

THE BARBARIANS

By Terry McLean

Like June in that celebrated song, nostalgia comes busting out all over as one looks back 50 years to the first two teams fielded by the Barbarians, the first against Thames at Thames in 1937, the second against Auckland at Eden Park in 1938. The story has often been told of the club's development from a conversation between the All Black flanker, Hugh McLean, and the secretary of the British Barbarians, Emile de Lisse, at a formal dinner held for the 1935-36 All Blacks (of which McLean was a member). The gist of the conversation was that, in the Barbarian concept as laid down by its founder, W. P. Carpmael, in the late 1890's, rugby was meant to be played for enjoyment. The Big Baa-Baas carved out a song — which they still sing most soulfully — "It's the way we have it in the Baa-Baas," to express the ideal which the club's teams tried to demonstrate in their every match. When McLean returned to Auckland, he spoke to his great friend, Ron Bush. More or less coincidentally, the two men, both of them leading players on the Auckland scene, heard that rugby in the Thames district was suffering. Poverty, you might say, was busting out all over. The Bush-McLean partnership went into action. An excellent team, which contained no fewer than 11 All Blacks, hired to Thames, played a game which was full of enjoyment, not least for the large crowd, benefited at the subsequent celebrations from a timely wager placed on the nags by their massive lock, "Bubs" Knight, and headed for the city, pleased, everyone of them, that they had done a good day's work for the game.

In the following year, Arthur Baker, that most able chairman of the Auckland Rugby Union, broached the idea to "The Big Two" that a match between the Baa-Baas and an Auckland XV might cheer up a populace which was still down in the dumps after the hammering suffered by the All Blacks (6 to 17, no tries to five) in the rubber match of the Springboks' tour and of which scars are still visible on parts of Eden Park. Once more, no fewer than 11 All Blacks turned out in the blazing colours of scarlet jersey with white lamb rampant (the Baa-baas, naturally), which McLean had devised and which he later incorporated into the club tie now reckoned to be one of the most distinctive and sought after in all of world rugby. These Baa-Baas really clicked. They beat Auckland by a massive 43 to 21 and in the doing displayed all kinds of

artifice and artistry. For a wonder, the team even fielded an English international, Charles Webb, who as a Marine of the Royal Navy had been posted to Auckland for a tour of duty. He was almost the perfect lock — straight of back, powerful of physique, tireless, a skilled forager for the ball at the lineout — and remains distinctive in English rugby history because he was one of the team which at Twickenham hammered the '35 All Blacks by 13 to 0.

Let us look at some of the players of these first two Barbarian sides and feel welling up within us gladness that we saw them and sadness that so many have gone, some for King and Country while serving in World War Two. The Thames match contained All Blacks in Arthur Bullock-Douglas, Swin Hadley, Frank Solomon, Rube McWilliams, Dave Solomon, Bill Hadley, Pat Caughey, Bush, McLean, Mervyn Corner and Knight. Most of these were still there at Eden Park next year. A most notable addition was George Hart, the national sprint champion of a few years before whose exclusion by Manager Vinnie Meredith from the '35 team's match against England was a direct cause of the two immortal tries scored by the legendary Prince Obolensky — in their encounters in two earlier matches, Hart had put the Indian sign very firmly on "Obo", and was like to do so, any time they met.

Famous names there. Caughey, Hart and Bullock-Douglas were lovely, flying threequarters, the Hadleys spurred in their every match by their mother, one of the most voluble and expert rugby students who ever graced a sideline, were supreme in the front row, McLean, McWilliams, Solomon — gee, there was stuffing in the way they played the wing-forward game.

