

## **Match Report**

### **Girls crowned U15 Rugby 7s Champions at Prestigious National Tournament**

Report by Nick Kerswell, Science teacher and Girls' Rugby coordinator:

It was an early start, but a bright one, bumping into a former Ivybridge Community College Rugby Alumni, Fergus Farrell, at breakfast, who was delighted to see us there as he recalled his time at the College back in 2003.

On arrival we set up camp and then started to prepare for our first match, which seemed to be very quickly upon us. The girls were busy soaking up the sun and the atmosphere, as the sponsor-laden tops of numerous rugby teams drifted past in vast numbers.

Our first opponents in the pool stages were Bryn Celynnog Comprehensive School. We were nervous in the first few games, and although we were moving the ball around confidently, as the tackles were made it was clear we were going to have to be more fierce around the breakdown and distribute the ball faster from the base of the ruck and scrum. The girls showed good resilience though, and shook off a few tries scored against them and continued to do their thing. With confidence growing and the ball being retained, we were able to release our pace on the wings. We emerged from the pool stages victorious and top of the group.

In between matches, the girls enjoyed the incredible weather and the lively centre of the tournament around the main pitch, with all of the sponsor's tents, sports performance stands and foods outlets. Even off the pitch they remained sharp though, and a photo opportunity with England Rugby stars Lewis Ludlow and Lewis Moody was not going to be missed. We found ourselves gathering around the main pitch with its cameras, spectator stands and commentary teams for our semi-final game. I knew they could make it this far, they were confident all day, but it still seemed very unreal. Our semi-final opponents were Glantaf College. They had looked good all day. We had just seen them beat a very good team in the pool stages and the boys had always met fierce opposition when they had travelled to Wales to play them; this was going to be our toughest challenge yet. The girls huddled, and Megan and Maddie were given instruction to share some of their focus and passion with the whole squad - not to just enjoy it, not to just go out there and do their best, this was it – this was about the win.

Both teams were ready for the challenge, and as we locked horns you could see they were not going to let us past without a fight. Their defence was good and you got an early indication they had runners that would break at speed. Our central players, Maddie, Abi and Summer took it right back at them though. Instinctively the girls started to play very direct rugby. Glantaf shook off some strong carries from the girls, but as we continued to pressurise in the middle of the park, we started to draw players in. Ellie and Susie were swift to spot opportunities as they arose and shifted the ball wide, and once in the hands of Megan and Izzy, ground was always going to be made and space was going to open up.

At half-time we were 14-0 up, but a solid half-time talk from the Glantaf team saw the opposition return fresh and with new hope. Sure enough, they managed to

come back at us, scoring a try mid-way through the second half. With only moments to go however and the ball going from one hand to the next, we carried hard once again up through the middle of the Glantaf squad. Under this pressure Izzy was able to release Summer into space to run over half the pitch, with a Glantaf player in hot pursuit, and go over and seal the victory. The cheers went up, the Mount Kelly U18 Boys' team in the stands were yelling for us, we were through to the final – amazing.

As you would expect, the girls lined up, and there was a big entrance onto the pitch. The huddles would be filmed, and the stage was set. We had not seen King's College Wessex all day, but they were through to the final stages in a similar manner to us – this was going to be tough. Our direct rugby was now going to be something we would have to face from the opposition. It was clear from the outset that Kings had some confident ball carriers and were very capable of challenging a defence. In just a few seconds we were under pressure and having to make some important tackles. Kings were fast to get over the ball, and any mistakes that we could force them to make, our scrum was going to be challenged. It was almost inevitable that Kings were going to score, as their continual pressure paid off, and they went under the sticks. The first time all day that the girls had gone behind – how would they cope?

The team regathered and realised that recycling the ball quickly, popping the ball out of contact and using tight off-loads was going to keep the ball off the floor and out of the hands of the opposition. It was not long before Megan and Izzy were once again tearing up the side-lines and categorically out-pacing the other wings. Maddie, Susie, Ellie and Abi battled away centrally, doing the best they could to get the ball wide under the pressure that Kings were piling on to make certain the ball did not go wide. As the ball went loose numerous times, Ebony even resorted to fly hacking the ball forward, dribbling it past the opposition line, only for it to be called back by the referee for offside. As the commentary team stated though, we were once again able to release our wide players, and send them on huge arcing runs to touch tries down three times and close the game out.

Six games, unbeaten, and a three-try difference in the final score; they had done it. Ivybridge Community College – Rosslyn Park HSBC National Schools Girls Rugby 7s inaugural title holders. Ivybridge Community College is the first name on that trophy, and the team to beat in the future. The girls loved the spotlight, cameras, presentations, caps and T-shirts...and Izzy even got player of the tournament. It was eerie being the last people to walk off the endless pitches of Rosslyn, with only our excitement and a FaceTime call to Mr Shepherd to break the silence of the dusk.

I think that what makes a winning side is not only what those players do on the pitch, but also what they do off the pitch. This team of young ladies were an absolute pleasure during the entirety of this trip. Their conduct was superb, they embraced the spirit of the whole event, listened intently to their coaches and to each other, and were incredibly humble in victory. Before we left Ivybridge for the competition, I recall speaking to the girls about the Ivybridge Community College Rugby legacy that they would be contributing to. The key messages were to make sure they do the very best they can, represent the entirety of the team members admirably and, most importantly, to enjoy and make the most out of this incredible opportunity. I really could not have asked for more.

Girls, you really are legends.

Report written by Nick Kerswell