

Club points



News for Hitchin Rugby Club members

Issue 40 • April 2020

End of 2019-20 season

Following our triumphant 2018-19 campaign, the new season began on 30 June with a new Club Captain and plenty of new and returning faces.

Eight hard weeks of preseason preceded friendlies against Stockwood Park, Datchworth, Biggleswade and Bedford Athletic, resulting in a win, a draw and two losses. A disjointed performance in an opening 23-5 defeat at Tabard demonstrated the challenge that lay ahead in our return to the London leagues.

Our first win came in the fourth game at home against Kilburn Cosmos, and we were two wins from six after beating Finchley. Three tough losses followed, before a cup win over Enfield, our first away win at Harrow and a home victory versus Royston left us in 9th at Christmas.

The new decade began with an agonizing defeat at 4th placed Cheshunt, but a thumping win at Kilburn, a home walkover (OMT's) and a gritty victory at Finchley moved us into 6th place in the top half of the table.



Carwyn Morgan breaks clear at Tabard



A muddy day at Finchley

In the Cup we ran unbeaten West Norfolk close before they ran away with the semi-final in the last 20 minutes.

The 2XV turned in impressive wins over top of the table Hertford and second placed Finchley, but poor consistency in availability across the whole playing section has impacted on results, and we are currently lie 5th in Merit Table 3. The 3XV have played eight friendlies this season, winning three.

Ciaran Sale leads the club point scoring charts with 134 points, ahead of Ben Wiggins on 80 and top 1XV try scorer Will Evans.

J Akrill, Playing Chair



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MESSAGE FROM RFU CHIEF EXECUTIVE BILL SWEENEY



My thoughts and those of all of us at the RFU are with everyone impacted by COVID-19 as well as recent flooding events, both across the country at large but also within our own rugby union community.

In order to provide clarity and to assist with immediate and longer term planning, the RFU is today announcing the end of the 2019/20 rugby season for all league, cup and county rugby in England. The only exception to this is the Gallagher Premiership, who we are in active discussions with to review possible best next steps.

When current government advice on social distancing measures changes, we will naturally encourage rugby training and friendlies to recommence.

I would like to personally thank everyone for their swift actions in suspending rugby activity, this is not an easy time and I know many of you will have concerns that go beyond the game.

We are working through the implications of ending the season early and have instigated a thorough process to ensure fair and balanced outcomes for the game. We will communicate these outcomes by the middle of April. While we would like to provide all the answers now, we need some time to get it right for the best interests of the game. Rest assured we are working on this as a priority and we will continue to send weekly updates to clubs.

MINI & YOUTH

We have seen some phenomenal progress across all year groups in our Hitchin minis and youth section, with numbers growing and players showing great performances and enjoying playing rugby. I am particularly impressed with the way our rugby core values have been upheld. Well done!

U12's had a super Bedford festival and have shown great improvement and developed a team spirit together.

U11s have seen lots of individual progress at all levels on the pitch with an over 80% win rate!

U7s were awarded the fair play award in their first ever festival at Bedford Junior Blues, reflecting the values of our club, the way we coach and the way the children play.

U8s highlight away to Hertford showed just how well the kids have developed this season. The team was outstanding and had some really positive comments about the standard of their play.

U10s season was full of increased levels of team work and outstanding



Our fantastic under U10s

performances. Bishop Stortford Festival showed how much the players have made great progress with their development and to see them play as a group is fantastic.

U15s have had many highlights particularly the win against Ruislip, a strong team that beat us the season before. The match epitomised all we are trying to do, with strong defence and

tries coming from both the forwards and backs.

U13s have had a fantastic season consistently demonstrating high performance with the best clubs in the county. At the recent London Irish festival U13s continued this high standard both finishing top of their pool and showing they are great ambassadors for the club.



Mark Adamson

28 September 1962 – 16 November 2019

Mark was tragically killed in a road accident as he was walking back to his house in November last year. He was an under 18s coach and devoted father of Thomas and Mollie. His passing followed only a few weeks after his wife, Dawn, died after a long illness.

Mark was a former M&Y Vice-Chair of the Youth Section, who loved Hitchin Rugby Club and gave many years of support and service to the club. The M&Y Section and those in the club who knew him were deeply affected by his death and as tribute the M&Y Section held a minute's silence on Sunday 24 November.

A great number of people in the club wanted to show their respects for Mark and their love and support to Thomas and Mollie. In response, the club set up a Just Giving account for the children that within just a few days raised over £4,000 from over 100 donations.

Mark's sister, Nicola Ainger, wanted us all to know how moved the family was by the club's support and that they would be using the funds to take Thomas and Mollie on holidays over the next couple of years. Mark had planned to take them to Florence later this year and so this would be where they'd probably be going first.

Birant Osman, the M&Y Chair, paid tribute saying, "Mark was a wonderful man and devoted father who provided many years of support to us. We were all devastated by the sad news of his passing. As one of our own, who gave so much to the club he will be greatly missed."



