

CARDIFF ATHLETIC CLUB RUGBY SECTION

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: SEASON 2006/2007

I began last year's report by commenting on our lowly league position stating that things could not remain the same and that changes had to be made. These changes were made. Firstly Justin Burnell was made Head Coach and he brought with him a coaching team of Matthew Silva (backs coach), Danny Wilson (forward and defence coach), Gavin Cooper (assistant back coach and assistant team manager) and Howard Stone (forwards coach) whom of course has been with the Club for many years. Together with several new players joining the Club in the summer there was a real sense of purpose from the first training session.

Justin and his team brought a new professional standard in their coaching methodology both on and off the pitch to the Premiership side that the players responded to with enthusiasm. The results from last season are testimony to the improvements made with 12 league games won, importantly with players from our own squad and without having to use players from the Blues – only a handful of appearances were made by Blues players throughout the season. We do not have a problem with playing players from the Blues; quite the contrary, we enjoy having them with us and hope that they enjoy the experience, but this season we were able to stand on our own feet and compete with any other side in the Premiership and that is how it must always be.

Our final League position of 8th was not I feel a true reflection of the season bearing in mind that we were 4th for much of the season and it was the final two home League games against Bedwas and Maesteg which were both lost when weakened teams were played to rest players in readiness for the Cup Final. These defeats coupled with losing at Llanelli in our final fixture meant that we tumbled down the table to 8th when only weeks before it could be argued we were in a position to really challenge for a top 3 place.

Our League position was not the only disappointment for the end of the season had a real sting in its tail. Following a tremendous cup run in which we beat Narberth (H) 69-14, Neath (A) 12-10, becoming the first ever Cardiff team to win at the Gnoll in a cup tie; Swansea (A) were next when a superb second half display saw Cardiff run out winners by 39-8; the semi-final against Bridgend was held at Pontypridd and was won by 23-16. So it was with great anticipation that we looked forward to seeing a Cardiff team in the Cup Final for the first time in 10 years. Despite being behind to a Llandovery side that played way above their lowly league position for much of the game, when Craig Evans dropped his second goal with only 26 seconds of normal time remaining we all thought it was to be our day. After 9 minutes 30 seconds of injury time our dream of winning the Cup lay in tatters after a very late Llandovery try and conversion. The Cardiff players gave everything that day and were absolutely devastated in defeat.

What the last month or so of the season clearly illustrated was the lack of strength in depth in a number of positions. The coaching team has worked hard on recruitment and as I write the squad for next season is more or less complete so the emphasis can now be on preparation for next season.

One of our roles as Premiership team is to develop players for the Regional side and those players who have risen through the ranks have acquitted themselves really well

making an excellent contribution to the Blues. Pride of place here must go to Tom James who played 12 games for the Premiership side last year before moving on to the Blues squad. Tom was voted Premiership Young Player of the Year by the WRU in conjunction with the Principality Building Society and was also chosen to go to Australia with the full Welsh squad. I feel it is only a matter of time before Tom's dream of a full Welsh cap becomes a reality.

We are also very proud of the achievements of Jamie Roberts and Dafydd Hewitt on being selected for the Wales 7's squads. Jamie also had the honour of being voted Premiership Player of the Year while Tom James was voted Best Young Welsh Player by the Welsh Rugby Writers Association.

Other significant landmarks reached last season include Craig Evans top scoring with 294 points; Tom James top try scorer with 12 tries and career landmarks for Chris Stamatakis, Leon Andrews and Richard Jones, all three achieving 100 games for the Premiership side.

Although this season there has been an improvement on last season there can be no room for complacency and we must strive to improve again next season. The cornerstones have been put in place, there can be no excuses, and we must continue to strive to put Cardiff RFC back to where it belongs at the top of Welsh rugby, leading the way for others to follow.

Unfortunately we will be without one of our "backroom" staff next season; our conditioning coach Gerrit Banjes, due to pressure of work, has had to resign. His presence at training and on match days will be sorely missed. I would like to thank him for everything that he has done for the Club over the last few years and to wish him well in the future.

Dyfri Owen, the team physiotherapist has again worked tirelessly with the players and we are so fortunate to have someone of Dyfri's ability as part of the Premiership team's set up. Dyfri has been joined this year by Chantelle who now acts as the team masseuse, a vital role in the preparation and rehabilitation of the players. Chantelle has settled in well and I hope that she becomes a regular member of the backroom staff for the foreseeable future.

The Rugby Committee have again worked tirelessly behind the scenes for the benefit of the RFC. My thanks again go to Keith Morgan who does a prodigious amount of work for the Premiership side to whom he is totally committed. Also my thanks to Simon Down and Steve Davies for attending the Premiership and East District meetings on our behalf.

Unfortunately relationships between the Athletic Club and the Rugby Section have been very difficult throughout the year. I would like to think that matters improve in the coming year and that all concerned can look positively to the future. In order to do this, bridges will have to be built. This may prove difficult to achieve but must be undertaken by all concerned if the situation is to improve.

The Supporters Club and Call to Arms have again given us wonderful support over the season, not only in voicing their support at both home and away games, but in selling programmes, replica training jerseys and souvenirs. This level of involvement is priceless and our gratitude to the supporters club cannot be overstated. Call to Arms provided video analysis equipment for the use of the team and coaches, a vital tool in

the modern game, which puts us in the forefront in terms of analysis and preparation. I cannot overstate how grateful we are to both groups for their support; long may it continue.

Brian Walker and his staff have again provided us with an excellent playing surface that is the envy of most clubs. I know that the ground staff are unstinting in their work on the pitch and must be congratulated on the high quality playing surface we enjoy throughout the season.

Karl Williams and his staff continue to provide us with excellent service in the clubhouse. Peter our head doorman in what can be a very difficult job particularly on International days, brings a very professional and effective presence to the position.

All concerned with the Premiership team have been delighted with the form of the Blues this season and they continue to gather strength and momentum. The Blues finished second in the Magners league and were in touching distance of winning it right to the very last game of the season. Our warmest congratulations to Dai Young and his coaching staff and we are looking forward to next season with a great deal of optimism. We would all like to wish Chris Czekaj a speedy and full recovery from the dreadful injury he sustained in Australia.

Peter Thomas and his Board of Directors have been very supportive of the Premiership side this year and they have given us the resources with which to develop the team into one which can compete at the top of the Premiership. Paul Bailey, one of the Blues Directors, became our main sponsor for last season and has already agreed to sponsor us again next season for which we are very grateful. Bob Norster and Alun Doull are both very supportive of the Premiership team and are always ready to discuss matters and offer advice. Andrew Thomas and all the other office staff are always prepared to help us in any way possible and I would like to offer our thanks for their invaluable support.

In conclusion I would like to wish you a very good summer break and look forward to seeing you all in September.

Many thanks,

MALCOLM CHILDS
CHAIRMAN