

# Club points



News for Hitchin Rugby Football Club members

Issue 32 • June 2015

## 99 year lease secured

Following years of negotiations, on 3rd March 2015 the Club entered into a new 99 year lease with North Hertfordshire District Council of the clubhouse and related facilities at Old Hale Way, and also a twenty year management agreement of all the sports facilities currently on offer at the King George V playing fields.

*Meanwhile, building of the new changing room block is making good progress...*

For more on the clubhouse development and the club's new charitable status – see page 2.



The footings are dug



... the floor's down



... the walls are up



... and the roof's going on!

## Volunteers thanked for their work by England team

**Stuart Lancaster and the England players have again paid tribute to the army of volunteers who underpin rugby in this country.**

A total of 15 volunteers belonging to clubs across the country, including Martin Prior who is Hitchin's

Minis and Youth coaching co-ordinator, were invited to watch the England senior squad train at Pennyhill Park – the team's base during the RBS 6 Nations – in recognition of their work for the game in various roles.

The volunteers enjoyed a three-course lunch, watched the England squad in training, and met with head coach Lancaster and a number of players for some highly prized photos and autographs.

Afterwards Lancaster thanked the volunteers for their work in supporting England's success at international level.

"The England team never forget that the game of rugby union in this country is underpinned by an army of more than 50,000 volunteers," said Lancaster.

"These people willingly give up their time and effort every week of the year, to ensure our rugby clubs continue to flourish – whether it is coaching or refereeing on the pitch, or running the bar and club finances off it.

"It was great to invite some of those volunteers to our training session as a thank you, both to them individually and to everyone who volunteers in English rugby and keeps it thriving."

Speaking about being recognised for his volunteering work, Prior said: "It's a great honour to be recognised for the work I do as a volunteer at Hitchin and with the Kids First pilot, and very humbling to talk to the other guests about their work and efforts they are doing for a considerable amount of time when compared to myself."

Martin Prior met England head coach Stuart Lancaster



# Clubhouse redevelopment

In May 2007 having been re-elected as Club Chairman I set out my stall as wanting to push for building a new satellite building to fill the growing need for more and better changing rooms, this was especially urgent for our rapidly expanding Mini and Youth section.

Chris Jones joined me in approaching the task and we set about arranging meetings with NHDC to investigate the possibility of extending our lease to add a satellite building and proceeding with fundraising for the task. The suggestion was met positively but I must say with some scepticism about our ability to deliver the funds to achieve the project. Nonetheless negotiations followed to extend our lease and construct a new building and architect's drawings were prepared to support the project. Alas, at this point we were advised by NHDC that we would be unable to take on a lease on a satellite building without taking on a lease for the entire footprint of the pavilion and clubhouse. Also investigations by NHDC's legal department concluded that the existing lease could not be extended or modified for reasons too numerous to describe here.

After a number of frustrating years of discussions and meetings, in 2012 we were finally making progress. November 2012 arrived and we obtained planning permission to re-build on the existing pavilion and clubhouse footprint. We drew up heads of terms and we hoped for a rapid turnaround. However, a number of serious stumbling blocks had to be negotiated before we could proceed. We required a longer lease to attract the funding we needed, NHDC needed to appoint trustees to oversee the suitability of any new lease, while any agreement for a lease on KGV fields needed to be



Chris Jones and Peter Tasko say farewell to the old wooden shack

ratified by Fields in Trust (the charity and owner of the field). Again, we approached this with resolve and began to make progress. Iain Charnley had joined the team and Pentangle design was retained for design of the facility in line with Sport England requirements. Over the next two years we agreed upon design, had a number of surveys carried out, held meetings with Sport England and the Rugby Football Foundation (RFF) and finally negotiated a 99 lease and 20 year management agreement with NHDC.

Iain sent out tenders for the demolition and construction work, and Linxcroft Construction was selected as our preferred builder.

We obtained conditional funding from grants, loans and donations of £350,000 to add to our own £125,000 saved by diligent financial management of the club over the last 20 years or so.

Particular thanks go to the Valiant Trust (Lady Valerie Dixon) for a donation of £100,000

After securing leases, agreements and funding, we were left with one final hurdle to the project. HRFC has had

a long term commitment to amateur rugby and sport in the community and as our CASC (Community Amateur Sports Club) designation implied, we acted as a charity, but only gained some the benefits of charity status from HMRC. So at the beginning of 2014 Chris and I, with the support of the management committee and membership at an EGM embarked on converting the club to a charity. This was successfully completed in July 2014 when Hitchin Rugby Limited (a registered charity) was formed. To go along with this, Chris worked diligently with our accountants Bradshaw Johnson to create a subsidiary company to undertake our commercial activities (Bar and Shop) and Hitchin RFC Trading Limited was formed. The process was completed at the start of this year when a further EGM voted to transfer the assets of Hitchin Rugby Football Club to the newly formed charity.

