

Club points



News for Hitchin Rugby Football Club members

Issue 34 • June 2016

1XV retain league status

It has been a very mixed season for the 1XV this year, and a season of two halves.

Before Christmas the 1XV were comfortably in the middle of the table and undefeated at home, the second half of the season only three league games were won in total. We managed to avoid relegation by pulling out a big performance at the end of the season against local rivals Datchworth, winning 38-17 in front of a large crowd.

The team this year has certainly turned in performances that show we can beat anyone in this league. Our focus next season will be to be able to perform like this consistently throughout the season, and aim to finish in at least the top half of the table. We have a good coaching set up in place for next season and a lot of players committing to stay and hopefully some new and old faces either joining or rejoining us.

Other senior teams

It again has been another mixed season for the rest of the club. Some weeks we were easily getting four teams out to play,

other weeks we struggled to get two, with the Six Nations matches having an affect upon numbers.

Hopefully the success of the touch team will encourage more people to come and give rugby a try and increase our numbers.

The second team faded away in the second half of the season, possibly due to lack of a single week in week out captain, with Adam Howard having being called up into the 1XV for most of the season.



Elliot Gibson caught in action against Datchworth

The 3XV became a solid unit of players who wanted to go out and play with and for each other, which is something we would like to see in all of our teams going forward.

The 4XV again managed to field teams very regularly and managed to win their merit table plate final this season as well!

James Bolter

LV= Cup finals

The fourth LV= Under 18's finals were hosted again by Hitchin rugby club on Sunday 1 May.

With clubs entering from East Anglia, the home counties and London, the format was changed this year to 4 groups, with Hitchin and Barnet Elizabethans getting through to the Plate final, and Cambridge and Ealing contesting the Cup final.

Ealing's Under 18 Academy side had triumphed over Old Albanians in their semi-final with the last kick of the game. The final against Cambridge – who had beaten Westcliff in their semi final – produced some excellent rugby, closely contested throughout, with Ealing hanging on to a 30-26 lead for the last



Ealing skipper receives cup from Peter Tasko

10 minutes or so, as their opponents did everything but score.

Easier in the Plate final, Hitchin's own academy, perhaps playing below par, were beaten 17-29 by a well drilled and determined Barnet side

Our thanks to LV= for sponsoring this popular event.



Club of the Year

Hitchin Rugby Club was crowned "Club of the Year" in the prestigious 2015 Comet Sports Awards at the awards ceremony on 29 January 2016 at The Icknield Centre in Letchworth.

It was a great night for rugby generally with the Bravehearts team from Letchworth winning the "Team of the Year" award and Nick Winwood of Letchworth RFC winning the "Services to Sport" award.

The Ladies are celebrating!

– see page 2 to find out why





The Ladies team

The Ladies (“god bless ‘em”)

Hitchin Ladies were off to a flying start with Lucy Ward captaining the side in the Merit League. They began away in Welwyn with many ladies stepping onto the field for their very first time. Hitchin had a stormer and a 14-38 win set the tone for the season.

With membership snowballing from 6 to 32 a real team spirit began to evolve. Training numbers were consistently strong and Sam Brown and Dale Baines worked tirelessly to ensure the Ladies were all fit and developing skills weekly.

We entered the Cup, beating Stockwood Park, to then be knocked out in the following round by Crowthorne Ladies.

Half way through the season Lucy Ward became injured and so Megan Nash stepped up as Captain. Both Ladies did a wonderful job of training many new players and mentoring the team through the year. The development

has been significant and Sarah Bolter exemplified this winning the Most Improved Player Trophy.

None of this would have been possible without the strong support of all club members on Sunday afternoons, so the Ladies want to thank everyone profusely for their moral support and loud voices!

The Merit League was won fairly and squarely, winning 9 games out of 11. The Club have found some wonderful women in Hitchin and surrounding areas and look forward to next year, taking them all forward to the National Challenge 2, East 2 league.



