

**Paul Dobson, *Rugby's Greatest Rivalry: South Africa vs New Zealand, 1921-1995*. Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, 1996. Bibliog. pp. 301.**

Paul Dobson's claim that the All Blacks could never win a Test series in South Africa was proved incorrect in 1996 when the New Zealand side proved that they were the best side in the world. However, Dobson deals with the history of the rugby relationship between South Africa and New Zealand before 1996.

Dobson begins his book with a 1949 quotation: 'when South Africa plays New Zealand, consider your country at war'. This has been the case since the first Test series in 1921. There was earlier rugby contact in 1902, during the Anglo-Boer War, when a team of New Zealand soldiers met a South African team.

The first attempt to initiate rugby contacts between the two countries was made by South Africa in 1904. No match was played until after World War I when an Inter-Services tournament took place in England in 1919. On their return, the New Zealanders played fifteen matches in fifty-four days in South Africa. The 'Army All Blacks' battled to pay their way though tips supplied by an ex-New Zealand jockey helped them survive financially!

It was during the preparations for this tour that it was decided that the inclusion of Maoris could wreck the tour and that 'immense harm and otherwise would follow. As a result Maori player, Ranji Wilson, went straight home. Long before the National Party's colour ban in 1948 sporting organisers had applied its own set of restrictions in 1919.

Dobson covers every heroic battle, the background and aftermath of each match and its highlights all in his inimitable style. There is also discussion of captains, players including the stars, referees, team managers, selectors, administrators and even the grounds. Essential statistics are also included.

This is Dobson's eighth book on South African rugby history. He has an easy and fluent style and cleverly interweaves pertinent and amusing anecdotes with facts and statistics. Dobson relates the interesting story that the All Blacks wore letters on their jerseys rather than numbers when the Springboks toured there in 1921. The reason for this action was to confuse (and undercut) pirate program sellers. During that tour a South African described Athletic Park, Wellington, as 'a lake with an occasional patch of mud showing here and there like raisins in a poor man's Christmas pudding'. In 1949 the touring All Blacks spent an hour

a day attempting to learn Afrikaans! Was this because of the new Nationalist Government, or to understand the Springbok calls on the field, or maybe even to facilitate their social activities? In 1960 Red Conway, the New Zealand loose forward, was afraid of missing the tour to South Africa due to a septic finger. He had it amputated to heal more quickly and to avoid affecting the rest of his body.

This book is well researched, although I did find it odd that Chris Laidlaw's book, *Mud in Your Eye*, is not listed in the three-page bibliography. This is an excellent book which will appeal equally to New Zealand and South African rugby supporters.

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