



# SALISBURY RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

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## **Mini/Midi/Junior/Colts 2016-17 season and outlook for 2017/18.**

In recent seasons as well as having the introduction of 'Shaping the Game' which was initially aimed at the U7, U8 and U9 age groups, there's been the introduction of the 'New Rules of Play' covering all age groups in the Mini Section and more recently the 'Age Grade Rugby Review' with all age groups coping well with those changes and growing in numbers.

The long term objectives of the changes which now run into the Junior Section with the U13s not having a league or cup competition for the coming season and the focus will continue to be:

- Provide a progressive player pathway that will enhance the way in which our players are developed in a more incremental manner
- Provide a game which is in line with the principles of Child Development based on extensive research and expertise
- Increase involvement of all players
- Emphasis on competitive performance not competitive outcome
- Encourage less structure (encourage skills and discourage fear of failure)
- Make the game easier to understand and referee
- Less emphasis on contact and more on continuity in early years
- Rewarding intention to tackle in early years as much as ability to tackle

With the recent 'Age Grade Rugby Review' it has helped by further segmenting youth rugby and making it more in line with the schools, and indeed schools coming into line with RFU policies:

- Mini Section – Reception to year 6 = U6 to U12
- Midi Section – Early Secondary/Prep = U12 and U13
- Junior Section – Secondary = U14 to U16
- Colts – Year 11 and 12

The main changes this coming season is that there will be no county league or competition for the U12 and U13 ages groups, with their focus continuing to be on festivals and fixtures. This is fully supported by the club and our coaching staff who have seen the benefits in growth in numbers in previous seasons as a result of the changes that have been implemented, as well as many of them doing their RFU courses and gaining a much better understanding of the rationale and reason for change. In the Mini Section the emphasis will continue to be involvement and enjoyment. This is undoubtedly leading to happier rugby children who are prepared to stay in the game longer despite lots of other external influences. An area that has also helped here is the development of some of our Colts players as coaches giving our charges role models they respect and can relate to being so youthful, this also has given us a better insight into what our charges think of our rugby sessions.

Our aims and objectives are confirmed and published at the beginning of each season and communicated to our membership. This has presented us with other challenges where the emphasis has been on providing squads with children of varying abilities, and not intentionally setting out to hone elite squads that will win everything in sight. The benefits of the changes are that many more children get the ball in hand and have the opportunity to run at the opposition, and this has helped grow our numbers in both the Mini and Midi section and the retention of those players.

Due to the 'Age Grade Rugby Review' and doing a like for like comparison to last season we ended last season with 319 paid up members in the Minis/Midis section which is 40 [+14.33%], and that in itself is a great achievement and one our coaches and club should be very proud of.

*TEAMWORK*

*RESPECT*

*ENJOYMENT*

*DISCIPLINE*

*SPORTSMANSHIP*

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These changes have thrown up some challenges for us and one being having to compete at mixed ability festivals where other clubs attending have clearly entered their best squad and are intent on trophy grazing, also competitive parents. These are not new issues and we manage both situations to the best of our ability with the latter being very much on the decrease as parent too appreciate our objectives are focused on the long term benefits to the game and children involved. To those less knowledgeable they could be forgiven for thinking we may not be focused on winning everything, I can assure you that we are very focused on the children's rugby development and of course our game's core values. Rest assured the most important fact is that when our children take to the field they play to win, and are very often successful. As has been the case many times in the Mini Section last season.

We have had some terrific results, wins and many trophies during the 2016-17 season, and all the while playing the game as we at Salisbury RFC would like the game to be played, and many of our Mini/Midi sections will be playing rugby for many years to come and no doubt some will be playing for our club as well.

Our Junior Section has also had a great deal of success with age all age groups performing well in both League and Cup competitions. Last season's U13s, this coming season's U14s had a great year in terms of recruitment having spent a few seasons in the doldrums but through a revitalised coaching structure and the benefits of RFU support through the 'All Schools Project' now have 35 players, which is great considering it wasn't long ago they were struggling to put out a side. They were also able to convert some of the effort and support into result in both fixtures and Cup competitions as well.

We're also very fortunate to have very knowledgeable, solid, committed and long-standing coaches and management structures at the U15 and U16 age groups both of which have good players numbers which bodes well for the rigours of the coming season, and again both these ages have performed admirably in the respective age groups leagues and cup competitions.

This leads us now to the Colts [U17 & U18], and for a variety of reasons [not all of them rugby] we struggled last season, however we're really excited and looking forward to having the benefits of last season's U16s and their coaching/management staff joining forces with last season's Colts who remained with the club. The numbers are good and will be able to more than withstand any absences through exams etc, and there is an abundance of talent at be that player and coaching/management staff. So we are planning to have a lot better news to deliver this season from our Colts, and personally I'm very excited about the potential rugby prospects of this group of young men.

There are a few members in our sections that have welcomed the club's support through our 'Hardship Policy' and thankfully those children are benefitting from playing rugby, and it's possible that had it not been for this support they may not be playing in sport outside of school. Other activities have been the charity work that our Mini section has helped provide a rugby program for the Splash Project which is a community based project for underprivileged children in the local community, this was very successful and we had some excellent feedback from the Splash personnel about how the course and our coaches had positively influenced the children that attended as well as picking up new members as a direct result of this project. We have again supported the Salisbury All Schools Rugby Event and an excellent and profitable festival which was well attended by so many clubs and we look forward to continuing to do so in the future.

The nearly all age groups arranged and had successful tours, there were great end of season dinners, lots of festivals, leagues and competitions entered, and in summary a great season was had and we are really looking forward to yet another one to come.

Steve Allen

Director of Youth Rugby - SRFC

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