

1st Game and Colts XV – Australia 2010

After a heavy haul of over 32 travelling hours, the tour party finally arrived safely at the Super Sports Centre, Runaway Bay on the Gold Coast. After 6 hours sleep, followed by some post breakfast volleyball, training got underway and began to shake off the accumulated jet-lag. The first four hours of training, straddling a lunchtime trip to the nearby mall, was difficult to deal with in the blaze of the Brisbane sun. The day came to a close with a short fitness session for the U18's courtesy of Mr Waite, whilst the U16's enjoyed the first cross-bar challenge of the Tour, with 0 hits from 23 efforts.

Both the Colts and Senior squads were lucky enough to have a training session hosted by two Queensland Reds Academy coaches, including former Wallaby Paul Carozza. Regardless of a few bumps and bruises from the contact session; a real eye-opener into the physicality and intensity of Australian Rugby, the skills of the "magic metre" bore the fruits of success in the matches that followed. That afternoon, the boys were treated to a surfing lesson on the golden beaches of Surfer's Paradise, by three typical Aussie surfers. Despite the cold water, the threat of shark attack and the spectacular surfing displays from the members of staff, the afternoon's antics were thoroughly enjoyable.

After some morning organisational sessions for all teams and a hearty yet healthy lunch, the first match was quickly upon us. We were immediately struck by the superb setting and playing conditions upon our arrival at All Saints College. After our first try of the Tour from Adam Hall, a strong All Saints outfit struck back immediately from the restart. Tries early on in the second half, gave us a platform from which we could attack and we ran in eight tries in total, with Will Rhodes scoring twice on his debut for the 1st XV.

Although the 2nd XV Captain, Henry Wellbelove, set the tone for the game with a dominating opening tackle, it was the home side that capitalised to score first, under the posts. A try from the Captain and some creative play by fly-half, Jonny McDuell, released Dan These to storm over the whitewash. The match was ended early at 12-12, due to an unfortunate incident concerning Mike Goldsworthy's rear-end and Archie Wellbelove's spinal column.

The U16's commenced their Tour with a slow start, having to defend constant Aussie attacks. As the pressure turned in our favour, we were rewarded with a well-deserved try from the unstoppable Adam Booth during the first half. After half time and some brave substitutions made by Mr Sherwin, the U16's took the game away from the All Saints, winning 59-12.

The coach left the plush Super Sports Centre for the journey to the country settlement of Dalby, in the heart of Darling Downs. After 3-hours traversing the expansive plains of brown farmland we disembarked the coach discussing escape routes to the State border. After a fantastic BBQ, we were smuggled away by our host families, leaving our fates undecided. But oh how wrong we were. The next morning, the Tour coach taking us around the region was buzzing with the excited tales of kangaroo hunting, quad bike acrobatics and the generous hospitality.

We entered the cattle ranch with the stench of 35,000 cattle fresh in our noses and the amusement of urinating cows dominating our camera lenses. For lunch, yet another BBQ was provided by some host families near to an ephemeral stream, where a similar number of cattle were also consumed along with ample volumes of damper (a sweet Aussie bread). The day's travels were concluded at the local cotton gins where the Dingo-Dog hybrid received the most attention. We returned to the pitches for a laborious training session where the quantity of red meat seemed to affect the quality of rugby, in preparation for the following days games.

The schedule of the day was that each team would play two 40-minute matches. The first match for the 1st XV was promising, although we were out-matched in size and power, we made up for it with pace and skill. Taking us into the interval with a comfortable lead. The hour and a half gap appeared to play to Dalby's advantage and the second match was well contested from both sides, allowing the Dalby heavy-weights to recharge their batteries. Scoreless until the last five minutes; Moses Osibanjo found himself in a foot race with the other Dalby prop to score under the posts. In the dying seconds, Greg Illingworth scored a blistering breakaway try to put the game beyond doubt, keeping up the unbeaten record for the 1st XV on the Tour.

Despite considerable pressure throughout the first half for the 2nd XV, it took some time to convert this pressure into points. Some dominating rucking and scrummaging, coupled with powerful running from the backs, most notably George Humphreys and Nick Coward, meant that a Bedford win looked possible. A disciplined forwards game in both lineouts and scrums were matched with influential performances from Jack Simpson and Henry Wellbelove. Injuries to both Rhys Williams and Musa Munatsi, failed to detract from a great first win on Tour for the 2nd XV.

