



FOLLOW THE BLUES

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Number 39

News from the Blues Followers

Two for the Price of One

As well as welcoming 2nd place Exeter to Bedford today, the Club is offering supporters the chance of watching the Blues Colts take on the Ath. Colts in the National Colts Knock Out Cup. So I am sure we are welcoming some regular Ath supporters today.

The fact that there are two Bedford teams in the last 32 of this competition is something we should all be proud of. It is here that I must declare an interest as the parent of a former Ath's colt.

From this I appreciate the work that the Ath put into Colts rugby as a community sport. To raise a team at the Ath the coaches were competing against other attractions; as well as Saturday work and there was always the possibility that the opposition would cry off because they could not raise a team on the day.

I firmly believe that a strong Bedford Ath club is an important part of the strength of Bedford rugby as a whole. I am sad to see that many Blues fringe players go to play for clubs outside the town rather than the Ath. I accept that the level the Ath is playing at, at the moment, is not as high as it has been, so to some extent this is understandable, but one current example of the benefit to the Blues has been the arrival of Marius Botha via the Ath.

Whatever the politics and the outcome today it is great to welcome the Ath back to Goldington Road.

STOP PRESS! Feb 2nd 5th Round of National Trophy. **Sedgley Park Home.**

Adrian Randall

Farewell 2007 – What's next?

The year-end - Week 18 in National League 1 terms – means more than half the season has passed and the likely finishing positions in April are pretty much decided. Or is that too cynical? This time last year we were 6th in the Table with 10 wins, 505 points scored and 375 conceded, and 57 league points for our efforts including 10 bonus points for 4 tries.

This year at the same point we were (guess) (yes) 6th in the Table with 10 wins 452 points scored and 374 conceded but with just 5 try bonus points in our tally of 50.

We are not alone in scoring less points and tries though; overall all teams have scored 6234 points this season compared with 6669 last – 83 try bonus points altogether against 100 last term.

Looking back at 2007, Leeds had taken top place by week 13 and Rotherham had secured second by week 15. Exeter improved 3 places after Christmas to finish 4th while our close rivals Plymouth declined 4 places to finish 6th. At the bottom end London Welsh's miserable season improved from relegation bound 15th to finish a creditable 12th in the circumstances, while poor Waterloo hit rock bottom in week 12 and stayed there. Launceston now seem destined to a similar fate.

This season Nottingham – not just *our* bogey team – were 5th at week 7 and have improved steadily to be 3rd while Exeter now 2nd have been on the heels of Saints throughout as Doncaster faded. Newcomers, Esher, have done well in recent weeks and at 8th are now 3 places above their average position. Coventry and Newbury are also on the rise, while Rotherham and London Welsh have been going downhill since week 7. History shows that these trends are not usually reversed.

Our own position in the table has improved despite recent reverses, from 11th in week 5 to 6th, one up on our average position to date, although recently this has much to do

with Rotherham's decline. Seventeen points adrift of 5th placed Penzance (or possibly only 14 points if their deduction of 3 is upheld) is an unachievable target for us to reduce. But the clubs above us are full time professionals and we are top of the pile of the non-professional clubs, and rightly so with nearly 3000 shareholders and an average home gate not far short of Nottingham and Doncaster's – both above us - added together!

Our targets now must be a home win today against Exeter, to restore fortress GR, and an away win at Plymouth to cement 6th place. **Our prayer** is an away draw against Saints in the Cup semi - final for a deserved cash boost for the coffers, with our 50% share of their gate money, plus that of other sides we will have to defeat to get there! And then of course a win at Franklins Gardens for a trip to HQ!

Chris Ward

History of Bedford Athletic Colts

The formation of the Colts team was one of the most important steps in the Club's history. Since the re-founding in 1920 most of Athletic's recruitment came from boys leaving the Bedford and Bedford Modern Schools. Normally such boys had been coached in the skills of the game and possessed considerable match experience.

Even after the Second World War a large proportion of new members were Old Bedford Modernians but, in the fifties and sixties, more and more Modern School boys were leaving Bedford to take up places at universities and colleges. At the same time, however, enthusiasm for rugby was growing at the local secondary schools and a new rugby playing school, Stratton, was developing. It became evident, therefore, that the sources of recruitment were changing and many of the Athletic's new members, though potentially as promising as ever, lacked experience and required further coaching in the game. At first these youngsters could be helped along under the guidance of older players in the

lower sides, and an outstanding example of one who benefited enormously from this method is John Cooley, who played for the Athletic Fifth XV and went on the play for Bedford, Northampton, East Midlands, and gain an England trial. But, as numbers increased it was obvious that some other solution would have to be found. Already several clubs in Northamptonshire and the Midlands were running regular Under 18 colts sides and when at the beginning of 1962, the Athletic were asked to provide games for a number of boys who had taken up rugby at Silver Jubilee School, they decided to take the plunge.

