The background of the cover is a photograph of a rugby match. A player in a black and white striped jersey is running with the ball on the left, while another player in a similar jersey is on the right. The scene is set on a green grass field. Overlaid on this is a central gold-colored rectangle containing the title and promotional text. The rectangle is divided into four quadrants by a dark green vertical line and a dark green horizontal line. The text is centered within the gold area.

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# Cardiff Rugby Club 1876-2026

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**Jamie Muir** Interim Managing Director Cardiff Rugby

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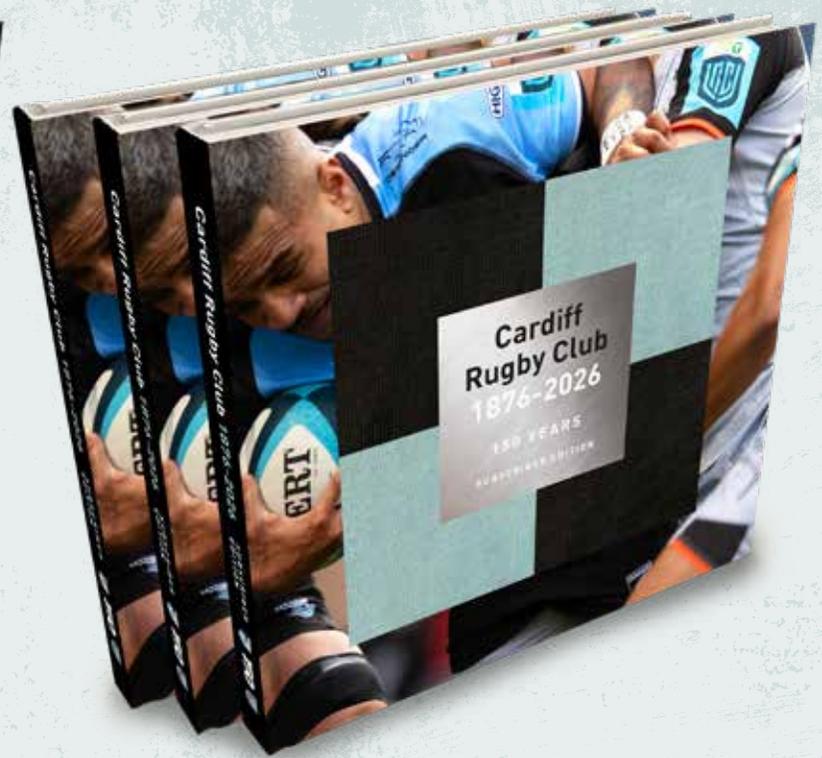
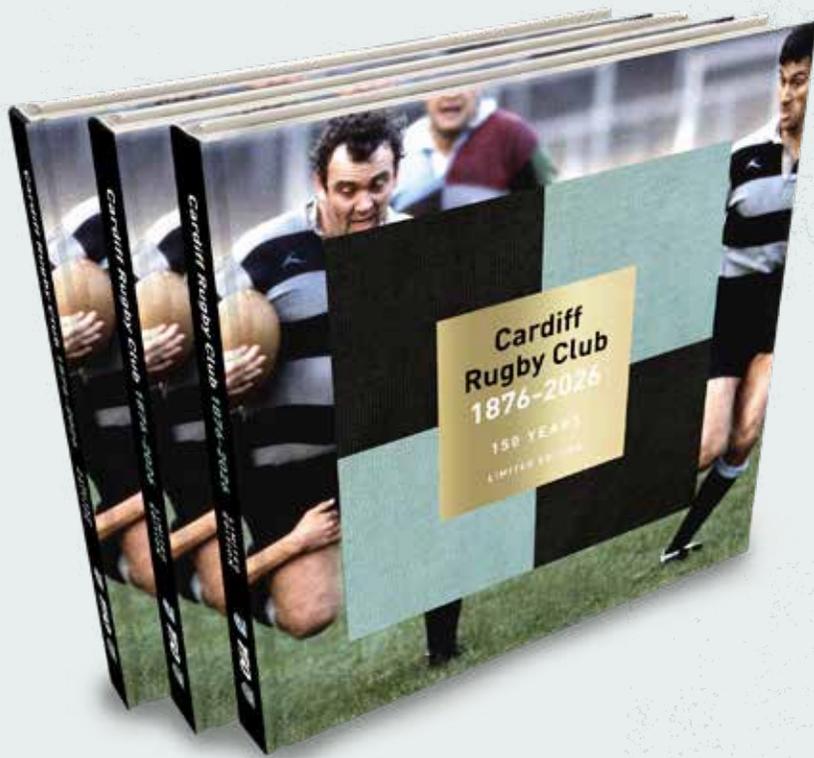
'I offer our sincere congratulations on the celebration of 150 years of Cardiff rugby. Cardiff has always been associated with an exciting brand of rugby and, in recent years, has provided a shining example in terms of its development pathway which is effectively helping grow the stars of the future. This is clearly evident in the teams we see on the pitch today. Those involved in the production of such a collectable volume are to be commended for their diligence and imagination in creating this record of memorable events and all praise for its production should be directed to its authors for the immense amount of time spent researching and collating the information.'

**Keith Morgan** Chairman, Cardiff Athletic Club

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# Authors

We were both absolutely delighted to have been asked to produce this celebratory volume of 150 years of Cardiff rugby. Between us, we can muster a combined total of 129 years watching the club in its various guises and we absolutely have Cambridge blue and black running through our veins – so not quite 150, but pretty close!

The project has taken almost three years to complete but has been an absolute labour of love. We have hugely enjoyed the task and are delighted to have played a small role in helping mark the sesquicentennial anniversary of the founding of our great club in 1876.

Despite there being several iterations in terms of how rugby at Cardiff has manifested itself over time, we have treated the story as a continuous one from the formation of the Cardiff Football Club in 1876 through to Cardiff Rugby in the present day. Though a minority at the Arms Park may take a different view, for us it is the only perspective that makes sense, and we are confident that the majority of readers will agree.

---

David Allen was previously a member of the Cardiff Rugby Board, founding chair of CF10, the club's supporters' trust, and a committee member of Cardiff RFC. He currently chairs the Cardiff Rugby Museum Steering Group. A lifelong Cardiff Rugby Club supporter, he collaborated with Gwyn Prescott on his previous publication *Cardiff Arms Park - An Illustrated Architectural and Social History* (2021).