Now it's time to look ahead to phase 2.



Peter Tasko

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## Social spaces

Following the £10,000 grant from the RFU, matched by £5,000 from the Supporters Club and £5,000 from members, the improvements and changes made to the clubhouse have resulted in an increase in club bookings, and bar takings!





# BACK TO SCHOOL-IVAL

Hitchin RFC  
06.06.2015

On Saturday 6 June 2015 Hitchin RFC hosted the first Back to School-ival tournament. Teams of Old Boys from various local schools congregated at the club for a day of fantastic rugby which saw many old faces return to the club and grace the pitches of King George.

In total the day saw 180 players taking part in the tournament with nine teams competing. The players ranged from seasoned pros to players who hadn't touched an oval ball since they left school all those years ago.

In the B tournament, a combined team of John Henry Newman, St Christopher's and Harlington Upper School ran out victorious, winning the final against Samuel Whitbread. A special mention to our neighbours the Priory here who, having struggled to get a school team out for the last few years, were represented by a squad of 20!

In the A tournament, local lads Hitchin Boys School battled out the final with

Stratton Upper having overcome the Knights Templar school in the process. Stratton ran out winners in the end but special praise should be reserved for all three teams who showcased some fantastic rugby!

Throughout the day, all of the local rugby clubs had strong representation with players taking part from Hitchin RFC, Letchworth, Stevenage, Biggleswade and various other clubs.

The day also comprised of a netball tournament hosted at the Priory, live music all day in the clubs marquee which was superb and the obvious pull of the club bar (which I think we pretty much drank dry)."



Knights Templar v Stratton – winners of the Cup tournament



Knights Templar were the winners of the Netball tournament

A huge "well done" to Hitchin RFC for again allowing their facilities to be used for such an event, and the often overlooked effort of the army of volunteers who played a crucial role in the event's success. Many of these volunteers were back again for the Beer Festival for the week after so they really deserve our gratitude.



A combined team of St Chris, John Henry Newman and Harlington Upper School won the plate tournament

**BACK TO SCHOOL-IVAL**  
will return to Hitchin in 2016. If you would like to be involved at all then get in touch with Adam Howard, Festival Organiser, at [madahowarda@msn.com](mailto:madahowarda@msn.com).

We are looking for volunteers for the day, companies who might wish to contribute and more players either to join the teams who played this year, or to take the lead and sort out a team from their old school.

See you again in 2016!

## Jordan secures London Broncos contract

**Jordan Williams, a 17 year old from Hitchin has earned himself a contract with the U19 academy of the London based rugby league team, the London Broncos. The Broncos are the only team in the South who have played in the super league.**

The first anyone in Jordan's year heard about the League game was when word went around school of a local team, with an U16 section and aspirations to be the best in the region. The North Hertfordshire Crusaders rugby league team harboured the only opportunity for people in Hertfordshire to play rugby league and in Jordan's case, the foundations to his academy contract. In the summer of 2012, the Crusaders trained every week and even without their own home kit, started winning game after game in the U16's with a talented group of players. This led to a debut season of victorious results only. However, amongst these spectacular performances, Jordan only featured twice



and was stuck between commitment to the Crusaders and Hitchin.

The next season saw Jordan make many more appearances and not just for the Crusaders. From only two games the previous season, Jordan was asked to attend the Hard Rock Café Origins team where he would play for the "North" side made up of the best players from the surrounding areas north of the Thames river. From origins, in the summer of 2014, Jordan went onto play for the South East colleges, the regional rugby league team. Jordan attended training sessions at weekends and weekdays where more of his talent was unlocked. So much so that his coach at the colleges put him up for a four week trial at the London Broncos academy. Unfortunately Jordan was turned down at this attempt but with guidance to "bulk up" and the new found world of a professional atmosphere in sport, Jordan earned another trial. Just three weeks into the second trial period, Jordan was offered a professional contract

to play for the U19 London Bronco academy.

Jordan is and has been an example to many of his school mates and friends at both Hitchin and Crusaders, that there are opportunities to try new sports in our area and to succeed in them. Jordan also said he felt he "fell into rugby" and everything else followed. On the other hand, Jordan had the talent to get to where he is now and would like to thank the coaches at Hitchin RFC and the North Hertfordshire Crusaders for their help in developing his knowledge and skills in both rugby union and rugby league.



