



Senior Rugby Review 2021 AGM

Mens Rugby

There were several times during the season that we prayed it would start. Little did we know the extraordinary events that would continue to deny any league rugby. Through government restrictions and RFU return to play guideline we managed to do as much as possible to keep the players engaged. Jeff Watt and the coaching team have done an excellent job in keeping the players engaged and participating with whatever we could do.

Summer training was a mixture of socially distanced runs around Old Sarum, cycle rides through the Woodford Valley and circuits around Hudson's Field. As the route back to league rugby was outlined the training moved to more rugby orientated skill session with all equipment being hand sanitised with every player having their own ball and passing against nets and targets. This progressed to small group sessions, larger group activities, touch rugby and finally to contact friendlies with modified rules. At present we are at stage D2 of the RFU roadmap but hope that the league rugby will restart in September.

Through all this, there has been a good number of players training (I think they just needed to get out of the house after lockdown), including a number of ex-colts and new faces have participated. With the number of players training, the completion of the changing rooms and high morale within the playing group we are looking forward to a good competitive league campaign for all 3 senior sides. That and the proposed restructuring of the leagues in the 2022/2023 season should ensure a good standard of rugby moving forward.

Unfortunately we are losing the services of Jeff Watt as head coach as he is being posted away but will hopefully be back in a couple of years. I cannot thank Jeff enough for his commitment and effort over the past year. The rapport and engagement with the players has improved exponentially and is the main reason we look forward to the coming season. He has engaged with players at every level and encouraged them to participate in training and learn team patterns and structures so all three teams will play in a consistent manner and players will be able to move up and down the sides easily.

Although there was some interest from external coaches, most of them felt that they could not commit due to uncertain work situations or feeling that they owed their current club at least another season. However, out of every cloud there is a silver lining, Gareth Blackborrow has agreed to step into the head coach role. He is a Salisbury man through and through, has a lot of experience in both playing and coaching and is well respected by the players. He has the same philosophy of playing attacking rugby based on teamwork, support and well-practised skills. Gareth will be supported by the current coaching team and David Veal who will help with player admin.

Although no league rugby was possible we organised a few internal and invitational Ready4Rugby events in September. These were adapted 10 a-side touch rugby games a few local sides as well as the colts and BWS were invited. The rugby proved a huge success but we must work better with the clubhouse team in organising dates facilities.

Once restrictions allowed some training games were organised with modified rules (no scrums or mauls), with the A side having a narrow loss to Tottonians and wins over Andover and Blandford. The B side had narrow losses against the Wheatsheaf, Andover and Tottonians. A Vets side had narrow losses to the Griffins and the Wheatsheaf. Although this might seem that we lost more than we won, a lot of positives can be taken from the way we played and the mere fact that we managed to have some rugby at all.

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More recently we have organised an internal and external 7's events. At the moment this is still with modified rules but at the internal event we had four squads of 12 players enjoying an afternoon of rugby. The Spitfire 7's had three invitational teams and 3 Salisbury teams. Salisbury A narrowly lost in the final to North Dorset All Stars.

These events were a huge success in terms of the rugby but there were organisational issues caused by the extended season and lockdown restrictions not being relaxed as anticipated. More integration with the clubhouse team needs to occur to avoid conflicts and ensure that we can promote the rugby whilst maintain the external bookings that keep the club profitable. We have a further 7's tournament at the end of July and a 10's tournament in August.

The fixture list for next season has been published with the league campaign starting on the 25th September with a home game against Swans. The target for this season is to play enjoyable rugby and to target a top 2 finish for all three teams. We have approximately 140 players that have been involved in training or games over the last season. This includes short term visitors, college students and other players that were only around because of lockdown restrictions and work needs to be done to get a clear picture of the available player pool for next season. It is also planned that regular Vets games will be organised throughout the season.

Womens Rugby

Enthusiasm and new players are a continuing theme, however raising sufficient numbers is still a struggle. 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. No fixtures have been arranged during this season due to lockdown and travel restrictions but there is hope things will pick up next season.

Nicky Atterton and Coach Greg Leadshom continue to lead the girls. 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

Story so far:

After a collapse in numbers in August 2020 there was a pause in training as most of the organisers had left. Thankfully there was a move in late September amongst some ex player members coordinated by Richard Lloyd to restart Walking Rugby. Our first session with the new group was early October and we have managed to train consistently since then apart from lock downs and one weather cancellation.

Numbers:

We have 25 players listed, consisting loosely of 6 from the original group, 10 "New Generation" and a further 9 joiners since restart (3 of which have only done 1 session and may/may not be back). This gives a core of 10-15 regular players. Attendance started at 10 and averages 12-14, dipped when the club facilities were closed and are now rising again, with a recent peak of 17.

These are very good numbers, but we will need to work on recruitment to ensure sustainability. Certain roles also need to be bolstered such as Coaching, Refereeing and Fixtures.

Sessions, Facilities, and Kit:

We currently run a weekly session on a Thursday from 6-7pm. We have not reinstated the Tuesday morning session which Pat started at Five Rivers and which reverted to the club after the first lockdown. I will enquire if Wiltshire Council intend to restart this and let you know what is on offer. The Thursday

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session has been outdoors throughout for obvious reasons (previously wintered indoors) and this seems to be acceptable.

We use a corner of the Main pitch under lights and if that is booked we use the top of the training field in the summer and lower down, if lit, in the winter.

We have the legacy kit from before: Balls, cones & bibs, this will need to be replaced at some point.

If acceptable we would need some guidance on a budget to cover additional kit, player shirts and match fees and what additional contribution would be expected from the players.

Sponsorship:

Richard Lloyd has secured £800 from Inspire Ltd to be a shirt sponsor and has submitted a proposal to the club to place an order with Akuma. This will give 2 shirts to each current player (Home & Away colours). I understand this hinges on the subs being agreed by Finance and to determine the contribution expected from the players. The requirement of kit for new players going forward to be agreed.

External links:

We have re-engaged with the Walking Rugby community through Bristol Bears. This has resulted in some offers from other clubs for Festivals this year. We have yet to play another team/club.

Fixtures & Festivals:

Festival invitations accepted, Kingswood 27 August. We will be sending 2 teams

Invited but unable to attend, Guildford 17 July, Burgess Hill 25 July, Topsham 7 August. We will keep in touch for next year and we should discuss the option of organising our own.

As a warmup we have arranged a back-to-back training/match fixture with our friends at Amesbury RFC on 22 July at Home and 29 July Away.

Russell Jugg
Director of Rugby

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