

Cronk-Cunis 2014

National U21 Rugby Festival



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A couple of seasons ago I was at the National School Seven's tournament when I was approached by Tim Cunis who is the joint founder of the Cronk-Cunis Cup, a national 15 a side U21 tournament held on the August Bank Holiday at the Richmond Athletic ground in south west London. It is a tournament designed primarily for public school old boys' sides to try and further cement the links that they have forged by bringing them back together to play



rugby for a couple of years after leaving school, hopefully to keep them going after that!

He was interested in recruiting RHS and I was interested in getting a side together. As things transpired it was the following season, after we had a successful OB Rugby at School and Jack Cantelo, my eldest, who had been 1st XV captain and was now in his final year of eligibility that we managed to generate interest for this fixture.

After a lot of drum banging at various school events and a Facebook drive, we managed to fix about 25 names who said that they would be able to play, as is unfortunately often the case this fell down to about 20 with 48hrs to go and much frantic ringing around by Jack. There were a variety of excuses, some more flaky than others, but the prize had to go to James Kerr who unfortunately broke his ankle the night before.



A few of the lads joined the pre-tournament training session at my house on the Sunday, with excellent guidance in proper sports nutrition.



So, somewhat in trepidation, we set out early on the Bank Holiday morning with our fingers crossed that all who had finally promised would show up and we would be able to field a team. On arrival it was clear that RHSA, in true Holbrook spirit, would not be thwarted by the near monsoon conditions as by 0915 we had at least a full side and a couple spare! The team list read like a Saturday detention record book but at least we would take the field!

The following are to be applauded for making the team sheet: Ben Allday, Angus and Monty Beaton, James Buckland, Josh Butt, Jack and Matthew Cantelo, Nat Carroll, Cam Cullen, Will Dodds, Ollie Gerard-Pearse, Luke Jones, Adam McGlynn, Ben Moore, Jack Morelli, Seb Pedley and Charlie Stuart. Rhys Evans came along with boots if required, but with imminent Royal Marine selection he was held in reserve should we be really desperate! Sam Cantelo was dying to get on but as the rules were quite clear about the minimum age for players he had to be content with the very important role of waterboy and general gopher, which he performed admirably.

Following an extensive(!) warm up we took the field for the first round of the Cup competition against Kings College, Taunton and after the first scrum, where we pushed them back 10m, we knew we were not out of place in this tournament. The referee decided that we were so dominant that it was only safe to go to uncontested scrums and after about 5 minutes of unstinting pressure, Angus Beaton broke through for a try from half way (or thereabouts)The pressure continued throughout the match, but we were unable to cross the line again mainly due to the appalling conditions having an effect on our finishing. The score remained 7-0 and we were through to the second round!

Our second round match was against St Paul's, London on the main pitch in front of the almost packed grandstand. St Paul's were a well drilled side who were used to playing together and managed to use the width of the pitch to best advantage, scoring a try early in each half which we were unable to match despite the roars of encouragement from the travelling fans in the stand. This meant we were moved into the Bowl competition.

Our first match in the Bowl was against Rydal, from Penrhos and surprisingly for a school from Wales, they seemed not to adapt to the torrential rain quite as well as RHSA who ran in four unanswered tries from Angus Beaton (again) Matt Cantelo (almost the whole length of the pitch, apparently...), Monty Beaton and Ollie G-P. This victory secured us a place in the Bowl semi-final.

The next match was against Old Whitgiftians. Whitgift School is a well known rugby school whose alumni make up about 80% of Old Whitgiftian RFC, a well supported rugby club in London, this meant that the team were playing together regularly in the Surrey RFU leagues.

This challenge was a stiff one and the lads were well up for it and an early try from Matt and a penalty from Ben Allday were enough to keep the Whitgiftians at bay, despite a late surge from them seeing them going over for a try in the dying seconds of the match.

So, the RHSA team were in a final. Albeit the Bowl, but the Bowl had seen teams such as Millfield and Dulwich perish this year. Our opponents in this match were Wellington College. Wellington had a large squad and were fitter, faster, stronger and better technically than our, by now, exhausted warriors so it was no surprise that they were able to run in several tries before Ben Allday managed a consolation try in the final moments of the game. However, if points were awarded for playing in the spirit of the game, then one of the sides would have had none. And it wasn't RHSA....

And so the RHSA side ran out Bowl finalists in their inaugural entry in this prestigious competition. That is no mean achievement by anyone's standards, but throughout the tournament people were asking "who are RHS?", and not in a bad way! The spirit in which we played, open rugby with a keen competitive edge and never say die attitude impressed many neutrals, won us many friends and we have a firm invite for next year's competition.

After the rugby was done the lads went off for a well earned shower and traditional changing room tinny, but on the way stopped off for a photo opportunity in their training tops by the Richmond FC/London Scottish War Memorial.



I would like to close by saying a few thankyou's. First of all to the lads who turned out on one of the most miserable days of the year to play in a cup that none had even heard of last year and yet did so in a manner to make all connected with RHS proud. To Jack Cantelo who did most of the hard work in recruiting those lads. To Aimee Frankham and the RHSA who provided the boys with lunch, ties, and the kit to play in. To the matrons of Collingwood and St V who made the long trip to lead the not inconsiderable support, whom I also thank. To Mrs Cantelo for washing the kit, and finally to our anonymous benefactor whose very

generous donation paid for the training tops, pre and post match 'refreshments' and a whole lot of other stuff that helped on the day.

We will return next year and Ben Moore has happily accepted the job as RHSA XV Captain for Cronk-Cunis 2015.