
Provincial Rugby in New Zealand: Otago's Academic Pioneers

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UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

“Political aspiration, clerical enthusiasm, and goldfields revenue were the bases on which Dunedin’s University was founded.”¹ The former certainly played its part, clerical enthusiasm and a general enthusiasm amongst the Scottish settlers for education was unquestionably significant, but it was the discovery of gold in Otago in 1861 that led to higher education becoming a serious possibility in Dunedin.

The province of Otago made a sudden leap forward to the first place in wealth and population...which made it for a generation the leading commercial centre in New Zealand.²

Just two years after gold was discovered, the Otago Boys’ High School was opened, and on June 3, 1869, James Macandrew, the superintendent of the Otago Province, signed into law the University of Otago Ordinance 1869. The Ordinance gave to the university the right to confer degrees in arts, medicine, law, and music, and New Zealand’s first university was formally established.³

Four days earlier, the *Otago Daily Times*, in its earliest report of a football game in the province, claimed that the game:

was of the rough and tumble sort, every recognisable rule of the game being set at naught. Indeed, so savage were the onslaughts of some of the players, that it was only by the merest good fortune serious injuries were not sustained.⁴

With the laws of football being somewhat indefinite at this time in England, it seems probable that this game would have been played under a mixture of association, rugby, and/or Victorian (or Australian) rules. It is of considerable interest, however, as it has been widely accepted that the first game of football under rugby rules in New Zealand took place one year later in Nelson on May 4, 1870.⁵

Rugby's Academic Pioneers

The creation of the University of Otago in 1869 was to have far-reaching significance for the future development of rugby football in Otago. On September 30, 1870, George Samuel Sale, of Rugby, former Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, was appointed to the chair of Classics at the university. Sale was born in May 1831 and had attended Rugby School, where his father was a writing master under the headmastership of the noted educationalist, Dr. Thomas Arnold. Arnold believed in the character-forming properties of team games and encouraged his pupils to play sports such as cricket and football in place of the field sports that he had banned.⁶ Sale's later years at the school were under Arnold's replacement, the Rev. A.C. Tait, and there is little doubt that the pupils of the school were instrumental in modifying "football" to the point where a new game was created.

It was at Rugby School in 1823 that the legendary Irishman William Webb Ellis supposedly gave the game of rugby its distinctive form by committing the deviant act of picking up the ball and running with it, although there is sufficient reason to believe that the story is mythical.⁷ Nevertheless, the pupils of Rugby School can be credited with developing the game, and Sale, certainly, was one of the school's many supporters of such "manly sporting activities."

Plagued by ill-health intermittently throughout his life, Sale emigrated to New Zealand in 1860 and, after some months spent as the manager of the Lake Coleridge sheep station in Canterbury, had become the first editor of the *Christchurch Press*. After a period in which this classical scholar spent time in the rough and tumble of the gold diggings on the Tuapeka fields in Otago, Sale became the Canterbury Provincial Treasurer before his appointment in 1865 as Commissioner on the West Coast goldfields where he became known as "King Sale" among the miners.⁸

When Westland was separated from Canterbury, Sale resigned his position and returned to England where he entered Lincoln's Inn with the intention of being called to the bar. On being offered the chair in Classics at the new University of Otago, however, Sale willingly accepted and left on March 20, 1871, to return to New Zealand and take up his appointment. In his days at Rugby School, Sale may well have been one of the pupils who had assisted Dr Arnold's son William to draft *The Laws of Football as Played at Rugby School* in 1845.⁹ While he was on his way back to New Zealand, three other Old Rugbeians were drafting the rules of the game for the newly formed Rugby Football Union in England.¹⁰ Like his former schoolmates in England, George Sale's influence on the development of the game of rugby football was to be highly significant. Tall, strongly built, and now in his early forties, Sale was to become not only "the moving spirit of university sport,"¹¹ but also the moving force behind the establishment of rugby football in his adopted province.

Just two months after his inaugural lecture at the university (in the handsome building initially commissioned as Dunedin's chief post office and later occupied by the Stock Exchange), Sale and George Thomson, resident tutor at the Rectory at Otago Boys' High School, had organized the first recorded game of rugby

football in Dunedin. Played between pupils and ex-pupils of the high school and students of the university, the game commenced on September 9, 1871, on the Southern Recreation Ground (the small oval in the center of, and four feet below, the present oval ground).

In that historical early game, played one year before the first Oxford-Cambridge rugby clash, the university team, which included some high school students, contained some notable contributors.¹² James Fulton joined the Public Works Department in 1873 and later designed and built the Kelburn cable tramway in Wellington, as well as bridges and railways in various parts of the country. James Mollison and Robert Park both became civil engineers in Sydney. George Duncan, too, became a civil engineer and constructed the cable tramways in Dunedin, Sydney, and Melbourne. Albert Cohen took up a career as a parliamentary reporter and was chairman of the Press Gallery in 1901, while James Brown later managed the National Bank in North Dunedin.

