



Castleford RUFC Girls

A brief history of rugby for girls
at Castleford RUFC
from 2008-2020

An extract from
'Castleford RUFC: a diarised history from 1870'
by Bill Thackray

Contents

<i>The Girls at Castleford RUFC.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Appendix 1 - Girls' Player of the Season awards..</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Appendix 2 - Yorkshire representation.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Appendix 3 - North Division representation</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Appendix 4 - England representation</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Appendix 5 – Match report (v Canadians).....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Postscript January 2023.....</i>	<i>30</i>

The Girls at Castleford RUFC

We weren't the first girls' rugby team in Yorkshire but we were in at the beginning of what has turned out to be a period of phenomenal growth of rugby for girls in the county. The phrase 'rugby for girls' is intentional as when it is phrased as 'girls rugby' the implication is that it is a different game played with different laws – it isn't; it's rugby played by girls and, over the years, the girls at Castleford have gained a well-deserved reputation for playing rugby and good rugby at that – and developing players, looking beyond the very creditable representation at county and national levels over the years.

The first training session in 2008 involved Megan Owens, Bethan Lloyd and Hannah Mayes. All 3 were ineligible to play in mixed rugby at the club as they had previously and we wanted to provide a team for them to continue playing. Indeed, Hannah had had a year without playing as she was a year older than the others.

At that time there were only 2 age groups U15s (which included girls from U12) and U18s and not many teams were around – in Yorkshire, West Park Leeds and Barnsley had teams and there were small groups of players at Bridlington and Malton, for example. Opportunities for games were few and far between and the emphasis in that season was on introducing the game to more girls and building numbers up to eventually have

4 | CASTLEFORD RUFC GIRLS

a squad to play a game. We did get two games that first season which was a great achievement.



The following season saw our numbers increase to then be able to field 13 U15s and many girls were playing rugby for the first time. The next season was another year of consolidation as most of the U15s went up to U18s and we were able to recruit more into the younger squad. Training was not easy as we always had to be cognisant of the fact that there could be no contact between girls of different age groups when we were all training together. However, slowly but surely numbers in the squads grew as word got about to local schools and the club's girls' first victory recorded was away against Eccles.





Yorkshire representative rugby was starting to grow and the first of many girls from the club began to be chosen for the county squads at U15s and U18s. The U15s notched the girls' first festival win in a good day trip out at Keswick.



Links with Featherstone Academy (then Purston Academy) and King's School began to bear fruit and many girls were recruited from these schools especially

when the U13s age grouping was introduced. For many girls this was their first sport or they made a transition from another sport to take advantage of the growing opportunities to play at a reasonable level. The standard of rugby played and team performances improved as the club continued to pursue the development of players as the key to longevity and sustainability rather than results; 3 U18s and 8 U15s played for Yorkshire county in 2012-13.

There was a slight bump in the road in 2013-14 as we were unable to build numbers for an U18s team and 3 girls, Hannah Mayes, Megan Owens and Hannah Greenaway had to move to play with Barnsley to enable them to continue to have game time. However, the focus was on building full squads for U13s and U15 and the vast proportion (90%) of players had not played rugby at all previously. There was progress as the U15s were runners up in both the fledgling Yorkshire Cup and Keswick Girls Festival tournaments and we even entered the National 7s for the first time at Lichfield.

The following season, 2014-15, was the real breakthrough year, especially when England Women won the World Cup in France and interest was generated generally. Finally, we were able to tap some of the undoubted talent that there was in the local Rugby League sides and the U15s were bolstered particularly. The U15 girls, coached initially by Aidan Wood and then taken on by John Hardy, worked hard at their game and steadily improved as the season progressed, culminating in winning the Area 6 Final at Darlington and then,

amazingly, the RFU National Cup. At Lichfield on 19 April 2015 the U15s, recovering from an early try against them, played some excellent rugby to overpower Crediton from Devon 36-5 (with tries from Courtney Pursglove, Abi Burton and Tilly Churm and conversions by Pursglove). Entering the National 7s again at Lichfield they fell just short as runners up but ended the season winning the Yorkshire Cup in a thrilling 59-43 victory against West Park Leeds at Barnsley.



