



Tarleton Rugby Union Football Club

Round Up – Season 02/03

The following is a brief summary of how the teams fared in Season 02/03:

First XV

Tarleton 1st XV has set new standards this season. At the time of writing, there are innumerable highlights to the season. The side has set new records whilst winning the North West B Teams League having only had one league defeat all season.

Over 830 points have been scored, whilst in the league only an average of 7 points a game have been conceded. This has to be a point of special praise for the defence throughout the season where each and every player has been exceptional.

The specific game highlights have to be a double over the reigning champions for the previous three seasons, Preston Grasshoppers and in a spectacular display of running rugby the 65-5 demolition of a very good Vale of Lune side.

On an individual viewpoint, many players have had outstanding seasons. It seems unfair to specifically name players when others have created their chances, but to set the records for future years the leading try scorer in the backs is currently Jim Goulden with 16, whilst in the forwards, Kev Strange, 1st team captain, has contributed 15 tries.

Leading points scorer for the season is the evergreen Mark Powell who has amassed 189 points and this included a club record 30 points in one game.

A special note also for the club captain John Sutton and Nick Brown who, both on and off the field, have contributed a great deal to the success of the season.

At the start of the season we set out with the target of winning the title for the first time. It is known a number of people were sceptical of the ability of the side and what they might achieve. The players have very firmly made all those people eat their words.

However, we must look to the future. We have been accepted into the RFU leagues and start next season in North Lancs Division 2. We have also been invited to the North Riding Senior Sevens in Scarborough an event to which the likes of the Samurais, Crusaders and Wakefield have been invited. This is a great honour for Tarleton and one which we should use to celebrate our season as well as testing ourselves against players of proven quality.

Gordon Humphries

Under 15s

The under 15s have had a good season, which peaked around February when the squad was playing exhilarating 15 man rugby and rolling aside decent sides such as Ormskirk, Blackburn and Caldervale.

A run in the Lancashire plate ended in March against Waterloo in the semi-final, the team conceding the lead in the last minute of a pulsating cup-tie.

The delays around getting this fixture on caused by weather and Waterloo ensuring they were at full strength, disrupted what could and should have been a more successful season in terms of results. Four games were lost on a single conversion.

Having said that, despite having to work with a small squad of 17 core players, we proved competitive with all opposition. Our aim next season will be to increase the squad size and to gain



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full commitment from everyone to set more ambitious goals for ourselves at under 16.

I would like to thank Ben Traynor for his commitment and leadership as captain and to all the players for their support, loyalty and humour. Special thanks to Dean Greenwood for his able assistance on the coaching front. "top drawer" and "now we're cooking" have become part of our vocabulary. My thanks also to the Pedleys for stepping into the team management breach and parents for transport and kit washing.

Hugh Paterson

Under 14s

Initially having lost 8 players from a squad of 20 and the head coach, the 2002/03 season was always going to be a difficult one. New players were recruited - all of whom had never touched a rugby ball in anger before and have turned out to be some of the best players the team has ever had. Despite having had an inexperienced team who gave their utmost and performed 100%, we have been very unlucky in most of our matches, losing very closely fought games by the matter of a try or two.

Our outstanding performance of the year was against local rivals, Preston Grasshoppers B team, who we have never beaten in the past. It was, therefore, particularly pleasing to win this match in a season of high endeavour and a steep learning curve.

This season has been about rebuilding and we can proudly boast a squad of 20/21 players. The team's spirit and commitment is second to none and we look forward to the 2003/04 season with real optimism.

Myself, Boris and Tony have enjoyed coaching this season- keep up the good work and let's look forward to some much deserved victories next season.

Steve Bradley

Under 13s

The step up from mini to junior rugby can be a daunting one. At junior level the game is played closely to the full game including playing on a full size pitch, handoffs, a full 8 man pack and a full 15 man team. However for this years U13 the step up has not been a problem at all, in fact this is possibly the best season they have had for a long, long time.