Hitchin RFC Academy Player: Jordan Williams

Daniel Wiggins

# AGM: election of 2015-16 Club Officers

At the AGM held on Tuesday 26 May 2015, the following people were elected to next season's management committee:

- **President:** Tim Jeffries
- **Chair:** Richard Lucas
- **Vice Chair and Chair of Business Committee:** Peter Tasko
- **Club Secretary:** Michael Emmerson
- **Treasurer Hitchin Rugby Ltd (The charity):** Alf Davis
- **Treasurer Hitchin RFC Trading Ltd:** Chris Jones
- **Club Captain and 1XV Captain:** James Bolter
- **Chair of the Playing Committee:** Rob Willoughby
- **Chair of Women's Rugby:** Lucy Kennedy
- **Chair of Mini and Youth:** John Walsh

## 2014/15 AWARDS

Awards for the 2014/15 season, presented at the annual dinner earlier in the month, included:

- **President's Cup – Team of the Year:** The Academy
- **Tony Else award – Most Improved Player:** Phil Hobbs
- **Wally Hazard trophy – Players' Player of the Year:** Alistair Southward
- **President's Salver:** Gerallt Morgan



Phil Hobbs

## 1XV report

It has been a much improved season from the 1XV this year, finishing comfortably away from the relegation zone. This has stemmed from more consistent selections week in week out. This year we had six winners of silver ties (25 caps) in contrast to none last year.

Adam Shaw has continued to work hard in his coaching role, improving team and individual performances with continued support from Robert Willoughby. The playing structure that is being built across all senior sides has now begun to sink in and that has shown in the results this season and something that will continue to be built upon.

Had it not been for a few near misses and narrow loses the team could have easily finished in the top half of the table and threatened the top four. The 1XV has been well supported by the academy again as well as a number of new recruits. We are also looking forward to seeing several players returning again next season from university as well as



### Skipper leads the way against Welwyn RFC

other clubs. Training numbers have again improved from last year as well.

### 2nd team

The 2nd team had a fine start to the season challenging top spot in the league. The Academy provided a number of players who could play less often, once Academy

success in competitions occurred creating more games for them. First XV injuries also called on 2nd teamers and results in the second part of the season weren't as strong.

### 3rd and 4th teams

The 3rd team reached and won their league Cup Final while the 4th XV were beaten in their Final.

### Ladies team

The Ladies team, playing alongside Tabard as Hit'Ard, narrowly missed out on a league title when Marlow cried off their final game leaving them in third place. Next season the Ladies will regroup as a Hitchin team and attempt to rebuild our own playing numbers. Hopefully the fledgling Girls Academy will soon be a feeder to them.

Natalie Mellowship has stood down as Ladies Chair and we thank her for her magnificent contribution. Lucy Kennedy is the new Chair.

James Bolter, Club Captain



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# A very successful season for Hitchin Rugby Academy!

The 2014/15 season saw the third year of the Hitchin Rugby Academy and it was probably the most successful season to date.

The U16s finished second in Division 2 of the Herts/Middx leagues (HML) and had a very unlucky exit from the County Cup. One of their number (Zac Conley) was selected for the Saracens U16 squad even though he was only 15.

The U17A squad were crowned Champions of HML League 2 and also reached the County Cup Final. The B team finished a very good season with a good league position. It is a mark of the success of the age group that many players moved between the A and B squads and also many played in the successful full Academy side. The age group were deserved winners of the Mini and Youth Youth Team of the Year award.

The full Academy side (mainly U18) had a magnificent season which gained



Dan Wiggins gets the ball away against Stortford in the LV= final

them the club Team of the Year Award at the senior End of Season Dinner! The Academy were Runners Up in their league, progressed further in the national Colts competition than any other Hitchin side, reached the final of the LV Cup losing to Bishops Stortford and won the Hertfordshire Colts Shield by beating Fullarians! One player played England senior rugby – three playing over 10 games for the First XV with Ruirí Shanahan

being the second youngest player in the history of the club to win a silver tie.

The academy player of the season was captain Ellis Lockyer and the most improved was Dan Grainger.

We now look forward to next season and hope to run two U18 teams for the first time (Academy 1st and 2nd) and coordinate even further with the senior coaching crew.

Tim Jeffries, Academy Chairman

## Mini & Youth

Well here we are then, safely at the end of another eventful season at HRFC.

Last time I wrote I introduced the committee that I have the privilege of working with, trying to ensure that the increased membership of over 500 members of the Mini and Youth section have a positive Rugby experience. I'd like to think that we have achieved that again this year.

