



Welcome to your March newsletter – it's been an eventful few weeks, on and off the field, with a mix of highs and lows across our playing teams. Pride of place this month goes to The Grizzlies who have won their league – with three games still to play. The Grizzlies, with their one-for-all and all-for-one spirit, coupled with their commitment and camaraderie, epitomise what we are striving to achieve right across the club. They give as much off the field as they do on it, and it has been wonderful to witness their high-spirited celebrations in recent weeks.

Our First XV hit a rough patch with a spell of three consecutive defeats, two of which were agonising losses, against title rivals Cambridge and Bishops Stortford, where on both occasions the opposition scored their winning points with literally the last play of the game. The third negative result in the run was a hugely disappointing home defeat by Chinnor, who defied their lowly league position by coming to Woollams with a clear and well-executed game plan, and strongly making the point that in on their day, anyone is capable of beating anyone else in this exciting and entertaining division. In fairness, OAs hardly turned up that day against Chinnor, and while it was encouraging to get back to winning ways against Dorking, the performance was still much below our Head Coach's high expectations. Following a home fixture vs Canterbury this coming weekend, Shanners team will then face two season-defining trips to the west country, to Redruth (12th March) and Taunton (19th March).

Talking of coaches with high expectations, Harry Harrison is another to have witnessed a desperately disappointing defeat, as our Colts were edged out of The National Colts Cup at the last-sixteen stage by a single point away at Brentwood.

We reported last month that OA Romans are now back performing in HMMT1, having replaced Welwyn 2nds, and at the time of writing the team remains unbeaten. On Saturday 12th March our Romans will travel to Hertford to play Hertford 2nds in the semi-final of the Herts President's Cup. The match kicks off at 1.00pm and with the First XV away in Cornwall, we are hoping that a sizeable posse of OA support will make its way across the county to cheer the team through to the final, which will again be staged at Allianz Park.

New Senior Playing Structure Approved

The club is delighted to announce the establishment of a new Senior Playing Structure and accompanying Playing Committee that will oversee all aspects of the Senior Men's Playing side of the club.

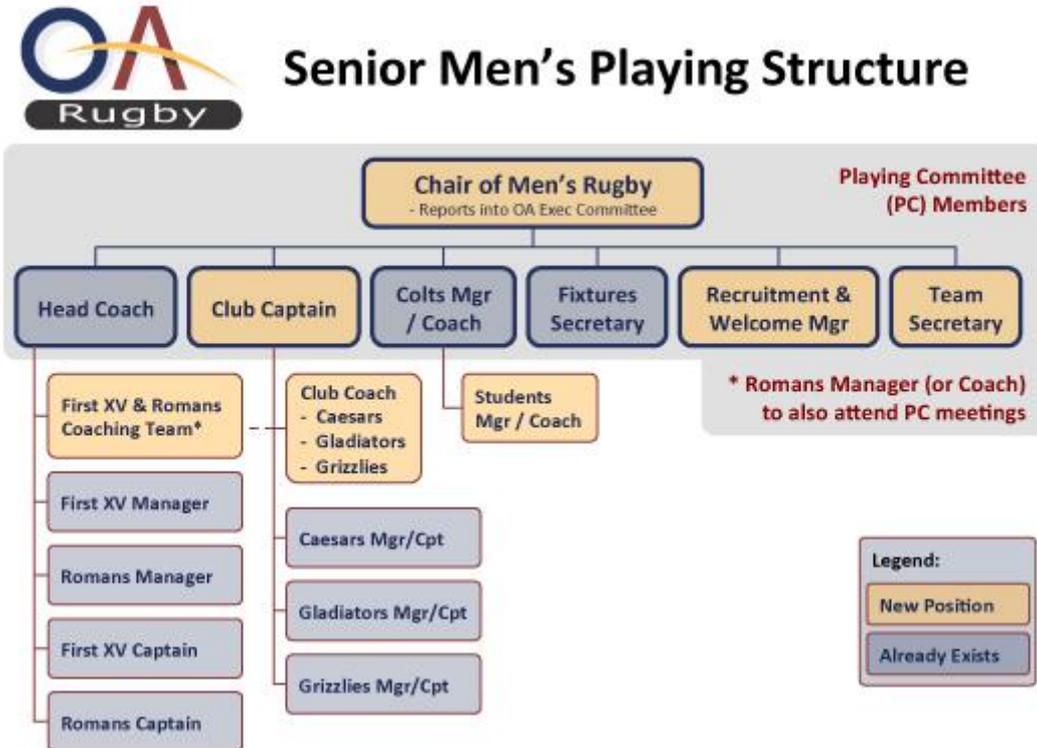
As many of you will know, OA Rugby, not unlike many other clubs, has had issues with player recruitment and retention over the past couple of seasons, especially below the First XV, and the new structure is a direct output of a working group led by Director of Rugby Bruce Millar, aimed at re-establishing our club as a role model community club, with a broad appeal to players of all levels and abilities. Accompanying the playing structure is a new mission statement and a set of values and guiding principles, which will be put before the club AGM in May.

