend (by a solitary point at home), Oxford University and Newport. It was the club's most depressing start since season 1955-56 when nine out of the first 18 matches were lost. What was wrong? Somehow we had lost our attacking flair, Keith James our young stand-off half, in spite of some wonderful touch finding, over kicked, there was selfishness in our centre play. Gerald Davies, having accepted a post at the Sports Centre, Sophia Gardens, rejoined his old club, but, as one sports writer put it, he "withered on the vine" for lack of passes.

For some time our full-backs were very inconsistent with goal kicking, and young James too, our props were guilty of indiscretions, and our captaincy uncertain. Where the club was strong was at scrum-half. It was able to call upon no less than six for that position, Gareth Edwards after his return from the Lions South African tour, Brynmor Williams, Gary Samuel, Robin Morgan, Terry Holmes and Nick Rose, the latter two from our Juniors XV.

Brynmor Williams played for Wales v. Tonga, R. C. Shell of Aberavon having withdrawn, but his appearance with those of Gareth Edwards in the other Wales internationals, created what is probably unique in international Rugby, that of a club having two international scrum half-backs in the same season. But the glut of top class scrum halves could not last and after serving Cardiff so loyally since 1965-66, Gary Samuel left to join and serve the Pontypridd Club with much distinction. Robin Morgan also left the club after assisting it since 1971-72, and Pontypool R.F.C. was pleased to acquire this first class player. On 22nd March at short notice, Terry Holmes, Cardiff Juniors captain made his first team début for the Seniors against Newport (A) and shared in a notable victory. Nick Rose the Juniors second scrum half choice, made his first team début for Cardiff against New Brighton in April, a winning match for the Blue and Blacks which young Rose will ever remember.

On 13th November, Gareth Davies, former Secondary Schools international from the Gwendraeth Grammar School, a young student at U.W.I.S.T., Cardiff, made his First XV début against Penarth at outside half. Not unlike Barry John in all aspects, he was able to secure the position and gain a First XV cap in his first season with Cardiff. At this time a London writer described Cardiff's form as "quite out of keeping with its glorious past". After beating the Wasps, we met Llanelli on 23rd November, and this match was to lift away some of the despondency which had prevailed in club and committee circles.

The Llanelli Club had not furnished another permit for Gareth Davies and Keith James was recalled. It was a pulsating game, and Cardiff showed the best form of the season to the delight of all our supporters. Our pack pretty well dominated that of the Scarlets. Gareth Edwards was dominant at half-back with power and strength with lengthy, accurate passes to James. The result was a well merited win by three tries from forwards Roger Lane, Mervyn John and Carl Smith and a penalty goal from Keith James, to Llanelli's three penalty goals from Andy Hill.

A defeat by ten points at Ebbw Vale followed, but this was forgotten with five subsequent wins over Neath, Swansea, London Welsh, Pontypridd and Ebbw Vale. Against Neath at the Cardiff Arms Park, Cardiff's pack dominated that of Neath to a degree I

cannot remember, and in spite of a lapse under our posts by our full back which gave Neath a lead of six points, the whole team raised its power to win by 20 points to nine and receive a rapturous welcome on return to the dressing rooms.

In January defeats were inflicted by Coventry, Aberavon, and a drawn match followed at Neath. The defeat at home by Aberavon was disappointing. We led at half time by two penalty goals to one having failed entirely to break down a rock-like Aberavon defence. In the second half, the "Wizards" took complete charge, scored a try to win by a point. There were successes over Headingley, Bristol and London Welsh. The Yorkshire team with the former Cambridge and England captain John Spencer in the centre, gave us a very hard match and it was very late in the game before they were overcome. The Tykes were the best exploiters of the short penalties I can remember. Roger Beard was badly hurt late in the game and it was tries from Gareth Edwards and our promising hooker Alun Phillips which turned it in our favour and we were flattered by a result of 25 points to 12. In this game Brynmor Williams played in the centre with Paul Evans.

