



Firstly I would like to state that this is not a swipe at any one individual, or is it a rant at the converted. This letter is just my general view of the club at present, following my return from the Emerald Isle. I will, during this ramble, compare our club with the Dublin team I played for, to which I make no apology.

During my time playing in Ireland I witnessed a squad of 40+ players turning up every Tuesdays and Thursdays for training from 17 years to 45 years. All players were committed to training as hard as they could, taking part in the training sessions to the **BEST OF THEIR ABILITY**. For those who struggled to get to grips with the drills, there was time to step out, watch and rejoin when possible. Nobody would chastise players who stepped out to watch or catch a breather, because each player to a man knew that that person was giving as much as they could to the cause.

There was a belief within the club that if you weren't willing to put the hard graft in you were not only counter productive to the success of the club, but that you would also lose your shirt to someone else, albeit as with Ashton at times, the ethos of bringing new players through and thus strengthening an ever evolving squad is difficult particularly for the 3rd Team and it is often the case that favours are called upon to 'get a team out'.

I am aware that people believe that, in respect of team selection, they are harshly treated at times; 1st XV one week, 3rd XV the next, 2nd XV the week after, 20 minutes here, 10 minutes away. I personally, would sit on the bench for 80 minutes, of any of the three teams, away to deepest darkest Peru and offer support to those playing if it meant we got the result.

I would, as you all know, have a gripe and a moan post match if I felt that I or any other player was unduly treated, but I would make sure when I got my chance to play I would give the captain the hard task of dropping me the week after.

I understand and sympathise with all those players who feel poorly treated, particularly those who put so much effort into self preparation leading up to a Saturday and there are countless arguments and situations where things happen on a weekend which would both reinforce and counter this view, but this is my take on things.

In Ireland the 3rd XV played on a Friday, 1st XV on a Saturday and 2nd XV on a Sunday. Non-competing players from all levels would stand and support their clubmen on the different days. Obviously due to the fixture arrangement here that is not possible. **BUT** I would ask that for those who can stop after a game, **welcome back teams who have played away and offer consolation in defeat, a pint of winners in victory and restore/ instil a level of collectiveness within our club** which appears to be on the decline.

As a Players' Representative it is my duty to listen to players' issues/ concerns and to voice any problems to the selection committee on a Tuesday, which I do without hesitation or prejudice. Whilst at team selection I am constantly trying to ensure that players are not over looked and are given a fair chance to play at a level that is conducive to the success of our club. It is also my duty to ensure that dropped players are contacted by the team captain to offer justification and constructive criticism.

I have great admiration for players who have given many years of service to our club and would rather opt out of playing 1st XV or 2nd XV team rugby because they are reaching the twilight of their careers. This is understandable and I thank them for their loyalty and continued commitment.

I am disappointed, however, when I hear of players who seem to have there own agenda, who answer the call to play with questions or who believe they should be playing for a specific team. Ideally we all want to win every week; we all want to be successful, we all want to play a full 80 minutes with our closest team mates but seldom is that the case.

Players who believe that the 1st XV, or indeed the 2nd XV is beyond their levels of skill/fitness etc. should not be perturbed when asked to answer the call and put the shirt on. 1st XV rugby is undoubtedly a 'step up' in respect of fitness and ability, ergo 2nd XV from 3rd XV, but if selected to play you are deemed to be the best player available to do so at that specific time and the selection committee is confident that you can do the job asked of you. **It disappoints me when I hear of players not wanting to 'step up' or indeed, 'step down' because of their own agenda.**

The 'Ashton upon Mersey Squad' is now littered with Senior Colts who have been selected on merit and taken their chances. Unflustered, the colts are establishing themselves at all levels including six on the 1st XV. The six, currently playing 1st XV are doing so largely thanks to the 2nd and 3rd teams support in bringing them through the ranks but also due to the colts **will and endeavour to make the shirt their own and push the boundaries of their own ability/skill levels** whilst accepting constructive criticism. **Long may it continue.**

Competition for places is only going to continue to develop as the 'new batch' of colts filter through the teams. There is a distinct possibility that **Ashton upon Mersey RUFC 4th XV** will rear its ugly head once more next season.