The U13s, progressed well under John Paul and Tony Teal, and they were successful with wins at the Keswick and Yorkshire Festivals.



Progression continued in 2015-16 and successes for the U13s included winning the Area 6 Tournament and runners up in the Yorkshire Cup Festival; the U15s were Area 6 Winners, runners up in the National Cup semi-finals (losing to eventual winners, Newark) and Yorkshire Cup winners; the U18s were Area 6 Winners, runners up in both the National Cup semi-finals and the Yorkshire Cup but beat a touring Canadian side, Winston Churchill HS, 49-0 (with tries from Pursglove, Burton (3), Rianna Manson, Jasmine Rowley, Emma Hardy and Sinead Peach).





2016-17 was another year of development and consolidation with good numbers of registered players (14 U13s, 28 U15s and 26 U18s). Significantly, there was Yorkshire representation for 7 U15s and 17 U18s and in the England Junior Academy North 14 players and the England Junior Academy 7s' squads 6 players in total over both age groups and 4 girls trialled for England U20s; Emma Hardy, Tilly Churm, Jasmine Bell and Abi Burton. The U18s were RFU Area 6 winners but a big disappointment was their eventual withdrawal from the National Cup Semi Final due to non-availability and late injuries. There was some consolation as they were Yorkshire Cup winners and the first tour (to Worcester) was a huge success. The U15s won the Yorkshire Cup and, relishing the extra space, they played some excellent 7s rugby with, at times, exceptional handling, passing and overall support play to deservedly win both the Durham and Northumberland 7s Tournaments.



Again in 2017-18 there was good development of players throughout the season in all age groups and Yorkshire representation continued with 6 U15s and 11 U18 players. After coaching our U15s and U18s, Yorkshire U15s and U18s John Hardy progressed to Yorkshire Senior Ladies and, as a measure of his influence on the club's players over the years, that season saw 2 former and 2 current U18 players playing for the county ladies as well as 8 former players playing Tyrells Premier 15s (the top level in the women's game) and others progressing to England Talent Development Group (U18s) and England U20s and U18 7s. The U18s were RFU Area 6 winners and played and won a thrilling floodlit match against another touring Canadian side, Mississauga Blues. The U15s won the Yorkshire Cup for the fourth year running to crown another eventful season.





2018-19 was another eventful season and playing numbers were strong and player development was again underlined in each of the 3 squads. The U18s had a very successful tour in Scotland with a very competitive match against Scotland Futures (their national U18s) where the teams were only separated by a converted try. They were also RFU Area 6 finalists and Yorkshire Cup winners U18.



Season 2019-20 was cut short by the Covid-19 lockdown at the point when each squad was arguably playing their best rugby of the season. The last fixture in February was away at Leigh, a new opposition, and that epitomised what club rugby was about: a bus was hired and the teams went with parents and supporters on the bus. The rugby was of a very good standard with many players

playing their best games of the season and the atmosphere of enjoyment and camaraderie throughout the day was palpable and invigorating for players, coaches, parents and supporters alike. If the season was to end then, it was on a very high note.



The RFU brought in the guaranteed half game rule whereby every player was guaranteed to play at least a half and we utilised this rule to help promote the advantages of playing union; everybody was able to play and relished the opportunities provided.

As this chapter in the club's history is written (September 2020) we are awaiting confirmation of a release from the necessary restrictions and a return to full training but we have become more aware of the importance of the benefits of providing opportunities for girls to be active with a purpose and how much the girls can gain socially from being part of a team. The club has benefitted from the success of the girls on and off the field and we hope that this can continue.