Practice session

AGM and awards dinner

Officers elected at the Annual General Meeting held on 31 May included:

- *President:* Tim Jeffries
- *Club/1 XV Captain:* James Bolter
- *Chair:* Richard Lucas
- *Business chair:* Peter Tasko
- *Playing chair:* Jim Panter
- *Secretary:* Michael Emmerson
- *Treasurer:* Chris Jones
- *Chair of Women's rugby:* Lucy Kennedy
- *Chair of Mini & Youth:* Christophe Lavialle

Awards presented at the dinner earlier in the month included:

- *President's cup*
– *Team of the year:* The Ladies
- *Tony Else award*
– *most improved player:* Adam Howard
- *Wally Hazard trophy – Players' player of the year:* James Bolter
- *Women's Player of the Season:* Charley Hamilton
- *Women's Players' Player of the Season:* Susie Gajda-Hilton
- *Women's Most Improved Player:* Sarah Bolter
- *President's Salver:* Tim Bonnett



James Bolter



Tim Bonnett

“Tim is stepping down after 23 years on the Mini & Youth committee where he held several roles but is most respected for his unstinting efforts as Club Safeguarding Officer. As player, coach and committee volunteer, Tim has served his club with distinction and still does as County Chairman of Community Rugby and County Safeguarding Officer”

Tim Jeffries

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CHEF & BREWER

“It’s only Hitchin”

Firstly, let us not forget Sean Tomlinson, Club Member and active and loyal HRFC Coach who sadly died in April (see page 4) and Jimmy Hanafin at Luton RFC, Youth Fixtures, a genuinely nice guy only interested in the rugby and none of the politics, who passed away in February.

I am standing down as Chair of the Mini & Youth section. Having been initially recruited (press ganged) into Fixtures Secretary then volunteering to be the Chair of the section. Time to move on and retire again!

The past season/year, a tremendous amount of work done on the pitch with teams at all age groups punching above their weight in the various leagues, competitions and in the spirit of rugby on Tours including Ireland, France and Germany and friendlies with neighbouring clubs.

Interestingly as Chair of the Discipline Committee I am pleased to report that we have not had to convene this year, an excellent precedent to maintain.

Thanks to Martin Brace and Angela Gregory for their work on the fixtures, ensuring that all the teams across the spectrum have a variety of matches at Home and Away.

Perhaps also as importantly behind the scenes by the various Coaching Team members who all perform in quietly understated role in delivering top quality



Prize giving at Founders’ Day

Rugby for an ever increasing membership and attending courses in their own time.

Highlights of the year:

- Club Membership hits an all-time high (600+)
- We only lost one day due to snow for the Minis this year, the Youth teams (parents) cleared the lines and played on. The on-going pitch maintenance by Brian Baines is the subject of compliments from many visiting clubs that are continually surprised by “little old Hitchin”.
- The completion of excellent new changing rooms that allow us to offer equal changing facilities to members of any age/sex.
- The continuing support of our Sponsors, Hitchin youth Trust, NHDC and many others that we should

thank. Also, Mark Adamson for as co-ordinator prior to his standing down.

- Mangold Trophy: Mini & Youth award to the Club member with a major contribution to the section this year – **John Chaplin** – the Godfather of the Minis 230+ tour (invasion) of Hampshire.

Returning to my title, “It’s only Hitchin”, this was heard at a match at Youth Level when a visiting “big club” were on the receiving end of a beating by the Academy. In an effort to inspire his team mates the captain was heard to shout “Come on lads it’s only Hitchin!”

Well he was quite right but for the wrong reasons, it is only Hitchin RFC that provides the best of rugby in its true traditions on and off the pitch

John Walsh

A good year for the Academy

Another good year passes for the Academy with both our U18s and U17s performing well in Herts/Middx Division One for their age groups. This was also the first year where two teams from an age group came through the system with the U18Bs performing in division 4.

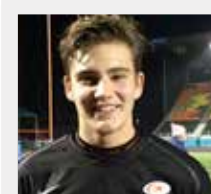
The Academy U18 team reached our furthest in the National Plate and also reached the LV Plate Final, losing to Barnet, following a memorable semi-final victory at Bury St Edmunds. County Cup results were good, eventually losing to eventual winners Bishops Stortford in the semi final. In the league, Bishops Stortford were beaten by Hitchin though!

Very pleasing to see was 19 U18 players playing senior rugby from 1st XV (Dan Holland) to our 4th XV. Hopefully they enjoyed the experience and certainly Dan Barnes did – the 3rd XV Player of the Season.