---

A lifelong supporter of Cardiff Rugby Club, Gwyn Prescott is a rugby and First World War historian who has written extensively on early rugby history especially in Wales. He is a member of the Cardiff Rugby Museum Steering Group and author of *'This Rugby Spellbound People': the Birth of Rugby in Cardiff and Wales* (3rd Ed. 2024).



David Allen



Gwyn Prescott

# Rugby Greats



From the amateur era to the professional age, Cardiff Rugby Club has been home to many remarkable players whose brilliance has echoed far beyond the Arms Park. Legends such as Barry John, Sir Gareth Edwards and Gerald Davies were central to Cardiff's achievements both in domestic rugby and against international touring sides, setting standards that opponents across Britain and beyond aspired to match. This has continued into the modern era, with players such as Sam Warburton, Leigh Halfpenny, Jamie Roberts, Taulupe Faletau, and Tomos Williams driving Cardiff's achievements in the professional game. Many of these greats have also gone on to represent Wales and the British and Irish Lions,

'There's a special magic about the name of Cardiff in rugby and rightly so. There is an atmosphere and style about the club.'

(Barry John)

underlining Cardiff Rugby's historic role as a breeding ground for international excellence and a cornerstone of the global rugby story.

Six rugby greats from Cardiff rugby will proudly sign each copy of the Limited Edition. By purchasing a Limited Edition or Subscriber copy in advance of publication, you can ensure that your

name is included in the subscriber appendix and forever associated with the history of this great club. Both editions are guaranteed to sell out, and applications will be dealt with on a first come, first served basis. Applications for both editions will close on the 20th of March, 2026.

---

Gareth Edwards; Gareth Davies.

# 1876-2026

**1876** Cardiff Football Club is formed. First match at the Arms Park.

**1878** Cambridge blue and black colours adopted.

**1881** South Wales Challenge Cup won.

**1947-8** 'Greatest ever season' with thirty-nine out forty-one games won.

**1926-7** Two First XVs adopted for five seasons.

**1908** Australia defeated 24-8.

**1947** Australia beaten 11-3.

**1953** New Zealand defeated 8-3.

**1957** Australia beaten 14-11.

**2003** Regional rugby arrives and the side becomes 'Cardiff Blues'.

**1996** Cardiff face Toulouse in the first ever European Cup Final.

**1984** Australia defeated for the sixth consecutive time 16-12.

**2009** Gloucester beaten 50-12 in EDF Cup Final at Twickenham.

**2010** Toulon defeated 28-21 in Amlin Challenge Cup Final.

**2012** Club returns to the Arms Park after three seasons at the Cardiff City Stadium.

Harlequins v Cardiff at Twickenham, 1985. Cardiff players (left to right) Alan Phillips, Alun Glasson, Steve Cannon, Ian Eidman, Jeff Whitefoot, Gareth Davies, and Tim Crothers. Cardiff won 38-16.

**1884** The four three-quarter system is born.

**1885-6** The "Cardiff game" is unleashed: one match out of twenty-seven lost.

**1888** New Zealand Native Team defeated 4-1.

**1907** South Africa beaten 17-0.

**1905-6** Unbeaten club season.

**1898** Newport beaten four times in one season for the first time.

**1966** Australia defeated 14-8.

**1970** New club ground opens.

**1975** Australia beaten 14-9.

**1981** WRU Cup won for the first time.

**1979-80** 'Rags' Centenary

**1976-7** Centenary season.

**2018** Gloucester beaten 31-30 in European Challenge Cup Final.

**2021** Club rebrands to 'Cardiff Rugby'.

**2025-6** Sesquicentennial season.





## Three titans of Cardiff Rugby

Though it perhaps seems unfair to pick out individual players in an age when so many contributed so much, three giants of the game graced the turf of the Arms Park in the early years of the new century

and played key roles in the first Golden Era of Cardiff and Welsh rugby – Gwyn Nicholls, Rhys Gabe and Percy Bush. During ‘The first Golden Era of Cardiff and Welsh Rugby’, three giants of the game graced the turf of the Arms Park in the early years of the new century – Gwyn Nicholls, Rhys Gabe and Percy Bush.

recognised as the outstanding back of his time and a great thinker about the game, both technically and tactically’. He would go on to represent the club 242 times, captaining it in four seasons, and scoring 111 tries. He won twenty-four Welsh caps, leading the team on ten occasions, and represented the British Isles on the 1899 tour to Australia. On the latter, he played in all four tests and scored two tries as the ‘Lions’ came back from a first test deficit to claim the series 3-1.

On his death in 1939, such was the esteem in which he was held that plans were immediately put in place to establish a lasting memorial to his name at the Arms Park. Though delayed by the Second World War, the Gwyn Nicholls Gates were funded by public subscription and officially opened on Boxing Day, 1949. Rhys Gabe, his centre partner of

many years, performed the key turning ceremony and recalled his friend as follows:

He was the most complete footballer I have ever met, equally strong in every department of the game. He was the most difficult man to stop because of his long, raking stride coupled with

a deceptive body-sway. His abiding ambition was to carve openings for himself that indefinable gleam in which other players have never shined. He was above all the rest.

Originally located at the Quay Street entrance, the gates now stand at the Angel Hotel approach to the current ground. Nicholls also authored one of the earliest technical manuals on the game, *The Modern Rugby Game and How to Play it* (1908), and after retiring in 1910 went on to serve on the committee and as a national selector.

Gabe himself was a native of Llangennech, Carmarthenshire, and made his debut for Llanelli at the tender age of seventeen. Moving to London in 1901 to undertake teacher training at Borough Road College, he played for London Welsh while in the metropolis. Returning to Wales to take up a teaching position at Howard Gardens Cardiff in 1904, he joined the club and played regularly until 1908. He appeared in a total of 115 matches for Cardiff, scoring fifty-one tries, and captaining the side in 1907-8. He also won twenty-four Welsh caps, scoring eleven tries for his country and formed a devastating partnership

with Nicholls as described by Dai Smith and Gareth Williams in their centenary history of Welsh rugby:

Rhys Gabe’s entry on the international stage gave the ageing Nicholls a tailor-made greyhound to release... (he) was then 5 foot 11 inches and 12 stone 10 lbs, very hard to stop as

he ran straight, elbows and knees pounding, or changed direction with a rapidity unexpected in such a big man. His own style fitted into Nicholls’ scheme of things making the two of them greater as a pair than Gould and Nicholls had ever been.