Grateful thanks must be given to past and present coaches and team managers and all associated at the club who have backed the girls over the years;

Coaches: Steve Ball, John Paul, Aidan Wood, John Hardy, Kalam Senior, Martin Lawrence, Paul Rank, Richard Parker, Steve Spence-Hirst, Paul Rackstraw, Pete Adams, Ashley Gregory, Mick Reynolds, Kim Priestley, Grace Keyes, Jess Jackson, Tony Teal, Jimmy Carlton, Mick Sant, James Pickett, Sam Zubrzycki.

Team Managers: Andy and Tracy Teece, Andy Whitworth, Julie Renouf, Ceri Toole, Hayley Hagues, Sam Vines, Simone King, Lisa Reynolds, Andy and Sarah Cromack, Jo Millward, Jackie Wilson, Jacintha Ball.

Committee members: Dave Watson, Alan Wandless,
Phil Murray, Mike Connell.

Steve Ball

September 2020

Appendix 1 - Girls' Player of the Season awards

2008/09	Jade Vowles
2009/10	Ella Hancock
2010/11	Megan Owens
2011/12	Hannah Mayes
2012/13	Rachael Lowe
2013/14	Abbie Mayes
2014/15	Abigail Burton
2015/16	Tilly Churm
2016/17	Emma Hardy
2017/18	Jasmine Hazell
2018/19	Rebecca Udall
2019/20	Mia Churm

Appendix 2 - Yorkshire representation

Yorkshire U15	
Pre 2013	
Emma	Lowe
Leanne	Downes
Rachael	Lowe
Jade	Vowles
Megan	Owens
Hannah	Mayes
Abbie	Mayes
Bethan	Lloyd
Jessica	Jackson
2013-2014	
Chelsea	Gledhill
Leigh	Powell
Ellie-Anne	Sutcliffe
2014-2015	
Megan	Blakeway
Abigail	Burton
Tilly	Churm
Amelia	Crosland
Emma	Hardy
Jasmine	Hazell
Brogan	Hood
Courtney	Pursglove
Ellie-Anne	Sutcliffe
Zoe	Teece

2015-2016	
Grace	Hepton
Lacey	Owens
Tamzin	Renouf
2016-2017	
Keara	Bennett
Hollie-Mae	Dodd
Abbie-Leigh	Lindley
Maisie	Lumb
Charlotte	Priestley
Esme	Reynolds
Chelsea	Senior
2017-2018	
Keara	Bennett
Hollie-Mae	Dodd
Sophie	Fairhurst
Francesca	Goldthorp
Nikita	Turner
Millie	Walsh
2018-2019	
Stephanie	Spence-Hirst
Lily	Williams
Nikita	Turner
2019-2020	
Stephanie	Spence-Hirst
Lily	Williams
Emily	Heaps

Yorkshire U18	
Pre 2013	
Lucy	Blewett
Hannah	Greenaway
Rachael	Lowe
Hannah	Mayes
Megan	Owens
Laura	Pickett
Louise	Pickett
Kirsty	Shires
2013-2014	
Megan	Owens
2014-2015	
Megan	Owens
2015-2016	
Megan	Blakeway
Saffron	Burrows
Abigail	Burton
Tilly	Churm
Amelia	Crosland
Emma	Hardy
Jasmine	Hazell
Rianna	Manson
Sinead	Peach
Courtney	Pursglove
Jasmine	Rowley
Ellie-Anne	Sutcliffe
Zoe	Teece
Frances	Whitworth

2016-2017	
Jasmine	Bell
Megan	Blakeway
Abigail	Burton
Tilly	Churm
Abigail	Crowther
Emma	Hardy
Jasmine	Hazell
Grace	Hepton
Imogen	Keirl
Ellie	Kildunne
Aimee	Middleton
Lacey	Owens
Megan	Price
Zoe	Teece
Tamzin	Renouf
Kayleigh	Waller
Frances	Whitworth
2017-2018	
Mia	Churm
Abigail	Crowther
Jasmine	Hazell
Grace	Hepton
Aimee	Middleton
Charlotte	Priestley
Tamzin	Renouf
Zoe	Teece
Rebecca	Udall
Danielle	Waters

