



Senior Rugby Review 2020 AGM

Mens Rugby

There were several times during the season that we prayed it would end. Little did we know the extraordinary events that would bring a premature close, nor the irony that by then we wanted, needed even, to complete our fixtures. More of that later.

The issues facing the Senior Mens teams were documented last year and continued this. We were also prepared for the disruption from the changing room build, with Neil Bowditch showing the value of his relationship with the Council by securing the Hudson's Field pavilion for both the Senior and Junior sections and the Senior teams working out new match day routines. But I have to record that it had a detrimental impact that grew as the weather worsened. It affected training numbers and motivation.

We approached pre-season with the usual high player turnover. The loss of players (all for job, family or injury reasons, not one left to join another club) amounted to a team that would have represented one of the strongest 1st XV's we could field in 2019. We cannot cope with that and meant the season was going to be one of hard work and progress towards safety across all our 4 teams, rather than aiming for any silverware.

The fixture list was also unkind to the 1st and 2nd XV's, with the first month spent playing the strongest teams in their respective leagues. Our targets were to improve individual players, mentor the new coaching team and develop the unit and team processes across the playing group. It is probably fair to say we achieved little of this. The reasons for this are:

- Player availability. The summary below highlights that even with 166 players making appearances for us, that is not enough. If we assume 23 games for each of our 3 teams we don't have enough to fill 18 places per team each week. This explains why we had to call time on the Stones (4th XV) who were pulled from the Dorset & Wilts leagues before Christmas.
- Training attendance. In the main numbers held up respectably through the season and we looked to improve the changing room situation through our support of after training meals and booking Sarum Academy's sportshall to get us through the wet weeks when our grass areas were unplayable. The critical mass required to instil and then embed unit and team patterns was an issue, but no different to many other seasons. If a core does not appear at the same sessions, or appear regularly by rotation, then we struggle to gain the collective learning meaning performances will falter against teams that are better organised or have better players
- Coach and Player Improvement. The formal education and improvement of our coaching team never materialised. Before Christmas, I decided that John Kimberley needed to step back from running training sessions. This decision was not made on John's technical input nor commitment. Both were enormous and I publicly thank John for all the time, energy and thought he put into our Club. However, with results going against us we needed to change. I took over on an interim basis before we appointed Jeff Watt as Head Coach. Jeff, along with Nik Mould, have improved the rapport with and amongst the playing group and I am sure that will continue into next season.



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Post-Christmas we set targets for winnable games and a focus on finishing the season in a positive frame of mind. The 'A' XV continue to struggle from the rather shameful actions of Clubs when higher league games are cancelled or postponed. Losing games is not an issue, playing loaded teams that should be playing against our United (2nd XV) or higher is. Despite this, the 2s and 3s were on course as the lockdown approached whilst the 1st XV lost the opportunity to add to the win over Windsor. But we can reflect on a number of games that were in the "should have won that" category: Trowbridge and Wimborne in both games, Buckingham and Wotton Bassett at home plus Sherborne and Windsor away. That would have been mid-table respectability. Despite all the travails of the season, we are not a million miles away. As the season closed the 1st XV were increasingly critical of their own performances. This represented real progress, being a reflection of the improvement in both the off-field preparations and the vibe around the whole group.

Many of our informed commentators at the Club will talk about cycles. Although we know of several high profile players who are leaving us, we can't stop people moving because of their jobs or even their hearts, we also know about some returning players and so the expectations, on the assumption we play in Southern Counties South and the structures and teams are in line with how the season ended, will be high that we can bounce back immediately. No pressure Juggy !

There have been successes:

1. 7 of last season's Colts played 1st XV rugby
2. A further 4 Colts aged players appeared in the 1st or 2nd XV's
3. As a group, whatever the situation or scoreline, all 3 teams invariably played all the way to the final whistle
4. Player morale and on-field leadership picked up during the season

I also need to namecheck Richard Smart and David Tonge for standing in as 1st XV captain during Josh Green's rehabilitation (sadly we will lose both next season), Scott Nicol, Baz Ramsey and Mark Lerpiniere for their energy and continued enthusiasm keeping the United and 'A' XV's running and to Chris Saunby, Russell Jugg and David Veal for coming forward to help with matchday preparations and management.

The underlying issues I mention above are not new to us, nor unique. But we have a great Club in respect of the off-field organisation and its facilities. The new changing rooms have to be a focus for our playing activities to start 2020/2021 with a bang, and to this end I wish Russell, Jeff, Nik, Barry, Neil and our new managers all the very best.

I have to finish with a note of caution. We lost our Availabilities Manager, Ian Wilkins, who is now running the Amesbury Mens team. Ian did a sterling amount of work in tracking players and supporting selection. However, we cannot be complacent about new clubs in the locality and the drain on our potential playing numbers and of course the loss of our homegrown players. Dorset & Wilts and the RFU itself seem to be pursuing a policy of "the more clubs the merrier". However, more clubs does not mean more games nor more players, and they have remained silent when challenged on the impact it has on clubs like our own. A degree of defensiveness yes, but as you will see from our playing numbers, society is changing and with it commitment that seems to come in ever decreasing timeframes.

TEAMWORK

RESPECT

ENJOYMENT

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SPORTSMANSHIP

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Number of total appearances – Senior Men

eg 21 players made 15 or more appearances

Appearances	Total	1s	2s	3s
15+	21	7	3	0
10+	28	3	8	5
5+	40	24	19	15
2+	33	25	35	36
1	44	7	24	41
	166	66	89	97

Player movement between the teams

eg 17 made appearances in both the 1s and 3s

Played 1s			44	17
Played 2s		44		52
Played 3s		17	52	

Whilst the movement between teams should be encouraged, it has to be managed so that a certain amount of consistency within each team can be maintained. The aim for next season is to continue to build on the team spirit within the club and ensure players of all teams enjoy their rugby.

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Womens Rugby

Enthusiasm and new players are a continuing theme, however raising sufficient numbers is still a struggle come game time, including fulfilment of our new League commitments. Thankfully, all the Womens teams are very supportive of each other, so even if we can only muster half a team the girls travel and get some game time.

We lost the admirable services of Laura Nicholson before Christmas, who had done so much to invigorate the group, with Nicky Atterton stepping forward to assist Coach Greg Leadshom. Continuous recruitment allied to an extended programme of games is our likely route to provide the environment and playing numbers to sustain the section.

Walking Rugby

Our season is slightly different to the rest of the club. So below mostly relates to summer 2019.

It's been a successful year for Walking Rugby with emphasis on inclusivity and enjoyment. We play all year with the main competitions taking place in the summer months and ad hoc friendlies during the winter. Our 2019 Salisbury RFC Walking Rugby Festival was the largest walking rugby festival held in the UK to date, Cardiff winning with an unbeaten record. We played in several festivals including Bristol, National Vintage Games Bath University, Topsham, in competitions we played 21, won 10, drew 5 and lost 6. Results were better than in previous seasons mainly due to improved defence (only losing six games) our target is to convert close games into wins. Our 2020 season has been disrupted losing several major competitions including our own festival but we hoping to play some competitions scheduled for late summer/autumn. We play/train twice a week at 5 Rivers Leisure Centre Tuesday am and Thursday evening at the club - age 50 (ish) and over including women all welcome.

Richard Lloyd
Director of Rugby

Another namecheck that needs to be included is that of Richard Lloyd. 'Lloydy' needed to step down from the DoR role mid-season but put his heart and soul into the post over the last few years. I greatly appreciate his guidance as he continues to support me as I grow into the role.

Russell Jugg
Director of Rugby (Elect)

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