

Annual Report 2022/23

This second season post Covid has proved difficult for many clubs as highlighted by the number of sides either pulling out of the leagues or failing to complete the season. For us, while we remain in a reasonably strong position we need to be guard against any complacency especially regarding finances, player retention and volunteer numbers.

I will start with the ladies section who have had an excellent season. With Benny and Mike heading the coaching team and Heather again captaining the side they have steadily picked up players throughout the season and are now able to select from a strong squad. The first half of the season saw them finish second in their conference with 7 wins and 3 losses before losing in the 3rd/4th play off to a strong Corstorphine 2s. However post Christmas the team competed in the National Plate winning all 3 pool ties before defeating Annan at home in the semi final to book their place at Murrayfield for Silver Saturday. They faced Oban Ladies and despite not playing their best rugby fought back strongly to score 2 tries in the last 10 minutes and secure a 31-22 victory. An excellent day for all concerned and a huge congratulations to all the squad from the club. We look forward to further success next season,

The 1st XV had a mixed season in what ended up being a very truncated league. Our initial 8 team league was reduced to 7 with Blairgowrie opting for relegation after one game and was further reduced to 6 after Hillfoots failed to complete all their fixtures. The side had some good early season performances but defeats to Dunfermline and Aberdeenshire and a draw away to Caithness put paid to any chance of finishing in the top 2 and having the chance of promotion. For the record we eventually finished 3rd with 6 wins, 3 defeats and a draw. The team also lost narrowly in the second round of the National Shield, losing to Dunfermline by 1 point. Jamie will have his own thoughts on the season but once again player availability affected our performances in crucial games. We also changed the coaching set up a couple of times during the season. The club did retain the Alban Jenkins Shield by defeating our old rivals Llandybie. The 2s also started the season brightly but like the 1s were affected by a changing league structure during the season. They finished in the top half of their league which unfortunately resulted in them playing the better sides in the post split with most of the fixtures being away from home. They finished with 4 wins and 9 defeats in the league and a creditable draw against Kinross in a friendly. My thanks to all the coaches – Aubrey, Geoff, Murray, Shorty, Kevin, Gordon and Tets, team managers Ian and Jodie and physio Louise for all their hard work over the year.

As you may have seen this week Falkirk have decided to withdraw from the Kelpies and pursue their own midi section. This is a very disappointing decision as we did not feel it was the right time to go down this route. We had hoped for a phased split but this was rejected by Falkirk. We have arranged an information meeting next week for the parents and the kids and we will listen to their concerns and ideas regarding the way forward for the Kelpies. We have appointed a new DO in Cammy Watson. He is now employed by the club and continues to work in Larbert HS and also in our new partnership with Braes HS. My thanks to all the youth coaches especially Scott Noble, Chris McDougall, Stevie Balfour, Cammy and Kyle.

The mini section has increased its numbers over the year and we now have good numbers at P1-3 and P6 and are working hard to increase the numbers at all age groups with Cammy and Kyle continue to work in the primary schools to introduce rugby to the local community. Daniel and Ryan

have helped to set up and head the mini committee with interested parents. My thanks to all the mini coaches- James, Graeme, Colin, Daniel, Ryan, Fritz, Kyle and Cammy.

The walking rugby section numbers continue to creep up and they had their first matches with home and away victories over Linlithgow. Thanks to Ron (despite his overzealous use of yellow cards) and Kyle.

We have started Tartan Touch this year and we have had over 90 players aged from 5-75 playing in the different groups. Thanks to Cammy for organising these events.

As always I will finish this section with a huge thanks to all the players who have pulled on a Grangemouth or Kelpies jersey at some point during the season.

Off the field we have faced ongoing financial challenges especially with rising costs including gas and electricity. We are looking at ways to minimise the effects of rising prices. The accounts will show that despite these problems and not receiving any Covid grants this year the club finances are fairly stable. We do need to monitor carefully our spending while looking to maximise all sources of revenue. In addition to our existing sponsors (Tonys Tile House and MGM Timber) we have been able to bring in a number of new sponsors during the year including Lady of the Glen, Candide and Verifier and more recently we have announced a deal with Mcdonalds to help with youth rugby. We also received a donation from the Rotary Club and were involved with their Santa Sleigh Ride collection. My thanks to all those involved in attracting new sponsors especially the hard work of Gordon. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Tets for his hard work as Treasurer over many years and for his part in helping turn around the club finances. My thanks to all the board members – Ron, Dom, Gordon and Tets for their hard work and support throughout the year. Last August we completed our wellbeing decking project and invited Scott and Jenny Hastings along with family members representing Wallace, Matt and Bobby to attend the official opening. This proved to be a very emotional occasion for all involved. My thanks to Alex Bell, Chris and Fritz for their efforts on the decking. A huge thanks as always to the groundsmen- Chris, Fritz, Gary and Brodie for all their efforts on the pitches and in and around the clubhouse, gym and barn. We are also looking to establish the club as a hub for Memories Scotland to support people with dementia in the community. Ron Taylor and Michael White are collaborating with Grangemouth High School to develop this project. This year we lost an ex club captain with the passing of David Gannon. David was a fine back row forward and an even better tourist. He will be sadly missed and our thoughts are with his family and friends.