Bristol were well beaten under floodlights—38–3, and on the morning of the England/Wales international we entertained London Welsh with a 10 a.m. kick off. The game had a most dramatic ending. The Welsh fielded a strong team which included six internationals, Colin Rees, Jim Shanklin and Keith Hughes in the threes, T. G. Evans and M. G. Roberts in the pack and Cardiff's former scrum worker Billy Hullin who belied his age by carving great gaps through the Cardiff defence. The Welsh ran at us strongly with far more skilful attacks than our own and late in the game the Exiles led by four penalty goals to two. Defeat seemed inevitable when we made a strong and late attack which swept over the Welsh twenty-five and Stuart Lane, deputising for the injured Finlayson ran most determinedly and scored an unconverted try with only minutes to go, the crowd in a great state of excitement roared Cardiff on. We were awarded a penalty, John Davies kicked the goal, we led—quite against the run of the game by 13–12 and the crowd erupted. But the drama had not ended. The referee, a splendid official (Mr. M. A. Richards) awarded the Welsh a penalty in injury time. It was only some thirty yards out and almost in front of the posts. The kick was taken by H. Stockham, a new recruit to London Welsh who already had kicked all four goals. Victory now seemed inevitable and deservedly so for London Welsh, but alas young Stockham pulled his kick and failed to goal, the whistle blew and Cardiff had won in the last moments by a single point.

On 22nd February our fixture with Llanelli was cancelled as the Scarlets were engaged in a cup-tie with Pontypool, and Cardiff accepted an invitation from the Saracens to play them at Southgate in London. This old club, founded in 1876 the same year as Cardiff, run some ten teams including the Crusaders, Infidels, Turks, Sultans, Saladins, Scimitars, Griffons and Colts. They were having an excellent season and had already beaten Bridgend, Ebbw Vale, Newbridge and Neath, two of their teams were engaged in English county matches. Cardiff were without Mervyn John—for the third occasion, Ian Robinson, Gareth Edwards and John Davies, but were confident of winning. Unfortunately our front row forwards were guilty of 'indiscretions' and the referee's decisions were questioned. Penalties awarded against us led to goals and a defeat! It is regrettable that our indiscipline on the field caused the London press to be most scathing of Cardiff's rough play.

A modest win over Heriots was followed by a hammering from Llanelli 27–3, in mid-week. Llanelli's powerful team scored their biggest victory ever against Cardiff, yet it was only the fourth time the Scarlets had registered 20 points or more over the Blue and Blacks. Cardiff had now lost fourteen matches, dismal statistics indeed, but there was a silver lining, Blue and Black magic had to come.

On 8th March at home against Newport, to the great delight of our supporters—and no doubt our selectors, the team turned on a splendid performance, playing with a sharpness, and keen attack that had not been seen for months. The two Gareths—Edwards and Davies—were most prominent, the latter showing signs of maturity, kicking five goals in the process. A morning victory over Bective before the afternoon's encounter between Wales and Ireland was followed by victory over Newport again, at Uskside 18–7, in which Terry Holmes, Cardiff's Youth team captain and scrum half made an excellent début.

More successes, two at Easter time, were to gladden the hearts of our supporters, and the 91st encounter with the Barbarians will long be remembered.

Before a record crowd on our new club ground, both teams entered into the spirit of running Rugby of which both clubs with the highest of tradition can always be proud. After some twenty-five minutes, Barbarians Scottish hooker D. E. Madsen left the field injured, his team were leading seven points to four. With the advantage of an extra man, Cardiff stormed irresistibly ahead with tries from John Davies, P. L. Jones and a brilliant one from Brynmor Williams. After half time the Barbarians rallied strongly and during a period of almost uncontrolled excitement had reduced Cardiff's lead to 21-19. Scotland's Andy Irvine, British Lion had contributed four goals, including three from penalties, one of which would have been avoided but for the referee being questioned. Short of a hooker, the 'Baa-baas' employed only a three man pack with Pontypool's Tony Faulkner as striker, thus releasing the remaining forwards for defence. But Cardiff would not be denied and attacked relentlessly to secure another score and make victory safe, but were held up by a most gallant defence. Ultimately, Ian Robinson scored another try shortly before the end, and Cardiff had won an epic, 24-19. The large crowd stayed and lustily cheered and clapped both teams with enthusiastic acclaim. The Cardiff Arms Park had seen another of the Rugby game's greatest epics. Honours came to Brynmor Williams and Garry Davies who were made Barbarians and played for them against Newport.

The Harlequins, with Bob Hiller at outside half, were beaten 41-9, but after a surprising defeat at Gloucester, Maesteg, Swansea, Bath, New Brighton and Fylde were beaten in succession. Against Swansea at home Mervyn John played magnificently.

Friday evening 25th April was a sad one. At Bridgend for the last match of the season Gerald Davies and Gareth Edwards were in Dublin for the I.R.F.U. Centenary international match. Cardiff were also without Alec Finlayson and Brynmor Williams in the backs, and Gerald Wallace and Ian Robinson in the pack. Young Nick Rose the Juniors second string scrum half had to be called up to play. Inevitably it seemed, the men of Penybont must win, and they did, by 24 points to 10.

