

Saturday 16th March 2008

## Grasshoppers Rugby Club

### 1982-1983 What a Great Season - 25 Years

The year started as any other with a bunch of hopefuls and not so hopefuls turning out for preseason training. As always we waited for that new player from some overseas location, usually an U21 international, but he never materialised just some lanky second row who wore spectacles and played last season for Old Wankorians.

The first match as always was against local rivals Twickenham Rugby club. The game was won by Terry Birtles combining with the back row of Whitaker and Damant, after some hard work by Jim O'Neil. This was followed by a conversion by Mike Reilly.

Although many of the match reports for that year seemed to reflect this limited game. This was by no means the real story. Grasshoppers had a side that combined a great collection of older players, approaching the end of their career, a hand full of very talented boys playing only their second or third season of senior rugby and six players that were representing Middlesex county clubs that season. This squad of players went on to have what is arguably the best season ever had by Grasshoppers.

The youngsters were epitomised by 18 year old Chris DeCort, a colt, after his 1<sup>st</sup> XV debut the players insisted that he hang around for a drink. His mother reported that she saw him lifting his smash bicycle from some stranger's car at 1.30 in the morning. One side of his face was covered in grazes and bruises and the other side in lipstick. He stunk of beer and sick and had a cigarette hanging from the side of his mouth.

The seniors were represented by "Big Jim" O'Neill, he was the squads "hardman". He never wore a gum shield and had a great right hand (Baveystock Quote - I'm having a bit of trouble Jim. . . .send one thro' ) His physical presence as a frightener to the opposition was always a good thing. He loved his tough guy tag and was well thought of by his team mates as being "The Heavy Artillery".

Any successful side must have a pool of players to draw from and to that end a mention must go to all the players that made up the lower sides. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> team were responsible for developing the colts, that went on to be such a big part of that successful side, and the second team who that year had almost as successful a season as the 1<sup>st</sup> XV. The previous season (81-82) the 2<sup>nd</sup> XV actually played 2 matches as the 1<sup>st</sup> XV after the 1<sup>st</sup> XV were all sent off after an altercation with Stevenage 1<sup>st</sup> XV and although they lost put in two very creditable performances.

The skills of the players are well documented, by studying the press cutting of the day you will read of props side stepping, second rows who had to jump for the ball and No8's taking conversions. It was a time before "League Rugby" where every time you played rugby your reputation was at stake. There were no rest days. . . no shopping days. . . and no girlfriend days. There was just Saturday. . . . .and on Saturday you played rugby.

The success of this Grasshoppers side was reported not only in the Local newspapers but in the national press, no more than on the occasion of the Middlesex Cup fixture v Richmand. This game

was to be the only defeat suffered by Grasshoppers during that 82-83 season. Despite this one defeat Grasshoppers got back on track and continued their winning ways for the rest of the season.

Easter Tour. . . the traditional door breaking, trophy collecting, beer drinking event was to Torquay. We travelled with a strong squad but a combination of wine, women and song meant that the quality of the rugby was well below standard. The Torquay Sevens on the Sunday was a very different story, we had six 7's specialists. Rob Jones, Chris Horn, Matt Jewers, Adrian Garrett and the Orishaguna brothers. . . all we had to do was find one other. . . Gary Fryer . . . and two replacements. . . Kevin Fryer and Matt Gilmore. We went on to win the tournament whilst the rest of the tour party prepared for the Easter Monday fixture by spending the afternoon in the beer tent.

This successful season culminated in the local newspaper awarding skipper Mike Reilly 'Sports Personality of the Month'. The team were all invited to a small reception sponsored by Pernod. If memory serves me right there was only Pernod and Dubonnet to drink that night. . . we were warned not to drink too much too quickly. The reception was for only two hours, but we fell out of there at 7.30pm made our way to the local pub "The Firestone" and carried on drinking. The last thing that I remember was standing on the tables and singing Sunshine Mountain.

Many statistics were recorded but some of the unpublished ones for that great season include:

- 3 Hotel rooms wrecked
- 1 Pernod Flag acquired
- 2 Tables broken singing "Sunshine Mountain"
- 17 Runners from a Curry House
- 6 Toilets smashed in the Pizza Land in Richmond

Not moments to be proud of, but worthy of a mention.

The end of season the presentation evening was preceded by the Married V Singles Fixture. This was won on this occasion by the singles. . . meaning the most successful Grasshoppers for the 82-83 season were in fact the single men in the team photo below.

This celebratory evening is to honour not just the players from that season but the achievements of everybody who contributed to the success of the side that year.



G.Orishaguna, Welch, Jefferies, Wallace, Damant, Parnham, Barratt, Baveystock, G.Fryer, Nash, Wildridge, Arthur, Horne, K.Fryer, Foxwell, Whittaker, Reilly, Gilmore, Birtles, Garrett, Read, Jones, DeCort, O'Neill, Oliver, B.Orishaguna, Dawe, Jewers,