

## **RIGHTING A WRONG**

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### ***The first All Blacks tour to Great Britain***

In 1902-03 the Rugby Football Union raised the subject of a tour by New Zealand with the four Home countries each offering fixtures for which financial guarantees would be given. The then Scottish Football Union, whilst embracing the idea were not, at the time, in a strong financial position and found itself 'on the spot'. Nevertheless, the Scots offered to host two matches: one to be played against a West of Scotland side at Burnbrae, Glasgow, the other an international match against a full Scotland side to be played at Inverleith.

The tour was not without its difficulties and misunderstandings and, for nearly one hundred years, the Scottish Football Union (later to be renamed the Scottish Rugby Union) has borne the brunt of much of the criticisms and recriminations. These reared up again when the 1924 All Blacks tour to the UK was being organised and a further layer of myth and misunderstanding was imposed and the finger of blame was pointed at the Scots. Even today some writers, probably because of a lack of real in-depth research before putting pen to paper, repeat and, literally, regurgitate the misinformation. It is time that these inaccuracies were corrected and the disservice to Scottish rugby was righted.

### ***The myths***

1. Prior to their tour in 1905 the New Zealanders sought a guarantee of £200 per match. The tale goes that the SFU were concerned that the drawing power of matches against the All Blacks would be insufficient to cover the guarantees asked for and, because of this, refused to agree to the £200 asked and, instead, offered the tourists the entire gate receipts.
2. The gate receipts for the international at Inverleith (Scotland 7 New Zealand 12) amounted to over £1000 and for the match in Glasgow to about £700. The tale continues that the Scots were sorely upset by this turn of events, so much so that they took the huff and omitted to lay on after-match entertainment for the tourists.
3. The SFU regretted their decision not to meet the sought-after guarantee and the subsequent hand-over of £1,700 to the tourists.

### ***The facts***

1. When, in 1902-03, the RFU raised the question about a tour by the New Zealanders with the Home Unions offering fixtures and match revenue guarantees, the SFU found themselves in a bit of a quandary. The SFU Minutes show that, by December 1903, the decision had been taken to offer the New Zealanders two fixtures. The Scots wished to assist the visitors with their expenses but, at the time, were not sufficiently financially solvent to offer the £200 guarantees requested. The stadium at Inverleith (opened in February 1899) had been financed by issues of Bonds and Debentures and debts of £6,600 were still outstanding. The Annual Accounts of the period show that the average surpluses from international matches at Inverleith, played between 1899 and 1903, were as follows: England £1,049; Ireland £698; Wales £770. The SFU Committee, with the foregoing information available felt that they could not impose further financial burden on its Bond and Debenture holders but, wishing to

assist the tourists, it would pass on the net receipts from the two Scottish matches – and it was perfectly clear that the total sum would surpass the figure of guarantee asked for.

2. The SFU Committee boasted several professional men with business expertise including R C Greig and the formidable figure of James Aikman Smith, both Chartered Accountants. The Committee knew *exactly* what they were doing.
3. If further proof of the SFU's wide-awake intentions be required, one has but to examine the Minutes of the following season, 1906-07, when exactly the same terms were offered to the touring South Africans. If the Scots had regretted their decision over guarantees paid to the New Zealanders, why on earth would they have offered the same terms to the South Africans a year later? The drawing power of either group of tourists was never in doubt; the SFU was protecting the interests of its Debenture and Bond holders (the outstanding debt of £6,600 incurred by the building of Inverleith was not cleared until 1908).
4. It is true that there was no after-match dinner or entertainment, which procedure was the usual vogue. However, prior to the tour George Dixon, the All Blacks Manager, wrote asking what expenses would be deducted from the gate receipts and about the situation if a match was cancelled (this after having known the SFU's offer for 22 months!). The New Zealanders representative in London, William Wray Palliser, wrote to the SFU to state that the touring party did not wish to be entertained after the matches. A strange state of affairs, perhaps – but that is the way the New Zealanders wanted it! In fact, the SFU Minutes record that '...it was resolved that all that could be done would be to try to secure seats at the Theatre for the team on the Friday night...' (The offer of theatre tickets was not taken up).

### ***The 1924 All Blacks***

In July 1923 the RFU advised the other Home Countries that they had made arrangements for a tour to the UK by New Zealand and asked those Unions if they wished fixtures with the All Blacks.

### ***The myth***

Some rugby history books record that Scotland were still, in 1923, incensed by what had happened in 1905 that, 19 years later, the SFU made it clear that the Scots did not wish to entertain the New Zealand tourists. Such writings also aver that '...J. Aikman Smith criticised the daily payment of expenses which the New Zealand Union had made to their players on tour (in 1905) so vociferously in fact that relations between the two Unions were not healed for almost 30 years and Scotland did not play against the All Blacks in 1924-25.' Absolute tosh! Any comments that may have been made by Aikman Smith had nothing to do with it – and this can be easily proved.

