

47th Year 1918-9

Locally, during the summer months of 1918, the R.F.A. Cadets published a full and attractive fixture list for the coming season. It was also stated that the Cadets would not field an association team but would concentrate on rugby football. The opening match took place on the first Saturday in October at Graslawn. However, with the armistice being declared a few weeks later, it was soon apparent that the team would not be able to complete its arrangements as by January 1919 practically the whole squad had been demobilised.

Nationally, a post war rugby tournament was arranged between teams representing Mother Country, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the Royal Air Force. New Zealand beat Mother Country in a play-off at Twickenham. Teams representing both New Zealand and Australia played against Devon during March. The only regular Exeter player to appear for Devon in these games was Stan Havill.

Inevitably the revival of the Exeter club was a slow process and it was not until the middle of March that rivalry with Exmouth was resumed at the County Ground. Exmouth was reported to be able to field a representative side but the Exeter team fielded many new faces including those of Drew and Brock from the Exeter School XV. The home team started sensationally with a try in the opening minutes scored by Havill but that was the team's only score (3-14).

A week later the return match took place on the Exmouth Cricket Ground where Exeter again demonstrated one of their frustrating pre-war frailties. For 45 minutes the game was stubbornly contested but then "a sudden and utter collapse by Exeter" saw the home team gain an easy victory by eight tries to one (3-24). Newcomer scrum half Martin touched down Exeter's only score.

A committee meeting on the last day of March announced that a mid-week practice match for existing, returning and new players would be held at the County Ground as well as detailing arrangements for the month of April. On the following Saturday a team was sent to Crediton to face the local side. Set play was described as "indifferent" but play in the loose was said to be good. Exeter included stalwarts Percy Kerswell, Billy Pike, Sam Lawrence and B.H. Lock who led the way to an Exeter victory (9-3) despite Webber being carried off with a leg injury. The Exeter eight were observed as "lacking avoirdupois".

After Devon had faced an Australian Services XV a week later, it was the turn of a combined Exeter & Exmouth XV to meet the Australians at Exmouth. The local team held the visitors to a narrow margin (3-9). During the game Exeter's Percy Kerswell broke his ankle and the Australians sportingly allowed a substitute to take his place as was the custom in their country.

Mid-week the two local teams faced each other for the third time in seven weeks before only a moderately sized attendance. Jack Vale made his mark for Exeter with two tries and in reply Exmouth registered a converted try (6-5). The margin of victory may have been only one point but this represented Exeter's first win over their seaside neighbours since April 1911 following which Exeter had come off second best in ten subsequent encounters.

Three days later the two teams combined again, this time to face New Zealand (Torquay Deport) a team the press referred to as the All Blacks. This title did not fool the public as again there was only a moderate crowd at the County Ground. The local team that included Billy Pike, Jack Vale and Colin Hoare again lost to their visitors (6-14).

Fittingly the final act of the season came on the last official day. With the desire of giving a game to servicemen returning from the war, a match was arranged between the club and an Old Crocks XV. Play was fast and “of good order”. The Crocks lasted well but the Exeter team were more youthful and showed better combination (16-8).

Only five games had been played but after the horrors of war and disruption on the home front, there were hopeful signs for the club. But more difficult times lay ahead in the post-war era.