The Gods of fortune had already smiled upon Bridgend. In the Floodlight fixture on 30th October they had beaten Cardiff by a single point, 13-12. At Cardiff Arms Park on New Year's Day, in the third round of the W.R.U.'s Challenge Cup-tie they won the match by two penalty goals to one try, six points to four. Cardiff had beaten Hendy and Ystradgynlais in the earlier rounds, and, in fact did not concede a try in the tournament. Before a crowd of 15,000 on a drizzly rainy evening, Cardiff were twice penalised—once quite unjustifiably and Steve Fenwick, against the wind, kicked two splendid goals in the first fifteen minutes.

Paul Evans crossed Bridgend's line near the posts, but Meirion Joseph ruled no try the ball not having been properly grounded. Meurig Owen from "The Rags", in the centre scored a try to reduce the lead; P. Lyn Jones also crossed the line but was recalled. In the second half it was all Cardiff against a courageous defence, in spite of the absence of Gerald Davies and Finlayson. There were two ill-judged attempts at drop goals, a waste of good ball and young Keith James missed a penalty goal from 25 yards; John Davies, after a nice break passed the wrong way with the line at our mercy. In the "Daily Telegraph" Tony Lewis wrote: "Cardiff's New Year opened in unhappy fashion. They might well ask how they lost a match which they had dominated . . . how Keith James could miss a penalty from point blank range . . . how the referee arrived at many incomprehensible decisions".

In the "Sevens", Cardiff twice beat Bridgend, the first in the final of the Aberaeron Tournament by 38 points to six, and that of the Welsh National, by 20-16. In the Snelling "Sevens" Bridgend triumphed 32-12 profiting by the slowness of P. L. Jones, Cardiff's strong man in fifteen-a-side Rugby. With by no means the strongest selections Cardiff's achievements in winning two out of the three events and being finalists in one was most praiseworthy. The participants in the Welsh National event had celebrated at the club's annual dinner the night before, yet found stamina to win in "extra time"!! Stuart Lane won the accolade of "the man of the Tournament" in the Snelling event, deservedly so

for his talented and aggressive displays. Gareth Davies kicked all goals, and Chris Camilleri will ever remember his winning try against Bridgend.

In this not very high scoring season, Alec Finlayson got 15 tries and our popular 'charger' P. Lyn Jones, and Chris Camilleri 11 each. But it was the determined and enthusiastic running of our talented young hooker, Alun Phillips, who equalled the club scoring record for a forward, having scored eight tries for the 1st XV and 14 for the Athletic XV. In 1968-69, Mervyn John scored 13 for the 1st XV and nine for the Athletic XV. With two tries and 53 goals, Gareth Davies amassed 142 points, John Davies the full-back scored 109 and Keith James eighty-one.

International Honours. Gerald Davies and Gareth Edwards played in all Welsh internationals, including New Zealand and Tonga, and also for the Barbarians against New Zealand at Twickenham. Both played for England & Wales v. Scotland & Ireland in the I.R.F.U. Centenary celebrations on 19th April 1975. Alec Finlayson, Gerald Wallace and Brynmor Williams played for Wales against Tonga.

Gareth Edwards was honoured as the "Western Mail's" leading sports personality of 1974! At a special BBC Wales TV Awards ceremony at the National Sports Centre on 22nd January 1975. The magnificent trophy was presented to him by Cliff Morgan, Cardiff's former outside-half, in his capacity as head of the BBC National Outside Radio Broadcasts. In my memory Cliff Morgan & Rex Willis, and Barry John & Gareth Edwards are the two greatest half-back pairs in Cardiff's history. Readers may well permute the brilliance of them with arguable interest, for instance: Cliff Morgan & Gareth Edwards or Barry John & Rex Willis? If they were contemporary I wonder how Cliff Jones and his Welsh selectors would pair them up for a final Welsh trial and the first international match.

Les Spence Cardiff's past President of the W.R.U. was appointed hon. manager of the Welsh touring team for Japan in September 1975, an honour to Les who ironically had been a prisoner of war in Japan, and who, some thirty years later as President of the W.R.U. was chief host to the Japanese touring team to Wales in 1973.

Stop Press. As I conclude this final chapter I must record that Barry Nelves, Cardiff's excellent prop forward who joined the club from Bristol last season, was called up to join the England touring team in Australia to replace the injured captain, Fran Cotton. In its long history a number of internationals of the Home Unions have worn Cardiff's Blue & Black jersey—as guest players, but Barry is the first player to be chosen for England whilst being a member of the Cardiff Club.