In Danny Davies’ view, Nicholls and Gabe were ‘probably the strongest threequarter partnership until challenged in the modern era by Jack Matthews and Bleddyn Williams’.

Having first played for Cardiff in season 1899-1900, Percy Bush was initially a ‘flashy’ centre three-quarter, but with Nicholls’ support (and supported by letters from enthusiastic advocates in the press), he switched to and had become the club’s established fly-half by Christmas 1903. Davies described the Canton-born man as:

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Page 45, top: Three legendary stars of Cardiff, Welsh, and British rugby (left to right): Gwyn Nicholls, Rhys Gabe, and Percy Bush.

Bottom: Nicholls and Bush combine for a Cardiff score against Newport at the Arms Park, early 1900s.



## The Greatest Season?

Cardiff resumed official post-war fixtures on the 1st September, 1945, with a 43-3 victory over a Cardiff and District XV. The match was a suitable return to some kind of normality, being a traditional

local curtain raiser that could trace its roots back to the 1880s. The legendary

While bomb damage meant that the Arms Park may not have had the shine of the old, Cardiff Rugby soon burned brighter than ever. The 1947-8 season, with the help of a captaincy by Danny Davies, Cardiff emerged triumphant in thirty-nine of their forty-one fixtures, packing up an astonishing 803 points (in the three-point try era) while conceding a mere 161. Undefeated at home, Tanner's side

Boxing Day, though they would gain some revenge by defeating them in the semi-final of the Middlesex Sevens the following April. Matthews retained the captaincy in 1946-7, but shared duties with Les Mansfield due to the continuing demands of his service career.

While bomb damage meant that the Arms Park may not have had the shine of

old, Cardiff rugby soon burned brighter than ever. The 1947-8 season, with the

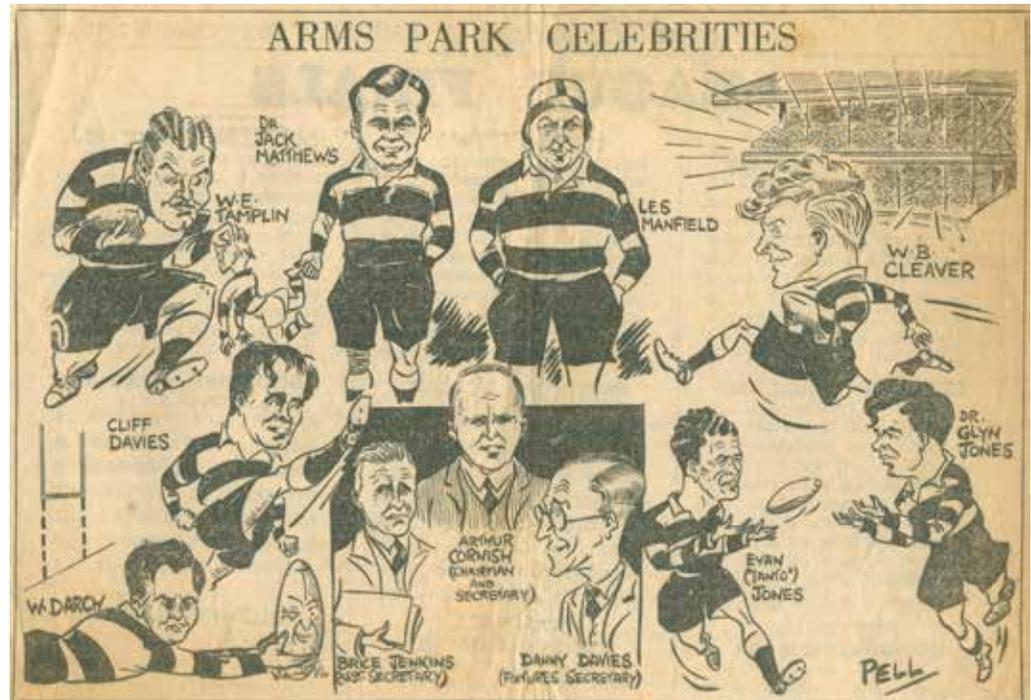
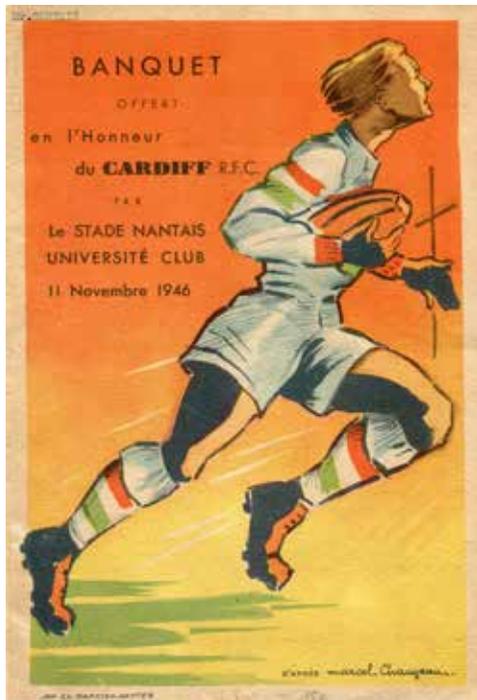
help of a captaincy by Danny Davies, Cardiff emerged triumphant in thirty-nine of their forty-one fixtures, packing up an astonishing 803 points (in the three-point try era) while conceding a mere 161.

Undefeated at home, Tanner's side

were crowned unofficial Welsh Club Champions. A highlight of the season included another win over Australia, with the crowd restricted to 40,000 due to rebuilding at the Arms Park. But, for those with blue and black in the blood, just as enjoyable was beating Newport four times in a season for the first time since 1905-6.

J.B.G Thomas wrote of Cardiff's 'inspiring' season and of how the players 'displayed team-work unequalled since the "Golden Days" of Welsh rugby at the beginning of the century'. Back-

Poster advertising the banquet that followed Cardiff's 22-5 win over Stade Nantais in November, 1946, together with a newspaper cartoon by 'Pell' of the *Football Echo* featuring famous club celebrities from the same year.





rower Elvet Jones played in thirty-nine of Cardiff's matches, while Roy Roberts, William Jones, and Frank Trott trailed just behind him on thirty-eight appearances. Matthews' centre partner and best friend, Bleddyn Williams, finished the season with forty-one tries, breaking a fifty-five year-old club record. It would take almost half a century for the figure to be surpassed, with winger Steve Ford finally overhauling it in 1997.

