

= Bill Cunningham ( rugby union ) =

William " Bill " Cunningham ( 8 July 1874 ? 3 September 1927 ) was a New Zealand rugby union player who represented New Zealand ? known as the All Blacks ? between 1901 and 1908 . Most notably he toured with the Original All Blacks on their 1905 ? 06 tour of the British Isles , France and North America . They were the first New Zealand representative team to visit the British Isles , and of their 32 matches there Cunningham played in 23 . He played mainly at lock , and was added to the touring party due to his strong scrummaging ability . He played in three Test matches during the trip : against Scotland , Ireland and France , but did not play in the loss to Wales due to injury , the All Blacks ' only defeat on tour .

Born near Te Awamutu , Cunningham originally played club rugby in Waihi , in the Coromandel region . Lying within the Auckland Rugby Football Union 's boundaries , he was selected to play for Auckland province in 1899 and continued to represent the side until his retirement in 1913 . He was first picked for New Zealand in 1901 , and played against New South Wales that year , but was not selected again until the 1905 Originals ' tour . After the tour he continued to represent New Zealand in both 1907 and 1908 . Affiliating to Rongowhakaata , he was a member of the first ever New Zealand M?ori team in 1910 , and played for them again in 1912 . On retirement in 1913 he had appeared for Auckland 45 times , and for New Zealand 39 ? both large numbers for the time .

= = Early life and family = =

Born at Rangiaowhia , near Te Awamutu , on 8 July 1874 , Cunningham was the son of Hera ( Sarah ) Ngaihika Halbert and her second husband , James Cunningham . Hera was the daughter of Thomas Halbert , a whaler and trader who landed in Poverty Bay in about 1832 , and his fifth wife , Keita Kaikiri , who belonged to the Rongowhakaata iwi . Hera later remarried Paratene Tatae , a cousin of Te Kooti : their daughters included Reremoana Hakiwai , and Keita Kaikiri Paratene , who married Reweti Tuhorouta Kohere .

Cunningham married Ethel Minnie Dance of Waihi on 23 September 1907 .

= = Early career = =

Cunningham first played representative rugby union for Auckland province in 1899 . He was selected from his club Waihi West ( a club in Waihi on the Coromandel Peninsula ) , which was affiliated to the Goldfield subunion . At the time the Goldfields Rugby Union was a subunion of the Auckland Rugby Football Union , but its constituent clubs are now affiliated to the Thames Valley Rugby Football Union .

He was first selected to play for New Zealand in 1901 , and played against Wellington and the New South Wales team that was touring New Zealand at the time . Both matches were comfortably won , with the tourists defeated 20 ? 3 . Cunningham played his first of four matches for Auckland against international opposition , against the same New South Wales side a week later , with his Auckland team winning 24 ? 3 .

Cunningham moved to Auckland in 1902 , and played his club rugby for City , before joining Ponsonby the following season . He had been displaced from the national team by this time , with Cantabrian Bernard Fanning preferred at lock . The New Zealanders used a different scrum formation than seen today , and only one lock was ever required .

Despite not being selected for New Zealand in 1904 , Cunningham continued to appear for Auckland , and played in two particularly notable matches that season . In 1904 the first Ranfurly Shield match was played . The shield , a provincial challenge trophy won by defeating the holder , was to become the most prestigious trophy in domestic New Zealand rugby . Due to their unmatched provincial record at the time Auckland were awarded the shield . The first shield challenge was played against Wellington , who were not expected to pose much of a threat . Auckland had not lost at home in six years , but , with Cunningham in the side , Auckland lost 6 ? 3 . The second notable match that season was against the touring British Isles who were conducting a

tour of Australia and New Zealand . The Aucklanders defeated the British Isles side 13 ? 0 , with Cunningham scoring a try and contributing significantly to the dominance of his team 's forwards .

= = Original All Blacks = =

The first ever tour of a New Zealand representative team to the British Isles was planned for 1905 , and a preliminary tour of Australia and New Zealand was undertaken to help fund the tour . Cunningham was not in the original touring squad , and so played for Auckland against New Zealand . According to Winston McCarthy , New Zealand 's forwards were at " sixes and sevens mainly through want of a good lock . " Following the conclusion of the preliminary tour of Australia and New Zealand it was clear that a specialist lock forward needed to be added to the side . Fanning , who had kept Cunningham out of the New Zealand side in 1903 and 1904 , had retired following the 1904 season and consequently Cunningham did enough to earn selection as the team 's only specialist lock .

The team departed aboard the Rimutaka and during the voyage conducted training drills on the ship 's deck ; for this the forwards were coached by the team 's captain , Dave Gallaher , with help from Cunningham . Vice @-@ captain and first five @-@ eighth Billy Stead was in charge of the backs , and consequently the services of the New Zealand Rugby Union @-@ appointed coach Jimmy Duncan were not used .