The U16's exerted pressure from the off and started the scoring when Ryan Brett-Williams broke through the opposition defences and linked with George Adams to finish off a powerful move. Unfortunately Dylan Tanna was injured in the act of scoring an inspirational try set up by some fancy footwork from Adam Booth, and had to go off to hospital, along with Will Hunt. The second game was fashioned similarly to that of the first game, as Bedford dominated; persistence prevailed and Bedford scored several tries in the first half. Dalby retaliated strongly after the drinks break and managed to get the home scoreboard rolling. Bedford swiftly upped the tempo and made chances pay in the closing stages, with James Stroomer completing a powerful run from the 22 and showing his unlikely pace before diving under the posts. The game was finished confidently and the U16's felt good about their chances, as they looked to the games in the coming weeks.

Feeling bleary from the previous night's celebrations with the Dalby boys (they know how to party!); we said our goodbyes to our first host families of the trip. Throughout our time there we were amazed by the incredible hospitality from all of those at Dalby RFC who have gone to extraordinary lengths to provide us with an unforgettable Tour experience of unrivalled quality.

We arrived at Sydney Airport and were immediately split into two groups; 17 boys going to Trinity Grammar and 40 going to Mater Maria Catholic College. The remainder of the day was spent socialising with our host families in various Sydney suburbs. After a morning tour of the Northern Beaches and a presentation to the School for the Trinity boys, the 2nd XV and the U16's played their third game of the Tour against Mater Maria 1st XV. The first score of the fixture for the 2nd XV came from Mater Maria, with a sloppy and lethargic display of tackling from Bedford. At 14-0, with the retirement of various players and the re-structuring of the pack, including the introduction of the marauding Curtis Weaver, Henry Wellbelove scored Bedford's only try of the game.

The U16's match commenced with Mater Maria dominating. After 15 minutes, the fixture was put on hold whilst Tom Bingham was taken to hospital with a head injury. Once the game recommenced, wonderful performances from Bob Barfoot and Charlie Esam lead Bedford to power over the line several times in the first ten minutes. Strong running from the forwards gave the backs the broken play they wanted, providing Tim Graham with the opportunity to slot the conversions that came his way. Bedford went on to have a clean sheet, winning 47-0.

Typical English weather greeted the 17 boys for a slippery training session at Trinity Grammar, before a relaxing recovery swim in the School's pool. Mr Sherwin's contact had arranged for one of their school buses to take us to the train station, regardless of the state it was in: stuck behind a

tree, egg stains on the window and to top it all off, took 10 minutes to start. Having crammed our bags onto the bus and strategically placed our players around them, we finally managed to shut the door. The engine spluttered and we were off. Two minutes later – we were there!

After having missed the first train due to Mr Burgess' lack of conditioning as he was unable to lug his bag up the stairs quick enough, the platform vending machine sales rocketed. We eventually reached the Menzies hotel in Central Sydney, where we were to spend the next three nights. After the announcement that the 1st XV match against West Harbour RFC was to be cancelled due to the wet weather, we were allowed the rest of the day to roam the city. That evening was spent at a 'cook your own' steakhouse with a side-order of the much loved Mr Swanwick.

The buffet breakfast was demolished by the stampede of 60 rugby players' stomachs before we made our way to Circular Quay, for the jet-boat ride. With poncho's put on and electricals removed (Elson's Ugg's included!), we were strapped to the boat and given the safety briefing. As the boat shot out of the Quay, left behind us were breath-taking views of the city along with the famous Harbour Bridge and the Opera House. The half an hour that followed was filled with speed, spins and a lot of ocean spray.

Soaked. In an attempt to dry-off, some wandered around the Opera House and the nearby shops but most ended up admiring the views from the Guylian café with hot chocolate in hand. A wounded Mr Huddleston, with injuries to both his cheek and his pride, returned from his surfing exploits earlier that day. Telling his tale of shark attacks, we split up into 5 groups ready for the various activities: a trip up Sydney Tower accompanied by an excursion out onto the glass sky-walk, Tauronga Zoo, Manly surfing beach, Olympic Park and the Harbour Bridge walk.

The final full day at the Menzies was started early with a group jog to a local park for team run-throughs in preparation for the fixtures against Riverview College later that afternoon. Following a lunchtime stop at Bondi Beach, the mobile changing room (disguised as a coach) took us to Riverview, where we arrived in chinos and polos.