Cardiff's only blemishes were somewhat surprising and came on the road at Pontypool and Penarth. For the latter, the club could at least point to nine of its regular team representing Wales in Belfast that day. Matthews was to get his revenge over Pooler in the return fixture at home, helping himself to four tries in a 30-3 win.

Cardiff's domestic dominance was rewarded with eleven different

players lining up for Wales during the international season. Remarkably, the club supplied ten players to each of the Wales XVs that faced England, Scotland, and France and nine to the sides that faced Australia and Ireland.

## Club Champions again

Cardiff again claimed the unofficial Welsh Club Championship in the 1948-9 season, this time securing thirty-nine wins from forty-five matches and suffering just three defeats.

The list of players that lined up in the years that followed the war and into the early 1950s reads like a 'who's who' of club icons. Alongside the aforementioned Bleddyn Williams, Tanner, and Matthews, Cardiff fans were blessed to be able to

watch the likes of Billy Cleaver, Gareth Griffiths, Gwyn Rowlands, Cliff Morgan, and Rex Willis in the backs, together with Stan Bowes, Geoff Beckingham, Cliff Davies, Bill Tamplin, Malcolm Thomas, Derek 'CD' Williams, and Sid Judd in the forwards. Several of these names are frequently listed among the greatest ever to line up for Wales and the British and Irish Lions. The fact they all played in blue and black in the immediate post-war period only underlines the strength of Cardiff rugby at this time.

Cardiff's prestigious place in world rugby made them hugely attractive opponents for other teams and it could take many years to be added to the club's fixture list (if the invitation ever came at

---

Three of the all-time Cardiff greats: Bleddyn Williams, Dr. Jack Mathews, and Cliff Morgan.



## 8

# 1970-1979

David Allen

The new club ground was officially opened in October 1970 on what had previously been the Arms Park cricket pitch. Edwards and John became established as the world's leading half-back partnership after the victorious Lions tour of 1971. A glittering centenary season in 1976-7 included games against a World XV and Argentina and culminated in a celebratory banquet at Cardiff Castle. By the decade end, two new half-back stars had emerged, and the 'Rags' celebrated their own centenary.

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Left: '...like pushing behind a sofa'.  
The Cardiff front row of Mike Knill,  
Mike Watkins, and Barry Nelmes.  
Cardiff v Italy, 1976.

## Championship and cup double

Lakin had been appointed captain of the 'Rags' at the start of the season but ended up featuring in forty-two out of forty-eight first team fixtures, the second team captaincy transferring to Ian Robinson.

The following Easter weekend the Barbarians were beaten 45-19 and

Season 1981-2 saw the club complete the rare double of winning the unofficial *Western Mail* Championships and retaining the WRU cup ... Thirty-two out of thirty-seven fixtures were won.

Season 1981-2 saw the club complete the rare double of winning the unofficial *Western Mail* Championship and retaining the WRU Cup. The Championship win was

the first since Eddie Thomas' team had claimed the title in 1957-8. Thirty-two out of thirty-seven fixtures were won, with four losses and one draw, with 798 points for and 430 against. Roger Beard, who was now coach alongside Gary Samuel, identified the keys to the team's success:

We decided to change our style dramatically...The players accepted what we were going to try to achieve and I think every one of them enjoyed our total dedication to attack from everywhere...it was wonderful to see the commitment that...all our international players gave to the team. They never picked their games or took rests just because they were star players. If things started to go wrong we could have switched to 10-man tactics without difficulty. But it is always more fun for the players to expand



attacking options to the full. That, and the loyalty of the players, was the foundation of our success.

The route to the cup this year was much tougher, with away matches against Glamorgan Wanderers and Ebbw Vale before a 12-3 home win against Llanelli in the fourth round. Newbridge were then overcome 21-11 in the semi-final at Rodney Parade. Bridgend were once again the opponents in the final and Cardiff were soon rocked back after they conceded nine points in the first six minutes of what was to be a fast and exciting game. A David Barry penalty from wide out was followed by a storming run by second-row Kevin Edwards that set prop Ian Eidman up for a try that was converted by Barry to level the scores just before half time. A further second half penalty by Barry saw the club

take the lead for the first time before it was cancelled out by one from Gary Pearce. Twelve all was how it ended, but the cup was won for the second time by virtue of Cardiff having scored the only try.

In the face of opposition from the Welsh Anti-Apartheid movement, and despite the fact the WRU had already cancelled its own planned tour to South Africa, the club went ahead with a five-match tour in May after 'seeking assurances that they would play South African sides chosen on a non-racial basis.' Three out of five fixtures were lost, but a notable 14-13 victory over Western Province achieved.

---

Cardiff v Maoris 1982, Gareth Evans fields a ball in front of the charging Maoris pack as David Barry looks on.

## Australia conquered for the sixth time

The following season of 1982-3 saw eighteen defeats and two draws in forty-six games and a finish in ninth position in the unofficial championship, the worst since 1935-6. The losses included a 17-10 defeat to the Maori on the National Ground after conceding fourteen points in a five-minute spell in October and a 13-6 away defeat in the cup to eventual winners Pontypool in which David Barry and Gareth Davies contrived to miss six penalties between them. The Barbarians match ended in a 32-all draw after the home side had trailed 26-12 at one point. Both sides scoring six tries and with Gareth Davies just failing to secure victory with his missed conversion of an Adrian Hadley try in the corner. The Baabaas featured Springbok stars Errol Tobias and Dannie Gerber, and the *Western Mail* reported that:

...the only sorrowful man as everyone trudged off the field was limping Cardiff touch judge Stan Bowes who had to be replaced by club Chairman Tony Williams, after pulling a calf muscle. But Stan is never unhappy for long — especially after a match like this.

The *Rugby Annual for Wales* again voted Holmes Player of the Year, attributing much of the revival in Welsh fortunes to the Cardiff man and declaring him the 'hero of the season', one in which he scored twenty-six tries for his Club.

