

## The 1905 All Blacks Tour of Britain

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I'll begin with Lloyd Jones' prize-winning novel *The Book of Fame* (Auckland, 2000). It is not, I think, much known in 'the Mother Country.' Despite his name the author is a 'Maorilander' (another phrase in common usage a hundred years ago), and his novel is an imaginative reconstruction of the 1905 tour. He has obviously done his homework in the primary sources - he seems to have read, for instance, manager George Dixon's 'Diary' - and he also takes some liberties. In this excerpt the All Blacks have just played their twenty seventh of the tour. They remain unbeaten.

*Then, the long journey from Bradford to Cardiff...*

*Those who sat back with eyes closed enabled others to note the strain on their faces: the poultices over Gallaher's neck boils; Smithy half-turned in his seat to protect his injured shoulder; others with crook legs dangled into the aisle, the flesh hard and swollen around the infected area that had still to be lanced....*

*Our hospital train silence.*

*When we looked up again, England had passed into Wales. Mister Dixon leant across Corbett's folded arms to clear a circle in the misted window, and through it passed the shingles and boards of Newport's businesses – tobacconists, collieries, herbal remedies, biscuits, tailors and laundries.*

*Wales, this is how Wales arrived in our window. With a squeal of wheels locking, followed by a hiss of steam. A single figure raced by, then another. And as we came to a halt the figures in the window appeared to go backwards. Then in the condensation on the glass you saw a man's wild eye, someone else's mouth: and like a quarter moon stood on its end a woman's face and her mad delight. Fists pounded against the carriage and the window. We heard our names being yelled out. Our names in the mouths of folk we didn't even know. As we began to move out and a hand clawed the window we found ourselves wondering about this mad human undertow – on what did it feed? George Nicholson turned away from the window with an ashen face...Jimmy Duncan staring blankly down the aisle. Some of us took out our tobacco then did nothing with it except to let it lie in our lap.*

*We had heard that the newspapermen had gathered from every corner of the Kingdom, some from as far away as the Continent. We heard it said that if the Welsh beat us the players would never again want for medicine, food or a roof.*

*From travellers we heard about the Welsh kneeling their children before their beds to pray for victory.*

*Wales, we were too tired for Wales.*

*We pulled into Cardiff just before midnight. We braced ourselves for a repeat of the Newport scenes but as we hobbled out to the platform with our suitcases and football boots there were only officials waiting to lead us to the drays and horses.....*

*The ambush came in the poorly lit streets around the railway station. We were half asleep, our chins bobbing against our chests, when they flew at us with their goblin language. They reached up wanting to touch us, shouting and shoving, and we had to pull our legs clear from their grasping. The front horses fought with the reins, twisted their heads and the bit. The startled face of Thompson looked back, then he disappeared around a corner and the space between filled with people shouting and waving....*

*The horses reared up and we saw the white terror in their eyes. We saw the clenched faces of the police wrestling the crowd back, and we held on to our seats with grim smiles.*

*A crowd of twenty thousand was later mentioned.  
But can that be right? That many?*

Of course it wasn't quite like that. He's a novelist. If you want to be pedantic it wasn't dead of night; they arrived on the 5.55 from Leeds. They wouldn't have heard much 'goblin language'; only one in ten spoke it in cosmopolitan Cardiff in 1905. And it wasn't quiet at the station, it was bedlam. But what Lloyd Jones has grasped and vividly conveys is the intensity of the reception. Why? Partly because this is the culture of the period. It's an age of travelling spectacles, Buffalo Bill's Wild West show (which had visited Wales the previous year), the great circuses, the great Houdini, escapologists, freaks, illusionists, conjurers, - an age hungry for spectacle. And nobody or nothing was more spectacular than the undefeated high scoring New Zealand rugby football touring team. When they walked out for the first time on to the Cardiff Arms Park, said one correspondent, 'the crowd started from their seats and almost tumbled over one another in their eagerness to see the famous All Blacks.'