We have a new Treasurer and Mini Fixtures Secretary and I welcome Emma and Angela to the team.

Not a game lost this year due to the weather or poor pitch conditions and our thanks must go out to firstly Brian Baines who does sterling work on the pitches and to Chris Jones who negotiated the grant for the repairs following the flooding of the previous season.

We also have the privilege of being able to use the Priory School fields on a regular basis, with the added ease of a direct access gate from the Rugby club. I am also pleased to announce we will soon be installing a small storage unit nearby to save taking all the kit across the fields.

In terms of Rugby, Hitchin Youth section is thriving, membership increases throughout the season. The various age groups have all enjoyed tours and festivals, plus in the older age groups,



U8s Celebrate Winning Hitchin M&Y 2015 Team of the Year

maintained their position as "teams to be reckoned with" around the County. This reputation can only be achieved by the hard work and commitment of the Coaches, Managers, Referees and the parents that deliver every week.

To that end I should also add my thanks to the Hitchin Youth Trust for another valuable donation to enable us to properly equip the section for the challenges of the membership.

To conclude we look forward to another eventful year with the added bonus of being able to supply top quality changing facilities in the new season.

John Walsh M&Y Chair

**U8s awarded Hitchin M&Y 2015 Team of the Year!**

The U8s capped their fantastic unbeaten record season with winning the Hitchin M&Y 2015 Team of the Year!

We are so proud of our players, parents, coaches and everybody who supports the U8s who have been absolutely amazing.

We are privileged with the effort, commitment and support everyone puts in making this team such a success and enjoyable for Players, Parents and Coaches.

# Herts County U15 Girls

Nine Hitchin Rugby under 15 girls were selected to play for Hertfordshire on Sunday 9 November 2014 in a county match against Surrey under 15s Girls Rugby.

Megan Gregory, Rosie Inman, Holly Pomfret, Grace Spillane, Alice Tomlinson and Rachel Warren, all of Hitchin, led the Herts team to a comprehensive

59-22 victory over the Surrey squad. Unfortunately three team-mates Megan Parry, Scarlett Welbury and Ellie Wilson were not available to play on the day.

Adrian Pomfret, the Representative for Girls Rugby on Hitchin's Mini and Youth Committee said, "We now have one of the largest girls rugby squads in the county and so we're very proud



Herts girls celebrate

that Hitchin Girls made up such a large contingent of the Hertfordshire team."

John Walsh, the M&Y Chair added, "Hitchin Rugby Club has been working hard to encourage participation in Girls Rugby. We hope this success at county-level will encourage more girls in the Hitchin area to give rugby a try".

Hitchin RFC has Girls Rugby squads for under 13s, under 15s and for under 18s.

To find out more about girls rugby email [MYMembership@HitchinRugby.com](mailto:MYMembership@HitchinRugby.com)



Herts v Surrey action

## Nice try, but troops face up to big defeat in rugby fundraiser

A team of servicemen were no match for a group of rugby players when they went head-to-head for charity.

The best players from Hitchin, Letchworth, Datchworth and Welwyn rugby clubs beat a military team 76-16 at Hitchin Rugby Club on Saturday 9 August 2014.

The event also included a sausage eating contest, bench press competition and tombola which helped raise more than £4,000 for Help for Heroes, the charity supporting injured military personnel and their families.

Hitchin rugby player Joe Benucci, who organised the fundraiser, said: "The whole day went really well. We had more than 1,000 people attend and everyone had a great time.

"Added to that we raised more than £4,000 for a charity that is very close to lots of people in the area's heart – and of course we also managed to cream the Combined Services team, which was a plus!"

The bench press competition, run by

Peak Physique Gym, challenged men to lift 60kg as many times as possible in one minute while women had the same challenge but with 30kg.

Herts Barbarians prop Barry Mellor came out on top for the men after managing 50 repetitions, while Amy Haughton was crowned the female champion after clocking up a total of 34.

The metre-long sausage eating competition, run by It's Grilled, was won by Hitchin Rugby Club chairman Richard Lucas who softened the bread with beer.

A slave auction, where members of the club gave up two hours of their time, raised £550.

Auctioneer Sarah Scott Foster said: "It is always nerve racking running a live auction but the people who attended really got in the spirit of the event and dug deep to support the charity.

"Raising more than £1,500 from the auction alone was fantastic and I am very proud to have been involved in such a wonderful and worthy event."



Too hot to handle: the Herts Barbarians side were comfortable winners in the big game



### The Hertfordshire Barbarians are back!

The Hertfordshire Barbarians are back, raising money for the Wooden Spoon (the children's charity of rugby) and the Make-a-Wish foundation.