With using a full size pitch the players have enjoyed the wide-open spaces to run at defences that on a number of occasions has produced some memorable tries. The forwards doing all the hard work, driving the ball down the field with the backs finishing off in style. It would be wrong to name individuals for their work because on the whole this has been a team that has played together and won games for each other.

This has been a season of firsts for us, the first time that we have had 50 points scored against us (Vale of Lune twice) and the first time that we have scored over 50 points against a team. It was also the first time we entered the Lancashire Cup. After being knocked out by Vale of Lune we managed to reach the semi-final of the Lancashire Plate which was lost to Fleetwood, who we beat at the start of the season, having to borrow four of their players to make the numbers up. Revenge will be sweet on the last game of the season.

Over the course of the 2002/03 season I believe that the U13 should have won all of their games (Vale of Lune being the notable exception) but unfortunately on more than one occasion the opposition were let back into the game.



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Over all this has been a very good season for the U13 and looking forward to next season I hope all the players will return so that they can continue the good work they have done so far.

Nick Wetherall

Under 12s

The under 12s have again had a fantastic season. As a team of 'Under 12s' they have been beaten only twice. The first was against Vale of Lune and the second against Preston Grasshoppers in the semi final of the Vale of Lune Festival.

The boys have particularly grown in stature and the biggest credit made by all coaches of opposing sides is that they do not believe the team are an Under 12s side. On many occasions we have got into dispute this season with claims that we are illegally playing over aged players. Of course this is not the case and we fully abide by the continuum. The boys are a very well disciplined side and play with skill, confidence, guts and flair.

As previously mentioned, the boys gave a fantastic performance at The Vale of Lune Festival and reached the semi final, being beaten by Preston 2-1. I personally believe we could have won the game apart from a lack of inner belief about how good the boys believe they really are!

The season was brought to a fitting conclusion when the team won the Rochdale Tournament. We really cannot wait for the 15 man game next season.

Thanks to Mick Frankland, Steve Robinson and a terrific set of parents.

Steve Wood

Under 11s

The under 11s have battled on bravely this season despite changes in the coaching team You may recall that Tim Caslake took on the role of coach from the beginning of the season. However, due to College work, he had to reduce his commitment and Mick Frankland kindly agreed to take over the team in order to give them some kind of stability. I know that they have had some really good training sessions, addressing the basic skills. Gordon Humphries and Jonathan Skofic have also been adding their support to the team. Development of the squad will probably reap rewards next season rather than this.

Despite these changes, the squad has kept together remarkably well and credit should be given to the boys for sticking at it, despite some heavy losses along the way. Long serving players such as Richard Wood, Max Ashcroft, Liam Nickson, Russell Halton, Joe Bullen and Jack Kelly have continuously fought hard with new players joining such as Matthew Bird and Scott Counce.

We hope that these boys will keep together for what, we are sure will be a very successful season next time. Well-done boys and Keep Going!!

Under 10s

The season started positively with an influx of new players. We now have a squad of around 15/16 players, which means we have been able to approach fixtures with the certainty that we would have a full team - a luxury we had only a couple of times last season.

Many of the new players had not played rugby before and it has been a steep learning curve.

With contested scrums and line-outs for the first time this season there has been a lot to take in, even for the small number of old stalwarts. The squad has shown great commitment with additional Wednesday night training sessions being well attended - often in poor weather



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conditions.

The under 10s have had a difficult season so far - coming up against sides that always seem to be physically bigger and stronger teams. That said the squad has shown great spirit with many players starting to relish the physical side of the game.

After initial heavy defeats against Southport and Aldwinians the team began to gel. Having lost heavily away to a big and robust Southport 12 tries to nil at the start of the season the return fixture at Edge Hill a few weeks later was a narrow 7 tries to 4 defeat. The Southport coach commented on the massive improvement in the team's performance.