Key objectives for the Playing Structure Review were as follows:

- to field a minimum of four senior men's teams on a regular basis
- to attract, retain and grow talent at all playing levels
- to provide "best in class" coaching and support infrastructure for all teams

- to provide equal playing opportunities for all players
- to provide regular fixtures for all teams
- to deliver a fully inclusive, and fully integrated, playing structure

See below the Org Chart showing our new playing structure:



To apply for any of the new roles within the Senior Playing Structure, or to get involved with any aspect of the playing side of the club, please make contact with our Director of Rugby, Bruce Millar. Email: bruce.millar46@gmail.com

The working group under Bruce is continuing its work by reviewing the membership and subscription structure of the club, and how we compare against other competing clubs in the local market. The outputs of this work will go before the Exec Committee in April and then to the AGM in May.



GRIZZLIES



February has been another great month for the Grizzlies. We have remained unbeaten and have effectively clinched the League title with three games remaining. The gloss was slightly taken off our achievement as we were hoping to claim the title on the back of a winning performance at Tring, but instead it was handed to us as our hosts could not put together a team and we therefore were awarded the points by default. It now means that we cannot be caught even if we lose all our remaining matches, for our points difference is significantly greater than that of Fullerians, our closest rivals. A win is a win but it wasn't quite how we envisaged winning the League.

Old Grammarians 2nds filled in for Tring by joining us for a friendly fixture, and we took our frustrations out on them, winning 57-7 in a very one-sided affair. The pack was dominant as usual, and the backs were pulling off moves and scoring for fun. Chris Butterworth at fly-half orchestrated a move that was inspired by the All Blacks vs Australia Bledisloe Cup match in 2000 – visualise it... the ball comes down off a line-out to the scrum-half... 9 passes to 10... 10 passes to 12... 12 to 13... 13 turns his back and plays a pop pass back to 10... 10 does a scissors with 11... 11 does a switch with 14, who then breaks through the line, straightens and offloads to the supporting 15 who then scores. Well, we managed to pull off a "Grizzlies" version of that try. As is customary, we celebrated in style at the end of the match.

The game before was also a friendly, after Chesham 3rds couldn't muster up a team to face the mighty Grizzlies and once again the points were given to us. Instead, Harpenden sent a mixed 3rds/4ths team to Woollams, with the hope of spoiling our unbeaten run. In tough conditions it was a hard fought a game against the enemy... I mean local rivals! The game saw our defence, as has been the case for most of this season, shut out the opposition, preventing them from scoring, while we managed to score three tries. Alan Kirk scored his first ever try against Harpenden, James Sykes at outside centre grabbed one and Danny Haith scored on his debut! Matty Perkins slotted a conversion to make the final score 17-0. A win against Harpie is always very, very satisfying, but to get the shut out was even sweeter.

