



## **Buckinghamshire RFU DOR Report 2023/24**

Another rewarding year of county invitational rugby draws to an end, as I summarise many of the key achievement's that have been highlights of the season I reflect on how fantastic it was to see so many new faces in and around the county training sessions, all potential county players working hard to gain selection into their respective squads, this year has been exceptional in many areas.

With the girls U16 DPP and 18's, the good work that started last year was replicated throughout this season with the girls U16's ERDPP, maintaining a squad size of circa forty players with new players coming through and completed their targeted ten sessions focusing on talent development and the explore phase of learning the game of rugby. Culminating in three playing opportunities against Middlesex, Berkshire and Warwickshire towards the second half of the season went well.

To broaden the scope of learning there were some initiatives developed including a specialised kicking session to add depth to the coaching sessions.

With sixteen of last years U16's squad moving into the girls U18's this was a real success and boosted competition for places. This season all three playing opportunities were completed for the U18's with a rewarding home win against a very competitive Dorset & Wilts squad.

Girls chairman Lynne Edhouse has decided to step down from her role this season after many years of guiding girls into Bucks rugby. Both U16's ERDPP and U18's have seen the benefits of Lynne's vision and determination to progress the game within the county. Thankyou very much Lynne for your dedication and commitment you have shown over the years. Gary Lee the U18's manager has also decided to step down this season, I thank you too Gary for your commitment and leadership. Dan Lock our ERDPP Manager has stepped into the role of Chairman (Girls) we also welcome Peter Tebbutt as the new ERDPP Manager and I wish them every success in their new roles developing the game within the county.

The boy's U17 team kicked off their season against Berkshire, it was a tough introduction to representative rugby! but a good learning opportunity. Next up was Oxfordshire, a dominant performance, resulting in a good win. The last weekend saw a road trip to Gloucestershire, a game of two halves, Bucks definitely won the 2nd half, despite losing it was a good all round team performance, and set us well for the U18's later in the year.

The U18's had another good year, following three matches at Hartpury College, five players selected for the long squad, with three making it into the final the South West Divisional squad, one of which has since signed for Bath. A great achievement for all the boys involved reflecting their dedication and commitment throughout the program.

The Bucks Cup & Plate competition was another showcase of the talent within Buckinghamshire. A big thank you to Bletchley RFC (Bucks Plate Final) and Marlow RFC (Bucks Cup Final) for hosting the exciting finals, which provided a memorable experience for players and spectators alike.

### **Bucks Cup Winners**

Amersham & Chiltern RFC U14. Amersham & Chiltern RFC U15. Amersham & Chiltern RFC U16

### **Bucks Plate Winners**

Milton Keynes RFC U14. Buckingham RFC U15. Buckingham RFC U16.

With the senior ladies were looking to carry on from last season's successes, a well-attended, structured training program was developed and delivered going into the first game, a selected squad of thirty players predominantly from the clubs who have fed into the county in previous seasons. The first and second games were a challenge where the squad didn't seem settled and the cohesion wasn't as evident as previously experienced however in the third and last game this was soon put to rights with a very strong performance against a young and building Berkshire squad. Great performances with strong leadership qualities from some of the squad stalwarts was evident again and although the dominance over the competition was not quite replicated valuable experience and lessons learnt to be carried into next season.

The gains made in recent years with our senior men's rugby built an anticipation this season we would continue to nurture the positive trend. However, we experienced a slow start in part due to end of season congestion with cup competitions and bad weather culminating in the first training session being cancelled due to a waterlogged training pitch. The impact resulted in low training numbers initially but began growing as we moved through April and player buy in began to bite, reflecting handsomely at the attractive and engaging training sessions being delivered by the coaches. In previous seasons we have been continually focused on identifying capable new and young players for the senior squad this was proving successful with seven teenagers training and competing for selection.

There has been an air of camaraderie building in and around the squad which led to some great performances on the field and produced the most successful senior men's season for a while, winning our first game against Essex, dominating and winning the third game for 75mins, then a lapse of concentration cost us five points and resulted in a loss in the last game against Sussex by one point, so close to winning two of the three games but reflects the potential in this squad of players, with the support from so many clubs throughout the county will go on to achieve great results I am sure.

It was an absolute pleasure to be able to present Jorge Gomez with his Bucks RFU cap for reaching his eight appearances for the county. The game against Essex saw our senior mens manager Ed Baildon and his son Will make selection and play together, the news made it to the RFU website.

None of the accolades and successes would be realised without the dedication of the many volunteers who work tirelessly to ensure rugby is played and enjoyed at county level, a special thank you in particular to the U16/U17/U18 coaching and management teams for producing the young players we see now filtering through into senior rugby but to **all** on a personal level thank you, the physios, managers, coaches and admin teams that have turned up, worked hard, come rain or shine at all levels to make it happen, your knowledge, commitment and dedication is remarkable, the future looks bright for Bucks RFU.

Thankyou

Andrew Blake

Director of Rugby Bucks RFU Ltd



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