

THE FIRSTS

Once again, Templeogue College came to the rescue of St. Mary's and in particular the 1st XV, when allowing the club use their facilities when Templeville Road proved unplayable. So the Old Wesley friendly which had "cancellation" written all over it was eventually played and our sincerest thanks go to Templeogue College. Incidentally that Old Wesley game which took place on the 28th January saw the number of players used by the firsts this season rise to 51. Quite a number of players have made their debut this season so the post-match dressing room has been echoing to the nervous sounds of the debutants traditional first match song!

As we approach the final four-match run in to the AIL we find ourselves in perhaps a stronger position than we may have hoped for at the beginning of the season. All thoughts of relegation are well and truly banished as we set our sights on consolidating our position close to the top of the league, ever hopeful that Shannon may still slip up.

This season has not been an easy one for the first team management nor indeed for the players. The usual arguments and debate have arisen with regard to club versus province. The long series of inter-provincials totally disrupted the AIL and made it virtually impossible to keep players at their peak during the stop-start winter months. In one 17-week period from the 15th October to the 11th February we had just one AIL fixture, that against Old Wesley.

As a club, we are obviously delighted to see so many of our players honoured at representative level. This year proved to be no exception with 11 of the first team and quite a number of this year's and last year's Under 19s being selected for various squads. As mentioned, this is to be welcomed as it allows players an opportunity to perform at a higher level and this can only improve their game. On the negative side the long absence from competitive football for the team, with many players not available week after week, didn't allow the first team management an opportunity to develop the squad as they might have wished.

Incidentally, there is a possibility next year of re-introducing the Leinster Senior League to be played at a time when AIL matches are not scheduled. We as a club welcome this and any other changes which we feel will be beneficial to both club and players.

Because of the problems already mentioned, it is very difficult to analyse the first team performance during the course of the friendly season. In total this year we have won more games than we have lost and scored more tries, conversions and penalties than we

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shannon	6	6	0	0	116	28	12
Blackrock	6	5	0	1	124	69	10
St Mary's	6	5	0	1	102	76	10
Garryowen	6	3	0	3	104	71	6
Instonians	5	3	0	2	72	56	6
Constitutions	5	3	0	2	79	81	6
Sunday's Well	6	2	0	4	63	88	4
Dungannon	5	1	0	4	54	74	2
Old Wesley	5	1	0	4	48	91	2
Lansdowne	5	1	0	4	73	129	2
Young Munster	5	0	0	5	35	107	0

have conceded. Interestingly we have yet to register a drop-goal. This means of scoring must be a secret trick to be used later in the season when the going gets tough!

For the statisticians among you, the record shows that we have scored 57 tries, 29 conversions, 53 penalties and conceded 39 tries, 20 conversions, 42 penalties and 2 drop-goals.

In the AIL the 1st XV have done us proud. Having lost our opening game to the probable league winners – Shannon – the team stormed back into contention with successive wins over Instonians, Sunday's Well, Cork Constitution, Young Munster and Old Wesley. No matter what way you look at it this team's AIL performances have been stunning, five wins from six played. Three away victories out of four. Travelling to Cork twice in eight days and winning both. Four of our first five games against Munster opposition and laying the Young Munster bogey. And all of this, with a new, inexperienced and young team!

The captain and management are under no illusions as to what lies ahead. There is no such thing as an easy AIL game. However a huge amount of effort and work both on and off the field has gone into preparing for the final game not only by the players and management but also a small army of others behind the scenes who help in various ways from selectors to advisors to intelligence gathers etc. Truly a team performance . . . long may it continue.

Brendan Spring

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Director of Rugby.

RUGBY MATTERS

We all remember the huge haul of silverware we collected last season. While it is still far too early to make predictions as to whether we can emulate that success this season, we could not have asked for a better position to be in coming to the various league playoffs. Except for the AIL, every league including the Under 19s is divided into sections from which the leaders emerge and qualify for the final knock-out stages. All of the St. Mary's league teams, cruised through their sections to qualify with ease. Actually, that is not exactly true as the J1s had to do it the hard way winning in Greystones after extra time. It is especially encouraging to see the J1s do so well as they, probably more than any other team, have suffered the most amount of disruptions due to 1st XV calls on their players during a very long series of Interpros. It is vitally important that our J1s do well because by so doing the players on the team keep the pressure on the first team squad. Everybody benefits.

