

## 91<sup>st</sup> Year 1962-3

For some unexplained reason the final playing records for this season that appeared in The Playfair Rugby Football Annual and in The Times fell well short of the number of games actually played. The following account of the season is based on other sources. Because severe weather disrupted the season, the total number of matches played reached only 38, of which 21 were won and five drawn.

After one year in office Derek Atkins stood aside as captain but continued to appear for the first fifteen. His role as leader was taken over by back-row forward D.C. ("Dick") Manley who had first appeared at senior level for the club in the 1950-1 season. Despite interruptions from National Service duties and calls to play for the county and the Barbarians, Dick was to record one of the all-time highest number of appearances for the club and became a legend in Exeter. It was during his year of captaincy that, a month shy of his thirtieth birthday, he received national recognition by playing the first of four times for England in the Five Nations Championship. His debut came at Cardiff Arms Park in January in Arctic conditions. England won in Wales for the first time in six years and then went on to win the Championship. It has been suggested that Dick might have achieved further honours with the England XV that visited New Zealand in 1963 but he could not afford the time away being self-employed, running his own cabinet-making business.

On the opening day of the season Exeter again faced London Welsh at the County Ground. From the start the visitors applied pressure on the home team who struggled to gain any possession. It took a long raking penalty goal from 45 yards by Derek Atkins to open the scoring against the run of play. Then a break by the new captain was supported by his fellow back row partners and Peter Brown forced his way over and so at half time, still against the run of play, Exeter led by eight points. The lead was not to last. The faster visiting backs found the space to register two tries. A dropped goal, a penalty goal and a conversion completed the scoring (8-14).

By the end of the month another five games had been played. Of these three home matches were won whilst two played away were lost. Tight victories were gained over Esher (15-9) and Torquay Athletic, when Exeter took the lead only three minutes from time (17-14) before the first defeat came at Falmouth, the home team being "right on top of their form" (3-11). Paignton at the County Ground succumbed (29-8) and then Exeter went under at Glamorgan Wanderers who controlled much of the game. Barrie Carless had to be treated for concussion after the game (6-18). In the opening matches, the versatile Carless had figured both at centre three-quarter and fly-half. Despite apparently suffering concussion the previous week, for the next match at home against Devonport Services he was chosen to play at scrum-half. The selection worked as he mesmerised a lack-lustre Services side and even scored a try after a 50 yard run. Wing forward John Jago registered a hat-trick of tries. In total Exeter scored five tries, all of which were converted by Derek Atkins (25-3).

As Devon was scheduled to play Canada at the County Ground on the afternoon of the 13<sup>th</sup> October, Exeter switched a home fixture with Redruth to a morning kick-off at the ground of the Devon Police and it was agreed to play only 35 minutes each way. Exeter dominated three-quarters of the game territorially but a series of botched chances and a determined Redruth defence turned what appeared likely to be a comfortable victory into a defeat. "A disappointing game" (3-6).

Recovering, Exeter then faced two away games and won both well, albeit narrowly, against Saracens (13-9) and Clifton (8-5). At home against Taunton, Exeter found themselves six points down but recovered in the second half. Three tries were registered, one of which was converted. Taunton hit back with a late try but the conversion failed thus leaving Exeter the victor (11-9). The following draw at Newton Abbot would not have been expected (3-3) but the home encounter with Weston super Mare produced the usual tight clash, with Exeter just coming out on top (6-3).

Exeter could not match Bristol's power and skill at the Memorial Ground (8-27) but the team was able to defeat Torquay Athletic at the Recreation Ground despite Derek Atkins missing six kicks at goal

(12-8). The following three games, all against Devon clubs, proved to be more difficult than would have been expected – at Barnstaple (3-3) and at home to Exmouth (8-3) and Teignmouth (3-3).

It was at this point in late December that the weather played a decisive part in the planned programme. Six consecutive fixtures had to be cancelled because of heavy snow and frozen pitches. Exeter in fact did not suffer as much as other parts of the country where fixtures were lost for two months, it was on the second Saturday in February that Exeter resumed on-field activities with a trip to West super Mare where a draw was a fitting result (3-3).

The first home game following the resumption resulted in a surprise when Barnstaple ran out comfortable winners (6-18). Two more home games did bring victory – Guy's Hospital (19-6) and Plymouth Albion (8-6) as did the away game with Devonport Services (9-5). Exeter gave Bridgend a tough battle at the County Ground, leading to a close finish (3-8). A mid-week meeting with St. Luke's College was postponed because the pitch was waterlogged.

A visit to Cheltenham did not bring success (0-6), however the rearranged meeting with St. Luke's College did – but only just (9-8). By the same score Exeter left it late to defeat Redruth in the Friday game of the week-end tour to Cornwall (9-8). In the following match St. Ives suffered “a really humiliating defeat” with Exeter scoring eight tries (32-0). Returning home Exeter then faced Welsh opposition again. In another Friday match, the visitors, Tredegar, won (0-9). The following day Exeter went to Exmouth where the backs proved to be more adept than the opposition (9-3). Four days later Brixham hosted Exeter who won after a tight game (8-5).

The first of the Easter games against touring sides began with a clear win over Old Cranleighans. Although the home side was reduced to fourteen men during the second half, the Exeter line was never seriously threatened (18-0). The Monday game against Moseley was described in the Birmingham press as “a hard and absorbing game”. The visitors ran up eight first half points before an Atkins penalty goal reduced the arrears. In a lively second period the Exeter full-back added a second penalty after having converted a try by Roy Sleight. The visitors drew level when a mass of forwards crashed over the Exeter line (11-11). Tuesday visitors, Leicester, returned home without a single win from a three match tour after losing to Exeter for the first time since 1957. The visitors were let down by an unusually lethargic pack which woke up too late to save the game. Highlight for Exeter was a hat-trick of tries from winger Tony Vinnicombe to which fly-half Pete Woolley added a dropped goal (12-9).

This run of successes was followed by three consecutive defeats which started with a visit to Bath. On a quagmire of a pitch at the Recreation Ground the Exeter forwards could not respond to the conditions underfoot (3-19). Exeter proved to be no match for visitors Newport at the County Ground and the club suffered its heaviest defeat of the season depending from which source the score is taken. Some say Newport scored 27 points whilst others state 32. Whichever is correct Exeter could manage only nine points in response. A narrow home defeat by visitors Penzance & Newlyn was probably a good result for Exeter who missed the services of six regular players(15-17) but amends were made with a fine win over Gloucester at the County Ground in the final game of the season (5-3).

Due, in part at least, to the severe weather conditions encountered, for the first time in several seasons, the club suffered a financial loss.