Ebenezer Hay qualified as a lawyer, later practicing in Dunedin. A man of "quaint habits, and a quiet disposition, he wrote a good deal of poetry for the press," and published a paper on Wordsworth's poetry. John Fraser, who had played in New Zealand's first high school football game for Christ's College in 1869, later became a crown solicitor and president of the Law Society in Dunedin. William Henderson was also a lawyer. Peter Hay completed his education at Otago University—the first Otago student to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree—and became resident engineer in Wellington.¹³

Other members of this team were to make their name on the rugby field, with Robert Park and E. Johnson as members of the Dunedin Club team that defeated the Auckland Club in New Zealand's first interprovincial game, played in 1875. Park, in fact, had the honor of scoring the first try in interprovincial rugby in New Zealand.¹⁴ Robert Brown was to become an Otago rugby representative from the Dunedin Club in 1882, while several others from this first team became prominent members of the Dunedin and Union Clubs on their formation the following year.

Donald Stuart was one of those who played in the first reported game of the Union Club in 1874, and was later to become a vice president of that club.¹⁵ A son of the famous minister of Knox Church and Vice Chancellor of the University, the Rev. Dr. Donald Stuart, the young Stuart had a sense of humor that may not have pleased his father. While attending one of the revivalist meetings of the time, Stuart was bent low in his seat in an attitude of prayer when one of the crusade assistants came looking for converts among the congregation:

"My friend," he asked earnestly, "have you found Christ?" Stuart looked up startled. "No," he said, still groping under his chair, "but I wish to Christ I could find my hat."¹⁶

For this first rugby game, Professor Duncan Macgregor of the university and Mr. Stuart Hawthorne (the rector of the high school) were appointed umpires. Macgregor was one of the three professors initially appointed by the University Council in 1870. Appointed to the chair of Mental and Moral

Philosophy, Macgregor was “another man of fine physical presence, tall, broad-shouldered, black-bearded, (and) a natural athlete,”¹⁷ who as a student at the University of Edinburgh may well have gained some acquaintance with the game of rugby. Interest in the game must have been considerable, as the *Times*, on the morning of the match, suggested that:

as this is the first encounter between those attending the two institutions, there will most likely be many onlookers. We would suggest that some arrangement be made so that ladies in the Pavilion may be able to see the ground, and not the backs of those on the sward.¹⁸

The game itself was a far cry from the game as we know it today, and can hardly have demanded the physical intensity of the modern equivalent. Its form, style, and rules would make it almost unrecognizable now:

After a contest of about half-an-hour, the ball was kicked through the goal of the University team by Mr Reid, an ex-pupil of the High School. The goal was won mainly through the University men not having properly defended it. The parties then changed ends, after which the game was continued with increased energy on both sides till six o'clock...¹⁹

Not satisfied with three and a half hour's play, and a one goal to nil scoreline, it was decided to continue the match the following weekend. Keeping its public well-informed, the *Times* announced the following Saturday that:

The match...will be further fought out today. Additional interest will no doubt be imparted to the match by the fact that Professor Sale and Mr Hawthorne will play on the sides of the University and the High School respectively.²⁰

On the resumption of play, George Thomson along with a Mr. Holmes acted as umpires. The honor of scoring the first points for the university in a game of rugby football went to William Smith, who succeeded in kicking the ball into the high school goal. The game continued until five o'clock, with the *Times* concluding its report with the information that “the match, which is at present a drawn one, will not be continued, and that a match between the University and the High School on one side and the cricket club...is the next that will take place.”²¹

George Thomson, who had farmed at Mabel Bush, Southland, on his arrival in New Zealand in 1868, joined the staff at Otago Boys' High School as a science master in 1871. Born in Calcutta, Thomson was also educated at the University of Edinburgh, and may well have been a contemporary of Professor Macgregor's. A man of vision, Thomson's desire to “help young artisans further their education” was instrumental in the establishment of the Dunedin Technical Classes Association in 1888, the forerunner of the Otago Polytechnic of today.²² Thomson was member of Parliament for Dunedin North from 1908 to 1914 and became a member of the Legislative Council in 1918. He was president and a senior fellow of the New Zealand Institute and was the winner of the Hector Medal for science in 1928.²³

Thomson had played rugby for the Enfield Pirates Club in England after leaving Edinburgh, and was to become the first president of the Dunedin Pirates Football Club a few years later. Almost 60 years after the initial encounter between the university and high school teams, Thomson was to recall that:

The game was Rugby football of a kind something like that described in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, and totally different from the severely ruled game played today...No doubt it was a pleasant, free-and-easy game, and none of the players were trained up to present day standards.²⁴

