



## The First Wallabies

### Tourists and Olympians



## The Players

31 PLAYERS TOOK PART IN THE TOUR. Almost of all them had been born in Australia. Unlike many of the teams they would come up against, especially in England, the Wallabies came from a mix of social backgrounds.

At this time rugby union was the dominant winter sport in the states of New South Wales and Queensland. Rugby league had only very recently emerged to challenge union. Australian rules was the main winter sport in the rest of Australia.

The Wallabies introduced new ideas and techniques to British rugby. The tourists were generally admired for the rugged athleticism of their play. They were also among the pioneers of the modern eight-man scrum, with defined positions instead of players packing down in the order in which they arrived at the scrum.



Not everything on the field ran smoothly. The players felt that refereeing decisions often went against them. Three players were sent off during the tour, two for punching and one for kicking an opponent. The squad were also unlucky with injuries – with two players breaking legs in the first three games.



The game in 1908 was recognisable to the one played today, but nonetheless very different. Teams had been standardised to 15 players and the scoring system was similar to today's. Tactics were perhaps the area of greatest difference – with forward play dominated by dribbling rushes and short passing moves.

- Top right: Line-out against Devon
- Left: Peter Burge
- Above: The Wallabies take to the pitch against Devon



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## Wallabies win Gold



IN OCTOBER 1908 AUSTRALIA DEFEATED CORNWALL, who were representing Great Britain, 32–4 in the Olympic rugby final. ‘Britain’ and Australia were the only two teams in the competition.

Rugby was an Olympic sport on four occasions – 1900, 1908, 1920 and 1924. The Olympics then were very different to the spectacle we recognise today. The games took place over several months, and countries were generally represented by clubs in team events.

Cornwall were chosen to represent Britain as they were the reigning English county champions. The Wallabies were technically representing Australasia – at the 1908 and 1912 games Australia and New Zealand competed as one team.

Finding other teams to compete in the championship had proved to be difficult. Scotland and Ireland ignored their invitations to compete, South Africa and Wales declined. France agreed to participate but withdrew at the last moment.

The final was played at Shepherd’s Bush stadium in London. The match was one of the finest Wallaby performances of the entire tour, despite being played in dreadfully wet conditions. The Wallabies scored seven tries to Cornwall’s one, including one scored by Daniel Carroll after a beautiful passing movement started near their own try line.

Carroll was the youngest member of the Wallabies team. He later emigrated to the United States and, remarkably, won two Olympic rugby gold medals for America – as a player in 1920 and as a coach in 1924.



- Top right: The Wallabies’ ‘war cry’ before the Olympic final
- Above: Daniel Carroll



## Preparation

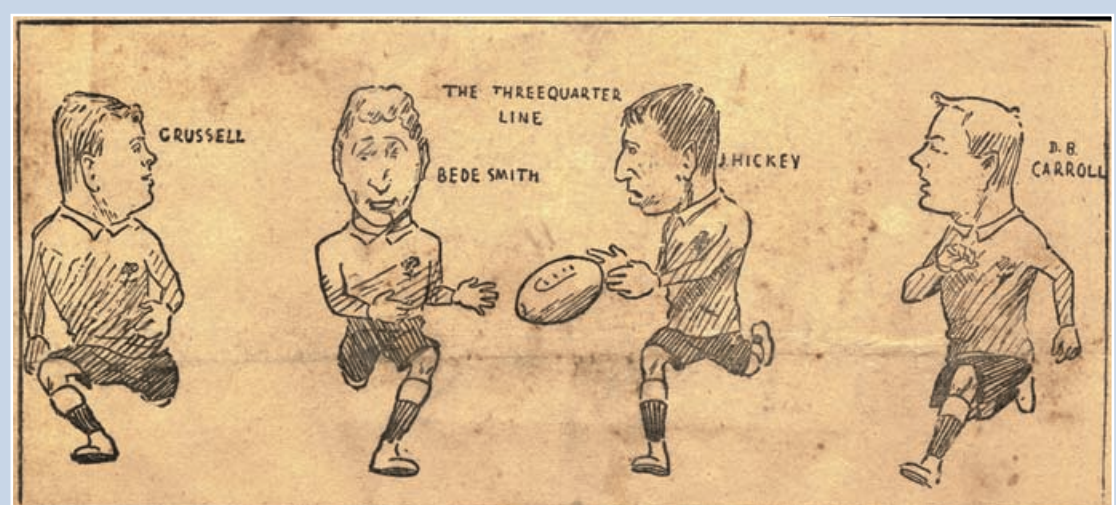
THE WALLABIES WERE NOT FULL-TIME ATHLETES. They were regarded as a formidably big and strong side for the time, and yet only two of them were over six feet tall. Their average weight was well under 13 stones.

