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Mortimer, 2014

NEWS

90 years on Invincibles remain larger than life part of All Blacks history

JAMES MORTIMER 09 DEC 2014 GETTY IMAGES

Long before the legend of the Invincibles was formed, rugby was in the midst of a landmark era, as the Great War had only recently ended, the rivalry between the All Blacks and Springboks had only just begun, while Wales were unbeaten against New Zealand.

Yes the early 1920s were an interesting time for the sport.

League had caused frictions in the game, professional versus the amateur traditions of rugby, and few would have thought that New Zealand would be about to etch out another special segment in their proud history.

1924

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COMING SOON: A feature on the @AllBlacks 'Invincibles', one of the great NZ rugby teams (1924/25) #TeamAllBlacks

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Somewhat fittingly, as the 90 year anniversary of the Invincibles tour is recognised, the current Ranfurly Shield holders, Hawke's Bay, were at the time holders of the famous Log o'Wood.

The oldest provincial union outside of the 'big four' was the superpower of New Zealand Rugby at the time, beating a powerful Wellington union 19-9 to take the country's remarkable rugby trophy in 1922.

Shield winning coach Norm McKenzie was appointed as an All Blacks selector at a time where Test matches were very rare.

After the 1921 South African tour of New Zealand, the next time the men with the silver fern donned their famous jersey would be in 1924, with eight members of the touring squad having served their country during World War One.

Their first match would be against Devonshire on 13 September, 1924, after six 'warm-up games'.

The Bay would feature only six players in the Invincibles, but they were some of the pillars of All Blacks history.

AGES, WEIGHTS, & HEIGHTS.

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Even back in those days there were some big @AllBlacks among the Invincibles #90yearson

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The Brownlie brothers Maurice (http://stats.allblacks.com/asp/profile.asp?ABID=99) and Cyril (http://stats.allblacks.com/asp/profile.asp?ABID=97), playmaker Lui Paewai (http://stats.allblacks.com/asp/profile.asp?ABID=685), halfback Jimmy Mill (http://stats.allblacks.com/asp/profile.asp?ABID=612), Bill Irvine (http://stats.allblacks.com/asp/profile.asp?ABID=422) and the incomparable George Nepia (http://stats.allblacks.com/asp/profile.asp?ABID=650) were part of the famous Magpies team and all would play roles in Europe.

With the benefit of no hindsight despite the exploits of Hawke's Bay – in 1926 they completed one of the dominant provincial seasons – some suggested that Europe's superpowers would be too strong for New Zealand.

Wales might not have been as imperious as they had been in the past, but they had an unbeaten record against the All Blacks (albeit over one Test), while England was in rude health, they had won three Five Nations Grand Slams between 1921 and 1925.

Less than two decades later, the might of the Originals was not considered notable or worth paying homage to as this new wave of New Zealanders descended on Britain. Early media reports prove that a big section of 'experts' had written off the 1924 outfit before they even had arrived on the ancient soil.

Ireland were conquered 6-0 in the first Test of the tour, with Ken Sydney Svenson, known as "Snowy" by the Buller faithful (Svenson was the most prolific All Black from the West Coast club), scoring the only try.

By the time New Zealand arrived in Swansea for their second Test against Wales, the tourists had established a 20-match winning streak on tour and local rags were beginning to warn of the perils home teams were facing against this mob of impressive visitors.

The Irish had tried unsuccessfully to duplicate the All Blacks 'rover' tactics, where a seven-man scrum was preferred to allow a forward to "rove" like a second halfback.

History recognises this as a wing forward.

Wales had in 1905, when defeating the Originals, played the tactic against New Zealand with great success, using the position as a ruse, allowing legendary Swansea halfback Dicky Owen to send over Teddy Morgan for