

61st Year 1932-3

A more balanced playing season than the previous campaign suggests more consistency by both backs and forwards. Over two-thirds of the games played were won. The season's record according to the Rugby Football Annual reads played 41 won 23 drew 3 lost 15. Press reports suggest that 42 games were played and one more match lost.

Robert Godfrey (Bob) Rew was the elected captain for the season leading his team by enthusiastic example. Like his elder brother Henry, he was educated at Exeter School. His first appearance in the senior team came in 1926-7 and he was to become a regular selection from the following season. His playing position was wing three-quarter a position from which he scored many tries. In this season of his captaincy he opted to play wing-forward but was also seen back on the wing when occasion demanded. He was selected to represent Devon in both positions.

Vice-captain was the ever dependable Tom Browning.

After the usual practice games at which a number of promising younger players were evident, the first match was played at Sidmouth. This proved to be a stiff test and it took a penalty goal from the half-way line by Peter Steele-Perkins and an opportunist try by the captain to make the game safe (6-3).

Travelling to Bath Exeter missed their rail connection at Bristol and made the final leg of their journey by taxis. Exeter found both pitch and ball to be wet and slippery allowing the team to mount only spasmodic attacks. According to a contradictory local report "the ground and surrounds were in beautiful condition". The headline in the Western Daily Press read "Bath win but disappoint" as the home team missed many chances (0-6). During the game the Reverend Kenneth Waights went down on the ball to stop a forward rush with the result that his nose was fractured. Bob Rew came out of the pack to replace him. Waights was detained in hospital overnight as he was also suffering from concussion.

Four more games were crammed in up to the end of September. Mid-week at the County Ground Teignmouth employed "spoiling tactics" in a game that did not reach a high-standard. In frustration Exeter adopted similar tactics to their opponents and managed to score the only try of the game in the final minute (3-0). Away at Bridgwater & Albion, Exeter found themselves behind but despite finishing strongly no more scoring resulted (3-6). With the Exeter forwards on top in an open game at Paignton a comfortable victory resulted (11-6). Back at home the Exeter forwards again had the better of the Royal Naval Engineering College in the scrums. The Exeter backs were also better than their opponents. "Conspicuous" was Peter Candler who scored a try and made the openings for two others (14-3). It was a different tale at Newton Abbot. The home team dominated loose play and Exeter was "inclined to fade out" (3-20).

A two match tour to South Wales with a weak side brought two defeats. Unfamiliar names appeared in the team that faced Bridgend and although it was said that there was little to choose between the packs Exeter went under (3-11). On the following Monday the tourists had to make late changes to their line-up at Neath whose forwards were bigger and heavier. Sid Waller and Roy Yendell "played brilliantly in adversity". Gerald Pincott was knocked out at one stage and had to leave the field. The visitors did manage to score a try right at the end of the game by which time Neath were well ahead (3-26).

The next four games came against opponents from Somerset. "Three brilliant tries all converted by Waller" accounted for visiting Bridgwater & Albion (15-3). At Wellington a "lucky victory" was achieved by a strong side against a home team weakened by injuries. Ten minutes from time a dropped goal saved Exeter from embarrassment (4-3). Facing Weston at the County Ground the following week Exeter was now deemed to have been unlucky in not securing victory. Pincott went off with an injured knee whereupon Bob Rew left the pack to replace him and promptly scored a try (8-8). Next up came Taunton who had the better of play in the first half. Some "unpleasant incidents" led to a visiting forward being sent off the field. Then "Exeter played an inspired game after half time" (17-3).

After a youthful Exeter team had defeated Old Blues from London (6-5) three games against Devon rivals brought mixed results. At Torquay Athletic "Exeter tired but defended stubbornly" (0-8). At Cranford a large crowd gathered to witness a keen game with Exmouth. After a scoreless first half the visitors ran out winners (7-0).

At home to Barnstaple "anticipations of a dour struggle were fully realized in the pointless draw". There was little to choose between the two teams. A Sid Waller penalty goal attempt hit the cross-bar and rebounded into play but that was the nearest either team got to scoring (0-0). Outstanding for Exeter was A.W.U. Roberts who had played at Cambridge University and was selected for a trial by Wales. He had now joined the staff at Blundell's School. Unusually for a centre at that time he wore headgear similar to a forward.

After a week's break due to a county game Exeter was not at its best when playing host to Woodford (3-6) and then a Christmas Eve visit to Plymouth Albion brought another defeat in a game that saw open play despite the fact that there were "inches of adhesive mud in many parts" (0-21).

Boxing Day saw a change of fortune when Exeter overcame the spoiling tactics of visiting Midland Bank (6-0). The next day a trip to Taunton with several enforced changes in the selected team brought another defeat (3-10).

