

CARDIFF RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB CHAIRMAN'S REPORT SEASON 2002/2003

The season may be best described as the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. As professional rugby now changes from Club to regional sides, many of us wait in anticipation of a higher and more intense standard of rugby. While Welsh rugby has always been competitive Clubs have struggled to compete at Celtic and European levels. Hopefully, as standards improve so will our national game improve.

Our new era began with the appointment of a new Head Coach, David Young, following Rudy Joubert's return to his native South Africa. Dai's appointment, along with the return of Derwyn Jones, as Team Manager, began the investment of 'home grown' talents in both playing and coaching staff. This investment in 'Cardiff' people will, no doubt, lead to great things in the future at both Club and Regional levels.

The season began with two friendly victories, Bath and Bourgoin, before we began our Celtic League campaign. After suffering defeats in our opening two games, the team rallied around one another and won 4 of the remaining 5 games to proceed to a quarter final place against Edinburgh away. An excellent second half performance gained a hard earned victory and a place against Neath in the semi final.

Our European campaign began poorly with 2 defeats and a five-week break for Autumn Internationals did nothing to galvanise team spirit. Disappointingly we lost all remaining European games and a Celtic League semi final. This was a time for concern for all at the Club but to the credit of the coaching and playing staff of the Club they rallied around and produced some excellent performances in the second half of the season. Losing only one of the last 8 League games saw us finish a very creditable 3rd in the League. Many of these games saw a mixture of experienced and youthful players taking the field and some performances give a great deal of hope for a bright future.

Whilst our form in the League improved, our Cup run was disappointing. After excellent victories over Bonymaen and Pontypridd, we failed to 'turn up' for our semi against Llanelli and for the second time, were well beaten in a semi final.

As previously mentioned many U21 players produced excellent performances at senior level. While having a mixed season at League level, an excellent Cup run was enjoyed and a victory over Swansea gave them the Cup. Many friendlies were played Worcester, Plymouth Albion, Harlequins, plus 2 games on tour to Malta and this gave players a chance to show their talents and many used this to good advantage. U21 coaches, Mike Rayer and Howard Stone, along with the other Academy coaches at U19 and U17 continue to work with the steady stream of talented youngsters attached to the Club and this augurs well for the future. Many

of these youngsters have achieved international honours and these, along with senior players, will ensure our International Representation continues to grow.

The negotiations for region rugby have been well documented and I would like to congratulate Robert Norster on securing Regional Rugby for Cardiff. This was not achieved without sacrifice but Bob's efforts have enabled us to keep top class rugby at Cardiff Arms Park. The office team is also an important part of the Club and we wish them every success in the future.

Team Manager, Derwyn Jones, Head Coach, David Young, Assistant Coach, Geraint John, Fitness Coach, Huw Wiltshire, Analyst, Alun Carter, Physiotherapist, Mrs. Jane James and Hywel Griffiths, Masseur, Wayne Mortimer, Doctors, Roger Evans, Prof. John Williams, Mr. John Fairclough, Mr. Mike Fardy, Dr. Richard Evans, Dr. Jim Naysmith, Mr. Geoff Graham and Optician, Frank Mahoney, Dentist, Geoff Price and Media Officer, Alan Evans, are all responsible for the effective running of the team and we thank them all.

The Rugby Committee continues to support teams at all levels and my thanks go to one and all. Special thanks go to Hon. Secretary, Brian Bennett and I am sure all Club Members wish him well in his 'retirement'. Many thanks to Jackie Flynn and Vicky McCracken for their valuable work. As various sections of Management Committee strive towards their new pitches, courts etc., we wish them well and look forward to their support in the future. The Lottery has, unfortunately, had to cease due to dwindling support but many thanks go to Kath and Ken Jones, Graham Kierle and Brian Bennett for their work over many seasons. The Supporters' Club continues to grow and the Chairman, Simon Down, and his Committee can be proud of their achievements. To Brian Walker and his ground staff and Karl Williams and bar staff many thanks.

Capital Rugby continues to take the game to the younger generation and in a time where children have so many opportunities, it is important we keep rugby in the forefront.

The Board of Directors continues to support the successful running of the Club. As we move forward into a new era, the support of everybody will become so important.

I would like to end by thanking all members for their support and look forward to seeing you next season in support of Cardiff Rugby Club and Cardiff Blues. Both I am sure will endeavour to bring pleasure and entertainment to you as our great Club has always done in the past.

Yours in Rugby
Robert Lakin