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Ladies success creates two winning teams



Ladies squad 2019-20

This year has been another incredibly successful year for Hitchin Ladies, with the First XV topping the NC 1 Midlands league and the Second XV finishing third in the Women's Challenge Series South East (North).

Due to the unfortunate premature ending to the season as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is yet to be decided if promotion for both teams will be possible. Despite this, it has been a huge achievement for Hitchin Ladies to field two teams so successfully in the

first season of running a Second XV, made possible by the strong commitment from the playing squad and invaluable efforts of the coaching team.

Training continues to see strong attendance, with many players taking advantage of extra personal development sessions to improve their skills and fitness. Recruitment will again be a big focus for Hitchin ladies looking ahead to next season so that we can continue to grow our playing squad to feed into both teams.

Our success wouldn't be possible

without our wonderful coaches; Nat Mabbett, Clive Cramphorn, Adam Howard and James Donovan. Special thanks to head coach Nat who has made a real difference to our playing structure and brings out the best in the squad. We are very pleased to have him back with us next season.

Going forward, the squad hopes to hit the ground running for preseason in preparation for the potential challenge of championship rugby next season.

A year of fantastic growth for the girls section

27 @ U13 We have been using Instagram as our main social media platform growing significant interest and linking up with a number of schools.



In late November we ran a U13G schools festival. The rain heavy and the wind came in sideways.

But we had 60 girls from 4 schools having a great time, most of them playing their first-ever game of rugby on Hitchin's pitches.

The U13 had around 12 girls at the start of the season and ended with 27.

The growth continued with the U15s gaining enough players to field 2 sides, with players joining the club from schools in Stevenage and Letchworth.

The U18's had a full squad for the first time ever, and we played as a Hitchin side rather than clustering or sharing players from other clubs.

The 18s grew with new recruits and challenged well in the regional part of the National Cup.

All three age groups took part in the guard of honour and flag-carrying at the Women's international England v Italy held at Bedford Blues.



Some of the girls at the England v Italy game as guard of honour

Representative honours

U18G:

- 7 - Hertfordshire County Players**
- 4 - Saracens Centre of Excellence**
- 1 - Bedfordshire County Women's** (selected but never played because of COVID-19)

U15G :

- 8 - Hertfordshire County Players**
- 2 - Hertfordshire County Coaches**



Some of the U18 county girls

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VP'S CORNER

Hello Vice Presidents!

I trust that you are all keeping fit and well and that you are enjoying plenty of "gardening leave" right now.

It was a sad end to the season with us not being able to bid farewell over a drink or two at the VP lunch – and even worse for me in that I wasn't able to throw any insults at Tim Jeffries. Never mind, the time will come again and September will soon be here.

A discussion in the always entertaining Thursday Club the other week focussed on the longevity of the club, and I was surprised to be

reminded that Hitchin was first founded in 1865, disbanded in 1876 (was this due to competition caused by Charles Wells opening his brewery in Bedford, I wonder?) and then founded again in 1954.

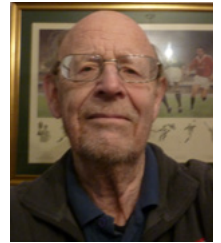
I'm not sure why I wrote about that, but I found it interesting anyway.

As ever, I look forward to seeing you all in the Autumn and remember – **keep smiling!**

Martin Howard



Life Member: Chris Jones



In self isolation!

We continue our series talking with our Life Members. This time we hear from the DNA of the club: Chris Jones.

When did you first join the club?

I moved to Hitchin in 1979 to find that Adrian Haigh, my wife's family doctor, lived across the road. Doc put two-and-two together (rugby player and chartered accountant) and within days I was in chairman Eddie Rawlings' front room being sworn in as club treasurer.

What playing positions have you played for the club?

Most of my playing career was with Old Stortfordians RFC (Bishops Stortford College Old boys) from December 1952 as Full back and/or fly half

At Hitchin I played full back for Keith Porters side, away against Amptill in 1979, but after a break from playing rugby of about four years, and on return to the clubhouse was seduced by a Herts county poster asking for referees! So spent a few years running around with a whistle, which I blew when I got tired

What club roles have you done?

For Old Stortfordians I was Team Secretary, Treasurer and Bar Manager.

For Hitchin I was Treasurer 1979-1985 and 1992 to date.

I took a few years off while involved with a management buy out of my company from a Scottish holding group.

I was also Team Secretary from 2008 for a number of years.

As Treasurer I've been a member of the Bar committee, Business committee, and Management committee – all as above dates.

Latterly, I was a founder member (with BAJC) of the KGV User Group, together with council members and councillors.

What were your proudest moments?

Being elected a Life Member in 1999, and President from 2001 to 2006, which coincided with the club's 50 years' celebrations, not to mention the 1XV successes during that period which brought promotion from Herts/ Middlesex 2 (deja vu).



