

## 92<sup>nd</sup> Year 1963-4

The captaincy of the club changed for the fourth season in succession. The new leader was Barrie Carless who had arrived in Exeter from Barry, South Wales, to attend St. Luke's College. Unable to break into the senior college team he joined Exeter where he quickly became a crowd favourite.

The son of a professional soccer player who had appeared for Plymouth Argyle and Cardiff City, Barrie initially played the round ball game. Although standing only 5 feet 7 inches (1.70m) he made a name for himself as a goal-keeper with Barry Town and Merthyr Tydfil in the Southern League and later Crewe Alexandra in the Football League.

In Exeter he switched his allegiance to rugby football with considerable success but even when concentrating on one code his versatility and skill presented a dilemma for both club and county. Initially he played at outside-half and occasionally centre but he later switched to the scrum-half position with success. He was quoted in the press as saying scrum half was his preferred playing position. A suggested rift with the club over selection was amicably resolved.

After graduating from St. Luke's College, Carless remained in the locality, joining the staff of Bramdean School, in Homefield Road, Heavitree. Having now been appointed captain of the club he took training to a new level, insisting on more rigorous and scientific training as well as developing tactics. His work paid off as, at the end of the season, the senior team had won 29 and drawn three of the 42 games played. This record was judged to be only just inferior to that of Plymouth Albion, the leading club in the county.

During the course of the season Exeter was able to field the England International A.M. (Martin) Underwood who had taken up a post on the staff of St. Luke's College. He had won four caps as a winger during the 1961-2 season and was recalled for one match against Ireland in February 1964.

The season began with a defeat at the hands of the touring London Welsh team though the deficit was only two points (9-11). As if to prove a point after this narrow reverse, the team was next defeated on the second Saturday in November after a run of eleven games made up of ten wins and one draw. Three regulation victories came at home against Paignton (24-3) and away at Esher (22-8) and at Torquay Athletic (22-3) but a home meeting with Newton Abbot proved to be more difficult. The visitors registered eight points in the first half to which Exeter replied with a try from Dick Manley that was converted by full back Bob White. Early in the second half Carless had to leave the field with a dislocated shoulder but, though reduced to seven men, the pack held on and Exeter managed to score another eight points (13-8).

A draw at Penzance & Newlyn was a creditable result (8-8) and this was followed by a narrow win at The Rectory over Devonport Services (6-3). Still on the road, Exeter won at Paignton (13-3) and play continued to improve and produce good results in the next three home games – Redruth (19-3), Saracens (19-0) and Clifton (22-6). At Taunton, Exeter did not have such an easy time of things. The home side completely outplayed Exeter in the forwards but contrived to lose the match by a single point (9-8).

After the fright at Taunton Exeter did well at home by holding a strong Bristol team to an eight point margin (8-16) but then struggled for form again. Both the next two home matches, against Barnstaple and Torquay Athletic, ended in scoreless draws. The return match at Barnstaple produced only one score and that was in Exeter's favour (3-0). At Teignmouth Exeter won more convincingly (19-9) before going on to defeat Exmouth at the County Ground on Boxing Day (14-9). Just after the holiday Exeter went to London where Old Blues were defeated by a wide margin (30-0). Then at home, in the return game against Taunton, Exeter showed their real worth (31-6).

Two setbacks at home came hard on the heels of each other - the first at the hands of St. Ives (3-9) and the second in a clash with Plymouth Albion. The latter game was described as “a sporting exhibition” and a credit to both sides. The Exeter team was without three leading backs, including Underwood, but did have the services of Carless and Hopper at half-back. Struggling for possession Exeter registered only a penalty goal against a converted try (3-5). The last game in January produced another close result but this time it was Exeter who gained the verdict over visitors Cheltenham (6-3).

Victory away against London Hospital was much clearer (24-3) so too was a home win over Weston super Mare (30-0). As often happened, St. Luke’s College ended the brief recovery. In a bitterly cold wind, both teams stood in silence in honour of Sir Winston Churchill whose death had recently been announced. Exeter remained an unchanged side from the previous week and the College was able to field its strongest team of the season. Showing more urgency the College team led by eight points at half time. After the interval the freezing wind carried with it some snowflakes. Exeter managed two scores to one by the visitors but it was not enough (6-11).

Three games away from home brought mixed results. Guy’s Hospital was defeated (10-6) but at Gloucester Exeter had to give way after a closely contested game (0-6). Plymouth Albion then completed the double to claim bragging rights amongst Devon clubs but the margin was just a single point this time (8-9). At the County Ground, a game Devonport Services proved to be a less demanding task (18-3).

Exeter then enjoyed the novel experience of travelling to Wales for a Friday evening game under floodlights. Brewery Field was the venue where both Bridgend and the visitors were lacking the services of some leading players. The home team scored a second try ten minutes before time but then, in what time remained, centre David Godfrey intercepted a pass setting up a try for David Sinnett that captain Carless converted. The one point difference between the teams remained (5-6).

For the next game on Easter Saturday against Old Cranleighans, Carless was moved to the centre to partner 18 year old Mike Maynard. This pairing appeared to solve a problem that had existed all season. The Old Boys were enthusiastic but lacked the skill of their opponents (17-3). Easter Monday saw the defeat of Moseley in a game where a high standard of tackling stifled most attacking moves made by the two teams. Exeter had to thank Derek Atkins and two penalty goals for the victory (6-0). This result meant that Moseley had not beaten Exeter in an Easter game for five seasons. Once again the meeting with Leicester presented a different proposition. In a lively game the visitors had to thank a prominent back row for the victory as they scored all the visitors points (8-16).

For the next Saturday match, Exeter travelled to Surrey where Esher was defeated (8-0). Three days later the team faced Newport at the County Ground. What transpired lived long in the memory and was often recalled in the clubhouse or bar for many years. Newport had, in the preceding October, been the only team to beat the otherwise all conquering 1963-4 All Blacks. On this occasion the visitors, who fielded six internationals, did not take long to go eleven points in front and still led by nine points at the interval. However in the second half they conceded a further seventeen points following “an amazing collapse” (22-14).

Streatham came to the County Ground and went away defeated (14-6). To fulfil the fixture postponed in November, Exeter went, mid-week, to play at the Imperial Ground at Exmouth for the first time. The home team was swamped (35-0). Back at home Exeter then scraped through against Bath in “a fiery game”. Exeter went ahead, Bath equalised but Exeter went ahead again through a Malcolm Gardner try (6-3). A visit to Redruth produced another win (11-8) but this score line was reversed when Gloucester visited for the last game of the season (8-11).