The side is yet to post it's first victory of the season, but the spirit and commitment of the squad remains high. Another strong performance against Sedgely Park confirmed that the squad has the potential to 'break their duck'. Week in and week out the squad work hard in training and give their all on the pitch.

They are a credit to themselves and their parents in the way that they get stuck in against what are often very mature looking under 10s from other clubs. Mike and Alastair are convinced that with continued hard work and a diet of three shredded wheat and raw meat this can be a group of players who will start turning narrow defeats in to good victories.

Alastair Skelton

Under 9s

The season started well for the 9s as they put together a ten match unbeaten run. There were some good wins, Southport 75-5 and Blackburn 55-15. However, it was not the high scoring or the wins which were so special, it was the meanness of the defence. In our first thirteen matches we only conceded seventeen tries and the hard tackling came from all the players, not just a few. This was the main reason why we only lost two matches this season.

The two matches we lost taught us the most, what we were doing wrong and we learned and changed the way the team played. Preston was the first team to beat us, 10-5. It was as close as the score suggests with the winning try coming in the dying seconds. The other team to beat us were Leigh. Again it was close, 15-25, the loss to Preston was the team's first for just over a year and it made us think about our style of play. We changed and this would not have been possible had we not had such good players. This is a team that has been building over the last four years, that has won festivals and lost them, one which has been well behaved and well received. It makes you proud to hear other team's parents and coaches saying "they are a really good team" when you walk off the pitch. We hope that we will be able to continue this high standard in future seasons, but if we don't, then well just have some fun trying.

HIGH POINTS OF THE SEASON-

Seeing the team grow and the lads forming friendships through their rugby.

LOW POINTS OF THE SEASON-

The constant changing of the fixtures and turning up to matches to find you have no team to play.

THANKS TO STEVE WOODS

For his help over the seasons, for his time and commitment to the club. Sometimes people don't get the credit they should.

THANKS TO SARA PEARCE

Our team manager for collecting the subs and doing the paper work.

THANKS TO PAUL CROMACK

For his help with the coaching over the seasons and his time and commitment on those cold wet days. For keeping control of me when we are not doing the business and most of all for getting a



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word in edge ways when I'm talking rugby again. But most of all, for his friendship and ideas when mine have dried up.

THANKS TO THE PARENTS

For getting the lads to the matches, for paying the subs, kit, petrol and for the time that you give when it would have made more sense to stay in bed. I hope we have given you a little back in our matches.

THANKS TO THE PLAYERS

For listening, learning and doing what we ask you to do, plus the things that you just make up as we play. You've made us all smile and proud again. The fifteen set plays learnt and put to good use. I hope that you have enjoyed it and that you all come back for more next season.

Steve Whittingham

Under 7s and Under 8s

These two teams operated as a combined squad this season, largely due to the age mix of the players. Out of the squad of twenty-two children only five were under eights the remainder were under sevens or younger.

For the sevens, the high point of the season has probably been completing the double over local rivals Southport, winning six nil at Birkdale and then completing a narrow four tries to three win at Sporting Edge in the return fixture. Their low point is without doubt having a total of eleven postponed fixtures.

For the eights there have been quite a few highlights; the double over Southport, the twelve tries to one victory over Collegiate, and most recently the victories over Bolton and Cockermouth. But pride of place must go to the double registered against our sporting rivals Ormskirk RUFC who were roundly beaten six tries to four and then on their own dust bowl by sixteen scores to ten.

Their only low points have been when poor displays cost them matches against Leigh and Altrincham, whilst the defeat at home to a very talented and mature West Park side was one step too far for our "young" eights side.

In summing up I would issue two challenges for next season, one for the players and one for the club;

The players who remain at under eights next season must go out and build on this season's achievement. Consolidate on what they have learned, then add the skills and nous to produce a team to be reckoned with next year.

The club needs to recruit some more players to enable the hand full of players who move up to nines next season to field a team and thereby continue to enjoy playing this great game.

Andy Sutcliffe