

120th Year 1991-2

Exeter made no secret about the club's ambition for the season. In a press interview, Phil Holman, one of the coaching staff, said "Our aim is Second Division rugby, and we think we have the players to get us there". There were not many around who disagreed with Holman's view. However hopes were again dashed and at the end of the season the Annual General Meeting reported "Despite the disappointment of not gaining promotion to National Division 2, the First Team won more league games than ever before (8), drew 2 and only lost 2. This was enough to finish 4th in Division 3.

Overall the First XV played 41 games, winning 27, drawing two and losing 12, with 919 points scored and 497 against.

Andy Maunder was re-elected captain, with the long-serving Trevor Harris as vice-captain. In the close season both Maunder and fly-half Andy Green had been approached by Bristol who had said they would both be welcome at the Division 1 club. Both decided to remain with Exeter, but before the new season began Green had changed his mind and joined Bristol. He returned part-way through the season.

At home on the first Saturday of the season Exeter, defeated Havant (24-6) but then, a week later, and still at home, the team was defeated by 4th Division Lichfield. Exeter took the lead with a penalty, but the home team's larger pack could make little headway against the visiting eight. After the break, Exeter's cause was not helped when Paul Westgate was sent off in rather puzzling circumstance. Of more concern was probably the fact that the opponent's line was not crossed whereas Exeter conceded three tries (15-19).

The first away game of the season took place at Imber Court against Metropolitan Police in a first round tie for the Pilkington Cup. Despite scrum-half Maunder having to leave the field with damaged ankle ligaments, Exeter returned home victorious (14-6).

The next few fixtures included opposition of contrasting strengths as illustrated by away games at Gloucester (10-33) and Stourbridge (34-9). Before the League season got underway, Exeter again organised a training camp at the end of October, this time at King's College, Taunton, a late change of venue. As in the previous year 25 players and five support staff took part.

The Camp was deemed to be a success, although the two games that followed were lost, both at home. In mitigation it should be pointed out that both opponents played their rugby in a higher league. Plymouth Albion was hard pressed to win (13-21), whilst in the Pilkington Cup, London Scottish proved to be superior (6-21). The Annual Report commented that this "was not a bad result considering they went on to win promotion to the First Division".

Four League fixtures were scheduled between mid-November and Christmas, of which three were won and one lost. A visit to Redruth saw Mark Chatterton score two tries in his native County (16-10), whilst at the County Ground Headingley was defeated (26-13).

On their own ground, Askeans were the next victims (12-3) but then, at home, Exeter fell to high-flying Fylde at the start of the holiday period (9-16). "Defeat at home ... was a blow ... four penalty goals were the key factor" said Rugby World.

A Boxing Day encounter with Torquay Athletic illustrated the changing face of local rugby. The newly appointed Torquay coach and former Exeter hooker, Bruce Priday, commented "Only the league counts now". Both teams fielded understrength sides for this friendly match on the Exeter reserve pitch. Exeter won comfortably with winger Malcolm Hoskins touching fown three trimes (35-4).

The New Year began with an away meeting with Richmond. The result was a deserved draw with the eventual Division 3 winners. A week later Clifton came to the County Ground and the win by Exeter saw the club become joint leaders of the Division (16-10).

A series of games against south-west opponents followed, including a home victory over Launceston (25-3). The next League fixture took place at Lydney at the beginning of February. The game did not start well as fly-half Charlie Gabbitass had the misfortune to break a leg within the first few minutes of play. Exeter's play was described as "careless" and "it took us until the final quarter that we started to play the sort of rugby that had made us attractive to watch. It was not enough to cancel the lead already built up by our opponents" commented a club programme. This defeat was a deciding factor in the club's failure to gain promotion. Lydney finished the season at the foot of the table and were relegated.

Exeter continued to play constructive rugby and the side did well to restrict Bristol to a narrow points difference in a mid-week game at the County Ground (12-17), before winning away at Maesteg (20-6). For the next two Division 3 games Exeter resumed winnings ways, defeating visiting Nuneaton (25-18) and then Roundhay, after a trip of 285 miles (31-13).

Venturing to London Exeter lost to Blackheath (12-22), before returning home to face Sheffield in a Division 3 game. A draw in this encounter (15-15) virtually put paid to hopes Exeter might have had of promotion, as their fate would now depend on close rivals suffering defeats in their remaining games. It was not to be.

A narrow defeat at Beacon Park by Plymouth Albion (6-10) preceded another long trip to Otley where the vanishingly small chance of promotion was kept alive by a victory (9-3).

Exeter minds were then focussed on the Final of the Bass Devon Cup. The club had won its way through to the final by defeating South Molton (62-3), Bideford (24-0) and Okehampton (22-3). The Final was played at the County Ground against Brixham who, having conceded an early try and playing with the advantage of the wind, kept the home team on the defensive for half an hour. Eventually the difference in class became more obvious and Exeter ran in a total of five tries. At one stage Exeter scored 26 points in 21 minutes but Brixham grabbed a consolation try in the final minutes. This being the only try Exeter had conceded in the competition (30-10).

As promotion hopes had gone, the last Division 3 game of the season Exeter played with determination against "a tough and gritty" Broughton Park Exeter turned round at half time only seven points ahead, to play into the teeth of a strong wind. An Andy Green try and conversion sealed the win. (13-0). Coach Staddon congratulated the players as they came off the field. "It's been a tremendous season" he said. Although regretting missing out on promotion, he was already looking forward to the next season.

Finally, to complete the current season, Exeter demolished Cullompton in a Centenary Celebration game (80-6).

Despite not returning from Bristol until mid-November, Andy Green was once again top scorer, this time with 217 points. Leading try scorers were wingers John Davies (18) and Simon Dovell (16).

The "A" team played 29 games, registering 21 victories and losing only eight matches. The "B" played 33 games, winning all but three of them, whilst the Extra "B" took to the field on 30 occasions, winning 26 games and losing one.

The Colts also had an outstanding season, winning 25 of 29 games played.

The Women's team played 19 games, winning 11 and thereby finishing top of Division 3 (South West). The decision was then made to switch allegiance to the London Division for the following season.