So what of the future. We certainly have a number of challenges. On the playing front there is a new league structure in place for Caley 1 which will hopefully reduce overall travel distances through the season. While our financial position is stable we must grab every opportunity to maximise our revenue and control expenditure. We also need to recruit more volunteers and coaches especially with the changes to the Kelpies. If you are able to help out even in a small way please speak to myself, Gordon or Ron. There is an opportunity to build on our numbers but we will all need to work hard over the coming months to achieve this target. Thank you.

Captains Report 2022-23

Playing Squad

After recovering from the disruption from covid and the instability from season 21/22, everyone associated with Grangemouth was looking forward to season 2022/23 with optimism and excitement. We were looking forward to playing under a new coaching set-up with some new players joining the squad.

Pre-season had progressed well with successful fixtures against Livingston and Alloa as well as a very competitive game with Stirling county 2XV. The season started with a solid win over Caithness in the cup 49-15, a team that we'd struggled against in previous seasons. This was followed up with a convincing win at hillfoots and blairgowrie and a thrilling 32-31 win against Ellon at home, won with a last play drop goal. The season was off to a great start with wins against teams that were previously a stumbling block, providing a great deal of optimism for the season ahead. The next challenge was Dunfermline at home a game that has been toughly fought over the past seasons and was no different this time, Dunfermline ran out 35-16 winners, with our mistakes and missed opportunities proving the difference. After losing to Dunfermline the squad were keen to get a good result making the long journey up to Caithness fighting hard to get a 7-7 draw against a physical team. Our next fixture saw the first trip to Aberdeen of the season to play Aberdeenshire, again mistakes and missed opportunities resulted in a disappointing defeat 36-24. Winning the league appeared to be an unachievable aim at this point however a second place finish was possible with an eye on playoffs for promotion that would bring.

The Squad were keen to get back to winning ways after having suffered 2 defeats and a draw in the previous games. After having played all the teams in the league once (with the exception of Aberdeen wanderers, which was rescheduled due to the death of the queen) our next fixture was hillfoots at home which ended in a much needed win.

With the league playoff positions still the aim and a positive start to the season the squad were looking forward to the next round of the cup against Dunfermline at home. Having been beaten a few weeks earlier in a game that felt winnable confidence was high going into the match. Despite a much improved performance this ended our progression in the cup, narrowly losing 15-14.

The start of November provided the first weekend with no game since the start of September a much needed week off to regroup. Following the break we made the second trip to Aberdeen for the rescheduled Aberdeen wanderers game. Ultimately winning 50-19 frustrations flared during the game and against a different team the result could have been different.

The autumn international break meant that the next scheduled fixture was not until mid december and an extremely cold spell of weather resulted in one game being rescheduled and the second game only going ahead due to the hard work of Dunfermline to secure a 4G pitch at south Queensferry. Due to unavailability and injury a much changed team was put out and ground out a 17-12 win, a result that felt deserved after having let ourselves down earlier in the season.

Our first home game of 2023 saw Caithness make the long journey down to glensburgh ending in a convincing 46-0 win. Due to weather the next game was not until the end of the month away to ellon. This was a must win game if a second place finish was to be achievable. This was a tight game which resulted in Ellon winning 19-8, which wasn't helped by injuries and last minute call offs due to illness.

Moving into February there were only 2 league matches remaining and the annual Llandibye match to look forward to. The first of those was at home to Aberdeen wanderers resulting in a win of 26-5. The annual Llandybie match followed, resulting in a win for Grangemouth, retaining the Alban Jenkins shield for another year. The final game of the season saw us welcome Aberdeenshire to Glensburgh. This was a game of two halves with Aberdeenshire winning 21-5 at half time and an end result of winning 22-21. What had promised to be a short season seemed to drag on and was finally at an end, having averaged 1 game a month from October until February.

The 2XV spent the year in a challenging and competitive Caledonia 3 division, where they ended up finishing in 9th place – played 13, won 4, lost 9. The structure of the league this year was such that there was a split of the top teams in the league for the final 4 games. The aim next season will be to remain competitive, fulfilling every fixture. Well done to all the players who played for and supported the 2XV throughout the season.

The Grangemouth Stagettes also had a good season, finishing 2nd in the Caledonia Midlands/East Region league, winning 7 and losing 3 games. The biggest achievement of the season came in the National Plate which the Stagettes won beating Oban Lorne 31-22 at the DAM Health stadium. Congratulations to the coaching team, Heather and all of the Stagettes players on their achievements this season.

Overall, it was a positive season for the club, that saw a number of younger players making the step into senior rugby. We all share frustrations with league structure both in a geographical sense as well as the lack of fixtures for large periods of time, but we can take confidence and look ahead to next season. It's important that we get a strong pre-season period under our belts, ensuring we are well prepared for what will be a challenging, yet exciting season come August.