The J2s won all of their league games in qualifying for the knock-out stages from a section which included traditionally strong teams at this level such as Old Wesley and Blackrock. Indeed, this team is unbeaten against all Leinster competition and seems to get stronger by the week.

Sammy Brennan's team, having lost their opening friendly of the season have won every single game since then at J3 level. They had a particularly strong league section which among others included Greystones, Lansdowne and Terenure, but came through it surprisingly easy in the end. Sammy has gathered a particularly strong management structure around him including such notables as Paddy Demery, Niall Woodcock and Pat O'Brien.

Del Boy is the happy captain of the J4s who have won every match they've played this season. This team too boasts a particularly strong management structure with John Boyle, David Hernan and Mick O'Connor all combining to ensure that the team delivers its best on the day. And it does! There are no easy league sections but the J4s came through after a succession of immense battles. Although their league section includes Wanderers and Trinity, their toughest moments came on the back pitch against Aer Lingus and Terenure. Whilst the gritty dour victory over Aer Lingus warmed the heart, the club performance of the season must surely go to Del Boy's team for their recent league victory over a powerful Terenure fifteen on a cold, dark, wet Sunday afternoon in Templeville Road.

Junior 1 League Section B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1. Lansdowne	6	5	0	1	136	67	10
2. Greystones	6	5	0	1	100	38	10
3. St. Mary's College	6	5	0	1	119	59	10
4. Dublin University	6	2	0	4	96	110	4
5. Clontarf	6	2	0	4	87	160	4
6. Bective Rangers	6	1	0	5	71	108	2
7. Monkstown	6	1	0	5	31	98	2

Junior 2 League Section 'A'

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1. St. Mary's College	6	6	0	0	273	47	12
2. Blackrock College	5	3	0	2	96	75	6
3. C.Y.M.	5	3	0	2	83	115	6
4. Old Wesley	5	2	0	3	74	72	4
5. Monkstown	5	2	0	3	39	107	4
6. Coolmine	5	2	0	3	58	139	4
7. Ashbourne	5	0	0	5	35	105	0

The J5s and J6s have Mick Thornton and Pat Fogarty captaining teams which have had mixed fortunes so far this season. There are no leagues involved at this level so the friendly matches take on significant importance as they build up towards their respective cups. Donal Swift and Mick O'Leary have put a huge amount of coaching and organisational work into place to ensure that we will be competing strongly by the first round of the cup.

Special mention must go to Karl Jennings and his Under 19s who qualified from their section of the McCorry League Cup which included the eventual winners - UCD. Although the team gradually strengthened and improved during the season, it met a very powerful Blackrock pack in the semi-final, who proved just too good on the day. The team has now dispersed and the players have had the effect of considerably strengthening all the other teams from J1 level down.

Why we are having this level of success is difficult to say. One key ingredient is the high level of individual coaching where we have a programme of about 22 players each of whom have an individual mentor who watches the player on a number of occasions and reports back to him to improve various aspects of his game. The rugby council is indebted to these mentors and to the overall co-ordinator - Victor O'Connor. Indeed both D. O'Brien, (the coaching co-ordinator) and Victor have recruited an astonishingly large number of senior players from the past and the present to help with this programme and already the results are evident on the field of play.

With regard to refereeing, St. Mary's is to the fore and has recently added John McPhilipps, John Pyne, Alastair Sutton and Shane Tracey to the impressive list of referees set out in the membership card. Any more budding referees or individual coaches would be greatly welcomed by the Rugby Council.

As we pause to consider the second part of the season which includes the knock-out stages of the league and the cup, we can congratulate ourselves on achieving our pre-season objective to safely come through to the knock-out stages of every league. Well done to all concerned.

Brendan Spring,
Director of Rugby.