2018-2019	
Mia	Churm
Keara	Bennett
Hollie-Mae	Dodd
Millie	Walsh
Rebecca	Udall
Danielle	Waters
2019-2020	
Mia	Churm
Hollie-Mae	Dodd
Jessica	Llewellyn
Nikita	Turner
Rebecca	Udall
Millie	Walsh
Danielle	Waters



Zoe Teece and Keara Bennett,
Yorkshire U18 and U15 Captains 2017-18

Yorkshire Ladies	
Rose	Nash
Jasmine	Bell
Rianna	Manson
Emma	Hardy
Zoe	Teece
Jasmine	Hazell
Tilly	Churm

Appendix 3 - North Division representation

North Division U15/U18	
2013-2014	
Ellie-Anne	Sutcliffe
Abigail	Burton
2014-2015	
Abigail	Burton
Tilly	Churm
Emma	Hardy
Brogan	Hood
Charlotte	Priestley
Ellie-Anne	Sutcliffe
Zoe	Teece
2015-2016	
Megan	Blakeway
Abigail	Burton
Tilly	Churm
Emma	Hardy
Lacey	Owens
Charlotte	Priestley
Courtney	Pursglove
Jasmine	Rowley
Zoe	Teece
Kayleigh	Waller

2016-2017	
Jasmine	Bell
Keara	Bennett
Abigail	Burton
Tilly	Churm
Abigail	Crowther
Hollie-Mae	Dodd
Emma	Hardy
Jasmine	Hazell
Imogen	Keirl
Ellie	Kildunne
Megan	Price
Charlotte	Priestley
Zoe	Teece
Kayleigh	Waller

Appendix 4 - England representation

England U20	
Abigail	Burton
Tilly	Churm
Emma	Hardy
Jasmine	Hazell
Rianna	Manson
Rebecca	Udall

England 7s	
Abigail	Burton
Emma	Hardy
Tamzin	Renouf

England XV	
Ellie	Kildunne

Appendix 5 – Match report (v Canadians)

Castleford U18s v Winston Churchill HS 29 March 2016

Griffins' wings clipped by Tykes

Rugby for girls in Yorkshire moved up a gear when the U18s from West Park Leeds RUFC and Castleford RUFC entertained a Canadian touring party from Winston Churchill High School Griffins and Lethbridge Collegiate High School Clippers from Lethbridge, Alberta. The Canadians were the first girls' party to tour Yorkshire and they were given a hearty welcome and there was some excellent rugby on show before an appreciative crowd.

West Park Leeds hosted the games and were first up against the tourists who were able to give all of their 22 strong squad game time in the two 30-minutes long mini games. The endeavour from both sides was evident from the off but soon West Park Leeds were able to ship the ball out wide and Georgia Cutt was able to use the space and her pace to score the first try of the night. West Park's centre Ellie Kildunne, always a threat, was able to score next with captain, Emma Lowe converting the try. WCHS settled into the match and were able to take advantage of their forward play for Rachel Greeno to crash over. This was followed by more sustained pressure from the Canadians and scrum half Mikhi Lagemaat was able to finish off her own move to bring the first half to a close with the scores level at 14-

14. The second half was evenly balanced with both sides unable to take advantage of their probing of the opposing defences until a good defensive kick by Ellie Kildunne relieved the pressure and she was able to take a good offload from the resulting chase to score a second try. She completed her hat trick of tries later, with Emma Lowe taking her hat trick of conversions to bring up the final score of 26-14.