It is also true that due to the Cheshire league restructure the 1st XV will be competing in 26 League fixtures next year. Subsequently the 1st XV squad will be expected to grow to meet the increase in demand.

I would ask that those players, who could be seen to have their own agenda, not grumble when your shirt is filled by a player looking up to the teams above. I would ask that instead, you either continue positively, **to serve the club** in the lower teams and help to bring further players through OR grasp the nettle and look to improve your own personal levels of skill and fitness and fight for the position. Either way the increase in competition will result in more successful teams.

**We are Ashton upon Mersey Rugby Club; we are Ashton upon Mersey Rugby Players.
We need to re-focus on the clubs agenda and not our own.**

The 'Ashton upon Mersey Squad' has a new coach, Dave Murray, who is making great strides into 'tweaking' Ashton's brand of rugby, which given time, will result in Ashton upon Mersey RUFC having more balanced and successful teams.

It is encouraging that training session attendance has increased over the season, even through the winter months and more Colts are beginning to link up with senior training.

External pressures from work and partners are always going to dictate to some players when they can train. However, I ask that if you are training elsewhere on a Thursday, in the gym, at the leisure centres, that you rearrange to another evening and attend training on a Thursday, even if it was just twice a month to start.

Thursday training, is not just a session for 1st team players it is open to all levels throughout our club. The 2nd and 3rd XV players will not be used as 'cannon fodder' and the potential is there for 2nd and 3rd XV players to practice their own set pieces during the course of the session.

I would also ask that if you do not attend training on a Thursday because you're washing your hair or watching Emmerdale to perhaps reassess your week and make the effort to better yourself, the squad and the club.

Cry offs on a Saturday morning - I have been aware of players crying off on Saturday mornings. Unless you have a good reason for doing this, it is unacceptable. The captains have a 'devils own' job of getting teams together during the week and do not need players failing to turn up at the 11th hour. This behaviour not only lets the captain down but the team and club down. This is also the case for 'no shows' without justification. **If you intend to cry off, you must let the team captain know as soon as possible, at the latest before close of play on Thursday.**

Please make captains aware of availability in plenty of time. Please also ensure that if you have been absent for a length of time that you cry back ON and contact either the last team captain you were selected for OR the selection committee.

Drinking to excess on a Friday night – I don't have an issue with players drinking on a Friday before a game; after all, we are not paid to play. However I do have a problem when a player has drunk to excess, that which leads to his poor performance on a Saturday. You ultimately, ruin your team mates Saturday afternoon.

Club Identity - Something that has bugged me for a long time now is that I fear **our club** is losing a sense of identity. To Harp on about Ireland again... The team I played for in Dublin was a collection of journeymen; Italy, Spain, USA, New Zealand, Australia, UK etc. **BUT** all players recognised the long history and ethos of the club and when they pulled on the team shirt all became members of a legacy dating back 120 years. **Our club is due to hit 80 years old in 2010.**

We need to re-discover **our club's** identity and I intend to organise for team photos to be produced this year. The last team photos were properly taken 10 years ago. I also intend to organise a Squad / Club photo. It is vital that the identity of **our club** is restored and people recognise the bigger picture in respect of remembering the past and safe guarding the future of **our club**.

I would also ask that players who are able to give up the odd Sunday morning, venture down to **our club** and support/coach the junior section, the life blood of **our club** for the next 80 years. **Our Club, YOUR Club is a place for the family, YOUR family.**

SUPPORT ALL OUR TEAMS; PARTICULARLY GET BEHIND ALL THOSE WHO HAVE LOST

TAKE POSITIVES OUT OF EVERY DEFEAT AND TAKE NEGATIVES OUT OF EVERY WIN.

LOOK AT WHAT WENT WRONG, LOOK WHAT YOU COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY AND DO IT NEXT TIME.

PLAY FOR THE CLUB, YOUR CLUB.

Thank you for your time,

Yours in rugby

DAVE BARKER - PLAYERS REPRESENTATIVE - 07834898089

For any player who wishes to voice opinion / issues where you feel that you or a peer have been ill treated and who does not feel that they can approach the team captain, please do not hesitate to contact the selection committee. Your point will be raised at the following Tuesday selection meeting in the strictest confidence, if preferred.

S. Ferguson

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