After the disappointments of the

previous year, Cardiff fared far better the following by finishing third in the championship in 1983-4 and securing the WRU cup for the third time in four years. Led by John Scott for a record equalling fourth consecutive year, the season saw the team break its own aggregate points record with 1,214, Gareth Davies improve his own personal club scoring record to 383 (which included four drop goals against Swansea to equal Barry John's record), Adrian Hadley scored twenty-nine tries and Alan Phillips twenty-four. Llanelli were beaten 26-6 in the cup semi-final at Swansea before a determined Neath side was overcome 24-19 in the final. Neath claimed the moral victory of scoring three tries to Cardiff's two and, on a perfect spring day, the crowd was reported as a 'disappointing' 25,000. Notable recruits include former Welsh Youth captain Mike Rayer, who joined from Llandaff North and was destined to become another Cardiff legend.

The attendance for the game against Australia in October 1984 was also disappointing at 20,000, largely because the fixture was played midweek. Those present saw the club record its sixth consecutive win over the Wallabies in a 16-12 triumph. Steve Cannon deputised for the injured Holmes and his partner Gareth Davies 'controlled events with superb tactical assurance'. 'Cardiff conquer! Aussie fightback fails as Gareth breaks their hearts' ran the *Western Mail* headline, though it was a superb forward effort by Norster, Edwards, Eidman, Phillips, and Whitefoot that carried the day. The outside-half was out of favour with the Welsh selectors at the time,

leading Australian coach Alan Jones to conclude that 'Wales must be a red-hot side if they can leave Davies out.'

Andrew Slack's side went on to defeat all four home nations on tour for the first time, leading Stan Bowes, by then Cardiff Chairman, to conclude that 'In retrospect the victory became more meritorious as the team on the day subsequently became their grand slam team.' With the benefit of additional hindsight, the match took on even greater significance as it turned out to be the last occasion that Cardiff would face the full Australian team, though Cardiff Blues would play a hastily arranged mid-week friendly against an Australian XV in 2009.

## Another partnership ends

Holmes had picked up the injury that prevented him from facing the Aussies in a titanic 9-all draw with Pontypool played before a crowd of 16,000 at the Arms Park in October. Cardiff were otherwise unbeaten at home, with stand-out victories against Leicester (47-21), Newport (37-3), Pontypridd (44-12), the Barbarians (44-20) and Swansea (42-16). Matches against Pontypool, that year's champions to be, featured large in the season, with Cardiff suffering a humiliating 24-6 defeat at Pontypool Park before emerging 24-3 victors in the cup semi-final at Newport just two weeks later. Despite being overwhelming underdogs, the Blue and Blacks rose to the occasion and won the day through twenty points from Gareth Davies with four penalties, two drop goals and the



1885-86 season ticket, the Cardiff team that was unbeaten until the final game of the season against Mosley, and the medal presented to the players to mark an otherwise highly successful season (the one shown belonged to RT Duncan).

CARDIFF 1<sup>ST</sup> XV - 1885/86



It was a learning process for spectators, too, who were initially bewildered by what was happening. Used to a more sluggish game in which the ball was tied up in lengthy mauls, and combined passing was a relative rarity, many were said to have had difficulty following the ball.

The 'Cardiff game' quickly became the 'Welsh game', as one Llanelli journalist correctly predicted:

The passing game was ... seen at its best: fifteen players worked with a perfect co-ordination unexampled in the annals of Welsh football ... the victorious team, not only should be the pride of Cardiff, but of the whole Principality, and strange it will be if their success does not stimulate to more scientific play the other teams of Wales and operate to improve the reputation of the Rugby game generally.

However, as the season progressed, opponents began to know what to expect and, in some return matches, the margin of victory was less spectacular. But it was only in the final game against Mosley that Cardiff's colours were lowered, by two tries to one. Hancock's men seemed over-said and even perhaps nervous. Mosley came well prepared. Their backs tackled fiercely and disrupted Cardiff's combination.

Despite this disappointing reverse, there is still much to celebrate beyond the results alone. There is no doubt that Cardiff's exciting 'scientific attack' play stimulated the popularity of rugby in Wales, both as a game to play and to watch. Within four years of Hancock's

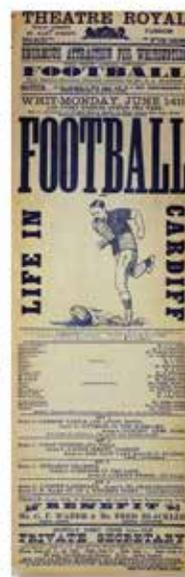
shining season, for example, the number of teams in the Cardiff area alone grew from eight to well over 200.

## Football in Victorian Cardiff

The seventeen men who played most regularly under Hancock all lived and worked in Cardiff but only nine were born there. Two came from elsewhere in Wales, two were Scottish, and four English. A third were working class. Almost all the players came through a flourishing grassroots club structure. So the composition of the team was a reflection of Victorian Cardiff society, its citizens, wherever they were born, and whatever their class, could therefore easily identify with the club and take pride in its success.

Responding to the growing enthusiasm for rugby, in 1884 the proprietors of the Theatre Royal staged a melodrama entitled 'Football or Life in Cardiff' in front of packed audiences. The playbill portrayed a rugby player in Cardiff kit, one of the scenes was set in the Arms Park, a match was enacted on stage, and there were songs about Hancock and his teammates. Here is clear evidence that, within ten years of its formation, the club had entered the very lifeblood of the booming Victorian town.

With opponents learning to counter or embrace Cardiff's tactics, it was inevitable that the results the following season would suffer. The club also had to manage without Hancock, who had retired, and Shadden and Angus Stuart, who joined Dewsbury. However, although five games



Advertising poster for 'Football or Life in Cardiff', Theatre Royal, June 1886.

In the minds of the public, the match was given as much importance as an international. Despite Cardiff's erratic post-war form, memories of events nineteen years earlier were still fresh and a long on/ five rematch was pure box office. The Western Mail reported that:

Last Saturday was a red-letter day in the history of Welsh rugby, and probably the most memorable day in the history of the Cardiff club. The match was the most discussed of the All Blacks tour to date, and consequently it was not surprising to find the greatest crowd which has yet greeted the colts... They played like men who had had a cocktail of all the nerve tonics, life giving elixirs and Kruschen healing mixtures in existence, and when Delaney dived over the line in his best style the visitors were able to experience a Welsh crowd at their best - or worst!