The second game played in 1871 was perhaps not quite so "free-and-easy." In its report of the match, the *Times* noted that the second goal scored by the cricketing team against the university-high school was hotly disputed, despite its having been declared fair by both umpires, and the game concluded amid controversy and discontent.²⁵ Disputes over rules were hardly surprising, as with no established clubs and no firmly established code of rules, both the players and the umpires would have had their difficulties. Dunedin's fickle winter weather made an early impression on rugby football, as this game, along with the earlier game, had had to be postponed.²⁶

A good deal of time was lost at the start of the game by the nonappearance of several of the players (a not uncommon problem in sporting encounters in early Dunedin), and the kick-off did not take place until three o'clock. The disputed goal in the game was scored by J.C. Fulton, a leading Otago cricketer who had captained one of the teams in the 1869 encounter reported by the *Times*, which adds weight to the possibility that the early game may well have been played under rugby rules. Despite the controversy in this game, rugby was gaining a foothold in the public imagination, and the *Times* was moved to report that "Football is just now amongst the most popular of athletic sports in Dunedin."²⁷

The First Football Clubs

The two games played in 1871 served as a forerunner for the formation of Dunedin's first rugby football club in the following year. On March 12, 1872:

A well attended meeting of gentlemen interested in football was held..., when it was determined to form a Club for the ensuing season, to be called the "Dunedin Football Club." Professor Sale was unanimously elected president, and the other office-bearers and a committee were appointed. It was resolved to play the first match of the season on the first Saturday in April.²⁸

William Begg, who had played for the university-high school team, was elected as secretary of the new club,²⁹ and others present at that first meeting included George Thomson, George Robertson and James Fulton (two old Blackheathians), J.C. Fulton (who was elected captain), and Henry Rose (a former Cambridge rugby player, after whom the Rose Stand at Otago's Carisbrook Ground was named). The administration of the new club was certainly in experienced hands, while pupils from the high school and university students

contributed significantly to the playing strength of the club.³⁰

A major difficulty faced by the fledgling club was to decide on the code of football to be played. This dilemma appears to have been solved by using the experience of Sale as a rule-writer to draft the club's unique set of rules. It is impossible now to assess the nature of "their" game, but an amendment to the club's rules reported on June 8, 1872, significantly altered the nature of the game, as it was almost unanimously resolved that carrying the ball, which had hitherto been forbidden, should be allowed.³¹

The game between the Dunedin Club and the university on June 15, 1872, would have been Dunedin's first experience of this new rule against outside opposition. The university team included J.C. Thomson (who was also a member of the Dunedin Club and played against the Auckland Club team in 1875) as captain, while new faces appearing for the team were John Denniston, William Glasgow, George Grant, Stuart Holmes, Thomas Hutchison, Francis Smith (who also played against the 1875 Auckland team and later represented Otago from the Pirates Club), Alf Strode, Edward Ward, and Ernest Wimot.

John Denniston, educated at Glasgow University, had a distinguished career in law. Later Sir John, he was admitted to the bar in 1874, and became a Supreme Court judge in 1889.³² William Glasgow was born in India and educated in Belfast before coming to Dunedin where he became the officer in charge of the New Zealand Distillery.³³ Thomas Hutchison was born in Dundee and was another lawyer of note, becoming a stipendiary magistrate in Masterton in 1893.³⁴ Alf Strode and Edward Ward were yet others to take up the law, with Strode practicing in Dunedin for many years. Ernest Wilmot, dux of Otago Boys' High in 1871, became Commissioner of Crown Lands in Southland in 1907.

The game itself was to be something of a nonevent, as our hardy forebears proved to be less determined than the elements. It "was played in very disagreeable weather, and after the game had been in progress for some time, it was decided, as rain was falling heavily, to postpone the match to some future time."³⁵

The Dunedin Club played a number of other games during the 1872 season, some amongst the Dunedin players themselves, two against the high school, one against the Volunteer Artillery, one against the Citizens Cricket Club, and one against a North Dunedin team. This latter game was a particularly one-sided affair, with 15 Dunedin players taking on 20 of the northerners, although this latter number grew to 26 for the greater part of the game and included several co-opted Dunedin men. In spite of their numbers, the North Dunedin team lost by five goals to nil.³⁶ Seemingly undeterred, the boys (many of them may have been high school pupils living in the north end of town) debated the desirability of forming a club in that part of the city,³⁷ and it seems likely that this ultimately led to the formation of a second club, the Union Football Club.³⁸

The Union Football Club, too, was to have strong early links with the university. Robert Stout, the inaugural club president, was the first student to enroll himself on the books at the University of Otago.³⁹ Appointed to the position of Reader of Common Law at the university in 1873, Stout, "like other members of Otago's business-professional elite...saw in the game of rugby football a perfect

analogue for a harmonious society.”⁴⁰ Later knighted, Sir Robert was to serve as a Provincial Councillor, Prime Minister, and Chief Justice of New Zealand during his illustrious career, but he was also a formidable opponent on the rugby field:

Few who saw his venerable figure adorned with a flowing beard and wearing a long black coat would have associated him with the game of rugby, but player he was, and from his strong and vigorous personality one can only judge that he must have been a redoubtable opponent.⁴¹