A properly constituted organisation for the colts section was drawn up and strictly adhered to. The most important points were that the colts committee was to be made up of responsible adult members and that at least one of these would accompany the colts on every fixture. Matches were to be played against similar Under 18 club sides or school teams. Starting on this firm basis the Athletic Colts soon achieved remarkable success.

By the end of the first half season they had already won two colts seven a side tournaments, the Northampton & District and the "Pink" Trophy (Huntingdon). The next season The Bedford Education Committee generously offered the use of the Fairfield Playing Field, Clapham Road, free of charge for colts matches. During this season a second colts side, the Colts "A" was started and on two occasions in season 1963-64 a Colts "B" was also fielded. In the same season, as a follow up to the Colts organisation, a new adult side, the Equal Third, was introduced specifically for ex-colts with a fixture list comprising mainly of school sides. Undoubtedly 1964-65 was the high point of the Colt's success: They provided ten players for the East Midlands Colts, including the Captain Chris Reynolds, and they won the Colts sevens of the Bedfordshire Colts R.F.U., the East Midlands RFU and the "Pink" trophy. The records for the first three full seasons speak for themselves:

1962-63 Played 23 Won 19 Drawn 0
Lost 4 Points For 383 Points Against 145

1963-64 Played 34 Won 30 Drawn 1
Lost 3 Points For 574 Points Against 109

1964-65 Played 28 Won 26 Drawn 0
Lost 2 Points For 592 Points Against 78

The second golden period in the history of the Bedford Athletic Colts team occurred in the 1980s. The highlight was the 1984/85 season when the Colts team was coached by Pat Wheeler and Mark Ward. Of their 32 games played, they won 29, drew one and lost two. On 12th January 1985 exactly 23 years to the day that the club first fielded a Colts team, the Athletic Colts defeated Northampton Men's Own Colts 63-0. The try scorers on this historic occasion were Michael Cato (3), John Robinson (3), Jez Craddock (2), Callum Leys (2), Ian Oxten (1), Rob Robinson (1) and Richard Sanders (1). Sadly the two defeats were in the two cups, losing to Bedford Colts in the semi-final of the Bedfordshire Cup and to Biggleswade in the Final of the East Midlands Cup. At the end of the season it was the fact that the First XV had been without a coach for four seasons that most occupied the council's mind and the decision was taken to appoint the successful Colts duo, Pat Wheeler and Mark Ward to first team affairs.

The current Colts side may well be considered to be the third golden generation that Bedford Athletic has produced. In 2006/07 under the guidance of Val Jones and Tommy Cassidy together with team manager Rob Saunders the team lost only 4 out of 18 games played. Sadly three of these games were in the knockout Cup competitions, a Bedfordshire Cup defeat to Ampthill, an East Midlands Cup defeat to Old Northamptonians and a League play off defeat to Kettering. This season however the side have lost only two games, and having entered the National Colts Cup for the first time have won past Grimsby, Oadby Wyggestonians and Towcestrians to reach this round.

Jeremy Tyrrell

CHARITY EVENTS

Over the Christmas/New Year period we held two events to benefit our nominated charities, Keech Cottage Children's Hospice and the MS Therapy Centre.

On 20th December members of Bedford Choral Society led our Carols Evening, which was enjoyed by

about 50 members and friends with Mike, Martin and Rob joining us after training. During the interval Alex Page, Marc Comb and Will Chudley drew out the winning tickets for the Grand Christmas Draw. A retiring collection took £140 which will be shared between the two charities.

The New Year's Eve Party attracted over 100 members and friends. Everyone enjoyed an evening among like-minded friends. Nos's buffet was cleared pretty quickly then lots of people attempted to use up the calories by dancing to the disco. The raffle made £160 profit for the charities.

We are holding a Curry Night in the Scrum Hall on Friday 25th January with food provided by Nos. Tickets cost £10 and are available from The Followers' office or by contacting Margaret (01234 354708) or Jackie (01234 401542). Again the profits will be shared between the two charities.

Our thanks to everyone who has contributed to these events by attending and donating prizes for the draw and raffle.

Jackie Markham

AWAY TRIPS

Coventry 26th Jan. Dep 11.30 Cost £11 & £6

Plymouth 9th Feb Dep 7 am Return Sunday Cost £75 & £55

Please note: If you are paying on the day please pay by cheque.

Social Events

**January 25th Curry night.
See above for details**

Next Issue:-

February 16th v Cornish Pirates.

Please let me have your views either via the committee or arandall69@btinternet.com by Friday 8th February.

The views expressed in this Newsletter are the authors and do not represent the views either of the Followers Association or Bedford Rugby