Tim Jeffries, Academy Chair



Connor Dudley



Zac Conley

Saracens honours for academy players

Two of our players are embedded in Saracens Academy squads.

After playing for Hertfordshire for two years, scrum half **Connor Dudley** (U16 next season) was selected for the new U15 Saracens squad where he has weekly skills and gym sessions. His first game was against Public Schools select squad, Lambs, but the highlight has been scoring against Bristol while captain.

Zac Conley (U18 next season) is in his second year and has been playing up a year group.

Training allows the Academy boys to mix with Saracens senior players and coaches and second row Zac has learnt much from line out coach Jim Hamilton.

Highlight for him was captaining Saracens against Lambs in a 32-5 victory and he is looking forward to playing against Ulster, Bath, Harlequins and Wasps early next season.



Academy squad for LV finals day



Officials and teams on LV finals day keep minute's silence for Sean Tomlinson

Hitchin Youth Rugby achieves european honours

Across the May bank holiday weekend an U14s side from Hitchin Rugby Club took part in a European Rugby Championship held in Frankfurt, Germany.

Hitchin and the hosts have built up a strong relationship via the RFU Unity Programme where English Clubs have been working with emerging rugby nations since before the 2015 Rugby World Cup.

From this relationship Hitchin were invited to join this prestigious tournament that that can boast participation from 9 countries with a number of national champions, including the unbeaten German champions and hosts Frankfurt.

With the pedigree and prestige around them the 21 strong squad from

Hitchin U14s entered the competition as underdogs, however they had different ideas and across a weekend of exceptional rugby and a team spirit that blew everyone away, the young lads from Hitchin came away heads held high, not just in the way they competed and represented themselves on and off the pitch but as Champions with an unbeaten run through the pool rounds and then throughout the knockout stages of the competition.

A special mention has to go to all the players who won huge respect from all the clubs with their attitude and ability, a true squad effort with everyone playing their part.

Hitchin RFC U14s... European Champions !



Hitchin fought off all comers





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Sean Tomlinson

We were shocked by the tragic and untimely death of one of our stalwart members recently. Sean Tomlinson, 50, died suddenly on Friday 29th April after playing Touch rugby for the Hitchin Grey Hogs (over 50s) at Allianz Park.

After completing several fun games that evening, the last against the England Over 45 Touch Team, Sean passed away at Mill Hill RFC. His teammates on the night recall the enjoyable atmosphere and camaraderie of the competition and are heartened by the pleasure Sean took from the games.

Sean had been an active member of Hitchin Rugby Club for 20 years. A former player and current U13 coach, he was known throughout the club as someone who loved the game and the people associated with it. Many younger players recall making their debuts alongside Sean and how he helped them graduate to adult rugby.

Such was his love of the game that he was selected to be a Lead Up and Legacy Ambassador for the Rugby World Cup last year and helped encourage successful participation in so many events locally that made the RWC such a success.

Sean's whole family are involved at Hitchin Rugby - his wife, Mandy, through Girls rugby and his children, Jack and Alice, as players.

The funeral took place on Tuesday 24 May at St Mary's Church, Hitchin SG5 1HP and was extremely well attended. This was followed by a reception/wake at Chesfield Downs Golf Club, where both Sean and Mandy were members.

A recent quote from Mandy, be it Water Polo or Rugby: "Sport; it's not the game you play but the friendships you make along the way." She added "We would like to thank everyone for their support over the last few weeks and for contributions to the 'Brighton Fund'"

If you feel able to contribute please do so via the following Just Giving crowdfunding page: _

Tim Jeffries, Hitchin Rugby President comments "We are so shocked and will miss Sean greatly. I have known Sean throughout my time at the club - he was a great guy, full of enthusiasm, fun, love of our game and more."

Our condolences to the family.



Guess who?



Just for fun: do you recognise these two Life members from their team photos?

VP's corner

We had four successful lunches this season, all well attended, with the St George's Day lunch on 23 April sold out in 4 days! And the bonus of seeing the 1 XV beat Datchworth to stay in the London NW3 league.



Martin Howard

It's too early to fix dates for 2016/17, but please reply early to your invitations to secure places.

