



# After the Final Whistle: The First Rugby World Cup and The First World War

*Stephen Cooper*

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As Britain's Empire went to war in August 1914, rugby players were the first to volunteer. They led from the front and paid a disproportionate price. In 1919, a grateful Mother Country hosted a rugby tournament: sevens teams at eight venues, playing 17 matches to declare a first 'world champion'. There had never been an international team tournament like it. For the first time teams from Australian, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Britain and France were assembled in one place. Rugby held the first ever 'World Cup'. It was a moment of triumph, a celebration of military victory, of Commonwealth and Allied unity, and of rugby values, moral and physical. In 2015 the tournament returns to England as the world remembers the Centenary of the Great War. Values of teamwork, respect, discipline were forged and tested in war - and enjoyment of rugby helped men through it. This is the story of rugby's journey through the First World War to its first World Cup, and how those value endure today.

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