After a 30-minute break Winston Churchill faced a Castleford side that put them under pressure from the outset. The weather started to deteriorate but the exciting play kept the spectators enthralled. The tourists tackled resolutely throughout but the Castleford girls were able to combine a well-organised defence with the ability to counterattack and scrum half, Courtney Pursglove was able to dart through to score the first try. The Castleford forwards started to dominate the scrums but also to run powerfully and with purpose. Good team support play allowed the combination play of fly half, Sinead Peach, and centres Emma Hardy and Abi Burton to exploit the space created. Abi Burton was next try scorer and then followed it with others to complete her hat trick. Other try scorers were Rianna Manson, Jasmine Rowley and Emma Hardy and Sinead Peach was able to crown a Player of the Match award-winning performance with a typically determined and skilful swerving run through a crowd of defenders to score her try. The final score was 49-0 and both teams knew that they'd been in a match.

Both games were played in excellent spirit and the post-match congratulations and joint photographs exemplified the sportsmanship on display. An informal meal attended by the players and coaching teams of all sides and many guests, amongst whom there were the President and Chairman of Yorkshire RFU, continued the excellent atmosphere to exemplify the benefits of touring for tourists and hosts alike.



(courtesy John Ashton)

Postscript January 2023

The season and half played since the restrictions of Covid lifted have been difficult on the whole, largely due to changes brought on by the effects of Covid etc on lifestyles and interests for girls and a general and perceptible 'post-Covid' lethargy.

2021-22 started well for the U13s who recruited well and apart from festival losses at Sandal went the rest of the season unbeaten, playing some very good rugby and encompassing the virtues of the RFU 'half-game rule' really well in the full spirit intended and with great effect. The U15s were slow off the mark but with good recruitment of new players from an RL background went from strength to strength and through the season unbeaten. The U18s played their most mature rugby not always with the reward of the scores doing them justice. The squad struggled for numbers but the players played with spirit and enjoyed the games.

Sadly, the trend of competing interests and other commitments of players, together with a reduction in the age range for this cohort (Y12 and Y13 only), meant that in season 2022-23 the U18s' numbers dropped and the team succumbed to the inevitable and folded – a very sad conclusion for all associated with that group of players, especially those who had come through the ranks from U13s. The 'hamster wheel' grew even larger with the introduction of the U12 age team and the new U14 and U16 age group teams and the players, coaches,

parents and supporters are to be commended for their efforts.

Thanks go to coaches, Steve Ball, Kalam Senior, Richard Parker, Jess Jackson, Mick Senior, Pete Adams, Chris Reavley, Ellie Vines and Dave Pursglove and parent helpers Ceri Toole, Laurie Anderson, Sam Vines, Mat Longfellow, Melissa Teece and Sam Brierley whose support has been invaluable.

Whilst the club is situated in the middle of a very strong RL area providing a pool of potential players, RL continues to draw players and has put a strain on playing strength through all age groups and brought to an end attempts to start Ladies' in both 2021-22 and 2022-23. The 'cross-fertilisation' between the codes is both a strength and a weakness and, sadly, the club's efforts will always be hampered until and unless there is greater understanding between both the RFL and RFU on season duration and general demands on players.

Since the main writing of this history we have had more players play at Yorkshire U15 and U18 levels; enter the England Rugby Development programmes at U16 (DPP) and U18 (CoE) levels; many former players, too-numerous to mention individually, go on to play top level Allianz Premier 15s and RL Women's Super League; one player play for GB 7s in the Tokyo Olympics; one for England in the World Cup final in New Zealand; three play in the RL Women's World Cup and two play club rugby in Hong Kong and we are proud to have played a part in their rugby life and given them

their opportunities to play. Grassroots rugby is so important and it must never be forgotten that the clubs provide the players for any further development be it at the clubs themselves (hard when the clubs don't have numbers for full sides), at county level and the 'elite development' programmes.

It will continue to be a truism that the club relies on the hard work and commitment of volunteers and the strength of the game as a whole on the cooperation and understanding between individuals at clubs to work together to provide game time for the girls so that they can enjoy the benefits of an important team sport and being part of team and a member of a club.

Steve Ball

January 2023