### ***The facts***

The most accurate book of reference for the facts is that by Eric W. Moses: *History of the International Rugby Football Board, 1886-1960* (1961):

*At a Committee of the Board in February 1909, long consideration was given to the vexed question of cash allowances to players on tour. The Scottish Union (which had entertained the First All Blacks) proposed '...that cash payments to players stated in the accounts of the New Zealand Union in connection with their tour in Great Britain...(in 1905-06) as daily allowances to players, £1.041 9s. 6d., and which were made with the approval of the RFU, are contrary to the principles of amateur Rugby Football, and amount to professionalism.'*

The voting being equal, the motion failed, but a further resolution found unanimous support – ‘...that the making of any allowance to players in cash in the opinion of this committee is contrary to the principles of amateur Rugby Football, and in future no such allowance be made to any player.’

In 1911 the following draft terms on which Colonial teams might be invited to play in the United Kingdom were formulated:

*‘That the Colonial teams must come as guests, no division of profits to be considered.  
The probable expense of a visiting team would be about £6,000.  
They would play about 35 matches and the expenses would be about £150 per match.  
The four Countries would be required to guarantee the expenses on the following scale in case they desired matches: England (16 matches) £2,850; Wales (11 matches) £1,640; Scotland (4 matches) £750; Ireland (4 matches) £750.  
An international match to count as four matches.  
For travelling: 3<sup>rd</sup> class railway fare, 1<sup>st</sup> class hotel expenses with ordinary drinks at meals.  
Medical attendance and laundry to form part of the expenses.  
A paid Manager to be appointed.’*

That the SRU did not wish fixtures with the 1924 touring New Zealanders can be further explained by the fact that, at the time, it was deeply involved with the building of the new Murrayfield Stadium (due to be opened in March 1925) and all of the financial implications that implied. A resolution dated 23 July 1924 says it all: ‘...The SRU hereby resolve for equipping the new football ground at Murrayfield to borrow a sum not exceeding £75,000 (£2.1 million in today’s terms) in the meantime, by the issue of debentures of £100 each.

This makes it clear that the Union was heavily in debt at the time of the proposed tour by the New Zealanders. The high-handed action by the RFU apart, to undertake to host the tourists would have been an unwanted distraction at a time when all energies and monies were being allocated to the building of the new stadium.

If further explanations be needed, it came in the form of an official statement, H M Simson, the then Secretary of the SRU issued the following to Scottish clubs:

*‘The May 1911 discussion was believed (by Scotland) to be a binding agreement between four countries as the future conduct of Dominion Tours in this country. Accordingly, when the second South African team visited the country in 1912, the tour was conducted on the lines thus laid down, without difficulty and without friction...  
In July 1923 your Committee were more than surprised to be advised that the RFU were bringing over a New Zealand team in 1924, and were asked if they wished fixtures. This arrangement was so absolutely opposed to the (May 11) agreement formally come to...and would naturally open the way to any of the four countries having the right to entertain a Touring team for their own profit, that they (the SRU) promptly declined to entertain the proposal and, in any case, no fixtures would have been arranged by your Union, even if willing, under the financial arrangements which they understood were laid down by the RFU.’*

It is fairly obvious that, in July 1923, upon learning of the RFU’s actions, the Scots alone of the other home Unions, took exception to the unilateral actions of the RFU. The English Union had, not for the first time (and certainly not the last!), with flagrant disregard of the 1911 agreement had usurped the other Home Unions. The Scots, never a race to let the English walk all over them, decided that they wanted nothing to do with the proposed tour. That the New Zealanders

understood fully the reaction of the SRU is proved in the book by Read Masters, one of the 1924-25 All Blacks ('The Invincibles'). Published in 1928 and titled *With the All Blacks in Great Britain, France, Canada and Australia, 1924-25*, reference is made to the New Zealanders farewell lunch at the Piccadilly Hotel, London, on 21 January 1925. In it he quotes from the speech by Stan Dean, the Manager of 'The Invincibles': '...During the tour there has been a lot of talk about Scotland. We are not interested in Scotland's attitude...and we know that Scotland has no grievance against us...'

Thus the myth that the Scots had borne a grudge against New Zealand since the 1905 tour is exposed as being the lie that it was. Scotland did not refuse to host the 1924 All Blacks because of any hangover from 1905. It was the RFU's breaking of the 1911 IRFB agreement – that and the financial constraints that prevailed at the time – that forced the Scots into the action they took. There was absolutely no anti-New Zealand feeling involved.

That the myths about the New Zealand tours of 1905 and 1924 have been so often perpetuated gives cause for regret. The Scots did not hold a grudge against the New Zealand tourists: they never did nor will they ever. Hopefully, this piece will help clear the air. Cause for regret? Yes! Sadly, some of our rugby history books got it embarrassingly wrong.