In 1908 training for an international side was not the exact science that it is today. Players had to fit their preparation in around full-time jobs. They ate a diet typical of the time, rather than the individually tailored, specialist menus used by players today.

The Wallabies' manager, Captain James McMahon, and captain, Dr Herbert Moran, were responsible for the Wallabies training whilst on tour. They organised rigorous sessions throughout the tour. These included lectures on tactics and game-plans, as well as scrum practice and physical drills such as running, skipping, leapfrog and boxing.

The management were keen to keep the players busy, as a way of preventing indiscipline and boredom. On the voyage to England Moran organised sessions from 6am in the morning until late at night. Leisure time during the tour was often spent at 'smoking' concerts and dinners organised by opposing teams.

The Wallabies all had full-time jobs, and many came from working-class backgrounds. As amateurs they received no pay during the tour. The small daily allowance they did receive, three shillings, caused controversy and led to allegations of professionalism. Unlike many of the players they came up against, especially in England, for many Wallabies playing the game represented a real financial hardship.



- Top right and above: The Wallabies in training at Newton Abbot
- Left: Sketch of Sydney Middleton
- Above: Sketches of various Wallabies

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## Colonial relations

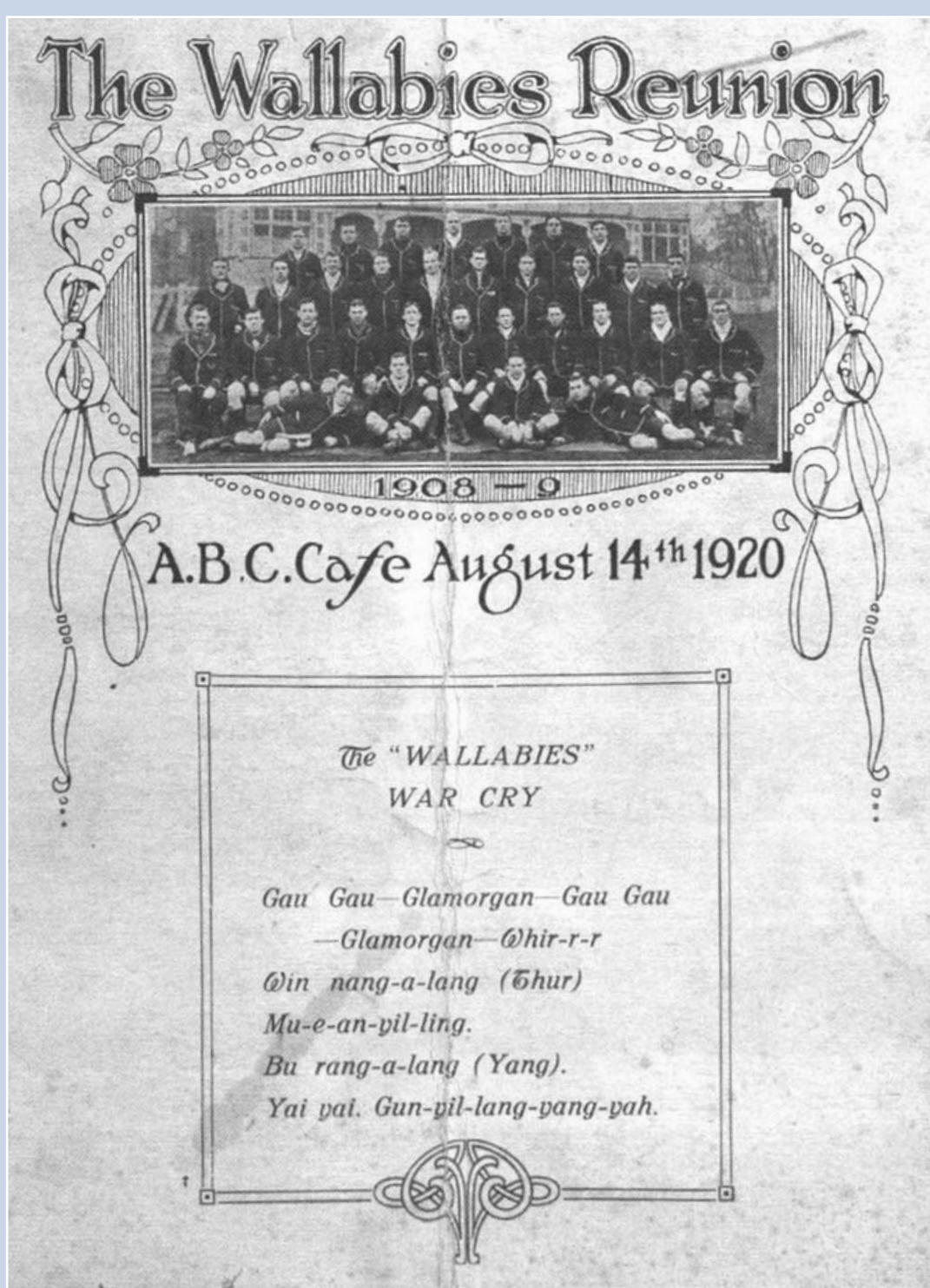
BY 1908 AUSTRALIA WAS NO LONGER A COLONY of Great Britain. Whilst in Britain, however, the Wallabies were often angered by patronising references to them as colonials, even ‘convicts’. This caused great resentment amongst many of the players.