Over the post-Christmas period the Reserves lost to Old Heleans (3-19) and an Exeter XV defeated Blundell's Squirrels in a game where ten out of eleven tries scored went unconverted (20-15).

1932 ended with a victory at home over Exmouth and so Exeter achieved a rare double over its seaside neighbours. The referee caused a fifteen minute delay by arriving late. In difficult conditions caused by wind and rain there were frequent stoppages to allow players to sponge the clinging mud from their faces (3-0). This was the last appearance by Peter Steele-Perkins before his departure to London for two years.

Another four victories followed. With the County Ground still in poor condition as usual at this time of year, Wellington were unlucky to lose a player with a fractured leg just before half time and Exeter was lucky to scrape another close win (3-0). A further close game at Teignmouth saw the visitors again edge through after a great struggle (5-3). At Sydenham, Surrey, Exeter showed better cohesion and better handling of a greasy ball than their opponents National Provincial Bank and should have won by a wider margin (16-0). After a home game against Torquay was cancelled due to frost Exeter defeated Blundell's School even though they elected to field only fourteen players (20-8).

Visitors from further afield brought mixed results. Illness caused Exeter to rearrange its back line and although they produced a cohesive display they could not match their Bridgend opponents (9-17). Only a disappointingly small crowd watched the game. Against St. Bartholomew's Hospital the backs did not play as well. Half time saw all the scoring completed and Exeter beginning to make a fight back but no more headway was made in the second period (3-14). Neath, on tour, came on the following Tuesday and "Early promise of an attractive game did not materialise". The visitors had picked up a number on injuries to their squad and had to borrow two players from local clubs. Exeter fielded a guest player, Jarvis, a Devon cap from Salcombe, on the wing. Play was mainly confined to the forwards and deteriorated as the game went on (0-0).

Entertaining Paignton, Exeter picked up its game and provided a brilliant display for the spectators. Roberts was again outstanding and scored two tries along with D.G. Matthew and Bob Rew who also bagged a brace each (22-0). Despite this win Exeter would no doubt have visited Barnstaple with some trepidation not just because the local hills were covered in snow. There was even a hailstorm during the game. Exeter had not won in north Devon for some years so there was some justification for the headline "Surprise Win". The victory though narrow was "thoroughly deserved" (3-0).

An early March visit to Devonport Services found Exeter leading by the only score at half-time but then the team fell away in marked fashion. The club's only points came from a remarkable penalty from beyond half-way kicked by the young Sid Waller (3-17). Back at home against Newton Abbot Exeter returned to winning ways though the game contained "several incidents of which the spectators voiced their disapproval" (11-0).

A char-a-banc break-down on the way to Weston-super-Mare did not appear to have affected the team as Exeter was first to score. Then the home forwards began to dominate and paved the way for a win for their team (3-5). A most welcome win at home was achieved against Plymouth Albion. The visitors were playing their six hard game in the month of March (11-9). Following this match the County Ground faithful then witnessed an additional game that was being staged to raise funds for the Cornwall Rugby Football Union. Three Exeter players appeared for a West of England XV that defeated Somerset.

Fielding two reserves a weakened Tiverton team on home soil was "decisively beaten" (11-3) but two days later Exeter "lacked cohesion and determination shown in previous matches" at the Royal Naval Engineering College. Conceding six tries Exeter could manage only two of their own both scored by the promising centre Peter Candler (10-20).

In strong April sunshine Exeter's home game against Bath ended in "a blaze of glory" with a welcome victory led by the forwards (6-3). A collection for the Princess Elizabeth Orthopaedic Hospital raised £5 (£170). Another win followed at home on Easter Saturday. Devonport Services was said to have been disappointing (13-9).

In their Easter Monday fixture Exeter was outplayed by Old Millhillians though the difference in the score was only a penalty goal (3-6). The next evening the season ended with a visit from Torquay Athletic whose backs outshone those of the home team (6-19).

The Annual Report stated that the senior team had done well but attendances at club matches was far below what might be expected. This situation had an adverse effect on finances as did

the increased level of entertainments tax levied on the club. Exeter was the only club west of Bristol running four teams but the cost had now to be taken into consideration.

Lack of finance was a problem throughout Devon and Cornwall. To combat this situation the question of re-introducing competitive rugby was raised. A personal view voiced by Exeter secretary Jack Coombes was that "it is a debateable question whether the spirit of the game would not be compromised by the introduction of the competitive element".

One positive feature of Exeter's season was the fine form shown by a batch of young players. Sid Waller had made his debut the previous season at the age of sixteen. He was now joined by Ken Wreford playing senior rugby at fly-half when aged only sixteen and a half years. Two eighteen year olds also drew high praise. Peter Candler and Dick Madge both went on to play international rugby for England. Another debutant was Colin Paul who was to feature in Exeter rugby for many years both as player and administrator.