Partly, by the time they arrived in Wales, their undefeated record. The incredulity in Fleet Street that greeted reports of their first game and overwhelming 55-4 victory over Devon is well known. Helped by fielding their strongest team, with Stead, Wallace, Hunter and Roberts among the backs, they scored twelve tries to a dropped goal. During the first few minutes the sound of jaws dropping echoed around the ground rather as it would in 1953 when the Hungarians - Puskas, Hidegkuti, Czibor and company - strung their first few passes together and the Wembley crowd suddenly realised they were witnessing something they had never seen before. That isn't strictly true of the All Blacks - critics were impressed by their efficiency and speed of execution rather than the novelty of their moves - but they kept winning by large

margins, running in eleven tries in the next game against Cornwall, thereafter apparently scoring almost at will, on average seven tries a match.

#### What did this impressive record suggest?

Clearly they were fit, they were innovative in play, never missed an advantage and maybe didn't always play the game.

Let's look at each in turn. Fit? –Well they should be, all they did on the boat for six weeks was fitness exercises, so it shouldn't surprise us - not match fit of course. Their fitness was then associated with claims made about the superiority of the colonial way of life the New Zealanders represented, coming as they did from a rural healthy, egalitarian paradise, a social laboratory, in Greg Ryan's words, 'that was leading the world into the 20<sup>th</sup> century by producing men of indomitable physique, natural athleticism, adaptability, dexterity and initiative,' specimens of physical manhood that impressed those concerned at home about the apparent declining racial vitality of the British stock which had recently been pointed up in South Africa; there was also the growing threat of the 'yellow peril' in the far east, demonstrated by Japan's stunning naval victory over Russia in May. Did a vigorous, open air, healthy way of living produce men physically superior to the sickly, sallow faced inhabitants of Britain's industrial towns and cities? In fact, only three or four of the team actually were farm workers. Most of them lived in the towns and the four large NZ cities. They were no more rustic than most of their opponents. There has always been a lot of sentiment about the alleged rural backbone of Kiwi rugby. As in England, the game's beginnings were urban, played by the professional and educated middle class, and while it spread to the rural areas, common sense suggests they couldn't keep up since in the country districts communications were poor, distances great, transport difficult and hours of work long, all of which militated against an effective developing an infrastructure of regular fixtures. But this idea persisted at least down to the 1960s, symbolised by pictures of Colin Meads carrying a sheep under each arm. But Piney's fellow All Blacks were no more all farmers (maybe eight, their largest ever contingent, among Wilson Whineray's 1964 tourists) than the Welsh team was at any time full of miners. It has been often claimed that the decline of Welsh rugby since the 1970s has been due to the collapse of the heavy industries, and the mines in particular - but Dai Morris was the only member of the 1970s team who worked anywhere near a colliery.

#### How innovative were they?

Their 2-3-2 formation was certainly unfamiliar, and the resulting wedge formation paid dividends in the scrum. They were fast and remarkable in combined play; but after the first few games many critics thought their play inferior to the Welsh style of combination at its best. The Scottish international G.A.W. Lamond, with a fine disregard for notions of imperial bonding as expressed in his day, thought that 'After all is said and done we can learn just a little more from our Welsh friends than we will ever learn from a 'foreign' footer foe.' After the sixth match against Middlesex, Blackheath's English International E.W Dillon told the *Daily Mail* that 'the Welsh clubs who play them right at the end of the tour ought to stand a good chance of beating them', and another writer after the eleventh match against Somerset believed

that 'Welsh passing was quicker and generally more accurate, and that the Welsh forwards would not allow themselves to be dispossessed of the ball in the scrums in such a ridiculous fashion.' After the sixteenth match versus Oxford University, a correspondent from Bradford opined that 'the little Welsh will beat them.' And so it proved, even though the *Times*, combining prejudice and apprehension in equal measure, thought a Welsh win would be 'an unthinkable contingency.'

#### What about their gamesmanship?

Much of this surrounded the controversial role of David Gallaher as roving wing forward who put the ball in to the scrum - crooked, it was reckoned - while his own inside half waited behind his forwards for the quick heel that the 2-3-2 two formation and the loose head, always seemed to secure. But Gallaher remained in position even after the ball was gone, detached from the scrum and therefore technically offside, so as to prevent the opposing inside half from getting to his opposite number. 'Play the game, Gallaher' became a predictable if ignorant chorus. One cartoon showed an exchange between two spectators. First spectator: 'Why doesn't the ref penalise Gallaher?' Second spectator: 'Yes, why doesn't he?' First: 'By the way, which one is Gallaher?' The wing forward role that Gallaher specialised in had been practised by the Yorkshire teams of the 20 years earlier, as Tony Collins has shown, though it must be said it came to be viewed unfavourably by the principled amateur guardians of the Yorkshire game, and fell into disuse by the end of that decade. Gallaher reckoned he attracted attention because he wore his shin guards outside his socks, from which the inference was drawn was that he wore them to protect himself from frustrated opponents who legitimately sought to kick him back onside. In fact all the tourists wore shin guards, but only Gallaher wore them outside his socks.

