

Our history

The history of New Zealand soccer has only ever received the most cursory written treatment. We are therefore indebted to veteran Auckland soccer fan Don Service for filling in a few more gaps with a further chapter on our past in...

The Canadian tour of 1927

The touring team that had the longest itinerary in New Zealand, with 23 matches, was the Canadians in 1927.

Of these they won 20, lost two, and drew one, with 116 goals for and 16 against. The 18 players all had good British or Irish surnames, with not a French-Canadian name among them.

They had a popular manager in Alderman James Adam, who liked to recall that in his official capacity he had welcomed the All Blacks when they played in Vancouver two years before. Mrs Adam came along too.

The team was joined on arrival by a Wellington resident, Colin Reid, a former St Mirren trainer-coach.

Back in 1924 when the Chinese Universities team suffered a series of early losses on tour, including 0-4 against Wellington, there was talk that Colin Reid might be attached to the team, but I haven't come across any confirmation that this was actually done.

The Canadians didn't draw as many people as the Chinese had done. The latter, although losing 12 of 22 matches, drew the crowds as exotic Orientals. But

the Canadians were still very popular, and drew an aggregate of about 120,000 people.

Canada won their first game against Taranaki 10-1. At half time it was 9-0, and press reports insisted that "in the second spell they obviously eased up".

This generosity was attributed to them again in the second game against Wanganui (7-0) and several later ones, although Marlborough was thrashed 11-0.

The first serious challenge came in the fourth game before 12,000 people at Athletic Park when they beat Wellington 2-0. According to the Weekly News the tourists' brilliant goalkeeper Tait contributed largely to their victory.

The Dominion told how "a full description of the play was broadcast by Mr George Campbell, an ex-captain of New Zealand teams".

The establishment was there too; the Governor-General and party, and the Prime Minister and wife.

This first Wellington visit was also typical of the large number of official functions arranged.

There was a civic welcome in the Great Chamber and a government welcome at Parliament House, and after the match both teams were entertained at a dinner in the Grand Hotel.

Speakers at these functions tended to dwell in flowery language on the bonds of friendship between the two sister dominions within the British Empire, and how loyal they were to the crown.

With seven games played the Canadians had scored 43 goals with one against. Yet in the next game they crashed 0-1 against lowly Westland at Greymouth. According to the Weekly News the Canadians "did by far the most attacking, but their shooting mostly lacked direction, and brilliant saves nullified their best shots... the tenacious defensive tactics of the local players withstood every onslaught of the visitors".

The goalkeeper Timlin (whose first name is not given) was carried shoulder-high from the field.

The first test came halfway through the tour, when 10,000 at Carisbrook saw a 2-2 draw after New Zealand had led 1-0 at half time.

The second test drew only about 5000 to Lancaster Park, where Canada won 2-1. A description of the preliminaries said that "somewhat appropriately, the band struck up God Defend New Zealand".

The third test, at the Basin Reserve, saw Wellington produce another crowd of 12,000. New Zealand won 1-0, which was also the halftime score.

But it was to be a long time between drinks. I can remember how in 1951 New Zealand's 3-1 win over Victoria (Australia)

at the same ground (followed by wins over Fiji and New Caledonia when we toured later in the year) was hailed as the first test win since 1927. In the interim we lost 18 straight, mostly by large margins.

When Canada beat Poverty Bay 6-0 the Weekly News said: "The best football programme ever played before the public of Poverty Bay was staged yesterday, when the Canadians played the Bay, and as a curtainraiser, the Maori All Blacks rugby team played a district team. The visitors in each case were successful."

And so to Auckland for the fourth test

at rugby league headquarters Carlaw Park. The Herald and the Auckland Star gave reasonable coverage to soccer in those days, but the paper which really treated the code quite generously was The Sun, which had conveniently started up at about the same time the tour began.

It's a pity it wasn't still here to show "Granny Herald" how local soccer should be treated, but unfortunately it only lasted three years.

It's hard to read The Sun's long discussions without feeling a real sense of occasion.

After all, the fourth test was the climax of a long tour, and would decide the series.

And soccer flourished in Auckland in the 1920s, particularly in the first half of the decade when crowds of 4000 were quite frequently seen for the club games at Victoria Park. The large intakes of British immigrants helped this.

Over its test report The Sun had four big headlines:

CANADIANS WIN SOCCER ASHES...

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Final Test... Historic Struggle for Supremacy in Inter-Dominion Soccer... Canada Outclasses All Blacks.

The Canadians, with their "short ground-passing, Scottish style of play", won 4-1 after leading 2-1 at the break.

Play deteriorated towards the end as drizzling rain set in and the ground became badly churned. All three newspapers gave the crowd as 23,000.

This must be one of the best photographed pre-war games, as the weekly Sporting and Dramatic Review had three pages of good pictures.

An inset in the main Sun article in darker print was headed: "A Reminder to the Powers that be". In this the sports editor complained bitterly that "the arrangements for accommodating the press men were totally inadequate... No one was responsible for reserving space where the press could be uninterrupted for the strenuous task of rushing through a detailed report and comments".

The Canadians then played mid-week at Kensington Park, Whangarei, beating North Auckland 4-1, with a hockey curtainraiser.

This might be open to correction, but I don't recall that any overseas soccer team at senior level has played in North Auckland or Westland since. (*We'll get letters if they have, Don – Ed.*)

The last match was on July 30, 1927, against Auckland at Blandford Park, which had been opened as a central headquarters in 1925.