With wide intentions from the start, Bedford 1st XV's applied pressure proved to be fruitful with a well-worked try from Nick Coward within the first few minutes. Riverview came back strongly and it wasn't too long before they replied with two tries in quick succession due to our lack of concentration in defence. Two tries in opposite corners, from Adam Hall and Greg Illingworth, took us into the interval 15-10 up. Perhaps due to a lack of fitness on Bedford's part and Riverview's ability to play wide, fast and expansive rugby, Riverview managed to score two converted tries to take the match 29-20.

After an undesirable performance against Mater Maria, the 2nd XV felt the pressure to respond positively. Despite this, for the first twenty minutes of the game was spent camped in Riverview's 22 with some impressive line out play from Alex Kemp and Nick Hoare. Later in the half, Ed Ambler's quick tap penalty led to Bedford's first and only try of the game. Dominant running and further poor defending meant Riverview entered the break with a commanding lead, yet sadly this was not enough to sneak the victory.

A less than satisfactory start for the U16's led to an early try by the opposition but Bedford almost struck back with an opportunistic break from 'power house' James Stroomeer but sadly could not complete the final pass. There was a definite improvement in the second half following a stern team talk at half time. After countless penalties and pressure on the opposition's line, Charlie Esam crossed over the line. Unfortunately Adam Booth was injured in the second half with a collar bone

break and found himself on the ever-increasing injury list. Despite losses across the board, the evening was spent at a local pizzeria for a senior squad meal.

Regardless of the in-flight headphones, the soundtrack of snoring could be heard from both ends of the plane. We checked into our hotel in Melbourne where operations were immediately halted due to a fire alarm. Once settled in, the tour party commandeered a tram into the city centre to watch the highly coveted AFL match between Collingwood Magpies and the Essendon Bombers at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Although one-sided with the Magpies winning by 98 points, it didn't detract from the entertaining atmosphere and the explosive pace of Aussie Rules.

After our final training session of the Tour, we dispersed with our last host families of the trip. For the remainder of the day we were left to our own devices with the ultimate match of the Tour preying on our minds. On arrival at the Melbourne Formula 1 circuit, where the matches against the Victoria State team were to be held, the news quickly spread that the giant team that were already assembled were only U16's, with the U18's yet to arrive!

The fixtures against the Victoria State sides allowed the Tour to culminate with a scintillating performance from the 1st XV to win the match in the dying minutes, 29-27. Positive performances across all teams was the perfect way to end the matches of the Tour and enjoy the remainder of the trip with peace of mind.

The final day in Australia was nigh and the time was spent, for most, wondering around the city centre, whilst others had a tour of the MCG. With tired feet, full bags and empty wallets, we returned with our hosts for our Last Supper. As practiced as we were at saying our goodbyes without getting emotional, we departed our comfy host's houses knowing that it would be replaced with a cramped plane for the 10-hour flight to Hong Kong.

Following such a lengthy flight; being met by 95% humidity and 29 degree heat at 2am Australian time, took it's toll on everyone, none more so than Ryan Brett-Williams who shared his flight with a stomach bug. After reaching the YMCA hotel in Kowloon, we hit the hay...hard!

The penultimate day of the Tour saw boys being harassed by tailors (and masseurs!) in the bustling streets of Hong Kong Island. The boys assembled back at the YMCA laden with glistening cheap watches, shiny new earphones and some 'Rolph' Lauren clothing, before going to the End of Tour Meal at Hong Kong FC.

The Stanley and Mankok markets bore the brunt of the Bedford boys as they scoured the stalls for the last-minute bargains before picking up tailor-made suits and packing our bags, ready for the late-night flight back to the UK. The final act of the Tour was by far, for so many, the most emotional; the last £2.50 large MacDonald's meal! The thought of the 13-hour flight was worsened by a 2-hour delay whilst onboard the plane. Many movies later with the English countryside visible from the small windows below us, we prepared for landing.

The Tour of Australia was an incredible experience, providing us with a great opportunity to view the World whilst doing what we love. The rugby on display bodes well for the coming season and the physicality shown by all sides is something the boys should take pride in. A huge thank you to all members of staff, especially Mr Burgess for his efforts, as well as Mrs Powell for dealing with so many injuries. It was certainly a Tour never to be forgotten.

Chris Albrow (U6th)