

90th Year 1961-2

The Playfair Rugby Football Annual summed up the club's season in an understated four word comment – "Exeter again did well". Four fewer matches were played and the final record showed 28 wins and a draw set against a dozen defeats. After four seasons as captain Tony Lee had decided to stand down and his place as leader was taken over by full-back Derek Atkins who had made his debut for the senior team at Easter 1955. Employed by the G.P.O./British Telecom, Atkins had been a first choice player and goal-kicker for some six years. However his often immaculate displays for the club did not persuade the Devon selectors to pick him on a regular basis for the county.

Exeter faced touring teams from London on the first two Saturdays of the season and lost them both, albeit narrowly. The margin of defeat against the powerful London Welsh team was only two points (16-18) and that against Esher seven points (11-18). The first victory came on the third Saturday when Falmouth paid a visit to the County Ground (16-0) whilst victory at Paignton four days later was a much closer encounter (11-8).

Playing form over the next two months appears to have been somewhat erratic. A good performance at home to Bristol (5-10) was followed by defeat at Devonport Services (12-19). A comfortable victory over Exeter University (29-0) and defeat at Redruth (11-17) preceded two prized victories in games against Saracens (13-9) and Clifton (14-0). Unfortunately form then dipped again and defeat at Taunton was the outcome. Exeter took the lead in this game with two penalties from Derek Atkins but after pulling three points back Taunton scored six more points in the last five minutes to claim the spoils (6-9). A win at Newton Abbot might have been expected (11-3) but then the victory at Weston super Mare would have been something of a collector's piece at the time (8-3).

December began with a loss to visitors Glamorgan Wanderers (0-14) but four wins on the trot came next. At home against Torquay Athletic all Exeter's points were registered in the first half. With the sun at their backs in the second half the Torquay players found their feet but were unable to close the gap to less than six points and near the end play developed into a rough-house which led to second-row Terry Hempton being taken to hospital with a cut mouth (15-9). A win away at Barnstaple followed. At the County Ground the Redruth forwards, although depleted, held the Exeter eight but in the end the better organisation of the home pack proved decisive (15-6). Snow then prevented play in the scheduled two remaining games in the month. However, just before Christmas, another win came in an away meeting with London Hospital (17-3).

January did not start well with a defeat at the County Ground inflicted by Taunton who thereby registered a rare double over Exeter (14-16). The response to this set back was a run of seven successive victories. Exmouth fell on their own ground. A week later Plymouth Albion visited the County Ground and suffered their heaviest defeat of the season to date. Heroes for Exeter were skipper Atkins, who kicked ten points, and Barrie Carless, playing at centre three-quarter, played out the game with a bandaged head. Not heeding Albion's reputation, Exeter scored a try within five minutes through centre Colin Knowles that was followed by another from forward Denis Dyson in the second half. "A Day Albion Would Like To Forget" ran one headline (16-0).

Continuing a run of successes Exeter in turn won at home against Streatham (15-6), away at Teignmouth (14-3), at home to both Weston super Mare (22-5) and Barnstaple (8-3), then finally away to Guy's Hospital (13-0). A visit to Beacon Park ended the run. Here Plymouth Albion gained revenge for the earlier defeat (9-17). Exeter returned to winning ways with two comfortable victories, both at home, over Royal Naval Engineering College (18-0) and Devonport Services (17-0). In place of a cancelled week-end trip to Wales, Exeter then faced St. Luke's College but went down to the students (3-11).

Exeter celebrated a civic visit by the Mayor and Sheriff to the County Ground with the biggest win of the season. Visitors Cheltenham, already weakened, played most of the game with fourteen men

through injury. Against the odds the visitors took the lead but Exeter went ahead with a penalty try awarded when Dick Manley was impeded without the ball near the line (34-6). The club then managed a mid-week draw against St. Luke's College (6-6) before travelling to face Torquay Athletic. A brilliant display from Barrie Carless saw him score a try in each half and dash the home side's hopes of a revenge win (18-9).

Esher provided the next opposition. The visiting Exeter forwards took charge on a dry, hard pitch gaining mastery over their opponents in Surrey. Half time came with no score and little open play, then in the second half Exeter's forward dominance allowed more movement from the back division (9-3). Back at home Exeter ran Newport close in a mid-week encounter (3-5) before travelling to meet and defeat Penzance & Newlyn, the strongest team in Cornwall at the time (8-0).

The Bath club was the next to visit the County Ground in another end of season midweek match. Bath was not having a good season and Exeter proved to be too good for the visitors. Barrie Carless scored a try after a run of 70 yards and the final touchdown was made by 17-year-old Roy Sleigh (20-8). The Easter programme began with a comfortable win over Old Cranleighans (17-0). Easter Monday visitors Moseley were playing the third game of an Easter tour. Exeter dominated the first half with Derek Atkins landing three penalty goals and a conversion to add to tries by Tony Marks and Nigel Clarke. Moseley rallied after that but ended four points short of Exeter's total (17-13). Any hope of an Easter treble was dashed by Leicester who scored six tries to one by their hosts (14-31).

For Exeter the season ended with an easy win at Sidmouth (29-0).

During the course of the campaign, winger Tony Marks set a new club record by scoring 35 tries.