All except two of the Wallabies were born in Australia. They regarded themselves as Australians, and were proud to represent their country. They recognised their links to Britain – which some players called ‘home’ or the ‘mother-country’. However, they were often angered by British assumptions that they would play and behave in a rough, uncultured way.

Before every game on the tour the Wallabies performed an ‘Aboriginal War-Cry’. This was following a tradition established by the 1905 All Blacks – which continues to this day with the Haka – and the 1906 Springboks. Such performances were popular with crowds and consequently with the tour’s promoters.



The captain, Dr Herbert Moran, and many of the players found the ‘war cry’ ridiculous and embarrassing. They felt it had no basis in aboriginal culture and was simply a publicity stunt. The tour management insisted on its performance. Moran registered his protest by hiding in the middle of the players during its performance.



■ Top right: The Wallabies’ controversial ‘war cry’



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## Rugby league emerges

THE WALLABIES TOUR CAME AT A CRUCIAL TIME in the development of rugby in Australia. In 1908 rugby league had only just begun in that country. After the tour many of the Wallaby players transferred to league clubs. Rugby league established the strong position in Australia that it enjoys to this day.

The New South Wales Rugby union (NSWRU) was established in 1881. It effectively controlled the administration of rugby in Australia until the formation of the Australian Rugby Union in 1949. Union games attracted large crowds, including a world record 52,000 who watched a test match against New Zealand in Sydney in 1907, and generated huge income for the NSWRU.

In 1895 the game in England split, and professional rugby league was born. The NSWRU was determined to retain its link to the RFU and to keep the game in Australia amateur.

For many players the game represented a financial burden. Working players had to fit playing and training around their jobs. Travelling and tour expenses often left them out of pocket, whilst injuries were a constant threat to both their playing career and working life.



In 1907 the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL) was formed, taking advantage of the resentment felt towards the NSWRU. As well as a league competition in Australia, the NSWRL organised a tour of Britain by a league team, the Kangaroos. The team toured Britain at the same time as the Wallabies.

On their return to Australia, no fewer than 14 of the Wallabies signed for the NSWRL. They received between £100 and £200 each. Many played with great distinction for league clubs and the Kangaroos. Helped by so many star players, league soon established a strong position – especially in NSW and Queensland.

- Top right: Members of the 1908 Kangaroos side
- Above left: Charles Parkinson
- Above right: Sketch of William Dix, one of the converts to league



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# Tom Richards



TOM RICHARDS LED AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE. HE WON CAPS for Australia and the British Lions, as well as playing in England, France and South Africa. He later served with distinction in the First World War, winning the Military Cross.

Richards was born in Vegetable Creek, New South Wales, in April 1883 and grew up in outback Queensland. His father was a tin miner and Methodist minister who strongly disapproved of rugby. Despite this Tom and his four brothers were keen players. In 1905 the family moved to South Africa. Tom's abilities were recognised, but residency laws prevented him from being picked for the 1906 Springbok tour of the UK. Annoyed, he travelled to Britain and succeeded in playing for Gloucestershire against the Springboks.

Richards returned to Australia when he heard about the proposed Wallabies tour to Britain. He was selected for the tour as a breakaway forward. Richards was one of the Wallabies' key players, with many in the British press calling him the best player in the world.

- Top right: Richards on the western front
- Above right: Sketch of Richards in action

In 1909 Richards moved back to South Africa. In 1910 a British Isles side were touring South Africa and many of the players were injured. They knew of Richards' reputation and, because of his spell playing in England, he was allowed to play for them.

With the outbreak of war in 1914 Richards served with great distinction for the Ambulance Corps in the Gallipoli campaign.

He then transferred to the infantry and saw action in France and Belgium. He personally pressed home a vital bombing attack and was awarded the Military Cross for 'conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty'.

Promoted to lieutenant, Richards served until 1918. He was injured several times and gassed on one occasion. He died in 1935 at the age of 52.



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# Yorkshire v. The "Wallabies" at Wakefield.



■ Newspaper cartoon from Wallabies v Yorkshire game





■ Charles Russell