

Stewart's Melville RFC – report to the FP Club October 2019

The Senior Club

Firstly thanks must go to Willie Purdie and his team once again for getting the pitches into such fantastic condition despite the Scottish weather – they genuinely look fantastic.

The First XV have got off to a largely positive start, winning 3 out of their first 4 matches, leaving them 4th in National League 2. The Second XV have also started well, having played 5 and won 3 of their fixtures to sit third in East District Reserve League 1. However we are focussed on becoming the best amateur club in Scotland, not narrowly on being the best amateur team in Scotland, therefore it has been really encouraging to see that the “Ferry Road Wanderers” - the merged Heriots and Stew Mel 3rd XV - is now able to field a team each week with moves afoot to add a veterans / social team further down the line, where previously both clubs were struggling to raise a team.

North Edinburgh Vikings

The North Edinburgh Vikings acts as a youth section for players from S1-S6 and is open to all players from any school who want to play rugby. Mixing hard work and fun remains at the core of everything we do and the style of rugby we want to play is fast, free-flowing and attractive to watch. The Vikings was formed from a merger with the Heriots Academy section effectively to form a new club. This decision has been taken to ensure that both clubs can provide the players with the high quality of coaching that they have come to expect as well as the opportunity to demonstrate and develop their skills in competitive matches. The Vikings provides a rugby programme to ensure that each player receives a well-balanced season plan incorporating specialist skills sessions and performance workshops from top coaches in a measured environment, with player welfare at the forefront

The Vikings now provides a sustainable platform for the players to enjoy their rugby through the Midi age groups, encouraging as many as possible to take part and to prepare them for Senior rugby. The combined player numbers at each year group should also ensure we can always provide a full team for matches on a Sunday while adhering to the SRU guidelines on player welfare by not playing more than 90 minutes of rugby within a 48-hour period.

The Stew Mel Lions

It's all too easy to summarise the Lions as “business as usual” and therefore overlook just what an amazing set-up it is. Not only is it one of the biggest (possibly THE biggest) and best-run minis sections in Scotland, but it has also been one of the most successful at setting up and growing a girls section (admittedly this is a “tiny acorns” situation). But they don't just stop there – there's always something new. This year the Calcutta Cup arrived at Inverleith at the Lions home tournament with hundreds of young kids (and quite a lot of coaches and parents) taking advantage of the photo opportunity.

On playing matters, the Lions continues in rude health with around 250 children from P1 to P7 and 55 coaches participating regularly. In addition to regular training sessions at Inverleith the Lions participated in 21 events during the 2018 / 19 Season, ranging from full-scale tournaments to round robins and friendly “development fixtures” and this Season's schedule looks similarly full.

The “Intangible Other”

However the numbers don't tell the full story – there is a good feeling around the club which is hard to put your finger on. Yes, winning more games helps – but it is more than that. The club feels like it is coming together as more of a “whole.” Historically the Senior Club would play on a Saturday and have limited contact with the Vikings and the Lions who play on Sundays. This Season we have had squads of Senior players helping with coaching sessions and there has been more effort put into supporting each other's events. One good example of this was the Rugby World Cup “long lunch” at Prestonfield House Hotel which had around 500 guests in attendance, including several tables from the Lions and the Academy. The event raised in excess of £15,000 for the Edinburgh Headway Charity, as well as raising funds for the Rugby Club and showcases what is best about amateur sport, with World cup-winning Captain and Lions Legend Martin Johnson, World cup-winning Vice-Captain Michael Lynagh, and England and Lions legend Dean Richards giving up their time for a phenomenally interesting Q&A session.

The club were also delighted to offer support to the ESMS Development Office with respect to the hugely successful “Dinner for Doddie” at the Chambers Street Museum. In truth we had very little to do and the credit goes to the Development Office, ably aided and abetted by Doddie's sister Kirsty, but we were delighted to be able to chip in.

On a much smaller scale we were delighted to welcome a team of cyclists organised by Stuart Thom (the ex-Stew Mel rugby player) for a quiz evening at Inverleith on 7th March. They were cycling from John O'Groats to Land's End to raise money for the “My Name's Doddie” Foundation. The event was supported by New Zealand legend Carl Hayman, former 7's World Player of the year Ollie Phillips, Scotland greats Bryan Redpath, Scott Hastings, Rob Wainwright and Iwan Tukalo, Scotland Captain Greig Laidlaw and the Scotland coach Gregor Townsend, with Doddie making a brief “in person” visit via video message. The fact that such a number of current and former internationalists were willing to attend and get involved says a lot about Doddie Weir and a lot about what is great about amateur sports clubs generally. We were grateful for the support of the wider rugby community, including Watsonians and the Lismore ladies for taking 3 tables between them.