

Rugby

1st XV Rugby

B. Leslie

After losing a full season to the Covid pandemic, it was great to get back to normality for this season and play an almost full schedule of games and a Schools' Cup campaign. The pre-season was elongated slightly to ensure a safe return to rugby for everyone but our first match in 18 months took place away to Omagh Academy where we put up a good fight, but looked understandably rusty, to lose out 7-38. This was followed by 3 close losses to Enniskillen RGS, Lurgan College and Limavady Grammar. Our season caught light with a fantastic 22-19 win against a strong Down High side. A disappointing loss 17-24 away to Belfast High was followed up by a well-deserved 15-7 win away to Portadown College and a 10-10 draw with RS Dungannon in a training game used as a pre-Schools' Cup warm-up.

Schools' Cup

In the first round of the Schools' Cup we had drawn Friends' School. The game, played at Banbridge Academy, was hampered by the wet and windy weather but both teams still put on a great display of attacking rugby and were full of endeavour. Banbridge, playing with the wind at their backs in the first half, opened the scoring with a long range penalty from Full Back Ryan Matthews after 7 minutes. They increased their lead on 20 minutes, when some good phase play led to Ulster U16 Hooker Connor Magee forcing his way over in the corner for a well-deserved try. Ryan Matthews was just wide with the extras. 10 Minutes later after some further pressure from the Academy and slick set play off, a scrum saw winger Ronan Quinn touch down in the corner after good play from No 8 and Captain Ben Bradshaw. Matthews was successful



with the conversion to give Banbridge a significant, but still precarious, 15-0 halftime lead.

The second half saw Friends' use the wind to force Banbridge into their own 22. After ten minutes some good play from the Friends' backs led to a score in the left-hand corner, but the difficult conversion was missed. This however proved to be the last score of the game as the Academy, playing into a strong wind and heavy rain tightened their grip on the game with some great phase play and some dogged defence. Flanker Marcus McNeill, a clear Man of the Match, was to the fore in this with endless carries and some bone-shuddering hits in defence. The team rallied around his lead and denied Friends' any real opportunities to close the gap. The final whistle blew to some relief and the players, and the large home crowd, celebrated a hard fought but well-earned 15-5 victory. Unfortunately, the win came at a cost with No 8 and Captain Ben Bradshaw breaking his jaw, which would see him miss the rest of the competitive season.

This fine Cup victory was followed up with an impressive 40-12 friendly win over Larne Grammar in a pre-Christmas run-out. We then played Down High again in early January, and with injuries starting to mount, we lost 12-35 while also losing another of our influential back row in flanker Ollie Norris to a broken hand.

Our next match was our Schools' Cup 3rd Rd game against local rivals Dromore High. Both sides put in a committed and industrious performance on a damp and dreary morning on Barban Hill. A large crowd had gathered to watch the local derby and despite the weather, both teams gave them plenty to cheer. Dromore got off to a fast start but determined defence by Banbridge Academy, led by 'Captain on the day' Marcus McNeill, repelled them at every attempt. It wasn't until the 20th minute that Dromore crossed the line for their first try. The score was unconverted. With the half drawing to a close, Banbridge were starting to tire as they were having to make a huge amount of

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tackles and Dromore took advantage of this to score on 30 minutes and again on the stroke of halftime. The 1st try was converted leaving the score 0-17 at halftime. The second half saw a resurgence from the Academy boys and wing Dylan Stewart was a hair away from picking up a bouncing ball and dropping over for a score, but the greasy ball slipped from his grasp. Out half Daniel Hutchinson was also a 'whisker away' as he chased down a hack through and dived to try to ground the ball but a Dromore player also slid in and the referee deemed it a Scrum five. Throughout this period the Academy were playing their best rugby with Full back Ryan Matthews very much to the fore with some astute kicking. But it was Dromore who would have the final say when a good phase of play saw them pressure the line and they slid in for a score on the final whistle leading to a 24-0 defeat for the Academy. While the Academy boys were disappointed to lose, they can be very proud of their fighting performance against a seeded Dromore side who play great rugby. The players showed great character throughout and when they had the chance they played some really good attacking rugby.

As a result of this loss the Academy would play Grosvenor Grammar in the ¼ final of the Schools' Bowl. Unfortunately, a horrendously windy day blew away any chance the Academy had and we put in a much below par performance to lose 10-26 to exit the Bowl in disappointing fashion. Ironically the season finished a couple of weeks later at Grosvenor again, where we played a round robin tournament with Grosvenor and Dromore. We drew 0-0 in the first game and lost 7-0 v Dromore in the second to round off what was ultimately a really enjoyable season, where not only did we get back on the rugby field but we also put in some really good performances and played some brilliant rugby.