Forty-thousand fans crammed into the Arms Park to witness the match. The home team were clearly inspired and following the Delaney try a pushover effort by the Cardiff pack was agonisingly ruled out by the referee. The game ended in a 16-8 loss for Cardiff, one of the narrower margins of defeat to the All Blacks on that tour. The Bark and his pack of forwards had stood up to the New Zealanders magnificently, but a first victory over the All Blacks remained elusive. It was nevertheless an honourable defeat to a team that would remain invincible on that tour.

\*The word 'Kruschen' came from a mineral water brand in the Balkan Empire with numerous claims that it would alleviate rheumatism, anxiety, and fatigue.



## Two first XVs experiment

Danny Davis was made captain with Bobby Delaney vice-captain for the 1925-6 season, a generally low scoring affair, though both Newport and Swansea were beaten three times. In 1926-7, the club instigated a policy of playing two official first XV teams, rather than a first XV and a reserves side. Though presented as a beneficial move that would advantage the large number of clubs seeking a fixture against Cardiff, the true reasoning was financial. More first team matches would mean more income for the cash strapped club, trying hard to balance the books after the recent acquisition of the Arms Park.

CARDIFF ATHLETIC CLUB 1925-26 SEASON	
<b>BLACKHEATH CARDIFF,</b>	
OFFICIAL PROGRAMME	
SENIOR FIELD, BLACKHEATH	
(To be played on 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st)	
(Admission: Adults 2s, Children 1s)	
(Refreshments: 6d)	
(Programme: 6d)	
(Box Seats: 10s)	
(Reserve Seats: 5s)	
(General Seats: 2s)	
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(Box Seats: 10s)	
(Reserve Seats: 5s)	
(General Seats: 2s)	
(Children: 1s)	

There had already been a precedent in England, where the prominent Blackheath club had first experimented with the practice.

Season tickets were marketed with the promise of a 'first class match every week'. Clubs used to being on the club's reserve XV fixture list were understandably in favour of the controversial system, but those already on the first team fixture list were markedly less enthused. Over the five years the club employed the system, complaints about the strength of the teams being fielded became increasingly frequent. The policy would eventually lead to a significant falling out with Leicester. The London Daily News reported in 1928 that the Midlands club were to cancel fixtures, quoting their secretary as saying that:

... the arrangement that Cardiff should always bring their first team to Leicester was a verbal one, but there was no doubt it had been made... He added that in view of Leicester's position as one of the premier clubs in the country they would not play reserve teams, no matter what their strength.

Fixtures between the two clubs only resumed in the 1940s.

## Maoris victorious

Cardiff managed to negotiate not one, but two games against the 1926 New Zealand Maoris in a further attempt to add to their coffers. Both ended in defeat. On November 6th the Maoris managed to rise above the Arms Park mud and win



18-8 in a game when the home crowd had expected a win. Cardiff made the mistake of sticking to their traditional attacking style, despite the wet conditions. The pack had the upper hand, but the Cardiff backs would provide the opposition with chance after chance through poor handling in the wet.

December 28th saw the rematch. A huge defensive effort led by Arthur Cornish and Ossie Male held back waves of Maori attack. But the forwards squirmed some 5-3 before a crowd of 27,000. It was a tense, exciting game that was rightly praised in the press, but ultimately one that failed to satisfy the club's ambition of a fresh win over a touring side.

Notable additions to the Cardiff squad that season were Bob Barrell and Harry Bowcott. Another policeman, based in Caerphilly, the well-named Officer Barrell

became another cornerstone of the Cardiff pack for eight seasons. Bowcott, a Cambridge Blue and one of many Cardiff High School Old Boys to serve the club in the 1920s and 1930s, was a skilled foot-balling centre in the club tradition who would play five tests on the 1930 Lions tour and later become President of the WRU.

Harry Bowcott (top left) played ten seasons for Cardiff and lock Bob Barrell (above) eight. Bowcott making 113 appearances and Barrell 261. Both were capped for Wales, Bowcott on eight occasions and Barrell four.

Page 44: Cardiff v RB Harriers match programme together with itinerary card for the match against Blackheath, 1925



Left: Cardiff First XV, 1938-9. Back Row: LC Walters (Gen. Secretary), J Powell (Dir.), Nasseau, RA Carrish, J Babinia, F Davies, DE Davies, GE Hestlop, DV Wynn-Jones (Conner-Itael). Middle Row Standing: WM Douglas (Conner-Itael), A Richards, J Davies, D Brown, S Brown, HJ Edwards, EL Brown, L Arnold, WR Davies, D Hale. Middle Row Seated: K Street, LJS Thomas, R Roberts, WSN Davis (Vice-Capt), WT Morgan (President), W Wecker (Capt), L Spavin, WD Morgan, DL Porter, J Thomas (Conner-Itael). First Row: E Jones, L Williams, ER Knapp, DEM Coombs.

## 5

## 1930-1944

Steve Coombs

The period between the wars saw Cardiff continue to struggle with regular defections to rugby league, but it also saw some great names join the club, notably the two great sporting all-rounders, Maurice Turnbull and Wilf Woolter, together with Cliff Jones and a young Bleddyn Williams. Cardiff continued to be in great demand to play clubs across Britain, but further victories against touring sides remained elusive.

## Cardiff Rugby Museum

Sal Carter

Back in the 1940s a small case was set up in the old Cardiff RFC clubhouse to display a collection of jerseys belonging to former Cardiff Athletic Club Secretary, LC Walters. By 1960 this small collection had grown considerably thanks to donations from former players and visiting rugby clubs. Hubert Johnson took on the responsibility of looking after this growing collection and became the Museum's first curator. Johnson had joined Cardiff in 1927 and served as a player and administrator until his death in 1979 when he was still President of CAC. When the new clubhouse was built a room within it was reserved for the growing collection. This was officially opened before the Barbarians Easter fixture against Cardiff in 1969, with Davey Davies recording the event in his obituary history.

"On the morning of the 12th April the splendidly renovated museum of ours, through the generosity of Hubert Johnson, a magnanimous gesture, was officially opened by Brigadier HG Glyn Hughes."

When Hubert Johnson died, Cardiff RFC decided to rename the museum 'The Hubert Johnson Room' in honour of the man who had done so much to foster the collection. On the 14th December, 1979 a small ceremony

Right: Victorian era sets of staves from a Cardiff versus Newport match.



took place unveiling a plaque recording the new name of the room.