The first fixture of the month was a friendly away at Datchworth, always a tricky place to go. The game was made harder by the gale force winds, making it difficult to kick for territory, so we had to run everything. It was a hard, bruising match with two of our players getting their noses broken and further injuries seeing us lose our Number Eight. Our customary team spirit shone through, and we managed to hold them to just two scores, an unconverted try and a penalty. A try apiece for myself and full-back Matt Perkins, with Matt slotting both conversions and a penalty saw us finish the game as 17-8 victors. Man of the match went to Pat O'Brien for his bone-shuddering tackling and penetrating line breaks at inside centre, all with a broken nose. His centre partner James Sykes was named Prat of the Match for being shown the outside, taking it, only to be bundled into touch by a player who could have been mistaken for his Grandad. Better luck next time Jimbo!

Last Saturday we entertained a Barking Vets XV at Woollams. We didn't know what to expect as we have never played them before but we guessed they would be a strong outfit with their Club President being the legend who is Jason Leonard. True enough, they were a very strong side, with

big powerful forwards and fit dynamic backs. Most of their "Vets" are still playing at a high level and it showed. We actually dominated possession for the first 20 minutes but could not convert it into points. The boys from Essex then put their foot down and powered into a 39-0 lead at half time. The Grizzlies' heads didn't drop and we came out for the second half determined to make the next score, which we duly achieved. A spilled ball was picked up by JP who ran from the half-way line towards their try line. Unfortunately his legs seemed to get heavier with each step as the Barking cover defence closed in on him. In a move that looked like try avoidance, he fell just before the line avoiding the tackle but managing to keep hold of the ball and he eventually stretched out to score. That got the spirits up and we began to once again take the game to them. Matt Perkins then scored a brilliant individual try in his first outing at 10. He picked up the ball, broke through the line, skipped past one tackler, shrugged off another and avoided the tap tackle to race under the posts. Unfortunately he couldn't convert either try. Barking added one more try and the game ended 44-10. It was a humbling experience but we took a lot of heart from knowing that we never gave up, and even managing to notch a couple of tries against a much stronger side.

With three more league matches still to play we hope we can remain unbeaten and extend our run of form into the Play-offs and the Cup – we want the treble! Keep going boys!

Kim Watson (Grizzlies Captain)



COLTS



The various Colts teams continue to make progress on a number of fronts despite the bitter disappointment of the u18A team going out of the National Colts Cup at Brentwood by the agonisingly close margin of 11-10.

The stand-out performance of the month was by the u17B team who beat Hitchin in the Herts u17 Cup to set up a semi-final against... the Old Albanian u17A team! The u17Bs are currently top of Division Two and their performances this season show what fantastic strength in depth the club has in this age group.

Meanwhile, the u17A have beaten Bishops Stortford (again) in the Cup to progress to the semi-finals, and they have also beaten Saracens to secure the Division One title with one game still to play.

The u18B have also progressed to the semi-finals of the Herts Shield by beating Letchworth in the First Round. They play Datchworth in the semi-final and are keen to defend this trophy, which they won last year at u17.

The u18A team have had a busy month beating Ealing and Wasps in the league (we are currently unbeaten and top of Division One), and defeating Barnet in the Herts Cup. The team is still in with a very good chance of winning the treble of HML Division One, Herts Cup, and LV= Cup, and finishing their time in the Colts on a high.

If we could just have found a way to score one more point against Brentwood, grrrrr.

Harry Harrison



SAINTS



Saints welcome former World Cup Winner Kat Merchant to Woollams to host their Pitch Up and Play Event

Saints continue to work hard on player recruitment, and an upcoming event could be just the thing for ladies looking for a fun way to boost their fitness and confidence.

Club captain and Saints stalwart Kate Barnes said, “We are looking to promote our sport and how accessible it is, there truly is a level of involvement for everyone. The England Women are world champions currently and have a growing number of ladies contracted full time. The sport has developed which has been so great to see but at the grassroots level, clubs like ours want to show there is still an entry point that isn’t so serious!

