

## 88<sup>th</sup> Year 1959-0

There was a marked improvement in Exeter's playing performance for the second year running. Out of a total 45 games played, seven more than in the previous season, three-quarters were either won or drawn and the team scored over twice as many points as it conceded. The official first team playing record read Played 45 Won 33 Drawn 2 Lost 10 Points for 561 Points against 261. Tony Lee was again at the helm for this successful campaign.

The season began in promising style with a well-earned victory at Beacon Park over arch rivals Plymouth Albion (18-9). This success was quickly followed by three more, all gained at home – Esher (18-3), Falmouth (30-0) and Teignmouth (20-6). The first set-back came at the end of September when the team lost by a surprisingly wide margin at Torquay Athletic (0-20). The team atoned for this reverse by achieving a rare victory over St Luke's College in a mid-week game. It should be pointed out that this encounter would have taken place very early in the College team's itinerary (11-3).

October began with a second somewhat surprising defeat, this time at The Rectory against Devonport Services (9-16). Successive home wins over Pontypool, on their first visit since 1913 (17-11), St. Ives (21-0) and Saracens (11-0) more than made up for the lapse against Services but disappointment came with another loss to Weston super Mare at the County Ground (11-19). A week later in Cornwall, Exeter suffered a defeat by Redruth (3-17) and after a mid-week win against the Royal Naval Engineering College (16-6) the team was held to a pointless draw at Taunton (0-0). The Taunton Courier headed its report rather oddly with the line "Taunton, Exeter in Rugby Classic". Apparently "There was never a dull moment and play switched rapidly from end to end in a series of daring moves". All that was missing was a score of some sort! The next scheduled home game with Bristol was cancelled as Gloucestershire and Devon were involved in a County Championship match at The Memorial Ground.

From mid-November until the second week of the New Year, Exeter proved victorious in eight consecutive matches. A win over the Royal Marine Corps at the County Ground was notable for the debut of Barry Carless at fly-half, a student at St. Luke's College who was unable to break into their first team. Despite a still wet pitch and rain, the newcomer combined well with scrum-half Tony Hopper to produce a good open game (18-0). Remaining at home "Exeter should have trebled their score" according to one report as hooker Brian Dyer dominated possession. Distribution was poor and it was left to scrum-half Hopper to initiate attacks against Clifton (24-9). Opponents from Devon featured in four of the next five games. The return of Carless at outside half brought an improvement in the three-quarters against Exmouth away (12-0). Back at home honours were even with the Torquay Athletic pack but the Exeter half-backs held sway thereby helping to avenge the early season defeat in south Devon (5-0). Exeter then won at Barnstaple (6-0) and the week before Christmas the Old Blues team was defeated in London (6-3). The first game in January, at the County Ground, saw the Taunton team fall to its first defeat in seven weeks. Exeter scored five tries with all conversion attempts failing (15-5).

So often the bogey team, Weston super Mare put an end to the run of victories when, on their own ground, the Somerset team achieved a double over its Devon rivals (8-9). Exeter responded to this set back by remaining undefeated in the next eight matches. Firstly came a revenge defeat of Redruth at the County Ground (6-3) followed by a comfortable home win over Barnstaple (18-3). A visit to the capital brought victory over London Hospital (8-5) after which Streatham went down to a narrow defeat on the County Ground (3-0).

The last two week-ends in February found Exeter travelling firstly to the far west and then east again to London. Falmouth succumbed at home but provided stiffer opposition than they had earlier in the season (11-3). The following week Exeter had to settle for a draw at Honor Oak Park against Guy's Hospital (5-5). March began with a victory at home over Plymouth Albion, thus achieving the double

over their rivals. With Roy Lewis filling in at stand-off the team took until half-time to settle (15-5). Continuing the run of success Devonport Services were seen off at the County Ground (14-3).

Fortunes then turned again for the next three games. St. Luke's College, now at their peak won the usual mid-week-meeting (0-9) and then Exeter went off on their two match tour to Wales. Defeated in both games Exeter nevertheless played some enterprising rugby against Bridgend (3-8) and Ebbw Vale (6-11).

Despite the usual hectic end of season fixture list, Exeter came through with flying colours losing only twice in the final eleven matches and winning the remainder. At the end of March, Exeter, at home, firstly saw off Cheltenham (14-3) and then Paignton at Queen's Park (9-3). On the road to Cornwall again, Exeter defeated Penance & Newlyn (14-8) before returning home to win against Newton Abbot (22-3).

The following four games were all played at the County Ground. The week before Easter Bath visited and went home defeated. Beset by injuries, the visitors faced a home side playing with confidence. Bath attacked whenever they could but the Exeter defence held firm (8-3). The holiday period began with victory over Old Cranleighans by a single point (17-16) but this narrow margin was just a prelude to the best performance of the season.

"Crushing Defeat for Moseley" declared a headline in the Birmingham Post. The tourists were forced to play a number of players out of position but still attempted to play an open game. Hooker Brian Dyer dominated the set scrums for Exeter but Moseley managed to gain useful line-out possession. Exeter ran in as many as eight tries, some from interceptions. Derek Atkins was successful with seven conversions and two penalty goals. The visitors managed only a single penalty goal. Exeter achieved its highest score against Moseley since fixtures between the two teams began in 1925 (44-3).

It was a different story the following day when Exeter failed to register any score at all against Leicester. Exeter once more gained possession from set scrums but the visitors proved to be far superior in the loose and the home side failed to counter the three tries scored against them (0-9). Leicester fielded two British Lions in this game – Phil Horrocks-Taylor of England and the legendary Tony O'Reilly of Ireland, each of whom went over for tries.

The last major game of the season – the regular mid-week game with touring Newport – also ended in defeat (3-11) but sandwiching this game were two away match victories against Teignmouth (23-10) and Sidmouth (14-3).