They did a lot of arguing with the referee, querying his decisions, especially when they got excessively penalised in some games like the Surrey game by Billy Williams, of cabbage patch fame, a game described by the *Daily Mail* as 'a whistling fantasia' (Billy Williams awarded twelve penalties against the All Blacks, though the RFU official history for some reason thinks was for obstruction by Gillett; it was by Gallaher of course). A particularly hostile critic was the journalist Hamish Stuart who thought the All Blacks played to the letter of the law rather than in the spirit of the game. Interestingly, Stuart bracketed the All Blacks with the Welsh in not playing the game, and were reminiscent too of the Yorkshire sides of the 80-s and 90s. We see clearly the drift of the argument here; the ideology of pristine amateurism and playing the game for its own sake, in stubborn defence of which the RFU had forced the northern clubs to go their own way in 1895. (It is one of the great counterfactual games rugby historians like to play as to whether an England side fully representative of the strength of English rugby before it weakened itself by anathematising northern union players would have defeated the 1905 All Blacks. Maybe one of the counters to that is that in the 1920s, when England had recovered its strength and was in the middle of a golden age - four grand slams in the 1920s - they still couldn't defeat Cliff Porter's 1924 team even when they were down to fourteen men after the tenth minute sending off of

Cyril Brownlie). As to gamesmanship, Hamish Stuart's superior conclusion was that if that was the way they routinely played the game, then 'so much the worse for the moral tone of the New Zealand footer.' Equally persistent were complaints about New Zealanders' penchant for rough play. Even the NZ press, in 1905 and 1924, noted the unnecessary vigour in throwing men violently to the ground after a tackle; Brian O'Driscoll might have sympathy with this viewpoint.

By mid December and the Welsh segment of the tour the All Blacks were approaching the end of a long and tiring tour - though not one as long as Joe Warbrick's Natives' side of 1888-89 that played 74 games, They were reckoned to be going stale, perhaps an odd claim: wasn't this what the much vaunted outdoor life was precisely meant to prevent? You didn't get stale. (In fairness, the players themselves never claimed this)

And if you were as remarkably fit as the All Blacks were reckoned to be, you didn't get tired either. Warbrick's men often played three times a week. If the leading players were getting stale or tired - and we remember too Lloyd Jones' 'hospital train'- then perhaps this was because some of them had been playing too much. The team's all round strength was maybe deceptive; there were some wonderful players in it, and also some rather ordinary ones. The brilliant Hunter, Roberts, Stead and Glasgow played an excessive number of games, while others - who now knows of Glenn or Crosby?— might complain they were underutilised (like half this year's Lions contingent but for a different reason). In any case, scores of 34-nil and 44-nil just before they arrive in Wales doesn't look like staleness to me.

As the tour was rolled out and they kept on winning, they were told they could expect to meet their match in Wales. Why was this?

First there was the Welsh record. Wales, peerless exponents of the four three quarter system they had invented, had won the Triple Crown three times since 1900 already; they were the reigning British, indeed European champions. The Welsh style of play was different because their historical and social background was different. The period from 1880 to 1914 has a unity of its own in Welsh history, they are years of soaring population figures, educational progress, political self awareness, cultural creativity and, underpinning it all, industrial growth and commercial confidence. It was symbolised by the newly elevated (1905) City of Cardiff, the 'Chicago of Wales', the funnel port of the greatest coal producing region in the world. A game developed by English public school toffs had become the passion of industrial working class Taffs. If New Zealand rugby derived its strength by combining the enterprising back play of the South Island with the aggressive forwards of the North Island, then the Welsh equivalent was more a social than geographical union, amalgamating professional men with manual workers. And it was a genuine mix. If, among the backs, Percy Bush was a university graduate, Gabe and Llewellyn trained teachers and Teddy Morgan studying pharmacy, Gwyn Nicholls at centre had left school at fourteen and scrum half Dicky Owen was a steelworker. Among the forwards Christ College Brecon-educated Boxer Harding and JF Williams packed down alongside tough nuts like ex-coller Dai 'Tarw' (Bull) Jones, who once threw a policeman across a Rhondda street,

Pontymister miner Jehoida Hodges and Newport docks coal trimmer George Travers.