The collection is a wonderfully eclectic mix of everyday rugby memorabilia such as old match programmes, jerseys, caps, trophies and medals, autographs, audio recordings (including a number of vinyl records), a radio interview with Gwyn Nicholls, Rhys Gabe and three other survivors of the 1905 Wales All Blacks match, and more contemporary player interviews and cigarette cards. There is also an extraordinary variety of items donated by visitors over the years. As befitting one of the most famous rugby grounds in the world, donating to the collection was seen as an important part of playing at the ground. Almost every rugby-playing nation is represented. The famous Springbok head was presented by South Africa to commemorate Cardiff's heroic effort against the 1952 tourists. After a hard game it was said that the 'shadow of the Springbok head adorned the Cardiff Club's Museum' so it was only fitting that they gave us the real thing to put on the wall.

Top left: Invitation postcard featuring Cardiff player, circa. 1904.

Top right: RFU Committee ribbon used to gain access to the Wales v Maori (New Zealand Native team), the first ever touring side to visit Britain, in 1888. (see pages 26-27).

Right: Photograph of Dai Westcott together with his inscribed gold watch that all players received to commemorate the incredible inter-club season of 1905-6. The watches were supplied by TW Lang & Company of Cardiff.





Above: Jane Williams, a celebrated young Cardiff supporter of the 1950s, shown leading the Cardiff team out before the away fixture against Newport in 1951 and in cartoon form as featured in the modern comic book *Bleddyn*, which commemorated the side's famous win against the 1952 All Blacks.

Left: Cardiff v South Africa, 1951, with Bleddyn Williams scoring Cardiff's second half try.

Page 93: Front cover of the *Eagle* comic from January, 1952, in which Dan Dare's uncle, New Dare, claims to have once been a Blue and Black three-quarter. Leicester v Cardiff programme, 1952.



The lions had come on the road against Llanelli, Swansea, and Northampton with the home game against Neath being drawn. The Blue and Blacks came in to face New Zealand fresh off a 5-2 away win at Rodney Parade the previous Saturday. Bob Stuart's tourists, meanwhile, had comfortably dispatched Southern Counties, Cambridge University, London Counties, Oxford University, Western Counties, and Llanelli.

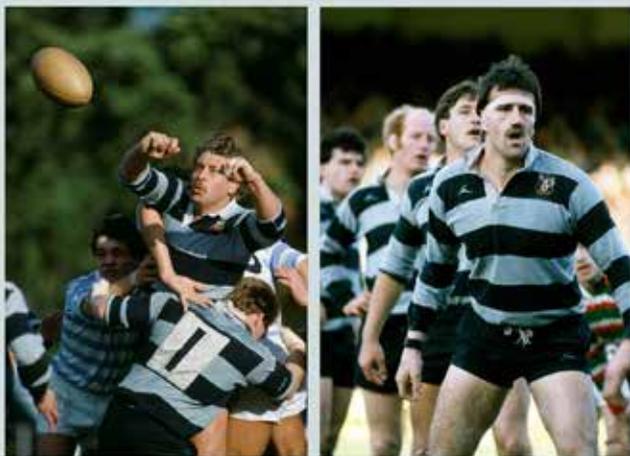
Bleddyn Williams had been on the 1950 British Lions tour to New Zealand and drew upon his knowledge of their game and culture to forge the conditions for an historic victory. The skipper knew that the All Black pack was significantly larger than his own, but was confident his forwards were brave, skilful, and fit enough to play a fast and agile game to wear down the tourists. He told his pack

### New Zealand beaten at last

Under the captaincy of Rex Willis, Cardiff again claimed the unofficial Welsh Club Championship in 1952-3, narrowly pipping Breidgend and Newport to the spoils. While in outright statistical terms the 1952-4 season was not as impressive as the celebrated one of 1947-8, with Cardiff winning a 'mere' thirty-seven of their

forty-nine games, drawing three and losing nine, it is arguably the most distinguished of all. For among the thirty-seven victories, captain Bleddyn Williams and his men put right the wrong of 1925 and 1935 by overcoming the mighty All Blacks.

By the time the New Zealanders arrived at the Arms Park on 21st November, 1953, Cardiff had won thirteen of their seventeen fixtures that season.



# 9

## 1980-1989

David Allen

After the Welsh Cup Final disappointments of the seventies, the eighties saw five victories in six appearances. An elusive unofficial championship title was also achieved in something of a golden era that was built around an outstanding pack featuring Jeff Whitefoot, Alan Philips, and Ian Eidman in the front row and Bob Norster and Kevin Edwards in the second. The back row was constructed around John Scott, together with the likes of Bob Lakin, Owen Golding, Gareth Roberts, Brian Lease, Tim Crothers, and Rhodri Lewis. With Holmes and Davies dominant at half-back, the silky skills of Mark Ring, Alan Donovan, and Mike Rayer were combined with power of Adrian Hadley and Gerald Cordle behind.

Left: John Scott and Bob Norster, two giants of the 1980s Cardiff Pack.



# 11

## 2000-2009

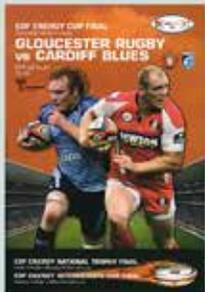
Dan Pearce

The new millennium brought a league title, a stunning Anglo-Welsh Cup win at Twickenham, and a European semi-final. The new professional era continued to impact as regional rugby was introduced to Wales and Cardiff morphed into 'Cardiff Blues'. The signing of rugby league star Iestyn Harris, former All Blacks Xavier Rush, Ben Blair, and Jonah Lomu, together with Maori Paul Tito, made clear statements about the side's ambitions in the new age. At the decade end, the Blues made the momentous decision to leave the Arms Park for the newly-built Cardiff City Stadium.