Football received little attention from the newspapers during 1873 and 1874, as few games were played with both seasons being plagued by poor weather. However, 1873 did mark the first “tour” by a Dunedin team when that club made a 75-mile trip north for a weekend visit to Oamaru on board the coastal steamer *Samson* to play the Oamaru Football Club.⁴² This game was to highlight some of the early problems faced by the players, as the rules were once again called into question:

. . . the captain of the Dunedin team, carrying the ball more than 50 yards in his arms, quietly dropped the ball before the goal, and passed it through. This finished the game as far as the rules of the play went, and to all practical purposes the event was decided in favour of Dunedin. Subsequently, however, at the request of the Oamaru Club, two goals were played without handling the ball, both resulting in favour of Dunedin.⁴³

Other games were played during the season, but these seem to have consisted entirely of internal games organized by the Dunedin Club. It was a season often disrupted by bad weather, and the first signs of a growing rift between the footballers and the cricketers over the use of the Southern Recreation Ground became apparent. A considerable amount of money, both public and private, was spent by the Dunedin Cricket Club in upgrading the ground, and they received permission from the City Corporation to fence off the main area to stop the local residents using paths across the prepared surface.⁴⁴ The *Times* expressed its disapproval of the footballers’ attitudes with regard to the playing surface,⁴⁵ and the games that were played during the winter may have had to use the Caledonian Grounds (the Northern Recreation Ground).

The annual game between teams chosen by the captain and the deputy captain was played at the Caledonian Ground, and brought to light another problem for the frustrated players:

. . . the game was played with about ten men on each side, which, although not a large number, was sufficiently so to keep the fun alive for an hour or two. Shortly before 4 o’clock the ball was unfortunately burst, and the game was brought to an untimely conclusion.⁴⁶

The game concluded what had obviously been a disappointing season, as the *Times* warned that “when the game is revived next season, we hope more vigour and life will be displayed, and more opportunities given for the members playing.”⁴⁷

Some of the reporting of games at this time may have had the effect of dampening the enthusiasm of potential new recruits to the sport. In reporting a football match in Patea during the season, the *Times* quoted from the *Wanganui Chronicle*:

There were no broken limbs—though the Doctor was on the Ground; but several singlets were seen flying about, some few ounces of blood were sprinkled on the ground, and some of the players were limping about testifying to the strength of their opponents...⁴⁸

The four scratch games played by the Dunedin Club on the Southern Recreation Ground during May 1874 highlighted the very real problem of grounds once again. As the *Times* put it:

It was indeed a pity to see the ground, which had been made suitable for the fine game of cricket, only after infinite care and great expense, torn and scarred by the feet of the footballers.⁴⁹

After this, the club was denied access to the ground for the remainder of the season, and the final game against the Union Club was played on the Caledonian Ground. The game was played under the Dunedin Club's rules, although it appears likely that the Union Club at this time were playing the Victorian (Australian rules) game.⁵⁰

During 1875, the question of rules was once again taken up by the Dunedin Club, still under the presidency of George Sale. A special meeting of the club on May 4 discussed the merits of soccer and rugby, and the motion to support rugby rules was lost by 17 votes to 7. Association rules were then adopted by the club.⁵¹ The Union Club, on the other hand, still seemed to prefer Victorian rules, but considerable flexibility was shown by both clubs:

Union Football Club played Dunedin Football Club under Victorian rules for their first clash of the season, and under Association rules in the return match. Union also played a match against the High School under the Association rules.⁵²

There was such confusion over the merits of the various codes that when the Dunedin Club played the engineers of the Public Works Department in July, the first half of the game was played under rugby rules, and the second half under association rules. According to the *Times*, under rugby rules:

some beautiful spills and scrimmages ensued, the competitors holding the ball occasionally measuring their length on the grass, and finding themselves encompassed by many other players. This afforded considerable amusement to the spectators, and at the same time evidenced the superiority of the Association over the Union Rules, the latter causing a rough and dangerous game.⁵³

Rugby football was undoubtedly still struggling for acceptance, and its future as the dominant code of football in Dunedin was by no means certain at this time.

New Zealand's First Interprovincial Contest

With the ongoing debate over the merits of the different codes of football and with the continuing friction over the use of the Southern Oval, rugby football in Dunedin may well have failed to survive this difficult period in its development. It lacked impetus and firm direction, and it needed a shot in the arm to guarantee its continued existence. The saviors of the game came from the far north of the colony in the form of an Auckland Club team, which was expected in Dunedin late in the 1875 season.