Bring your family, friends and neighbours to enjoy the atmosphere – lots to do for everyone, competitions, raffle, auctions, fun for the kids, big beer tent for the adults and much more.

#### Herts Barbarians vs Combined Emergency Services

The game is between a combined team from the Police, Fire and Rescue and Ambulance Emergency Services

vs  
The Herts Barbarians – a team made up of players from different clubs in Hertfordshire.

Saturday 8 August 2015  
Doors open at 11.30am

If you'd like to help on the day, please volunteer by emailing Joe Benucci or call him on 07817 683525.



## George Chance RIP

### “Foot up! What me Sir?”

Arriving at the Club in 1966 aged 30, I met George then around 50. Still playing and continued to do so for many a season. The more remarkable because the Hitchin 2XV of that period was possibly the most defeated team in the country and George played almost all of his games in the front row.

His occasional rejoinder to the referee “What me Sir?” always brought a smile from team members. However, a few of us will also carry the memory of George, arms held high at the front of the lineout, awaiting the throw in, slowly moving into the opponents half. All of us moving forward with him, including the touch judge with flag held high.

You do not need 15 Georges in a team. You would be very lucky to have 14 like him.

George you were special, and reliable.  
God Bless



B.A.J. (Brian) Chapman

Life member George Chance (98) visiting the club in February 2015

## End of Season dinners



Past presidents Humphries, Millner and Dwyer at the senior dinner



VIP table at M&Y dinner

### Special thanks...

Thanks to the volunteers who helped with two End of Season dinners, but in particular a special mention for Deb Jeffries (Senior EOS) and Justin Welbury (M&Y EOS) who, once again, put in many hours to ensure that both events were successful. Well done ladies, fun was had by all!



M&Y committee ladies ready for a bite!

## VP's corner

### Hywel Jones Hitchin RFC VP of the Year

You may recall that Phil Jones spoke to us about a new award which would act as a memorial to his father and great club member, Hywel Jones.

The Hywel Jones Hitchin RFC VP of the Year. There are no awards just for VPs and this new trophy will honour both Hywel and annually a person who contributes greatly to the fabric of our club. It will be awarded at our December VP Lunch of the 2015/2016 season to someone who, in the opinion of Phil, our President Tim Jeffries and myself, has given selflessly – plenty of nominees!

The trophy itself is a magnificent leaping hedgehogs sculpture created by Bob Newbury for Hywel and is secured in the club.

### VPS

We have heard from a couple of our brethren who have not been so well lately and I know you will join with me in wishing them well.

**Simon Watts** has not been too good in the chest department and has been experiencing some breathing difficulties. He is due into hospital and we all hope he gets sorted out! Still as cheery a soul as ever, he wants to get active again quickly.

Then there's **Steve Battersby**. He'll always be a silly arse. His ego is in disarray as he broke his right leg whilst walking (!) in Pembrokeshire. Plaster is now off and he is more mobile but, I ask you... couldn't even blame it on alcohol.



Martin Howard





Academy squad for LV= U 18's cup final

# LV= weekend 2015

The main event, the LV= U18's Cup and Plate Competition took place on the Sunday.

**In October 2014 clubs from London, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambs, Herts and Beds signed up for the fourth year of the LV= Sponsored Competition.**

Without being too prescriptive the clubs were given target dates to complete the matches, as opposed to previous years the matches all went ahead, none cancelled to the weather

Combined with other commitments such as League, National Colts and regional matches all the clubs have done well to play the games. They are to be congratulated.

This year the hosts, Hitchin RFC progressed into the final stage before coming up against a well drilled team from Bishops Stortford on Sunday, who ran out the winners 27-13 in a frantic match enjoyed by both sets of spectators.

The Plate Competition was won by Colchester beating Wymondham both teams enjoying the day out in Hitchin in this popular competition.

Awards in both the matches were presented by Cllr Jane Gray (NHDC Leisure).

Firstly we owe our Sponsor LV= our thanks, without this competition many of the clubs involved would not generally play each other in other matches. It no

doubt enhances contacts and the development of the "spirit of rugby"

Very many thanks to all the clubs, managers and match officials that give up time every year to ensure the smooth running of this competition.





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## ... and the Ladies kicked it off!

The weekend's festivities started on Saturday 25 April with the Ladies 10's competition, with Hitchin Ladies coming through to win the LV= cup, a fitting end to a successful season.

The ladies are now recruiting for next season!



Don't forget to log on to our website!

[www.hitchinrugby.com](http://www.hitchinrugby.com)

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