The club has retained many good players over the years, as well as seeing ladies move up to higher levels within the sport. There are also players who just seek a more social level of rugby and involvement in sport. Pitch Up and Play Events have been hosted at rugby clubs all over the UK for females looking to give rugby a go. Supported by the RFU, we are looking to empower women to go out and have some fun being active. At OA Saints we like to have lots of banter and laughter, whilst learning new skills. The best thing about a team sport is seeing how new people come in and improve the dynamic of the team, both on and off the field. We want more women to experience that.”

The OA Saints’ Pitch Up and Play event is being held at Woollams on Sunday 13th March between 13.00 and 15.00. There will be food and drink provided in the clubhouse after the session with full changing facilities provided. The session is for anyone that wants to try the game and the session will be tailored to suit the participants, so anyone should feel confident to have a go, with no pressure to join the club or to start playing.

“We would be really pleased to welcome anyone that fancies giving it a go,” Kate adds, “bring as many friends as you want. It’s a one-off session – come down and have some fun!”

Kate Barnes

Be inspired, any shape, any size, get active!





Not much rugby has been played by the Minis in recent weeks, but with the promise of better weather ahead, there is much to look forward to.

We have lots of exciting festivals on the Minis calendar during March, including the Hertford Floodlit B Festival this coming Saturday evening (5th March), and the ever popular Marlow Tag Fest and The Herts County Contact Festival, both on Sunday 20th March. The County Fest is always the Blue Riband event of the Mini Festival season and all OA's sides in the u9-u12 age groups will be attending.

After many disjointed weekends with waterlogged pitches, home and away , it's great to know that the weather is clearing and hopefully all our Mini players will get plenty of rugby in ahead of the Easter holidays.

Steve Pope



Five lucky OAs from various age groups were lucky winners of a Saracens competition to be mascots for the recent match against Gloucester at Allianz Park.



U9s



Despite it being a leap year, and as such a longer month, the weather continued to do its best to curtail u9 mini rugby. Fingers crossed that the worst is now behind us as we look forward to the end of season festival run in.

On 7th Feb we relocated to the Sam Ryder Fields in St Albans where we hosted four sides from Harpenden for a great morning of highly competitive rugby against our local friends and rivals. The following week, despite the reduced half-term numbers, four u9 sides headed across to Bedford, and again we enjoyed a competitive but evenly balanced morning of rugby.

Being the first year of contact rugby, it takes time for many of the players to get used to, and be able to, execute a well-timed tackle, or sometimes any tackle to be fair. In a season so disrupted by the weather it becomes all the harder as the players are not training or playing week in week out.

The weekend of the 21st was lost to bad weather, so when we finally regrouped at Woollams last Sunday we dedicated the morning to a training session focused on tackling. Who's up for more of the same next week?

Now we look forward, fingers crossed, to a month of fixtures and festivals including Letchworth, Harpenden, Hertford, the County Contact Festival and the Saracens Plate finals.

Finally, well done to U9 Xavier Fenton, who was one of the five lucky OA winners of the Saracens Match Day Mascot Competition. Xavier enjoyed a memorable day out at Allianz Park.

Mike Fisher



U8s



On Sunday 20th Feb we took two teams to the Plate competition at Allianz Park. It was a great day, enjoyed by all, even if it was a little damp come the end of the day! It was a great experience playing on the 4G pitch and then watching Saracens play afterwards!

The final results tally: OA1's W0 D2 L2; OA2's W2 D1 L1.

We're back at Allianz Park this coming Saturday for the Champions Cup!

Deborah Ludlow





U7s



With opportunities to play in competition few and far between, and given the prolonged wet weather period since the start of the year, it's the kids' resilience to the elements that is most newsworthy this month! Their enthusiasm for the sport and the club has seen them deal with some pretty cold, wet and muddy mornings.

We did manage to make the away fixture against Bedford on Valentine's Day: where the teams performed admirably in a round-robin format, again in persistent rain (which explains the lack of photos this month).