There was some controversy over the selection of the Dunedin Club team, as the challenge from the Auckland Club had gone only to the Dunedin Football Club, and the team chosen came almost entirely from their ranks. Needless to say, the Union Football Club were not particularly happy about the situation, but they finally resolved to allow the three Union Club members selected to take part in the game as individuals.⁵⁴ The problem of finding a ground was also to be overcome, and alternatives to the Southern Oval were not easy to find. Mr. Anderson's paddock at Caversham had been pegged out into sections,⁵⁵ "the Northern Recreation Ground used by the University Club. . . was considered dangerous, and required draining,"⁵⁶ and it was apparent that the Southern Oval was the only suitable place on which to play an interprovincial match. Despite this reference to the University Club, no formal club had yet been formed, and no games involving the university were recorded during the 1875 season.

A compromise was finally reached with the Dunedin Cricket Club, and the Dunedin Club side agreed to train at Montecillo in the Town Belt, with the game itself to be played on the Southern Oval. The game was to create tremendous public interest in rugby football, and served to attract many new recruits to the sport. So much attention was paid to the game that the deputy superintendent of Dunedin even saw fit to ask that a half-holiday be observed so that the public could attend.⁵⁷ Attend they did, in spite of the fact that the game was played on a Wednesday afternoon, and the match was played before an enormous crowd of 3,000 spectators, "including numerous representatives of the fair sex."⁵⁸ Although Dunedin was at this time the largest city in New Zealand, with a population of 18,500 in 1874, the percentage of the population that attended this midweek game would delight the present administrators of the sport.

The game commenced at three o'clock and was played in four half-hour spells. After conceding an early force down to the Aucklanders, "the Otago heroes set to work...and after several scrimmages they succeeded in keeping the ball in dangerous proximity to their opponent's goal."⁵⁹ Their efforts were rewarded when Robert Park touched down and Henry Rose kicked the resulting goal. The final result was a well-merited victory to Otago by 9 1/2 to 1/2. It was clearly a result that pleased the spectators, who were obviously a little too eager to get close to the action. As the *Times* noted, "the crowd displayed considerable enthusiasm, laughing heartily at the various spills occasioned by the numerous attacks. However, they might have kept outside the boundaries."⁶⁰

The visitors were entertained after the game at the Imperial Hotel where George Sale, as president of the Dunedin Football Club, presided at the dinner.

After numerous toasts and speeches and “excellent songs having been heartily rendered, the company proceeded to accept Messrs. Steele and Keogh’s invitation to attend the Queen’s Theatre.”⁶¹ There is little doubt that the success of the game had some influence in establishing rugby football as the dominant code in Dunedin, although a further year was to elapse before rugby cemented its place as the pre-eminent winter sport.

The following season in 1876 was not without its moments of controversy. In a somewhat surprising move, the Dunedin Football Club again elected to follow association rules for the season, but the Union Club adopted rugby football as its code. The annual Dunedin versus Union game brought the problem to a head, with the captain of the Union Club declaring that his side had “no intention of playing Rugby Union rules with any club except one which has adopted them and certainly not with the Dunedin Football Club.”⁶² The problem was finally resolved, but not without cost to the advancement of rugby. The two clubs decided to play half the game under Victorian rules and half under association rules.⁶³ In Dunedin’s traditional game against Oamaru, however, rugby union rules were adopted, so the Dunedin Club obviously operated under a great deal of flexibility.

Dunedin’s Northern Tour

Finally, in 1877, both major clubs in Dunedin were operating under rugby union rules, and it seems likely that Dunedin’s impending northern tour, which was to be undertaken in August, influenced the club’s decision, as the northern clubs were playing the rugby code. It was this New Zealand-wide tour that finally confirmed rugby football’s status:

Rugby was already entrenched as the New Zealand game in most parts of the country and was the only game to play if the Dunedin team was to make a name for itself on the tour. The coming tour dominated the activities of the Dunedin Club members during the first half of the year...and a couple of rugby games were played against Union.⁶⁴

In addition to the games against Union, a further informal game prior to the Dunedin Club’s departure in early August was played against the university. While a formal club had not yet been established at Otago University, many of the students were members of the two established club sides. Played on June 23, it was “considerably the best game played this season, both teams playing with great spirit and good feeling,”⁶⁵ and resulted in a win to university by one goal and one try to one try.

Commenting on the game, the *Otago Guardian* recorded that the university team consisted of some of the best players from the Union and Dunedin clubs,⁶⁶ with Henry Rose and Pat Nichol scoring touchdowns in what was Otago University’s first victory on the rugby field. Both Rose and Nichol (a member of the Union Club), along with William McLean, Aaron Smith (who was a teacher at Otago Boys’ for many years), and Spence Turton (later a solicitor at Cromwell), were members of the university team who were to take part in Dunedin’s northern tour. Certain aspects of the game were disappointing, however, and in a warning

that has an all too familiar ring about it, the *Times* proclaimed: "We would urge the Match Committee of the D.F.C. to give special attention of the all important positions of backs upon whose play invariably hangs the fortune of the day."⁶⁷

