

87th Year 1958-9

With Tony Lee remaining in charge, Exeter turned the corner after three consecutive years of poor results. The final playing record published in the Playfair Rugby Football Annual shows that of 38 games played 23 were won and four drawn. The club remained unbeaten until the end of October by which time six games had been won and one drawn.

The season opened with victory over new opponents, Public Schools' Wanderers (14-11). A visit to Falmouth produced another win (16-6) and this was followed by home successes against over the touring Esher team (20-0), Torquay Athletic (9-6) and Barnstaple (12-0). Exeter then exacted revenge for the defeat by Streatham the previous season with a win in London (14-3) before returning home to defeat Devonport Services a week later (9-0). After a week-off due to a Devon game being staged at the County Ground, Exeter returned to London where they recorded a creditable drawn encounter with Saracens (3-3).

The first defeat of the season came at the County Ground against Penzance & Newlyn (6-9) and this was followed by another home defeat when facing the Royal Marines XV four days later (6-16). Exeter quickly responded at home on the first day of November by posting the highest score of the season against Taunton. Seven tries were scored in all, five by the wingers John Stark (3) and M. Gardner (2). Although soundly beaten the visitors played a full part in the attractive football shown throughout (25-8). Defeat returned at Clifton (3-17) before a return to the County Ground saw the club draw with Redruth (0-0).

Up to Boxing Day opposition was provided by teams from Devon. Two games against Exmouth were won, including the Boxing Day encounter, both by the same score (14-3). In between these games Torquay Athletic went down on their own ground (16-6) but Barnstaple at home proved again to be too difficult a hurdle to overcome (3-6).

The Old Year did not end well when visitors Old Blues beat Exeter for the first time since October 1950 (0-11), but the New Year began well with Exeter remaining undefeated for five matches in a row. Firstly a double was recorded against Taunton on their own ground (11-5) and then came a notable victory against visitors Ebbw Vale (5-3). Perhaps the most notable achievement in this run came at Bristol when Exeter managed to hold the strong home side to a draw (9-9). Two home matches completed the sequence of victories – Old Millhillians (21-9) and Weston super Mare (14-6).

A week later the return match with Weston produced the same score line but this time in favour of the Somerset side (6-14). Another defeat followed Guy's Hospital came to Exeter (8-14) but a prized win at home to Plymouth Albion provided some compensation (12-3). Victory against St. Luke's College again proved elusive in a mid-week meeting (3-11).

For once the tough end of season programme ended in Exeter's favour. Of the last eleven games played only three were lost, another was drawn and the remainder won. Two victories were recorded in the run up to Easter - Bridgend (14-11) and Old Cranleighans (12-8). Moseley achieved a narrow victory in the Easter Monday meeting in a game described as being "full of thrust and counter-thrust". Exeter led by eight points at half-time through tries by wingers John Stark and Tony Marks. Crucially Derek Atkins was successful with only one conversion. In the second period the visitors hit back with two tries of their own. Both were converted, the second one of which was successful from a difficult angle (8-10).

The Tuesday game with Leicester was, by contrast, a drab affair. According to the Birmingham Evening Post "The game bore an end-of-season look. It was the dullest meeting between the two clubs since the fixture was instituted shortly after the war." The Exeter forwards proved the stronger of the

two packs but the backs were unable to take advantage of the possession provided. Each side kicked a penalty goal (3-3).

Defeats in this period came at the hands of Newport (3-11) and away at Bath. The latter game was played in driving rain and heavy conditions with pools of water accumulating on the pitch. Scrums were prolonged affairs on the boggy pitch and the Exeter forwards proved their worth in the loose but once again all that could be shown for their efforts was a solitary penalty goal. Bath came from behind to win with a penalty and a try (3-6).

The week-end trip to Cornwall towards the end of April brought success with victories over Redruth (8-6) and St. Ives (8-0). The last senior game of the season saw the defeat of another team from the Duchy – Falmouth – this time at the County Ground (14-0).