In fact everything about the game in Wales was different from the rest of the UK. Consider the statistics for the Welsh portion of the tour. There were more spectators: the All Blacks drew crowds averaging 12,500 in England, 32,000 in Wales. Before arriving in Wales they had averaged 30 points a match in their 27 games, scoring on average seven tries a game, and conceding only three in all. In their five matches in Wales, they averaged only 6 points and one try a match. Only twice on the whole tour did they fail to cross their opponents' line, and those occasions were against Wales and Swansea. Only Cardiff scored 2 tries against them, and Swansea scored the only try of their match but were beaten by a magnificent Billy Wallace drop goal which was worth four points.

#### Argument without end

The Welsh portion of the tour is synonymous with dispute but we can't pretend that it had been free of controversy until then. The perceived illegalities that led to the vilification of Gallaher and the Surrey game being 'a whistling fantasia' apart, the Scottish segment was acrimonious from their arrival. The Scots had refused them a guarantee and allowed them all the gate money, a decision made by the cash strapped SRU before the tour but one they soon came to regret. They appeared to sulk by refusing to meet the All Blacks or to entertain them (in contrast to the Irish - the All Blacks always like going to Ireland, away from Welsh intensity, English condescension and Scottish dourness). One little mentioned achievement is that the Scots were the first to score first against the All Blacks. Strictly they should have done better: at the start of the twentieth century Scotland were winning the Triple Crown (1901,'03,'07) in the years when Wales weren't.

But in Wales, everything was controversial. Little agreement about anything, then or since. What was the size of the crowd? – 40,000 as officially given, 50,000 unofficially? More?

Why didn't Billy Stead play? Boils on his backside according to one account, dysentery said another, or was it merely (merely? against Wales?) a generous gesture to allow Simon Mynott who had played so well against Cheshire, his chance for a Test? Dysentery or not, Billy Stead ran the line, and though he is silent on the matter in his own diary of the tour, Terry McLean is not: apparently a call of nature did prevent Billy from being there when he most needed, to judge whether Deans had scored. George Nicholson was running the line in his stead.

It was a stroke of genius that prompted Welsh committeeman and selector Tom Williams to suggest the Welsh players respond to the haka by singing the Welsh national anthem. Most accounts reckon this was led by Teddy Morgan. But the *Western Mail* says it was the other wing-man Willie Llewellyn. Some modern day accounts give the impression that Wales won by a controversial try. That's clearly wrong. NZ may have controversially lost through having a try disallowed, but there was nothing disputed about the

Welsh try. It was as clean cut as a diamond. It was well-rehearsed and lethally executed, though one account has Cliff Pritchard passing to Percy Bush, who then transferred it to Gabe. No way: Bush was part of the decoy move that pulled the New Zealand defence across to the narrow side before Owen switched the movement to the left.

#### The Deans (non) try

When did the controversial Dean incident occur? In the second half, certainly. That's almost the only thing we can say with certainty. Some accounts say after 17 minutes, another with 10 minutes to go, yet another 'very close to the end'. Wallace launched the move with a fine run from deep, but when did he pass to Deans - 25-30 yards out as has come to be agreed? The *Evening Express* said that Wallace's magnificent run took him to the Welsh line - when he passed to Hunter! Coach Jimmy Duncan (who was airbrushed out of Gallaher and Stead's 1906 account of the tour with Stalinist efficiency) also thought it was Hunter who scored.