The Dunedin Club had by this time acquired the use of the Caledonian Society's new ground in South Dunedin for their games, the society having moved from the Northern Recreation Ground in 1876 and having taken their grandstand with them. Obviously tired of their continued disputes with the Dunedin Cricket Club over the use of the Oval, and having been accused of breaking into the Oval Pavilion to use it for one of their games in 1876,⁶⁸ the club must have been delighted to have found suitable headquarters and had the use of a top class grandstand to boot.⁶⁹ With the public being able to catch the 3:15 p.m. train, which stopped outside the ground for a return fare of sixpence, and with admission set at one shilling, the entertainment was well within the means of most of the general public.⁷⁰

The northern tour, a considerable undertaking in those days, was the undoubted highlight of the 1877 season. Embarking from Dunedin on August 5, the team was victorious in its first game in Christchurch in front of a crowd of 2,000 spectators, and was unbeaten in further games in Auckland (a scoreless draw), Wellington, Termuka, and Timaru. The proposed game against Taranaki did not come to pass:

The Otago Captain, W.G. Dixon, refused to take the field as the team was unwell after a very rough passage on the boat. His offer of a game to last for one hour only was rejected by the Taranaki captain.⁷¹

These were obviously tough conditions for a touring rugby team, and the Taranaki province's hospitality was clearly not so cordial in those early days.

On their return, the team traveled from Christchurch to Oamaru by train. From Oamaru to Dunedin, the railway was not completed, and they finished the journey by boat. The team was given a heroes' welcome, being met by a huge crowd at the Rattray Street Wharf. The mayor of Dunedin entertained them at a banquet the following evening, presided over by Bishop Nevill.

The Dunedin public was proud of their rugby team's successes, the players knew that they could play the game well, and for the first time the two major clubs, Dunedin and Union, were playing by the same rules. Otago rugby never looked back.⁷²

Formation of the Otago Rugby Football Union

By 1881, the number of rugby clubs in Dunedin had increased considerably. Some of these were short-lived, with the Standard Football Club having played during the 1876 season, the Carisbrook Football Club in 1878, and the Montecillo Club having its inaugural meeting in 1879 and lasting for 10 years before disbanding in 1889. The Zingari Football Club was formed by the Naval Cadets after a game against the High School Artillery on May 17, 1879,⁷³ at the Asylum Ground which was later to become the home of Otago Boys' High School.

In order to join the Rugby Football Union in England, it was first necessary to form an Otago Union, and a committee consisting of representatives from the Dunedin, Union, Montecillo, and Zingari clubs along with representation for the schools (Dunedin Normal, Otago Boys' High, All Saints, Carol, and Montrose) first met to consider the move in 1880. On March 26, 1881, the Otago Rugby Football Union was formed and directly affiliated with the Rugby Football Union.⁷⁴ The original clubs in the union were the senior clubs of Dunedin, Union, Montecillo, Zingari, and High School, while Montrose, Dunedin Normal School, Orakanui College (Waitati), Invercargill, and Oamaru were also affiliated.⁷⁵ The senior clubs had an informal and limited schedule of games, and it seems probable that trials for the representative team occupied a large part of the season.

Success for the new union was soon forthcoming, however, as Otago scored its first win over Canterbury in Christchurch by one goal and one try to nil. Public interest in the game was considerable, and a crowd of 3,000 spectators, including 500 ladies, attended the game at the Christchurch College grounds. One tongue-in-cheek writer to the *Star*, giving statistics on the Otago team, listed Tairaoa as 8 feet 10 inches, Rose as 7 feet 10 inches, and Wheeler as 7 feet 1 inch, and suggested that Otago could hardly lose with men such as these.⁷⁶

The Canterbury team had a few surprises for Otago early in the game, but the canny southerners took control in a manner that was hardly likely to inspire the large crowd:

The Canterbury scrummaging formation was of a type never seen in Otago. Instead of lapping around each other like the dark blues, they packed man behind man, until they formed a regular wedge, and at times took everything before them...The last 25 minutes was a "caution." The Otago men, having the match in hand, decided to play the safe game, and kept the ball in one continual scrimmage for the whole spell.⁷⁷

With each spell lasting for 25 minutes, some of today's "dull rugby" would seem sparkling in comparison. William Milne flew the flag for the university in this first provincial game between the two unions.

The following year was an important one for the Otago union. An overseas team was to visit Dunedin for the first time, with the Southern Rugby Union of New South Wales, Australia, sending a team "on the longest trip ever undertaken by followers of the leather."⁷⁸ Once again, there was a problem in obtaining a suitable ground for the fixture, and the union was forced to play the game at Mosgiel, necessitating a train trip for spectators or a difficult journey over a three-mile hill to the Taieri Plains township. Playing in the unfamiliar colors of cerise and dark grey, Otago won the game by one goal and three tries to nil. In spite of having a referee and two umpires, there was considerable disputing of the rules of the game, and one certain try to Otago was disallowed, in accordance with Sydney rules, since two of the Otago men had touched the ball down.