After a six @-@ week voyage , the team arrived in Plymouth , England on 8 September 1905 . After finally arriving in England , the side opened their tour against Devon . Cunningham played in the match which was won easily by the New Zealanders 55 ? 4 . Devon were expected to pose a serious challenge , but were overwhelmed and only managed to score a drop @-@ kick . A series of large victories followed against domestic opposition throughout England , and by the time the All Blacks played their first Test match against Scotland , the team had played and won nineteen matches , and scored 612 points while conceding only 15 .

When time for the Scotland Test did arrive , it was discovered that as the ground had not been covered for protection from the elements , and had frozen over . The Scotland Football Union wanted to abandon the match , but Gallaher and the tour manager George Dixon contended that the weather would improve enough for the pitch to thaw , and the match was eventually allowed to proceed . The Test was closely contested , with Scotland leading 7 ? 6 at half @-@ time , but the All Blacks scored two late tries , including one to Cunningham , to win 12 ? 7 ; despite the close score @-@ line , the New Zealanders were clearly the better of the two sides .

Cunningham was selected for the Ireland match a week later . The fixture was won 15 ? 0 by New Zealand in front of 12 @, @ 000 people at Lansdowne Road . The tourists then returned to England where they defeated England 15 ? 0 at Crystal Palace , but Cunningham was not selected due to injury . He was still injured for the Wales Test , and this may have contributed to New Zealand 's defeat . The 3 ? 0 loss , the New Zealander 's first of the tour , was narrow and controversial , and according to team manager Dixon , " New Zealand suffered by the absence from the team of G. W. [ George ] Smith , W. Cunningham , and J. W. [ Billy ] Stead . "

Cunningham recovered to play the team 's final Test , against France in Paris , where he played as " breakaway " ( flanker ) rather than his usual position of lock . His last two tour matches were against British Columbia during the American leg of the tour , after which the side returned to New Zealand . The " Original All Blacks " ? as the team is now known ? had played 35 games and lost only once . Over their 32 matches in the British Isles , of which Cunningham had played 23 , New Zealand scored 830 points and conceded 39 ; overall they scored 976 points and conceded only 59 . On their arrival back in New Zealand on 6 March 1906 , the All Blacks were welcomed by a crowd of 10 @, @ 000 before being hosted at a civic reception in Auckland . The 1905 ? 06 Originals are remembered as perhaps the greatest of All Black sides , and set the standard for all their successors . They introduced a number of innovations to Britain and Ireland , including specialised forward positions and unfamiliar variations in attacking plays .

= = Later career = =

Cunningham continued to play for Auckland on his return from the Originals ' tour . They had regained the Ranfurly Shield in 1905 , and he played in a number of shield defences over the subsequent seasons . He was selected for the New Zealand team that toured Australia in 1907 where he played seven matches , including all three Tests against Australia . He was again selected for the All Blacks in 1908 , this time to play the touring Anglo @-@ Welsh team , and played in all three Tests . This was his last appearance for New Zealand , which gave him 39 appearances for his national team , including 9 Test matches . He was later selected for the inaugural New Zealand M?ori team ( now called the M?ori All Blacks ) on their 1910 tour of Australia , and again for another tour in 1912 .

He continued to play for Auckland until 1913 . This period included two more matches against international opposition : a victory over the 1908 Anglo @-@ Welsh side 11 ? 0 , and a defeat of Australia in 1913 . Auckland had held the Ranfurly Shield throughout this time , and had endured a number of close shield challenges during their reign . They had 23 successful shield defenses before they faced Taranaki on 16 August 1913 . In the match Taranaki scored a converted try ( worth five points at the time ) four minutes from full @-@ time to end Auckland 's shield reign . Cunningham had played in 16 of Auckland 's 24 shield matches during their tenure . He retired from provincial rugby at the end of that season .

= = Personal life and playing style = =

Cunningham was very physically fit and strong , and was " remarkably agile " according to writer Matt Elliott . He was very popular with his teammates and possessed a good sense of humour . Like the other M?ori in the 1905 ? 06 All Blacks Billy Stead he was able to speak the language . Outside of rugby he spent his early working @-@ life as an axeman . He also spent some time as a miner , and later worked for the Auckland Harbour Board . At the time of his death he was working at an Auckland freezing works .

= = Death and legacy = =

Cunningham died suddenly from acute meningitis at Auckland in September 1927 , and his funeral was attended by a number of dignitaries , including representatives of the New Zealand , Auckland , New South Wales and Thames Rugby Unions . His pallbearers were all former All Blacks , and included fellow Original All Blacks George Tyler , George Nicholson and George Gillett . After his casket had been lowered into its grave at Hillsborough Cemetery , an Auckland representative jersey was thrown on top .

Under the average height on a line @-@ out , yet no man ever beat him , a genius in scrum , no need to tell him when to keep the ball or let it out . Am I wrong in saying that his death removes the greatest lock the Dominion [ of New Zealand ] ever possessed ? He had three intuitions as far back as November 1904 [ sic ] , that Wales would beat us , that war would occur between England and Germany within ten years , and that he would not live to get the old age pension . How lamentably true . How hard to write the innate qualities of this Nature 's gentleman , a hard but clean player , respected and appreciated by opponents , and adored by his intimates . He goes West leaving us the poorer by his departure .