Who tackled Deans? Wallace says Morgan tackled Deans over the line, and that Owen picked the ball up and placed it back in the field of play to show the referee that Deans had been tackled short of the line. But what could Wallace have seen? He was on the ground having been tackled by Llewellyn on the '25'. Morgan, in 1921, said he tackled Deans short of the line. But in 1924 he notoriously told Cliff Porter that Deans had scored. A book published that year even reckons that Morgan claimed that Wallace had scored. The *Western Mail* said Bert Winfield came across to help Morgan, while the *South Wales Daily News* said it was Winfield alone who made the tackle. Rhys Gabe never deviated from his claim that he tackled Deans. My own view is that Morgan probably got in Deans' way, until he was joined by the heavier Gabe, to make a double tackle rather like Bleddyn and Gerwyn Williams' double tackle on Brian Fitzpatrick outside the Welsh line in 1953 that is on the cover of Huw Richards' recent book (*Dragons and All Blacks: Wales versus New Zealand and a century or rivalry*, Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2004).

Consensus, at least in Wales, has naturally settled around Gabe's version, that he tackled Deans short of the line, and Deans struggled forward. Sensing this Gabe pulled him back. Asked by Deans later, 'Why did you pull me back?' Gabe replied 'If you were already over the line why did you struggle forward?' And was it Owen, or Bush, each as tricky as the other, who picked up the ball and placed it back in play by the time the referee Mr Dallas arrived on the scene? Mr Dallas, incidentally, was not puffing along behind the play. He was younger than both captains, had played for Scotland against England in 1903, and was up with the play as Wallace counter-attacked and passed to Deans who then veered away from his straight line to the posts to avoid the defence; the referee was running between the posts as he blew his whistle to indicate the tackle on Deans, before running over – not running up from behind, an important distinction – to order a scrummage.

What give the game its fascination is not just that it was undeniably a meeting of equals - two relatively new societies, both roughly equal in population, the two most innovative rugby nations at that time, the best in the northern

hemisphere against the best in the southern - but that these various controversies could never be resolved. How could they be? There were no video cameras then. No fourth official for Mr Dallas to appeal to for replay evidence with the now familiar - possibly over-familiar - indication. What did the pressmen know, straining to see from their seats at trestle tables, at ground level, at half way, trying to watch and write at the same time? How much could George Dixon see, a guest of the Welsh Union sitting up in the stand, probably at or near halfway?

But at the time – and ignoring the notorious prepaid telegram sent at the prompting of the *Daily Mail* but which it never published (another mystery) – the All Blacks conceded that the better team won on the day. Gallaher said so, Dixon said so (or at least that ‘on the day New Zealand did not deserve to win’); Billy Stead was still saying so fifty years later. It was February before a sense of injustice began to ripple across New Zealand. Despite their conviction that Deans had scored, none any of the tourists begrudged Wales their victory - another important distinction - then or later.

The incident was helped on its way to mythological status by the premature death at only 24 – at twenty-one he had been the youngest tourist – of the religious, teetotal, charitable Bob Deans, who was among those who contributed to a weekly on-tour fund to assist the less well off members of the team. Lloyd Jones in his novel plausibly has Bob Deans knocking on players’ cabin doors every evening on board ship to remind them of evening service. Deans died in 1908 with the assertion that he did score against Wales on his lips. Dave Gallaher’s death at Passchendaele in 1917 later gilded the legend. I began with one New Zealand writer Lloyd Jones. I’ll end with another one, Terry McLean (*Great Days in New Zealand Rugby*, 1959):

*It is fascinating, if fruitless, to speculate on the might-have-beens if the try had been awarded and Wallace, as he would almost certainly have done, had kicked the goal. Would Rugby in New Zealand have remained the national game? Would the rivalry with Wales still be of a special quality which none but New Zealanders and Welshmen can ever properly understand?*

*One speculates and gets no further. Was it a try? Of course not. The referee said so.*

*Fifty years later – and in 50 years you can cover most of the arguments – Stead said, almost as if were ruminating: ‘We did not deserve to win. Wales had the better team on the day.’*

*When wisdom speaks, let all other tongues be silent.*

He adds a footnote:

*The 1953 All Black team streamed on to the field at its first visit to Cardiff and a local guide headed purposefully for a corner. ‘Here it is,’ he exclaimed. He dug his heel into the turf. ‘Away out here?’ said an All Black wonderingly. ‘Golly, not even Billy Wallace could have kicked the*

*goal from here.' 'No, no,' said the Welshman. 'This was where Morgan scored.'*

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