Chris Jones receives VP of the Year 2019 trophy from President Gerallt Morgan

- Opening of new changing rooms in September 2015.
- Proudest club moment – being at Twickenham for the cup final in 1993.
- Proudest personal memory – recent EOS presentation of platinum hedgehog!

What do you like most about the club?

Has been a home-from-home for many years!

Great atmosphere and good social occasions, excellent bar! A marvelous mixture of men's rugby, women's rugby and the flourishing M&Y section. brings a real community feel to the club.

And your hopes for the club?

I hope and trust that the current position the club holds in the community is upheld, and the club remains the "club of choice" in the local area, and that we find success on the field a well, at all levels.

Floodlights

With the continued growth over the years in Mini & Youth (especially the Girls), the success of the Ladies now running two teams, and touch rugby, sorting out the available floodlit grass for mid-week training has become a real headache

Having sought and obtained planning permission to switch on the 1 XV and 2 XV floodlights simultaneously, we proceeded to investigate the necessary alterations to

the electricity supply. As the quotation we received was around £60K, we stepped back and took stock!

With the assistance of British Gas and Highlights Floodlighting Ltd we refigured the supply and metering and now have the ability to use both sets of lights at the same time, at a fraction of the above cost.

At the time of going to press, we await a Section 106 Monies claim with the council to cover these costs.

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Strange times...

Social distancing was not what I anticipated doing at this point in the season!

Our women's 1XV were topping their league, our men's 1XV had consolidated a secure position in the table to ensure a position for next year, mini and youth, both boys and girls were having great seasons and we were all looking forward to our end of season celebrations. Then of course the terrible and unexpected happens and we find our country in lockdown and our perspective on life refocussed in extreme.

Over the coming months

we will all face significant challenges, many of which we are ill prepared for. In this difficult period, I hope that we as a club can pull together to help and support each other. I know many of our younger members are already using social media platforms to stay in touch and this is something that I envisage spreading more widely through our membership in coming months. There are also several solid initiatives ongoing to support our membership. Richard Lucas is using his GoVox wellbeing platform to identify and

help members who need support and Adam Howard is co-ordinating support for members who are self-isolating or are otherwise unable to shop or carry out chores made impossible by our current circumstances. Please watch your email and social media feeds for details and updates.

The club is strongly placed to flourish when this is all over, we have sound finances, we benefit from charity status and hold a long term lease. We retain tremendous support from our sponsors and will emerge from this



Peter Tasko

cloud in a secure position to restart activities.

In the meantime, please stay safe and do not be shy in contacting me or any of the management committee if you need help or indeed just want a chat.

Peter Tasko, Chair



For the conversations that matter



govox is the online **mental health wellbeing** tool that helps you proactively pinpoint at-risk individuals and prioritise the conversations that matter.



shows your people you care

Asking people how they're doing in-person during an annual review is great, but we use the analogy that an annual appraisal is the equivalent of taking a bath once per year in relation to Mental Health and Wellbeing. Instead, we promote a culture of regularly checking in, in a non-intrusive manner, through a series of expertly-written questions. This will show your people that you care as you begin to prioritise the conversations that matter.

www.govox.co.uk/team-wellbeing

Sponsors' dinner

Unfortunately the dinner arranged for 18 March 2020 had to be postponed, due to the Coronavirus Outbreak.

RFU President Peter Wheeler had pulled out due to a hospital appointment, but President Elect Jeff Blackett had accepted

We hope that we can rearrange the event later this year, with both Jeff Blackett and popular comedian Ian Irving hoping to still be available. Watch this space!



HITCHIN TOUCH RUGBY

The Hitchin Hedgehogs are a Hertfordshire-based Touch Rugby group for men and women of all standards.

We formed ourselves a few years ago during one Summer where there was a lot of interest for out of season rugby

based activities and a core of us kept it going so we now have almost 200 members in our Facebook group. We meet every Weds at 7.30-8.30/9pm typically getting 50+ players at our weekly summer sessions, which we split into different groups depending on age and how serious people want to take it, and regularly between 20-30+ during the rest of the year.

A typical session is open play, split into a couple of groups if we have the numbers, with the basis being on fun and inclusivity. Men, Ladies and kids aged 12 and over welcome. We also enter various competitions and have a decent amount of success due to our 'unconventional' Touch strategy (we basically don't have one and just go and enjoy ourselves).

Hitchin Touch is perfect for absolutely anyone interested in meeting new people, getting fit, having a laugh and either staying involved, or getting involved in rugby. We have had players from the Senior XV teams and Ladies join in while recovering from injury and people new to the area who have started Touch and gone on to play contact for Hitchin. We are a completely inclusive club with opportunity for anybody to play any type of rugby from any age and ability, a lot of us are ex-players who still enjoy the social side and being part of the overall Hitchin Rugby community but who's bodies can't take the punishment anymore!

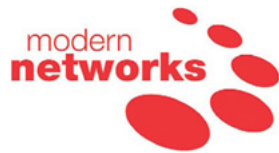
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