

DEVIZES RFC JUNIORS CHAIR END OF SEASON REPORT

A challenging season has ended on a high, with very well-supported celebration awards ceremonies held on 12th May and the situation looking much more promising for this September than it did 12 months ago. The good number of players successfully stepping up from the Colts to join the 'home grown' talent already in the senior men's teams in the last weeks of the season bearing testament to the value from maintaining and investing further in the Club's Junior set-up.

The season started ominously with new, inexperienced volunteers taking on the lead coach roles for the U6s, U8s, U10s, U13s and the Colts. The U11s then quickly imploded as the three coaches moved on to other things at little notice resulting in all the stronger players moved to other clubs. Things quickly got worse when initial access to Cricket 2 for the younger teams to train and then play matches on was withdrawn as the torrential autumn rain made the grass unplayable: this placed intense pressure on the remaining playing surfaces. Then in February the volunteer who had been providing superb catering for the Juniors had to significantly step back from the role; fortunately, not before the bulk of the home match meals had been cooked. At the top end of the Juniors the U17s last year were a small group so the Colts this season were a relatively young, new squad who faced a big task against more established teams. So, some difficult times from the start, on and off the pitch, for the Juniors but things have improved tremendously since.

At the forefront of the recovery on the pitch Andy Cook, the Club Schools Liaison Officer, and Paul Harding, the Club Coaching Coordinator, have collectively successfully invested a huge amount of effort into the teams above. The U11s continue and we hope will attract a good number of new recruits, including a girls-only group, through a primary schools' tournament the Junior Committee is leading on 10th June. The U8s, U10s and U13s have grown into remarkably healthy squads. The Colts have had the U16s training regularly with them for a while, which helped a few of the latter play up at the higher level for the last two games of the season where they gave a great account of themselves. Even at U6 things are looking good for September as we experimented with allowing some more mature U5s play, which turned out to be a great success and brought with it an established senior coach for the new season. With all bar one of the other age grade leads already filled by existing coaches, a number of whom are congratulated for recently completing their coaching awards, the Juniors will start in September with the rare benefit of an almost full set from the outset.

On the pitch whilst there may have been fewer trophies won this season; indeed, the U14s managed the best as close runners-up to Supermarine in the DW Cup, elsewhere there have been unexpected but well-deserved wins against much bigger outfits including Chippenham, Royal Wootton Bassett and Salisbury. Notable tours have been enjoyed by the U15s, U16s and Colts, which have really built team numbers; indeed, whilst the U11 implosion has meant overall numbers are slightly lower than last year, the U13s and upwards have really good strong squads, which bodes very well not only for next season but also the future of the Club.

The lack of playing space if Cricket 2 is to remain unavailable for the foreseeable future and is a constraint for the Juniors. Even with the careful coordination of fixtures, there became a need to run three consecutive sessions a day several times this season; placing more stress than usual on the grass and the maintenance of it; furthermore, the aspiration to build representative girls teams in the older age groups will be difficult to realise with the limited space available. On the positive, having the bar open for every Junior home match has made a significant difference to the ambiance of the Club and been much appreciated. Establishing a new catering solution on a Sunday, which is not dependent on parent volunteers to run, would be a significant further step forward.

In conclusion, it has not been a remarkable year in terms of results on the field but the processes of consolidation then building have gone really well. The net result is that the Juniors end the season with healthy player numbers, a supporting cast of engaged parents already looking forward to the restart in September and a strong coaching base to take things forward into the new season.

Chris Long, Junior Chair

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