

## **Director of Rugby (Seniors) - 2018 AGM Report**

Final League positions of 5<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and bottom respectively for our four senior teams might not look like a successful season, but it highlights both the positives within the Men's section and some of the issues we need to address. The Women have started playing games again under a new Manager, Coach and leadership team.

The early season injuries sustained before Christmas took some momentum away from the squad, who were always looking to play an open, attacking style of game. When considered against the large number of changes from the previous season, including the loss of all four locks, and the turnover in the team most weeks, 60 different players represented the first XV last season, a 5<sup>th</sup> placed standing actually represents a very respectable effort.

Alongside many other clubs, we are actually struggling with playing numbers. We may have had over 170 players wearing a green and white shirt for the four teams, but there are weeks when we didn't have enough to fulfill four fixtures, requiring great efforts on the part of Barry White the Chairman of Selectors and the Stones co-captains Ben Cullen and Ben O'Neill to ensure we fulfilled our final fixtures to avoid our 4<sup>th</sup> team being evicted from the League.

What has been uncovered by this high turnover is the large number of players who are good enough to play 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby. Where we and any other side will struggle, is with the sheer number of changes and depth of talent in every position. If we can get more games from our better players, the benefits will be felt across all teams. Availability, accountability, communication are all areas we will be working on during the summer and into next season. We also contributed hugely to the Dorset & Wilts U20 season, with 7 of our boys appearing for them. James Bagguley and Jared Cardew also went through to the South-West stages.

The United XV were competitive throughout the season, but came unstuck towards the end of the season with the double whammy of fielding inexperienced sides against the top sides in the League. The highlight of the season was the success of the 'A' XV in the Dorset & Wilts Cup. Playing a Bournemouth side that play in the same League as the United, our third string came from behind to win the game in the final minutes. A fantastic result that rendered many of them speechless.....by 22.00hrs.

The Stones success was in keeping going.

The Women's section has a very keen band of players under the leadership of Laura Nicholson and coach Greg Leadsham. Efforts to increase numbers have had only limited success, so we continue to support recruitment initiatives whilst taking steps to build a fixture list. This has started with 7 a-side games and tournaments.

"Recruitment" is also a word often asked to cover problem positions or to strengthen the 1<sup>st</sup> XV. As a Club with an aim to remain amateur on the pitch, but as professional as we can off it, simply buying players is not an option. Networking, whether current players, VPs, wives, extending the invite to play for our Club and promoting what a great Club we have, that is our strongest weapon. So we will continue with our military and school links, maintain our excellent Junior & Colts sections and WE WILL have new changing rooms. Next season we will build the links between our Minis and Senior Players, the Girls and Women and try to get the Colts to a couple of away fixtures with the 1<sup>st</sup> XV. Success is always likely to come in cycles, but together we can ensure the Club behind it remains strong and vibrant.

**Player of the Year:** Dan Hammond

**Players' Player:** Dave Tonge

**2nd Team Player:** Jamie Wright

**3rd Team Player:** Dave Thorpe

**4th Team Player:** Dave Veal

**Young Player:** Serge Griffiths

**Most Improved:** Reman Gurung