In these days, the early doings of the Barbarians tend to be concentrated upon McLean and Bush, giving the impression that the club would have foundered without them. McLean most warmly disputes this. He talks, nostalgically, of the great services offered the fledgling club by such as the mother of Doug Flett (and his famous bowling brother, John), who ran the Commercial Hotel at the corner of Shortland and High streets and who, as the club reformed after the war, was still busy mothering her Baa-Baa boys. George Ashley, a sideline worker, was a powerhouse of activity who expected neither thanks nor reward. A Grand Old Man of Auckland rugby, Arthur Tilly, one of the best-informed and

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A. KNIGHT (67)



S. HADLEY (60)



ANGUS FINLAYSON (59)



FRANK SOLOMON (55)



F. W. LUCAS (51)



R. G. BUSH (48)

SIX BARBARIANS WHO HAVE MADE 340 APPEARANCES IN AUCKLAND

The service given to Auckland Rugby members of the Barbarians Club is indicated by the remarkable records of the above six, whose names and faces are familiar to all lovers of the Rugby Union game in Auckland.

BARBARIANS v. AUCKLAND. SOUVENIR PROGRAMME.

Programme for the first Barbarians v Auckland match in 1938.

driest wits of rugby history, benignly did all he could to help. Fred Lucas, famous All Black, not least because, as to dress, he was the most immaculate player ever to represent club, province or country, was a man of such mana that his patronage convinced the public this strange institution was even better than it looked — or played. Poor Fred, though retired eight years, was prevailed upon to play emergency in the 1939 Auckland game and in it took such a

heavy knock on the head that the injury, only a few years later, was to set going those strains of Alzheimer's Disease which caused him to spend his last sad years in a psychiatric hospital.

Charlie Cammick — was ever such an enthusiast for anything to do with rugby, or golf, or sport? His services as player and officer were priceless. Charlie's partner in the Ponsonby and Auckland five-eighths line, Alex Jamieson, if quieter than Charlie, was as much of a character.



*The first major match played by the Barbarians was against Auckland in 1938. The team pictured here was:
 Back row: J. G. C. Wales (referee), J. R. Evans, G. W. Nicholson (part obscured, manager), A. Finlayson, J. P. McNeile, G. A. H. Bullock-Douglas, S. Hadley, R. G. McWilliams, D. Solomon, C. S. H. Webb, H. M. Fraser, F. Solomon, F. W. Lucas (coach).
 Middle row: W. E. Hadley, T. H. C. Caughey, R. G. Bush, H. F. McLean, C. E. Cammick, D. Flett, A. Tilly (President).
 In front: M. M. N. Corner, F. R. Lucas (mascot), G. F. Hart.*

“Ack” was much beloved as secretary, not least because of the suspicion that, in the early days after the war, he wrote a report of the previous annual meeting on the back of an envelope while awaiting the chairman’s call to start the first meeting for the new season. The Baa-Baas a little time ago made Jack Evans a life-member and Jack, as slim and modest as in his playing days when he was a very industrious forward indeed, was overcome. Yet Jack has been the salt of the earth to the club. Living, as he does, a few blocks from the club’s rooms hard by Eden Park, he makes a daily call to check that all’s well with the premises; and if a bit of carpentering, or plumbing, or something is needed, be sure that he, the handiest of men, will fix it. Jack Bourke may not have played in those first two games but he, too, was attracted to the Baa-Baa concept; so firmly that, years later, when the club had its own premises, his contributions to its re-development were so significant that over the fireplace now hangs the notice, “This Is the House

that Jack Built”.

If one omits important persons, it’s because Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away; but the spirit which has sustained the Barbarians and which was so strong that, despite the loss of eight years because of the war, there was never a doubt that, as soon as possible, it would be reformed, has remained significant to the club ever since. Still, forever, sticks in the mind the answer of the great postwar lock, Bob Duff, when, by request, he was invited to turn out for the club. “I should be honoured,” said he — and Bob is a solemn, earnest man who means exactly what he says — “to play for the Barbarians.”

“Honoured” is the key word. In these past 50 years, a great many rugby men from New Zealand and abroad have felt themselves honoured by the invitation to play for the club. No wonder nostalgia comes busting out all over when these men get together to talk about themselves and, above all, about the Baa-Baas.