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## Mini and Youth Section 2022/2023 Season Report.

### Overview

I think it is fair to say that Salisbury RFC Minis and Juniors has not been impacted the same as other clubs' equivalent sections after COVID. This should be attributed to the fact that we were far more relaxed, by followed all protocols to ensure that our players got as much rugby as possible over the COVID period. It also meant that the parents and carers had social engagement and I think this was a positive experience for them.

We have continued to grow again this season, with approx. 450 U6-Colts players registered and for the first time in a long time we have fielded two teams in a D&W League age group (U13s), a big thank you to the coaches and admin in this age group for making it work. We are looking at the largest number of players in every age group that we have ever had. We have also had approx. 20 enquiries for new starters across various ages already during the off season!!

Our minis and Juniors and Colts have had strong season in their respective leagues. Our Colts have had to work hard to ensure games went ahead and we have successfully engaged with Amesbury to ensure both clubs have been able to field teams when needed.

Our girls squads have continued to grow and develop both in players and coaches and we are hoping to grow this even more next season. We have undertaken several pitch-up and play days which have proved successful.

We have continued to develop our Community Rugby Programme after the success if the Pizza Venti trial last season. Bath and JK Rugby Coaching and Mentoring have provided over 100hrs of coaching to approx. 100 children from local schools in yr7, 8 and 9. This has led to several new starters in our U12s Boys and girls, U13 Boys and U14 girls. Next season we are teaming up with a Charity called Star that uses rugby to support disadvantaged children and families aged 12+. We have also had approx. £1500 donated to our Community Rugby Project Fund by a local firm and member donations that we are looking at utilising to target younger children aged 5+ within the school setting, ideally focusing on girls to try and provide a pipeline for our Girls squads and then subsequently generate a women's team.

We have continued to support our Ugandan 'Twinned' Team and they will be touring the UK and Ireland next season and will be at SRFC on the weekend of the 20<sup>th</sup> October.

We have also had a working team that has looked at the possibility of creating a SRFC Academy. This will be bringing together our U16s and Colts into one 'group' where, when necessary, joint training (non-contact) will be carried out. We will also look to sign up any suitable U16s to play for the Colts if required to makes that D&W Colts games are honoured.

## Minis Section

It has been another fantastic season for the Minis. With over 225 members, we have seen a steady growth in the section at all age grades over the last season. Age grades have had a fantastic year, including:

**U6.** This year started out with 50 kids in the U6's and had an average of 40 kids through this session. It has been really awesome watching the kids develop from not playing had playing rugby before and by the end of the season catching the balls, running drills and working together as a team. We feel confident that they are ready to move up to the U7's and will perform well in the next challenge if learning to play against other clubs in tournaments.

**U7s.** The U7s have averaged 37 players over the season with a couple of leavers replaced by new players. The team has also boasted 9 coaches and 2 first aiders working tirelessly to run fantastic training. The team have taken part in 5-6 festivals and many hosted and hosting training sessions. Lots of fun and laughter has been had and a real improvement in rugby skills and team spirit demonstrated. U7s have successfully run the fun day for the club and completed two fundraisers furnishing the mini pot with an incredible £567! The engagement from parents to support these endeavours has been invaluable. We look forward to stepping up to U8's and continuing to grow a phenomenal team.

**U10.** U10s have 40 on the books. 38 boys and 2 Girls, who want to play one more season with the squad. We only had three festivals this season, but we saw great strength in depth and good play and teamwork. For season 23/24, we will be looking to hopefully keep at least 35 players.

**U11.** The Under 11 team have played fixtures against many teams from across Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire winning almost every game they have competed in. They have continued to improve as rugby players and as a squad. With only one loss this season to a very strong Winchester RFC team the players can be very proud of their improvement. They always play the game in the true spirit of TREDs, which is fantastic to witness. The squad participated in the Land Rover Cup at the end of the season and were the only undefeated team within their age group, which was an astonishing achievement given the high standard from across a wide range of teams from across the southwest counties. Players who have stood out this year include Theo Alison, Charlie Thorpe, Freddie Griffiths, Able Beebe, Matthew Johnson and William Thatcher.

**Mini festival.** We had the biggest festival at SRFC for a considerable time, if not ever, with approx. 800 players from 8 clubs in attendance. All was amazingly run by a team of volunteers.....parking on Hudson's was a nervy affair but we survived – looking forward to a great event on 15 Oct 23!!

In summary, we have had a great year, consumed hundreds of hot dogs, had thousands of smiling faces, endured the driving rain and cold, and had a great turn out every week. Thank you.

## **Junior Section.**

### **Boys**

Again, we have gone from strength to strength we well over 200 players now. All our age groups U12-Colts have participated in age-appropriate events. SRFC promote and follow the RFU direction of any match at any age in the Junior section not being about winning or competition. However, all of our age groups have performed extremely well and not 'lost' many games between them. All players have had the opportunity to participate in games and all seem to have enjoyed their season. Some of our teams have, sadly, experienced poor rugby values from opposition. This has been addressed where needed via the club's discipline officer. SRFC do not condone poor behaviours from anyone, Player, coach, parent, carer or spectator.

There has been an issue raised by a group of parents about our U12 and U13s taking part in the D&W League as this is effectively a competition. The RFU clearly states that this is not sanctioned. SRFC with support from an ex RFU parent have raised this up and it is being investigated. We have yet to learn the outcome apart from RFU confirming that the way D&W have run their U12 and U13 game structure is against the RFU Policy. We will await D&W request from teams into competitions and then see how to deal with our U12 and U13s entering. If D&W do continue with the U12 and U13 leagues, we will instigate a discussion and review with parents and players to get an agreed way forward.

Our Colts have had a tough session due to numbers and players having other commitments. It is testament to the Team Manager and coaches and players that we ended the season with a playing squad and pushing 5 players into our Seniors set up and retaining all our U17s that will be joined by approx. 20 of these seasons U16s. We have teamed up with Amesbury Colts though and both clubs have supported each other by supplying players to ensure that games went ahead. Last season I commented that we need to keep an eye on the impact of Amesbury starting a Minis and Juniors section but, so far, this has not come to much as they seem to be struggling to retain players and some are now moving to SRFC as they want to play games.

### **Girls**

Our Girls squads continues to grow rapidly. We now have 6 coaches (compared to 3 last season) spread across the girls age bands: U12, U14, U16 and U18. We have grown the girl's section to 35 players (from 6 in season 20-21 and 20 in Season 21-22). Our U14s entered their first competition, 7s at North Dorset, won their first game and showed great commitment, strength and determination against more established sides like Trowbridge, Chippenham, RWB and Oaks. They did the club, the coaches and more importantly themselves proud. Our U16s set an aim of playing one game representing SRFC. This would have been the first girls' XV game since 2017. By season end they had played 6 games, home and away, creating strong foundations for both U16 and U18 XV games in the season to come. The girls attended several Bath and D&W Girls' clusters. Two U18 girls represent the County and one U16 is in the England Rugby Developing Players' Programme, with 5 more attending trials in August. The girls aim to train with the growing women's squad to support women's rugby at SRFC.