

By: Lou Raymond

While the Chicago area was experiencing strong winds and rain, the UK was being hit by Tornados of their own. Coach Nolan Day and his twenty three Tornados mixed from this year and last traveled to England and Wales to test their skills, and such fine skills they showed! After a couple of days in London touring the likes of Twickenham and the Tower of London the boys traveled the short distance to Windsor. Tour captain Pat Sullivan and the rest were ready to play.

There, under the watchful eyes of the Queen from her castle some serious rugby was played. A match played in unseasonably hot weather was a nail biter from start to finish. Defense was the name of this game. Each offense had opportunity and was able to change territory inch by inch, but each time a break was made, stellar cover defense from both teams prevented the score. A half time lead of 3-0 off the boot of Captain Bobby Mulvaney was for naught as an early break proved to be the winner from Windsor midway through the second half. The Tornados lost their first over-seas match 5-3. Man of the Match – Mike Barry.

A quick trip to visit Bath Rugby and then on to Swindon swept the Tornados, and they brought with them a chip on their shoulder. A short days rest didn't matter as Jack Brennan captained the team to a 59-0 victory. Mike Barry led the way with four tries, Joe Peroni, Nick Kruzel, DeShawn Ivy and a couple others added scores with kicks from Blake White and Pat Sullivan. Man of the Match went to Pat Sullivan.

Enough of England, bring on Wales! A day in Cardiff was followed by proper Welsh hospitality in Porthcawl, make friends then put the boots in. A night of dancing and chatting up the young ladies must have put pride on the line as the rugby became more physical than had been prior. Captain Mike Barry must have said something right in the locker room as these young men came out inspired. An early penalty kick by Pat Sullivan gave the Tornados the first lead of the match, but that wouldn't last long. As the Tornados adjusted to the rougher style, Porthcawl took advantage and grabbed a 10-3 lead. Some gritty play and a penalty kick later was followed by the game changer. A stolen ball found its way to the hands of Jack Brennan who out-paced everyone for a try on a 60 meter trot. Another penalty kick saw the Tornados with a 16-10 lead and a determined Welsh side refusing to accept the outcome. Game saving tackles were made time and time again as Porthcawl could not break the defense while spending the last five minutes 10 meters out. Final 16-10 Tornados. Most definitely the best rugby this team has ever played. Man of the Match deservedly went to Pat Sullivan, but there were many candidates for this match.

A well deserved day of rest meant going to the beach for surfing lessons. Yes Surfing in Wales! A few even managed to “Hang Ten” before running out of gas and heading to Gorsienon for a quiet evening. With an evening match scheduled, a mid-day trip to explore the history of Welsh coal in the Big Pit was enlightening to the hardships of a by-gone era.

News must have traveled to Gorseinon about the skills that were on display as they recalled a couple of back-rowers and a center from the senior ranks. Rumors have it that one was signed by the Opsreys developmental, and another by the Cardiff Blues. A high compliment indeed for the Tornados. As the match began, it was evident that our team speed was mitigated by a narrow field and ten days on tour. It was either that or a well schooled side from Gorseinon who seemed to steal ball from too many rucks, and close down our wingers at every opportunity. A close match with no score for about twenty minutes before Gorseinon finally scored the try that had been eluding them. Great defense from the Illinois side, and plenty of ball in play kept the hosts on their toes. A late try and penalty kick saw the Tornados down 17-3 at half. Captain Dan Pammer would not let this group quit, but they could not muster enough in this last match. A late try by Mike Barry closed the gap to 22-10 which is the way this one ended. Man of the Match went to Pat Sullivan.

A sad farewell to Wales was followed by an evening in Bath, a trip to Stonehenge and another evening in London.

As these young men head off to college, they have experiences that will last a lifetime and proud memories they should share. It should be noted that no better ambassador for rugby could be found than the twenty-three men who ventured on this trip. Some lasting friendships were made amongst both teammates and opponents. As this group traveled from town to town, an entourage started to grow. Host families and players from each stop came to cheer us on against our next opponent. This is a great testament of character. A gratitude goes out to all the coaches, parents, and especially the players for making this a successful trip. Many thanks to each of the hosting clubs, and the individual families who welcomed us into their homes and showed us the true meaning of rugby. A large appreciation goes out to Coach Day for all of the efforts he put in to the organization of the tour, without him, this wouldn't have happened.