University Leadership in Club Rugby

The game against Canterbury in 1882 also had to be played at Mosgiel. Won convincingly by Otago, the home team once again included James Allen, who was at this time both the president of the Zingari Club *and* captain of the Dunedin Club, a not uncommon practice at this stage of the game's development in Dunedin. Allen was another member of the university to make a significant contribution to the game in the province. He was for three years in the early 1890s the president of the Otago Rugby Football Union, and in 1903 he was appointed vice chancellor of the university. After a period as chancellor, Allen resigned from the university, and in 1912 became Minister of Finance and Minister of Education. Later knighted, Allen Hall commemorates Sir James' efforts on behalf of the university, while his house in Clyde Street, "Arana" (the Maori form of Allen), was purchased by the university on Sir James' death in 1942 and is now one of the university's Halls of Residence.⁷⁹

While the Zingari Club had been formed in 1879, Allen was its first recorded president in 1882. Following Allen as president, Dr. Millen Coughtrey assumed office in 1883, and was to continue in that position when Zingari amalgamated with the Richmond Club in 1879.⁸⁰ Dr. Coughtrey was appointed Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at the university in 1874, and was Zingari-Richmond's longest serving president, finally stepping down in 1896 after 14 years in the office. He was also a member of the Otago Union from 1883 to 1892, and was the union's second president, following J.P. Maitland, from 1887 to 1890.

Yet another club president from the university was Dr. Ferdinand Batchelor, who occupied this position in the Union Club from 1881 to 1890. Batchelor was Professor of Midwifery at the university, and was a strong supporter of Dr. Frederick Truby King in his fight to establish a Department of Home Science at the university.⁸¹ James Allen had not yet completed his contribution to club rugby in the city, and after serving Zingari as president, he assumed the same office with the young Alhambra Club (which was formed in 1884), and became the longest serving president of that club, holding office from 1886 to 1894.⁸²

In 1883, Otago embarked on a northern tour, and encountered problems both on and off the field. On its way to Auckland, the team played Canterbury at Christchurch:

After the game, the team returned to town in the drags, the flag that has never known defeat flying gaily in the breeze...Both teams left Lyttelton on the Sunday for Wellington in the Wanaka. Galbraith missed the boat; rushing to the nearest point of the breakwater, he made known his whereabouts, and the Captain stopped the vessel, and sent a boat ashore.⁸³

The game against Auckland was played before a remarkable crowd of 6,000, and Otago seemed hard done by on at least one occasion:

Austin (Otago) secured an unmistakable touchdown: the ball eluded his grasp and was secured by Mills (Otago), who also touched down. Leckie [sic] (Auckland) pulled the ball from Mills's grasp, and claimed a force. The umpires were divided, and the referee, on being appealed to, gave his decision in favour of Auckland.⁸⁴

It seems apparent that it was not only the Australians who were benefitting from rule disputes at Otago's expense.

The Reappearance of University Rugby

The 1883 season was well advanced when a passing suggestion by "Forward," the rugby correspondent for the *Otago Witness*, brought an immediate response in a letter to the editor from "JMV":

Re a University Club - I notice "Forward" touched last week on the advisability of forming a University team. I think the idea a first rate one, and should immediately be acted on. With men like Cooke, Tairaroa, and the Allans for backs, and Stuart, Chapman, Milne and other forwards a very strong combination could be got, and quite capable of holding their own against Christchurch College, and even some of the senior Dunedin clubs.⁸⁵

The reply from "Forward" in the *Otago Witness* on July 14, 1883, was again supportive of the idea:

The difficulty of course would be a ground, but as most of the players also belong to other clubs, they would be in sufficiently good trim for a country trip, or for meeting a rival college team in Dunedin. I look forward to the day when the Otago v. Canterbury University rugby football contest will be an annual affair, and provocative of as much interest as the present interprovincial match.⁸⁶

Both "Forward" and "JMV" would have been delighted at the response to their suggestion, for less than two months later a university rugby team was once again in action after a period in the wilderness.

With such strong support for the game by the city's professional elite (whose sons were students at the university), and with the considerable involvement of many of the university's professors in the game, it seems hardly surprising that rugby football would soon hold a pre-eminent place at the institution, and the following year saw the formation of the Otago University Football Club, a club destined to become perhaps the greatest in the history of New Zealand's "national game."

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1. W.H. Oliver (ed.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand* (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 132.
 2. W.P. Morrell, *The University of Otago. A Centennial History* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1969), p. 3.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
 4. *Otago Daily Times* (hereinafter cited as *ODT*), May 31, 1969.
 5. R.H. Chester, N.A.C. McMillan, R.A. Palenski, *The Encyclopedia of New Zealand Rugby* (Auckland: Moa, 1987), p. 14.
 6. Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Prayers* (Wellington: Price Milburn, 1979), p. 81.

