

Moseley wins silver at the Olympics!

Moseley Wanderers represented Great Britain in the Summer 1900 Paris Olympics at rugby union. They played one game, losing 27–8 to France – but still winning the silver medal. How did this strange state of affairs come to pass? Great Britain, France and Germany were the sole participants in the first ever rugby tournament at the Olympics. The first game, held on 14th October, was between France and Germany with France beating Germany 27–17. The second game saw Moseley Wanderers take on France on the 28th October. France beat the British team 27–8. Wanderers were shut out in the first half, with France scoring 21 points. The second half saw a better performance from Wanderers and they outscored France in the second half, 8–6, but had no chance of catching up. Joseph Wallis scored a try while John Henry Birtles made a conversion and a penalty for Britain. Reichel scored his second try of the tournament, and Binoche added a try to bring France's victory to a 27–8 margin.

It is unclear how the team was chosen. Four of the players, including the captain, John Henry Birtles, played for Moseley, with a number of others also playing for Midlands based clubs. How the team came to be chosen to represent Moseley and Britain at the Olympics is not known.

On the 28th October the Birmingham Evening Gazette reported: On Sunday an English fifteen will meet the French Rugby Union at the Paris Exhibition Grounds. A later report in The Times added more details: A rugby football match was played today at the Velodrome Municipal at Vincennes between Moseley Wanderers and a team representing the full strength of France. A crowd of 10,000 people was present. The French team held the advantage from the first and ultimately gained victory by 27 points to 8. The defeat of the Moseley team which was a strong one may be attributed partly to the fatigue of the journey. They only arrived in Paris this morning and have to leave again this evening. Neither reports mention the Olympics and it is unclear whether the players even realized they were competing in the Olympics. There is little doubt though that fatigue was probably a major contributor to the defeat. At least five of the players are believed to have played for their respective clubs, in England, the day before the game. Clement Deykin, for example, represented the Midland Counties on the 24th October, Moseley on 27th October, made the trip to Paris overnight, and then played for the Wanderers the next day. The team in Paris was: Bayliss (Moseley), Birtles (Captain, Moseley), Cantion (London Irish), Darby (Cambridge University), Deykin (Moseley), Hood (Rosslyn Park), Logan (London Scottish), Loveitt (Coventry), Nicol (Old Edwardians), Smith (Old Edwardians), Talbot (Moseley), Wallis (Old Edwardians), Whittindale. C (Aston Old Edwardians), Whittindale. R (Aston Old Edwardians), Wilson (Old Crusaders) Captain John Henry Birtles of Moseley was one of the star players for Moseley Wanderers. He died in 1935.