

## OWRFC 2017-18 Report

After the disappointment of relegation from Surrey 1 following a dismal 2016-17 league campaign, OWRFC needed to stop the rot, and breathe new life into the club over the next 18 fixtures. Could we shake the hoodoo of our poor form, or would this be another year of frustration?

The season began positively enough – some fresh faces mixing with seasoned veterans to produce a bonus point win away at Bec Old Boys. So far so good. But as has so often been the case with OW league campaigns, a bright start soon dims down to lacklustre performances against arguably inferior opponents that, after a few weeks of the competition, see us languishing in mid-table mediocrity. But in a competition now including bonus points, we were able to continually take something from almost every game and remain in touching distance of the top four spots in the table.

We knew with patience and consistent availability we'd get the results we deserved, and shortly before Christmas we really found our groove with what may have been our most settled squad for some time. Over the next 10 games, we lost just two. One of which occurred in rather contentious circumstances against league winners Reeds Weybridge. After our dominant pack had earned four penalties from five scrums, two members of the Reeds front row mysteriously picked up injuries during one passage of play, sending the game to uncontested scrums after only half an hour. This effectively negated our most potent weapon on a technicality and gave the visitors an unlikely reprieve at the set piece. In the dying minutes of the game **Andrew Robertson (Pn, 04)** – scorer of only three tries in well over 100 games for OWRFC – was awarded the rarest of winning scores. The wailing of the away supporters then coaxed the referee into consulting the Reeds touch judge, who said that he "couldn't see."

The try was then rescinded and with uncontested scrums, we were unable to go for a push-over try from the resulting restart 5m out, and the snap drop goal attempt from Tom Gwynne was adjudged to have just drifted wide as the clock ran dead. A moral victory if ever there was won, and two bonus points taken from the encounter.

It was at this point that any realistic chances of finishing second and gaining promotion to Surrey 1 all but vanished, but we continued to put in the performances to bookend the season with another bonus point win over Bec Old Boys, finishing a respectable fourth. With the 2018-19 season now including play-offs for the top four teams, you'd be hard pressed to discount our chances of emerging on top should we be able to bring the form from the latter half of last season into our opening fixtures in September.

Crucial to our success this year were several new additions to the club. Starting in the front row, **Chris Parrish** has given our scrum an anchor for some years to come, and alongside **Hamish Fletcher**, Andrew Robertson and the retiring **Sean Starling (L '04)** offered an effective blend of youth and experience, and a strong platform to build our game around. James Tozer, James Peacock and Jack England have slotted in sublimely next to the wizen heads of Nick Dennis and Joe Burnett in the second row, while Craig Flannigan and Ed Sanders often provided great support to established back rowers **George Byrd**, Nick Holding-Parsons, Tom Kelly and **Dan Cervino (Pn '06)**.

Arguably the lynchpin of our play is our halfback pairing of Liam and Tom Gwynne, with the elder of the two brothers (Tom), playing every minute of the season at fly half – an incredible achievement. It would also be remiss not to mention Liam's 10-minute hat-trick in the return fixture against Purely

John Fisher in March, a game that contained 14 tries and finished 48-47 to the OWs. Breath-taking stuff.

In the centres, **Charlie Crichton** has proved to be a superb addition to the club, acting as a subtle foil for the more 'direct' approach of Tim Salmon, and rotating with the returning **Cameron Brown**, gives us plenty of options for next season. At the back and on the wings, we saw **Charlie Gordon** produce some of his best rugby yet in an OW shirt and alongside **Will Miller** and **Robbie Offer**, welcomed in newcomers **Ben Rose** and **Simon Sexton** who between them will no doubt rack up the tries as the season progresses.

But in order to deliver on the pitch, we need to be prepared off the field, and we owe an immense debt of thanks to **Pete Byre** - player for over a decade, and more recently introducing a new rigour and purpose to our pre-game preparations in his role as coach. Having given the club so much over years, he is now taking a break to focus fully on family life. So, we would like to say a big thank you to Pete for all of his contributions, and to Abigail and Jacob for letting him out on Saturdays! We wish them all the very best.

While we are on the 'thank yous' and 'goodbyes', we also must mention Sean Starling, **Doug Harrison (O '00)** and Dan Cervino. They have all been 1<sup>st</sup> XV captain, *and* played in the front row, with Sean having played well over a hundred games at loose-head prop. Which isn't bad going, considering he joined the club in 2009 as a No.8..! Along with Doug and Dan, they have all contributed a phenomenal amount to the club over the years, both on and off the field. With Dan emigrating to Canada for work, it's not out of the question that we'll see him in an OW shirt again at some point, but depending on how much he likes Poutine, that may well be in the front row! For Doug, we wish him all the best as he settles down to family life with his wife Kelly and their daughter Vivienne, and we hope to see them all on the touchlines again at some point soon. We also hope to see Sean and Gabriella Starling on cheering us on with a beer in hand, alongside notable supporters Roy Freer, Andy Byrd and John Robertson, whose encouragement and commitment is appreciated by every member of the squad.

As ever, we are indebted to the support of **Jules Benkert** and Canmoor in their capacity as sponsors of OWRFC.

And finally, a massive thank you to our landlords the Old Haileyburians, especially Clive and Debbie Searle in the clubhouse who do an exemplary job of looking after us, providing first class pitches and post-game hospitality at Ruxley Lane.

Our season begins on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, and if you'd like to get involved please refer to the contacts section of the yearbook.