



24 June 2024

END OF SEASON REPORT 23/24 - SENIOR SECTION

In the last AGM report the senior section set out our objectives for the season. As ever some objectives were to a degree aspirational, where others were musts. For simplicity I'll report against the stated objectives and read you into our plans for 24/25.

- Increase player numbers and frequency of player availability. Achieved.** Despite losing a handful of players before the season we have recruited well through social media, word of mouth and by exploiting military links. As such the player pool expanded and on average each player played more games than they had in the previous two seasons. Of particular note we had significantly more players playing 10 or more games in the season. This has been complimented by the player sponsorship packages, which saw, through player effort, an increase from 7 player sponsors to 23, meaning more funds for the club, but critically our committed players having rugby subsidised. Huge credit must go to captain of the club Dave Veal who was the conduit between players and coaches, constantly persuading players to make themselves available.
- 1st XV to maintain current standing at level 6. Not Achieved.** There is no doubt the 1st XV's season has been disappointing. 6 wins from 24 competitive games (5 from 22 in the league) was not good enough and saw us finish second bottom. Relegation is a hard pill to swallow, but we can take solace in a dedicated group of players, our deeply committed coaches Gareth Blackborow and Jonah Thorpe, and a quality team manager in Dom Hayakawa. We have little doubt we can turn it around. Under the leadership of captain Luke Newton there was also a few highs in there, including a mini tour to Jersey that will live long in the memory.
- 2nd XV to improve. Achieved.** A disappointing 22/23 saw the 2s finish 2nd bottom with only 3 wins in 16 (18%), and some bruising defeats. We asked Nik Mould and Tom Hill to target mid table and win over 40% of their games. With the help of skipper Tom Browning-Stamp and vice captain Baz Ramsay they excelled, finishing 4th of 9 and winning half their games. Furthermore they did brilliantly in developing players for the 1st XV and simply ensuring rugby remained fun.
- 3rd XV to be sustained. Partially achieved.** With so many club 3rd XV's folding, we asked new coach Alastair Aitken, supported by team manager Julia Doig, to fulfil all fixtures and give an opportunity for all to play competitive rugby. They achieved the latter and came so close to the former: only twice did we have to concede fixtures, and both were not fully of our own volition. 4 wins from 13 games seems disappointing, but ultimately it was about enjoyment and there was no doubt the 3s under the leadership of Dave Cleary and Dan Jugg achieved that.
- Improve player discipline. Partially achieved** – but more to do. Despite the change in tackle height and the greater emphasis on referees giving cards for dangerous play, we have seen a reduction in cards across the senior section. More can be done. We'll miss the council of Martin Plimsole in that regard – Thanks for your support Martin.
- Grow the Vets XV. Not achieved.** A casualty of a busy season, with multiple match delays, we didn't get the Vets XV up and running, but many got some rugby in with the 3rd XV. One for next season.
- Re-establish the Salisbury Spitfires 7s team. Achieved.** Overall, the squad will play in three tournaments this summer. We're one competition in and one trophy already, having won the plate at the Frome 7s: a brilliant yet disappointing result having only lost to the eventual winners, the Royal Navy, in the knock out stages.
- Prepare to re-establish the Ladies XV. Partially achieved.** This season a small cohort of ladies, supported by Rich Lloyd and Mo Cooper have pushed to offer some rugby for the ladies at the club. Coordinating with the booming girls' section, we've seen some mixed age group teams running out at touch tournaments across the county. Indeed, we even hosted our own on a very rainy Sunday in February. Available numbers have meant 7s tournaments this summer haven't been viable, but we're optimistic with the volume of girls coming through the junior section and the first group of girls in the S6C rugby program, that we'll see a full established ladies' team in the years to come.

9. **Maintain and improve the colts pathway. Achieved** - but more to do. Slowly we're increasing the volume of interactions between the senior squad and the colts, which is already proving beneficial with a number of last season's colts moving up into the senior section this year. The next step is to embrace 'lads and dads' fixtures into the regular season to allow colts to 'play up' and safely get their first experience of senior rugby. Thanks go to Jason Yarwood and Doug Logan for all they and their coaching team do.

So that totals 4 achieved, 3 partially achieved and 2 not achieved. A league score of 22 points from a possible 36 - so certainly room to improve.

So, what for the 24/25 season? We will target the following (in no particular order):

- **1st XV to promote back to level 6 (Top Priority)**. A top two place in Counties 1 Southern South is a must.
- **2nd XV to maintain position**. Same targets: top half finish in Counties 2 Dorset & Wilts Central and greater than 40% win ratio. Continue developing young talent.
- **3rd XV to be sustained**. Fulfil all fixtures in the Dorset & Wilts merit league and offer competitive rugby to all levels of player.
- **Invest in our coaching**. Develop and add to our current coaching team to help deliver bullets 1-3.
- **Continue to recruit and retain players**. Encourage more players and more players to play more often. Double down on player sponsorship.
- **Continue to improve player discipline**. Simply: less cards and less penalties.
- **Retain the Salisbury Spitfire 7s team**. Target at a minimum 3 competitions in summer 25. Consider hosting own tournament.
- **Re-establish the Vets XV**.
- **Continue to lay the foundations for the Ladies XV**.
- **Continue to improve the Colts pathway**. More joint training and seniors working the Colts. Lads & Dads matches.
- **Increase sponsorship revenue**. More to follow.
- **Walking Rugby to continue growing**.

You'll agree there's lots to do, but we truly believe we can achieve it all. We will ruthlessly prioritise getting the 1st XV back to level 6 and I would only ask you all to come and support your team.

A final mention must go to Neil Bowditch who will step down as fixtures secretary this summer. The truth is Neil does far more than coordinate our matches and the volume of work he does will need to be divided over multiple people. I'll personally miss his wise council and I hope we'll continue to see him on the sidelines. Thanks Neil from everyone in the senior section.

Mr J D Watt
Director of Rugby

TEAMWORK

RESPECT

ENJOYMENT

DISCIPLINE

SPORTSMANSHIP