

58th Year 1929-0

For once reconciling match reports with the official final first team playing record was made easy this season by courtesy of a fixture card completed in the hand of Jack Coombes the long serving club secretary. This shows the results of 39 matches played but a note suggests that three games played on Wednesdays were not included in the official tally. The final record showed that Exeter had won or drawn over two-thirds of the 36 games played and the other eleven had been lost. All three of the excluded Wednesday games ended in defeat for the club.

“Exeter have enjoyed a better season than usual” was faint praise indeed for a team that enjoyed its best season since the War. The first fifteen showed much better consistency and, despite inevitable injuries, could field good sides from a pool of players of senior team quality. “The style of play showed great improvement” and “players enjoyed their games” were more positive press comments. Another indicator of a good season was that the teams sent on away games could be fairly confident of success.

Edward Noel Morgan was the elected captain. The quality of his often dazzling play at outside-half had been a feature since his debut for Exeter in March 1926. Many observers thought he should have been an automatic choice for the Devon county side but he failed to feature in a County Championship match. It would appear that the county selectors preferred to choose the Plymouth Albion half-back pairing that included the current England scrum-half.

The captain was born in Garnant, a mining village ten miles north of Swansea, into a sporting family. An uncle was Teddy Morgan, winner of sixteen Welsh caps and a member of the 1904 British touring team, who will be remembered forever in Wales as the scorer of the try that defeated the 1905 All Blacks at Cardiff. Noel’s younger brother Guy gained four Blues at Cambridge University and was capped eight times by Wales. All three of these members of the Morgan family made appearances for Glamorgan County Cricket Club. E.N. Morgan was also prominent in Exeter cricket and golf circles.

To his own disappointment and that of the club Noel Morgan suffered a knee injury towards the end of October and although he made attempts to return to the first team he felt obliged to resign the captaincy early in February. Fortunately for the club there were able replacements to step into the breach. T.R.K. Jones the vice-captain was appointed to lead the team and B.W. “Bunny” Turner took over the fly-half position on the field.

After the usual practice matches the season started with two victories. Exeter entertained Teignmouth the current Devon Cup holders but the visitors did not provide the challenge expected (16-3). An evening engagement at Paignton provided a harder tussle and eventually the weightier Exeter pack held sway (14-5).

The first reverse came at Bridgwater & Albion where Exeter turned up late and delayed the kick-off by half an hour. On a hard ground the visitors “played a delightfully sportsmanlike game” but this time it was the home pack that proved to be the stronger. Despite the paucity of possession, Exeter scored two brilliant tries through Denton and Morgan but the latter had to retire for a time due to his troublesome knee injury (6-17).

Exeter sent an understrength team to Tiverton for a Thursday evening game that won only in the last minute (11-9). Two days later the Royal Naval Engineering College visited the County Ground. Morgan played with his knee bandaged and T.R.K. Jones was selected to play at full-back. The College disappointed spectators as the team was not as strong as it had been in recent seasons (22-5).

A trip to Bournemouth for a first encounter with the local club ended in “a somewhat unlucky defeat” (3-5). In a fast game Exeter did a lot of attacking but Morgan’s knee again gave trouble and he was off the field for the last ten minutes of the game. A visit by Barnstaple resulted in another defeat. The home forwards were unable to stand up to their heavier, sometimes over-robust, opponents. To some it was an unexpected win for the north Devonians (7-11).

Evidence of the team’s revived form and confidence was demonstrated by two successive victories away from home. Firstly another star performance from Morgan who scored two tries and kicked three conversions was instrumental in defeating Weston (18-8). This match saw former captain D.P. Wilcocks making his final appearance for the club before departing for Canada. After a visit to London the team was greeted with a rather low-key comment in a local newspaper. “Exeter did quite well to win at Woodford” appeared to again damn with faint praise. The observer may not have taken into account that Exeter was not fully represented and both Morgan and centre C.H. Beer failed to finish the game (16-12).

Three more victories followed. Sidmouth was the team to run out of luck at the County Ground when they lost the services of two players during the game, “due to mishaps”, only one of whom was able to return. All five Exeter tries were registered by backs (17-3). From London came Old Blues for a guarantee match that was marked by “strong tackling”. J.W. Denton scored a try in first five minutes to help Exeter on the way to victory (8-0). The return match at Sidmouth was described as a “thrilling game in the rain” and the report ended “Exeter no doubt account themselves very lucky” (9-6).

After winning nine out of the first dozen fixtures Exeter experienced mixed fortunes in the run up to Christmas. The first half of the eagerly awaited home encounter with Exmouth was played in drenching rain that turned the pitch to mud. Inevitably the game was mostly confined to the forwards. The exception was another spectacular try by Morgan who outspurred the opposition to touch down under the posts. The effort was spoilt by the try scorer taking the conversion himself and missing. “It would surely have been advantageous if Morgan had allowed someone else to take the kick after such a hard run”. Exmouth managed a penalty goal to effect a draw (3-3).