The Athletic XV—"The Rags". Their record was the best of the post-war years. P36, W34, L2, D0. Points 1,218—246. John Hickey was the captain and he drove his team with voice and physical example. Two club records were created, the first by scoring 104 points against Chepstow, the highest ever club victory, and the second by scoring the highest number of points by any of the club's fifteens since 1876. This was a remarkable achievement despite the fact that six matches were cancelled for different reasons. No less than 65 players were called upon of whom ten were drafted from our Youth XV. In nine matches 40 points or more were scored by Hickey's "Rags". These were the scores: Llanharan (H) 40-15, Barry (S.G.) 56-10, our popular Welsh regiment—the Welsh Guards were routed at home 86-3 having run out of ammunition steam, Harlequins Wanderers (H) 42-12, Taibach (S.G.) 62-6, Maesteg Celtic (H) 64-6, Llanelly Wanderers—friendly, but no longer strong enough opposition (S.G.) 94-0, then hapless Chepstow (S.G.) the century defeat 104-0, and after defeating Milford Haven on their West Wales tour "The Rags" defeated Fishguard 45-0.

The Truman Cup competition for scoring most tries was won, but owing to an unfortunate administrative lapse, failure to notify a winning score over Bristol United lost the chance of probable success in the Silver Bowl Competition. The two defeats were by Pontypool United (A) by a single point 4-3, and Swansea Athletic (A) 15-7 "The Rags" fielding a very weak and re-arranged team.

In this record season there were 52 scorers, a tribute to fifteen man Rugby. Top amongst them were Chris Camilleri 18 tries, Steve Bool 16 and Steve McCann 15. The full-back Leighton Davies was top scorer with 170 points from eight tries and 63 goals—against Chepstow he kicked 14 converted goals and got two tries for a total of 36 points.

This effort was still two points short of the record of George McGrath who against Usk in 1907-08 for Cardiff Reserves kicked 10 goals and scored six tries for a total of 38 points, which, with a present value of four points for a try would have meant 44.

Steve Bool, Tony Brahim, Chris Camilleri, Ken Poole and Peter Rawlins gained "Rags" caps and the following played 20 matches or more in this very interesting season: Tony Brahim, Leighton Davies, John Hickey, Paul Kerrigan, Don Llewellyn, John Luff and Peter Rawlins. John Hickey will no doubt remember Cardiff's splendid victory over the Barbarians, he will remember more—with pride no doubt, that on the same day his "Rags" scored a century over Chepstow.

Cardiff Juniors' record (captain: Wayne Peckham) was P24, W20, L3, D1. Points 579—196. It was another successful season with no less than ten of the Youth players assisting the Senior XV's. The main successes were achieved over Bath Youth (H) 56-10, Llandaff (A) 64-3, an astonishing feat over these our near rivals, and Mountain Ash (H) 52-4. A first ever win at Llanelli, although by a mere penalty goal, was a pleasing result.

The defeat at home by Pontypridd was indeed surprising. Bridgend beat the Juniors by one point, 10-9 and the third defeat was by the Marist College O.B., Hull, by 26-8 which followed a victory over Hull & East Riding Colts 13-7 on the first Yorkshire tour.

In "Sevens" the Juniors won the Cardiff & District Y.R.U. Tournament, their "A" entry beating the "B" entry in the final by 44-4 which indicates there was no "soft pedalling". Entering the Tiverton "Sevens" for the first time, the Juniors won the event beating their counterparts of Midsomer Norton, Wellington, Cleeve, Exeter and in the final, Gloucester, by scoring 24 points in the process. Cardiff's Peter Mullins was elected "Player of the Tournament".

Youth international caps were awarded to Terry Holmes, Nick James, Paul Rees, Wayne Peckham and, as a replacement against France, Peter Mullins. Terry Holmes who captained the Welsh Youth in the three internationals also captained the Cardiff & District Y.R.U. against the Bridgend & District Y.R.U. leading his XV to victory.

Chief scorers for the Juniors were Brian Cox 22 tries (in 17 matches), John Newman 16 (in 21), Paul Rees 13 (in 18), Peter Mullins 10 plus nine goals (in 15), L. O'Brien 8 (in 21), Terry Holmes 7 plus five goals (in 15), Wayne Peckham 7 (in 10), Steve Donoghue four plus 21 goals (in 10). Gareth Luff headed the list of appearances with 22 matches, Will Crowther played in 18 and both Sean Driscoll and Neil O'Donnell played in sixteen.