

21<sup>st</sup> April 2024



# In Touch Celebration Special



A few years ago the players' awards evening used to be combined with the annual dinner with a celebrity guest speaker who closed the evening by handing over the awards. It wasn't always a success. The celebrity speakers often weren't known to the young players and because the speakers cost a lot we were forced to charge a lot of money for tickets which meant not too many of the players could afford it and those that did quickly got bored as they waited for their bit of the evening and talked over the expensive speaker.



But all that changed thanks to Ludlow coach Mikey Jones. He said the evening should be about the lads and their achievements and that they would provide the entertainment. He was right. The evening is now so popular with the players that very few VP's get to attend which is a shame. But the players and their achievements, are wonderfully showcased during a very entertaining evening which I felt privileged to have attended.

Hosted by our very own Ant and Dec, Stu Lewis and Charlie Doyle, it commenced with a super tribute to the leavers, principally Mikey Jones after seven years as coach and Matt Ginge Davies after a similar stretch as captain.

There were tears aplenty, mostly from Mikey, as his young son appeared on the screen to tell us Daddy's shoes will be big ones to fill. And don't we know it! Along with Ginge go Jim Alderson while Charlie Doyle and Jamie Durban are off to try their luck at Luctonians. But, tears over, Mikey told us that there were a very special group of young players remaining who he was certain would continue to develop and bring success once again to the club. It was an uplifting speech and echoed by a rare speech from Ginge. It so moved Stu Lewis that he quipped that if Ginge had spoken like that at the start of every match we'd have had a clean sweep for the season.

There were plenty of joke awards for achievements that I can't really recount in this report but it's good to know that plenty of the antics I fondly recall from my playing days persist even if Superman and shopping

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trolleys hadn't been invented then. And who knew that we had spawned a composer and supergroup from among our playing ranks.



The main awards went to:  
First team player of the season - Jamie Durban  
Players' Player - Ben Black  
Seconds Player of the Season and Seconds' Players' Player - Jonny Grainger  
Mike Thomas Development Player - Toby Morgan  
Clubman of the Year - Stuart Lewis  
President's Cup - Kelly Nicklin



Jonny Grainger is definitely worth a mention. He turned up at the beginning of the season and had serious difficulty catching a ball while standing still. By the end of the season Mikey Jones said he was the first name on the team sheet, a brilliant effort and together with the encouraging numbers of youngsters playing rugby at Ludlow. That brings me to a story by journalist Owen Slot about how rugby can transform young lives. That story is told in a podcast "Hope within the mango trees" which was sent to him. In a nutshell this is it.

Tim Grandage was a banker with HSBC and posted to Calcutta in 1987. He began parking his car on a street and was told by street urchins that the car would be stolen and then they would be blamed by the police. He thought it was a scam and they were after money. They weren't and he was so impressed that he left the car unlocked so they could sleep in it or under it. A friendship was formed and eventually he found himself looking after a large number of these street kids. He wanted to help them by educating them but when that didn't work he turned to his big love, rugby and they responded. He taught them to play and pretty soon they were beating some of the elite from local schools. Eventually they were so good that they beat the local police team and one of the illiterate players was asked to go back and coach the police side. I was reminded of that as Mikey Jones told us that he had fallen out of love with rugby until Stuart Jardine brought him back to Ludlow in 2010 and got him playing for a side he grew to love and then to coach into championship winners. As I said, a great night.

I have to bring you some bad news too which does no credit to the RFU. After a long battle to re-establish a seconds team we were placed in a league which required travel to far off places like Trentham and Burton-On-Trent. Like all country clubs we suffer from the farming season. So when the season starts our farmer players are sowing and in February they are lambing. We struggled to get out a side so we began the season with minus ten points having been docked for failing to muster a full side to go to the far side of Staffordshire. Playing in a league which contained many first teams it became harder and harder to assemble a side willing to drive high mileages to be on the wrong end of a trouncing. We expected to be relegated to a league which would have put us in contention with several local clubs next season. Not a bit of it. The RFU has booted us out and told us that we have to prove we can play 20 games next season before we will be considered for readmission. Shrewsbury are in the same predicament.

We have appealed and will await the verdict. Meanwhile the RFU have delegated a young lady to try to assemble a merit league locally. If she can find enough teams it may be a good solution. We'll see.

I can't help but reflect that it is the RFU that caused this problem in the first place by encouraging lots of new local teams, some of which were never destined to succeed and denuding successful clubs like Ludlow and Shrewsbury of players. Having said that the seconds managed to finish their season with a more local trip and a decent win over Clee Hill seconds 29-7.

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Our Minis and Juniors season also finishes soon and this weekend was a really successful one for our Under 14s who travelled to Bridgnorth and won with a brilliant score of 83 – 5. A fantastic effort from this team, coached by James Bridge, with five different try scorers in total, some of the lads scoring 3 tries each.



Our Under 11s also had a successful time playing against six different teams at Whitchurch Festival with coaches Gareth Nicklin and Ben Jackson – they drew a few and lost a few but the effort from the players was superb. We're hoping to get more of our age grade teams playing in festivals next season.



A huge thank you to James Bridge and our team of Minis and Juniors coaches who support our young players (and senior players of the future!) every Sunday morning – thanks for inspiring and encouraging the kids this season.

Some sad news now of a former Ludlow player, Phil Moo Cow Edwards, who died on 15<sup>th</sup> April. Phil was one of the founder members of our neighbours Cleve Hill Rugby Club and instrumental in making that club such a success. At the time of writing funeral details were not available.

The Club's annual golf day takes place on Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> May at Ludlow Golf Club followed by a meal and prize giving at the Linney. Wynne Jones is organising if you fancy entering a team.

Also a reminder that it's the AGM on 23<sup>rd</sup> May at 7pm.

Friday 24<sup>th</sup> May sees an evening at The Linney organised by Gerry Acton and Wynne Jones with Broadcaster, former schoolteacher, Wales B standard rugby player and club cricketer Phil Steele which promises to be a cracker of a night. Tickets are £30 to include dinner and are available either through Wynne or Gerry.

The new season will soon be upon us.

*Andy Wright*

President Ludlow Rugby Club