In the last training session of February, some of our U7s had the opportunity to show their skills in

some introductory games with our U6s, with both age groups taking plenty of learning out of the session. We now look forward to a busy March, with plenty of fixtures to get excited about!

Nick Clark



U6s



The U6's had have a good start to this year, but just like everyone else we have had to contend with the awful weather. The boys have remained enthusiastic throughout, if a little cold and wet on Sunday mornings.

Following on from several joint training fixtures with other clubs at the end of last year, we are arranging reciprocal fixtures for this year and we have also organised a round robin against the U7's, with further ones to be planned.

In January, we also formed the guard of honour for the second half of the Saracens vs. Ulster game after playing on the 4G pitch at half-time, something that all the lads thoroughly enjoyed.

Mark Albon



COMMERCIAL, SOCIAL & OTHER



OA 'First Thursday' Quiz

Thanks to all those who have responded by entering a team into this fun social event, open to all sections and age groups across the club. We can always accommodate more teams, so what are you scared of? It's not Mastermind or University Challenge – but it's still a great test of your general knowledge, with specialist rounds included. There are prizes for the winners, and also the wooden spooners.

Entry is £12.50 per person, which includes an excellent two-course hot supper and coffee. If you would prefer not to dine, then please say so at time of booking.

Each quiz starts at 8.00pm and the evening concludes no later than 10.30pm. To register a team, please email fiona@oasport.com or call the office at 01727 864476.

OA Rugby on Social Media

The club now has more than one thousand followers on [Twitter](#), plus many more logging into our [Facebook](#) Page. You can also watch highlights of all our matches on the [OA YouTube](#) channel. These channels are an excellent way to keep up to date with all that is happening at your club.

OA Rugby Promotional Video

The club is in the process of producing a promotional video that can be used in schools, colleges and on our website and social media channels to aid with the recruitment of new players and potential sponsors.

The video will seek to portray OAs as a fully inclusive community club, and therefore we want to include content from all sections of the club.

If you have any relevant content that you think could be suitable for inclusion, then please contact our Marketing Secretary, Mike Osborne Email: mike@gower.co.uk

FORTHCOMING EVENTS – Dates For Your Diary

Six Nations at Woollams – all Saturday and Sunday Six Nations matches continue to be screened ‘live’ at the club.

Saturday 5th March – First XV v Canterbury RFC
Match preceded by Former Players Lunch – Sold Out

Friday 11th March – OA Grizzlies v Letchworth 4ths Kick-off 7.00pm
Friday night floodlit rugby. Bar open at 6.00pm. Food available.

Saturday 12th March – Hertford 2nds v OA Romans
Herts President’s Cup Semi-Final (at Hertford RFC) Kick-off 1.00pm

Sunday 13th March – OA Saints Pitch Up & Play Event 1.00pm-3.00pm
Food & drink available.

Saturday 2nd April – First XV v Worthing Raiders RFC
Match preceded by our third and final Vice President’s Lunch of the season

Thursday 8th April – OA Club Quiz Night (All Welcome)

Saturday 16th April – First XV v Old Elthamians RFC
Also Georgie Robinson Memorial Day, featuring OA Saints v The Army WRFC

Friday 22nd April – St George’s Day Lunch

Saturday 30th April – First XV v Launceston
Match followed by Club Supper – Book Early, this event will sell out

Thursday 5th May – OA Club Quiz Night (All Welcome)

Saturday 7th May – National Two Play-Off Final

The runners-up of Nat 2 N&S face up to win promotion to National League One

Thursday 26th May – OARFC Annual General Meeting

Saturday 2nd July – OARFC Summer Ball

Saturday 20th August – “Back To Schoolival” Old Boys Rugby Festival, featuring ‘scratch’ teams of Old Boys of local schools. There is **no age limit** on entrants – if you are interested, please contact Harry Harrison at harryharrison@rfu.com

If you have something to communicate to OA members and supporters, a news item or perhaps the date of a forthcoming event, then please email: paul.plant1@googlemail.com, to arrive no later than two days before the end of the month for publication in the following newsletter