Pre-match advertising posed the question: "Auckland's chance to vindicate New Zealand – Can we do it?"

One newspaper headline asked: "Can

Auckland Can Canada?"

There were only two New Zealand players in the Auckland team; Bob Innes (captain) and Peter Gerrard.

It was a game of two halves. Canada led 5-0 at half time, but Auckland, through Innes and Dunsmore, outscored them 2-1 in the second spell to go down 2-6.

But Auckland was handicapped when left winger Miles was injured in the first five minutes in a collision with goalkeeper Tait. With no replacements allowed "the popular marine was a lame duck from then on, but struggled through to the bitter end with admirable gameness".

Dudley Wrathall, father of John Wrathall, gave a live radio broadcast of this game.

The crowd was 7000. Dunedin-born Phil Neesham, a former New Zealand player, was the Auckland coach and selector (and NZ coach).

For many years afterwards it used to be claimed that teams chosen by Neesham

just before and after 1930 were among the best Auckland ever had.

At game's end players of both teams joined hands in a singing of Auld Lang Syne. But still to come was a farewell banquet at the Cargen Hotel for 150 guests. The banquet was thrown by brewery magnate and later Mayor of Auckland, Sir Ernest Davis, who was president of the Auckland Football Association from 1921-38 and 1942-46.

The Sun had a long rambling article headed "Canadian Footballer's Impressions of NZ" in which Dave Turner, the second highest goalscorer (16) gave his thoughts. Turner insisted that it had been a most enjoyable experience from the moment they received a cable of

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welcome from Prime Minister Coates in mid-Pacific, right through to the end, and that all in the party had absolutely loved the New Zealand hospitality, scenery, butter and girls.

He reverted to the Westland game: "I would like to call particular attention to Timlin, the goalkeeper of that side. Alone he beat us, breaking our hearts with the magnificent exhibition he put up.

"The field was deplorable, comparable with Blanford Park on Saturday last. We

had so much of the play that Edmunds and Moon were down at the greymouth end, shooting in, but Timlin was there."

Turner also said: "The boys wish to pay tribute to Colin Reid as a trainer, as a sport, and a man."

In 1980 New Zealand played Canada at Vancouver (lost 0-4) and Edmonton (lost 0-3). But it seems strange that New Zealand officials never seem to have tried to get Canada back here again.

SHORT PASSES: Former All White **John Morris**, Headmaster of Auckland Grammar School and **Kristin Bowman**, corporate counsel for Auckland International Airport Limited have been seconded to join the NZS Board for two years. Tony Marks resigned as a seconded member of the Board after completing his two year term. Meanwhile Sitter! subscriber **Rex Dawkins** won the ballot for a board position, with Nigel Mattison also being returned. Unsuccessful were Ted Midlane (Auckland), Barbara Cox (Auckland), Paul Max (Nelson) and Ray Ellison (Hawke's Bay).

Napier City Rovers have renamed their home ground as **Bluewater Stadium**. Seeing the old name was Park Island (as opposed to Island Park), we wonder, shouldn't that be **Stadium Bluewater**? Welcome to two more Kiwis at college in the US. Miramar's U20 All White Wiremu Patrick has joined the Bearcats in Cincinnati from the spring season. Meanwhile **James Trotter** also from Wellington is a freshman at Winthrop University in South Carolina.

Last time **Brad Scott** was called up to the All Whites he was playing reserve team football for Central. But the big fella topped that when Ken Dugdale named his 32-man preliminary World Cup qualifiers squad. Brad was playing in the Cosmos Youth team at the time. Nice one, Brad.

Four years after the grandstand was demolished, **English Park** (Christchurch) is finally getting a facelift. It is being redeveloped as a 3000 capacity ground with a 750-seater stand, more powerful floodlights and a host of function rooms. Napier City Rovers stalwart, Sitter! subscriber and all-round soccer legend **John Simmonds** died on March 21, victim of melanoma. Over 300 attended the service at Park Island. John was a fixture at Napier, a pillar of the game, and one of the most dedicated workers soccer had. Condolences to Sue.

Kevin **Hendy**, known as "Mr Technical" for his unstinting work for the Christchurch Technical soccer club, died in Christchurch in late March, aged 60. He seemed a sitter to represent New Zealand until his football career ended abruptly in 1963 when he developed rheumatoid arthritis, but he served Technical and Canterbury soccer as a hard-working and visionary administrator until the end of the 2000 season. Hendy played eight games for Canterbury from 1960 to 1963. His career highlight was an appearance in 1961 when he marked Tom Finney in the 1-11 loss to the touring England XI. Meanwhile Dunedin ever-present **Max Stevens** (56) died from a heart attack in late March. Welcome back to **Shane Gillies**. We've been advised not to say too much, particularly in relation to New Zealand Sports Drug Agency activities, so obviously we won't. Indeed, probably most of you never noticed, but our Shane -- a Durex Bachelor of the Year finalist a couple of years back -- was out of soccer action for, well, exactly eight months by our calculations.

Oldies rule in Christchurch. Former All Whites midfield terrier **Danny Halligan** has re-launched his national league career with Christchurch City after a three year stint of not playing. What next? A Steve Sumner comeback? **Hoots, man: Steve Turner** and **Steve Pritchett** (former All White U17s) have signed for Aberdeen. Leo bertos preferred ahead of **Rory Fallon** at Barnsley. **Ryan Nelsen**, All Whites captain-in-waiting, was named US College System (Universities) "Scholar-Athlete of the Year. Outstanding when you consider he was up against the basketball and gridiron jocks.