Morgan missed the next game at Torquay Athletic because of injury and the new half-back pairing of “Bunny” Turner and H. Davey was outplayed by their opposing pair (3-16). A team containing some new names did well at Wellington to hold the home side to a draw (8-8).

A guarantee match with Old Dunstonians was doubly disappointing. The committee expected much stronger opposition and the spectators would have preferred not to have witnessed such a one sided game. “It was evident that one or two of them are not accustomed to playing many serious games” was a comment on the visitors’ performance (37-0).

Plymouth Albion, in contrast to some previous meetings, sent a practically full strength team on the Saturday before Christmas. The Exeter pack played well but could not match their weightier opponents for the whole duration (6-13).

Boxing Day visitors came from Rouen, France, in the form of Elbeuf whom Exeter had met on tour the previous season. A good attendance saw the Frenchmen play well individually but not collectively. Exeter won comfortably (26-3). Two days later Exeter again was not fully extended - this time by Devon Blues a "holiday team" that suffered from last minute changes to their selection (19-0).

The New Year began well when "Exeter astonished everybody by the remarkable speed at which they executed their movements" at Newton Abbot (19-14). The second Saturday did not go quite so well. "Exeter did very creditably" was the milder verdict at Plymouth Albion. Exeter was missing six regulars whilst the home side was about a third of full strength due to county calls. Played in "wretched conditions the game was restricted to half an hour each way (5-8).

A late penalty for "leg up" awarded against Bridgwater & Albion was turned into a goal by stand-in fly-half Davey that provided the difference between the sides at Exeter (14-11). Davey was not so lucky in the next game at Torquay Athletic. Resuming his normal position at scrum-half he fractured a collar bone five minutes from the end by which time his absence made little difference to the result (0-17). Former Exeter full-back Frank Buckland was selected as a wing forward by Torquay for this game.

Two games were then cancelled due to the pitch being water-logged after a week of rain. The opponents were to have been the Duke of Wellington's Regiment and Paignton.

Exeter fielded only three regular back players for a trip to Barnstaple and Tom Browning, a long serving member of the pack, was selected to fill a gap in the centre. Exeter went ahead against the wind but in the second half playing with the wind the team in fact saw less of the play. "Home supporters were highly pleased at the lowering of Exeter's colours by such a margin" (3-24).

Back to winning ways at home to Bournemouth the local scribe thought "Exeter hardly deserved such a decisive victory. The score was three points all at the break but then the visitors lost a man due to injury and Exeter went on to win (17-3).

Then consecutive games probably left the Exeter club with contrasting feelings. Exmouth had not won for several weeks before Exeter came to visit (3-7) but then at the County Ground Newton Abbot was defeated, "the first time in many years that Exeter had beaten Newton Abbot twice in a season" (15-6). Before the latter game a minute's silence was observed to mark the tragic death of former player Billy Braddon who had died following an accident in Argentina. The club flag was flown at half-mast.

Exeter was expected to win against a "weak" Devonport Services XV whose "stronger" XV met Wellington. At The Rectory Exeter opened the scoring through winger R.G. Rew but eventually disappointed (5-12). During the game winger Denton dislocated a collar bone and Jack Rushmere, the club's travelling medical support, managed to put it back in place in the manner of an old style "physio". Denton played on "as best he could". The following week

Denton was included in the team and such was his recovery that he scored one of the tries that defeated visitors Taunton (6-0).

Still at home the club defeated Weston (10-3) and drew with Devonport Services. The other Services team lost at Barnstaple. The home view was that "Exeter deserved to have won" especially as two tries were scored to Services' one (8-8). Exeter was "good value for the points they scored" when achieving a double at Taunton (8-6). A midweek game against Wellington was cancelled when the County Ground Company was trying to assist the troubled local speedway organisation stage an event. In the run up to Easter a team was sent to Teignmouth where "a draw was a fair result" at the end of a lively game (3-3) but a midweek team lost at Tiverton (0-3).

Easter Saturday found the County Ground fairly full despite a bitter wind. Exeter registered all the points in the first half whilst visitors Nottingham was unable notch a single score (9-0). Easter Monday proved to be "a runaway affair" and opponents Old Queenians, the old boys of Queen's College, Taunton drew a later comment that they "were not worth the fixture" (29-0).

Winning 21 and drawing four of 36 games meant that the first team had shown great improvement especially as the fixtures were now getting stronger. The second XV played 27 games of which sixteen were won and three drawn. The "B" record was thought not to be quite so successful though the record broke even at nine wins and two drawn out of twenty games played. An "Extras" XV won "a good number of their games".

The position of the club financially was reported to be satisfactory although public support was not as good as hoped.