Left: Dafydd Jenkins, Martyn Williams, and Xavier Rush pack down against Toulouse, 2009

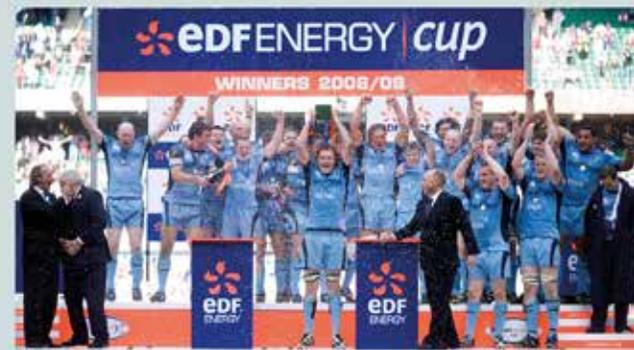
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Programme and match ticket from the 2009 EDF Final at Twickenham, when Cardiff routed Gloucester by 50-12. Blair and Halfpenny crossing the line for Cardiff and Paul Tito receiving the Trophy in front of the ecstatic travelling support

Chapter 11, 2000-2009



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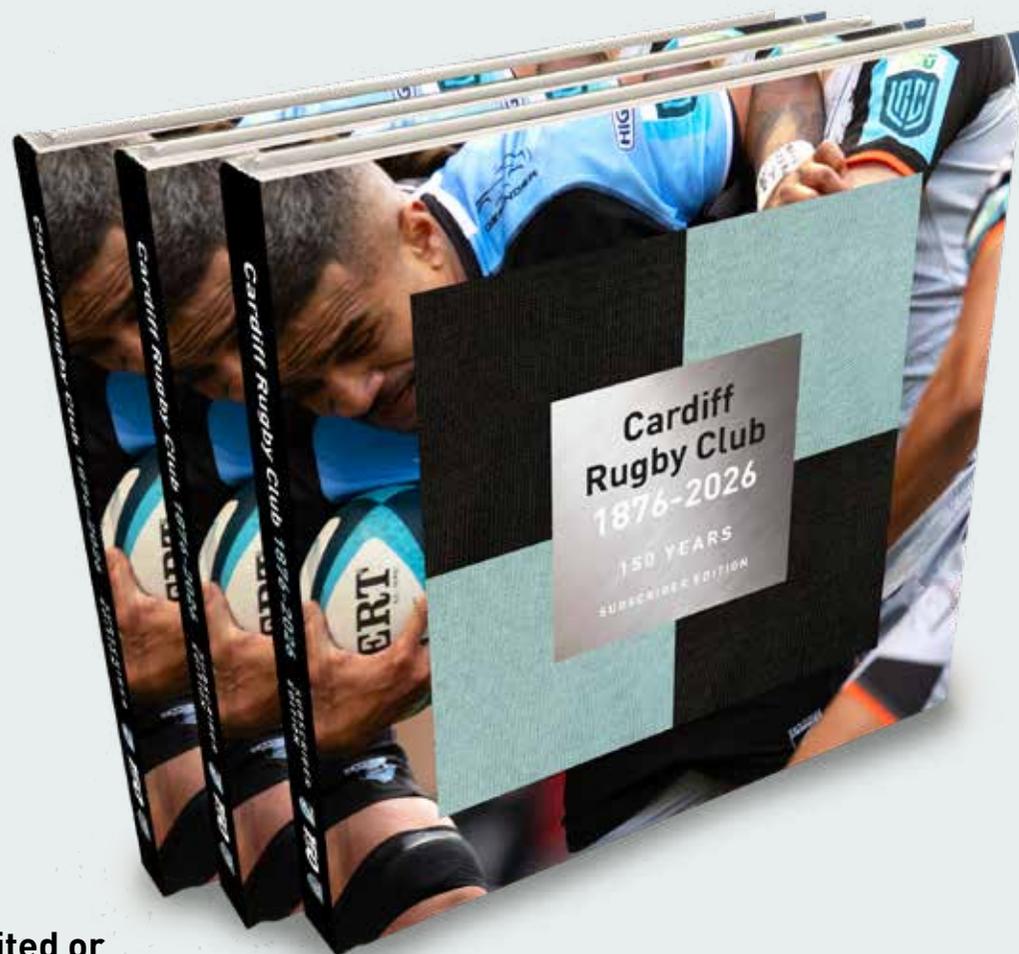
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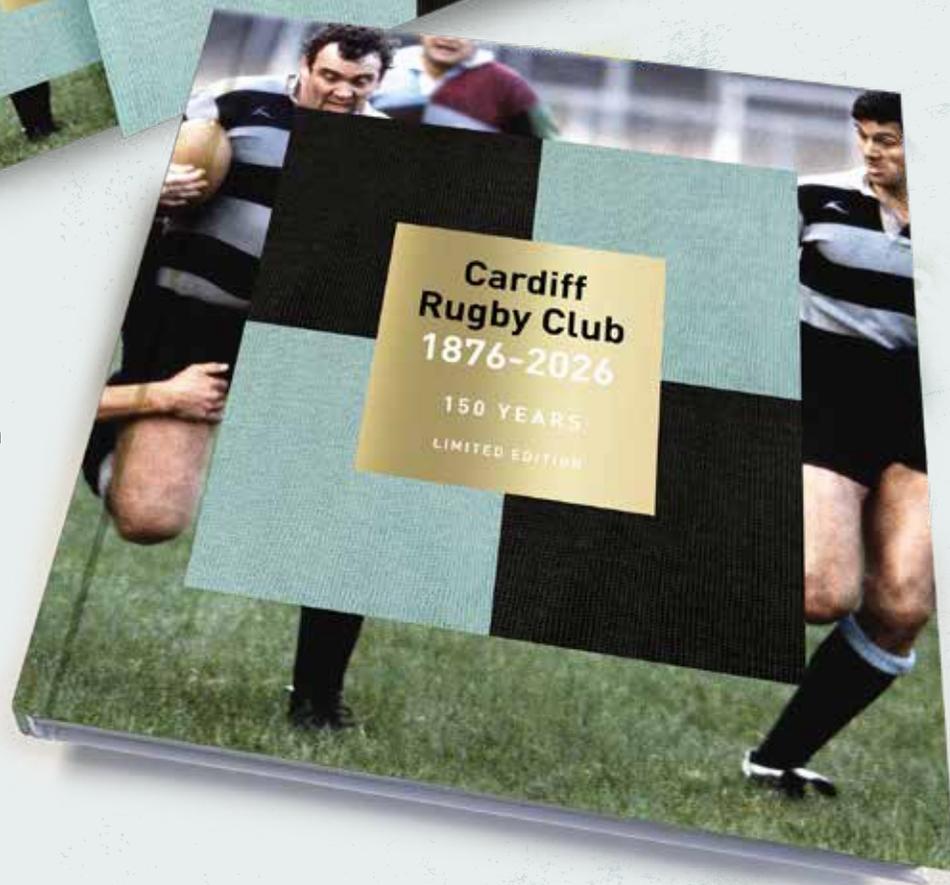


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