7. Ibid, p. 60.
8. G.H. Scholefield (ed.), *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940), pp. 271-272.
9. Dunning and Sheard, p. 91. Sale himself claimed that "he had taken part in the framing of the Rugby Rules" (*ODT*, September 23, 1875).
10. Ibid, p. 122.
11. George Griffiths, *Otago University at Cricket* (Dunedin: Otago Heritage Books, 1978), p. 6.
12. *ODT*, September 9, 1871.
13. Scholefield (ed.), p. 370.
14. *ODT*, September 23, 1875.
15. R.I. Douglas, *A Century of Club Rugby. Union Rugby Football Club (Inc.)* (Dunedin: Coulls Somerville Wilkie, 1972), p. 7.
16. Griffiths, p. 9.
17. Morrell, p. 40.
18. *ODT*, September 9, 1871.
19. *ODT*, September 11, 1871.
20. *ODT*, September 16, 1871.
21. *ODT*, September 18, 1871.
22. *ODT*, May 18, 1985.
23. G.H. Scholefield (ed.) *Who's Who in New Zealand and the Western Pacific*, 3rd Edition, (Wellington: Rangatira Press, 1932), p. 330-331.
24. *ODT*, September 19, 1930.
25. *ODT*, September 25, 1871.
26. *ODT*, September 23, 1871.
27. *ODT*, September 28, 1871.
28. *ODT*, March 14, 1872. Although the Dunedin Club celebrated its centennial in 1971, it is clear that club was not formally established until March 1872.
29. *Evening Star* (hereinafter cited as *Star*), March 15, 1872.
30. Sean O'Hagan, *The Pride of Southern Rebels* (Dunedin: Pilgrims South Press, 1981), p. 15.
31. *Star*, June 10, 1872.
32. G.H. Scholefield and E. Schwabe (eds.), *Who's Who in New Zealand and the Western Pacific* (Wellington: Gordon and Gotch, 1908), p. 42.
33. Ibid, p. 62.
34. Ibid, p. 83.
35. Arthur R. Andrew and W.S. Robertson, *Otago University Football Club Jubilee, 1936. History of the Club* (Dunedin: Otago Daily Times and Witness Newspapers, 1936) p. 9.
36. *ODT*, August 12, 1872.
37. Douglas, p. 4.
38. Although Douglas claims that the Union Club was formed after a game between the Dunedin Club and pupils from the high school in 1871, it seems likely that this is the game to which he refers. In the absence of supporting evidence, the exact date of the formation of the club is difficult to establish. While 1874 is the earliest mention of the club in the press, 1873 is the most likely date.
39. G.E. Thompson, *A History of the University of Otago* (Dunedin: Wilkie, 1920), p. 62.
40. Erik Olssen, *A History of Otago* (Dunedin: McIndoe, 1984), p. 99.
41. Douglas, p. 5.

42. Grant D. Connon and Stephen M. Haycock, "The History and Development of Rugby Football in Dunedin, 1871-1831," unpublished Special Study, University of Otago, 1977, p. 11.
43. *Star*, May 29, 1873.
44. *ODT*, September 15, 1873.
45. *ODT*, May 6, 1873.
46. *ODT*, September 29, 1873.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *ODT*, August 28, 1873.
49. *ODT*, June 13, 1874.
50. Connon and Haycock, p. 16.
51. *Star*, May 5, 1875.
52. Connon and Haycock, p. 16.
53. *ODT*, July 12, 1875.
54. *Star*, September 17, 1875.
55. *ODT*, September 6, 1875.
56. Andrew and Robertson, p. 12.
57. *Star*, September 22, 1875.
58. *Star*, September 23, 1875.
59. *ODT*, September 23, 1875.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*
62. *ODT*, June 3, 1876.
63. *ODT*, June 10, 1876.
64. O'Hagan, p. 17.
65. *ODT*, June 25, 1877.
66. *Otago Guardian*, June 25, 1877.
67. *ODT*, June 25, 1877.
68. *Star*, May 30, 1876.
69. McDonald, K.C., *City of Dunedin, A Century of Civic Enterprise* (Dunedin: Dunedin City Corporation, 1965), p. 175.
70. *Saturday Advertiser*, April 21, 1877.
71. *ODT*, August 15, 1877.
72. O'Hagan, p. 19.
73. *ODT*, May 17, 1879.
74. *ODT*, March 28, 1881.
75. *ODT*, May 9, 1881.
76. *Star*, August 23, 1881.
77. *ODT*, August 31, 1881.
78. Andrew and Robertson, p. 13.
79. Morrell, pp. 210-211.
80. Jeff Holloway (ed.), *Zingari-Richmond Football Club (Inc.) Centennial Publication* (Dunedin: Zingari-Richmond Football Club, 1978), p. 8.
81. Olssen, p. 149.

82. Carole Hendry, *Boots of the Bamas. The History of the Albambra Rugby Football Club 1884-1984* (Dunedin: Kerr, 1984), p. 49.
83. Andrew and Robertson, p. 14.
84. *Ibid.*
85. *Otago Witness*, July 14, 1883.
86. *Ibid.*