

## BRIAR'S RUGBY AMERICAN TOUR 1978

The tourists departed Sydney on Friday. 24th November 1978. A "farewell drink" was had at "The Dolphin" and then on to Kingsford-Smith to board our special Pan Am 747 non-stop to Los Angeles.

The flight over was expected to be quiet with the players supremely fit and quietly confident for their first encounter of the tour which was of course against the Pan Am flight crew.

Your scribe is pleased to report a result of 25 points all. It was a long game, approximately 15 hours from start to finish with no allowance for halftime. It is difficult to single out any individual performance, but mention should be made of Ian Steele who put so much in to his game that a Hostess, readily swapped Jumpers with him.

Our sincere thanks to Pan Am ... WELL PLAYED!! On arrival at Los Angeles we transferred to Huntington Beach and immediately set about making friends with the natives and weaning ourselves onto American Beer. Our training runs were scheduled each morning at 7.30 am and considering our exhausting schedule it was an appropriate way to end an evening out.

The first match of the Tour was against Finlanders Rugby Club in Norwalk, Los Angeles. What our opposition lacked in technical ability they made up for in size and aggressiveness. I am most pleased to report that not only did we win an extremely hard game, but all participants lifted their game to a standard that would put us in This Year's Grand Final. The final score was Briars 14 Finlanders 0. From a ruck 35 yards out, a conventional passing run to the Wing saw Paul Hayes become the first Briar to score in America (on the field). Unfortunately, in the third quarter of this game Ken Harvey was injured and unable to play again on tour, Ken was a great help as Coach for the first two weeks of the Tour and his assistance was greatly appreciated.

The next few days saw trips to Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm which helped put our liver back into shape. Through a local Rugby team at Huntington Beach, "The Unicorns" we were introduced to a ladies rugby team. Our boys responded very warmly to an invitation to coach these ladies and were seen on several evenings going through various movements with them. We hope we were able to improve their game. Rugby with the ladies is very popular in California and in the Los Angeles area some 25 teams compete against each other.

Our second match took us to Bakersfield, California, about 120 miles north west of Los Angeles. Bakersfield where "the men are men and the sheep are really nervous" has a population of 100,000 and produces oil, cattle, cotton and really large footballers. The game was played under lights at the local American football ground (they have never heard of Grid Iron). Briars were outweighed by approximately 2 stone per man and about 4 - 5" in height. The locals scored a converted try in the first two minutes to lead 6 / 0. Our boys however, stuck to the task by using 2-man line-outs, wheeling scrums & kicking into the pocket etc. Derek Nix kicked a memorable 40-yard penalty and we trailed most of the game 6/3. Derek had another chance to equalize with two minutes to go but was unsuccessful. Mention should be made of Craig Hickey's effort through the match of helping the referee in making his decisions, they were even seen drinking together after the match.

After an overnight stop in Bakersfield we departed for Las Vegas.

Our stay in Vegas was only 14 hours. 3 pm to 5 am, but most enjoyable. It was Band Saw's birthday and at short notice we were able to organise him a party, which went off with a real bang.

The return trip from Vegas to Los Angeles was the usual Rugby Bus Trip. 6 hours of cocktails and Band Saw telling us how much he enjoyed his birthday.

That day in Los Angeles a very subdued team hit the sack, except for Murray and Steele of course.

On leaving Los Angeles we travelled Route 101, Pacific Coast Highway, to San Francisco. We took the longer route to enjoy the coastal scenery. After 10 minutes of travelling all but 2 members of the Tour Party were asleep. .... who said you can't sleep on a bus! San Francisco's a great town but bloody cold. Training each morning to the Bay Park by Taxi, \$10.00, return was the best part.....of training that is. Our opposition here was Browns Rugby Club and the venue was the Polo Grounds in the magnificent Golden Gate National Park. Our boys, after a slow start, led an inexperienced opposition 12/0 at half time ..... there were really no excuses (8 of the team had the flu) but we were defeated 14/12 and this had to be our bad one for the Tour.

On to Santa Rosa. At this stage of the tour it was time unfortunately to say farewell to John Edmonds and Ken Harvey. John Edmonds returning home to fulfil business commitments and Ken Harvey due to injuries which would not allow him to play again on tour.

After two days of ripping into San Francisco and especially Union Street, the tour had left their indelible mark and it was time to move on to our next encounter at Santa Rosa. Santa Rosa is about an hour's drive north of San Francisco in a rapidly decreasing rural district. The inhabitants are still "a little bit country" and typical country hospitality and entertainment was provided. Our only billets of the tour were at Santa Rosa, this made a pleasant break from hotels. California Gold!! is plentifully in this district which made some eyes light up..... The hospitality shown by our billets left nothing to be desired and more specific details are available from the individual players. Santa Rosa provided probably the strongest opposition on tour and at half time we led 10/0 which regrettably compounded in the second half to lose 28/10" Derek Nix unfortunately felt the full affects of an American football tackle and finished early complaining of a broken leg. Following our most enjoyable Post Game Drink at the Santa Rosa Bar we returned to San Francisco late that evening. Late the following evening, following a farewell drink with the Tour Guides. we departed for Hawaii. While boarding the aircraft Ken Kable gave a fantastic Impersonation of an intoxicated tourist and thoroughly fooled the flight crew and even some of the party. Upon our arrival at Honolulu in the early hours of the morning it was disappointing that we did not receive "lays" as in the Elvis movies, however there was time to rectify the situation during our four days stay. It was pleasing to be able to enjoy the warm weather after the cool of San Francisco and getting the boys to shape-up for our game of Rugby was difficult.

The accommodation at Waikiki Beach was the best of the tour with magnificent views along the beach to Diamond Head. Our opposition were the Harlequin Rugby Club and they proved too strong for our injury depleted side. We consider we put on a good performance even though we were defeated 13/0. At this point of time it should be noted that the rugby Briars played was very good and solid and this kept the morale very high during the trip.

After the game we had two days of R & R touring the Island water holes and night spots and generally melting into the American way of life in our typical fashion. It was time to go and after collecting Steele from the bar and with the ugly heads counted it was found that Murray, for the first time, did not have a lady travelling on the bus with him and the count was correct .... or is there anyone missing.

There were several hours delay at the airport which did not help to Improve the condition of the tour party and we did not depart until 2 am. Saturday morning. The flight home was very hard to take as there was a strike at San Francisco airport and food was not available.

Qantas made an attempt to make amends providing free grog on the flight .....which we readily accepted with their apologies. Best performance on the return flight went to Steele who was able to keep several ladies busy during the trip.

After stopping at Nandi, It was pleasant to view the Australian Coastline on a sunny Sunday morning. Sydney had really progressed while were away and It only took one and one half hours to get through customs and out to freedom.

Certain awards were given out during the trip and they were as follows:

- **Best Player:** David Vaughan
- **Most Improved:** Gary Brady
- **Top Scorer:** Chris Murray
- **Most Consistent Performer:** Ian Steele
- **Worst Driving Exhibition:** Ken Harvey