Welcome to the following new VP's, elected since the last issue of *Club Points*:

- Alex Nicoll
- Phil Jeffrey
- Lucy Ward
- John Walsh



1 XV's Ross Merrliees on the charge against Datchworth

PETER THAIR – VP (Club Captain 1966-1968)

On Friday 6 May Richard Cracknell telephoned me with news of the death in Wales of Peter Thair. It saddened me greatly for in my lifetime I have met very few as reliable and honest as Peter.



Peter Thair

I first met Peter in 1965 in the Bucks Head Public House. He arrived on a Saturday evening with the words to the landlord "Alec, we can't get a team tomorrow".

Hitchin were due to play a game against Alec's club Hendon. Hitchin were at a low ebb.

The mood in the pub was such that sufficient players came forward to supplement the Club and the game was played.

My last game had been for Canterbury in 1956 when a serious car crash finished my playing career.

The experience against Hendon enthused me, despite outstanding difficulties. Let me illustrate them with three examples facing a young captain. Peter barely had 15 players let alone a team. When I attended my first AGM I learnt the bar had taken £169 that season and the players shirts still lay on the floor from the last game.

That is the situation from which the Club recovered with the notable contribution of Peter. A turning point for Hitchin.

40 years on, or possibly more, who do you think would travel six hours there and back to attend VP lunches?

Sport brings us, with luck, into sharing time and experiences with the likes of Peter.

We are fortunate to indeed have these memories.

B.A.J. (Brian) Chapman

Sponsors' dinner

This popular annual event was held in the club's marquee on 9th March, to say a big "thank you" to the club's sponsors for their support during the 2015/6 season. Over 140 sat down to eat drink and be merry!

Our own Doug Brooker was MC, introducing guest speakers, Hertfordshire's own Peter Baines, senior RFU vice-president, who takes over at Twickenham from Jason Leonard this month, England legend Jeff Probyn, and comedian Jed Stone.



Jeff Probyn



Jed Stone

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BACK 2 SCHOOL-IVAL

Hitchin 2016

Back2Schoolival will return to Hitchin RFC following its first successful event in 2015. Saturday 9 July will see Hitchin host both the Back2Schoolival tournament and the LV= Women's 10's tournament.

The morning will see ladies teams from around the county, and a few from further afield compete in the annual 10-a-side competition sponsored by LV=. Hitchin RFC ladies have entered a team so would appreciate the support as it offers a great chance to start the season with a bang and some silverware.

Then, in the afternoon, the Back2Schoolival tournament takes centre stage. Teams will be formed of ex students of the local schools. Last year 13 schools were represented from nine teams with 140 players taking part. We hope to beat that number this year! Stratton will be looking to defend their title while "home side" Hitchin Boys Old Boys will be looking to go one better and win the competition.

As Back2Schoolival tradition dictates the conclusion of the tournament will be followed by the after party. This year the marquee will take the shape of a Bavarian Beer Hall for the nights festivities. German Oompah Band the Edelweiss Allstars will fill the marquee with classic Bavarian music, while also throwing a German spin on modern classics.

With pre season for the seniors starting on Tuesday 5 July, this tournament is perfect time to test yourself ahead of the new season.



If you would like to get involved as a player, a spectator or a sponsor, you can contact Adam Howard on adam@back2schoolival.com

Schools Project

The club's outreach programme has continued delivery at the Priory School and has introduced rugby to a number of additional schools with an emphasis on rugby for girls. Our sponsors and donors include LV=, Herts County Council through the Locality Budget Scheme) and The Hitchin Youth Trust.

The club has been successful in being awarded a £10,000 grant from Sport England, to enable us to continue and expand our outreach programme. We continue to build community links in the local area and are very pleased that we will be able to continue to expand these programmes in the coming year. The continued generosity of our sponsors financially and our volunteers with time and resources is a great asset to the club, backing up the delivery of the programme by Adam Shaw and his team.

Adam Shaw, club coach, whose team delivers the schools' coaching programme



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- OLD MUTUAL WEALTH SERIES
- 12 November 2016
England v. South Africa*
- 19 November 2016
England v. Fiji
- 26 November 2016
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- 03 December 2016
England v. Australia*

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ANSWER: Did you guess right? Tim Millner (white shirts) and Chris Jones (striped shirts)