The Forwards

The front row was made up of Jonathan McCrum and Thomas Williamson at prop and Conor Magee at hooker. This was a unique mix as it is very rare indeed to have an all Year 12 front row at 1st XV level, but all three boys did brilliantly in their first seasons. Jonathan, a late convert to rugby, progressed magnificently throughout the season and his scrummaging and

ball carrying both improved immensely. Thomas also made good strides forward and is a constant threat over the ball and willing carrier. Hooker, Conor Magee, has an excellent all-around game and is becoming the complete package at hooker adding good throwing to his armoury. Conor was involved with Ulster U17 all season and has been rewarded with selection for the summer training squad. John McAlister also deserves a mention; John would have been our senior prop and is a very talented rugby player but unfortunately a heavy concussion early in the season meant his year was cut short. This was a disappointment for John and the team as he is such a quality player and strong character. The 2nd Row combination was Joel Good and Tom King. Joel took on responsibility for calling the lineout and led from the front in this. Joel was awarded the 'Clubman' trophy at the end of season award ceremony. Tom is a strong ball carrier and his lineout continues to improve. The back row was undoubtedly our strength though; led by No 8 and Captain Ben Bradshaw and supported by Flankers Marcus McNeill and Ollie Norris. Ben is a talismanic leader and great loose player. Unfortunately, injuries at both



the start and the end of the season meant his season was short but he was still influential throughout both on and off the pitch. Ollie, who was equally at home in the front row, had a brilliant season and was an immense ball carrier and hard worker and justifiably won the 'Most Improved Player' award. But our standout player was flanker Marcus McNeill. Marcus was the epitome of leading from the front. His work-rate, tackle count and ball carrying ability were second to none and his dominant tackle statistics would have been through the roof. Marcus was involved with Ulster U18 squads throughout lockdown and just missed out on selection for the Interpros. He was awarded Player of the Year at the end of season dinner. An exceptional season from an exceptional player. Henry Knox also played the majority of 1st XV games and he is quickly becoming a really good back row player with his work-rate and tackle count. Adam Logan was also involved many times and always put 100% into any game he played and was improving week-on-week. Jack Shaw, Ollie Kelly and James Seifert were also heavily involved throughout the season and all are young Year 12s with big futures ahead at senior level.

The Backs

Scrum-half was Noah Myles. Noah is a tenacious and industrious player who worked hard on his skill set and got the team moving forward. Fergus Alway made several appearances at scrum half and his quick service and bravery at the base will stand him in good stead in future years. Noah's half back partner was Daniel Hutchinson. Daniel was relatively new to the 10 position but grew into it throughout the season and has attacking flair and

an eye for a gap. Daniel was involved with Ulster U17 throughout the season. The centre pairing was Matthew Daly and Will Russell. Matthew has a gliding running style and picked some great lines in attack, while Will was the hard-hitting centre who worked tirelessly for the team and was always willing to carry the ball. On the wings were Ronan Quinn and Dylan Stewart. Ronan was industrious and dogged in defence while Dylan, after 5 years away from rugby, was ever present in attack looking to break down defences. At full back was Ryan Matthews who started at out-half, but revelled in the positional switch to 15 which saw him with more time and space to use his own formidable attacking game and kicking prowess. Jacques McCauley made many appearances both on the wing and at centre and has wonderful attacking flair and athleticism and is a strong defender. Luke Charman and Darragh Knox are two Yr 12 players who played several matches and both are strong attacking players who love nothing more than running with ball in hand. Luke was involved with the Ulster U17 squad throughout the season.

In addition to those detailed earlier the following players also represented the 1st XV during the season: Harry Wan, Daniel Lappin, Thomas Humphries, Ethan Vince, Adam Wightman, Joey Mackrell and Matthew Colvin.

The 1st XV playing record was:
 Played 16, Won 5, Lost 9, Drew 2.
 Points for 171, Points against 214.

Top points scorers:

	Tries	Penalties	Conversions	Drop Goal	Total Points
Ryan Matthews	2	7	15	-	61
Ronan Quinn	3	-	-	-	15
Jacques McCauley	3	-	-	-	15
Matthew Daly	3	-	-	-	15

Thanks

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a few people for their invaluable help throughout the season.

Thanks to Mr Roy Stevenson, Mr Robbie Ervine, Mr Brian O'Shaughnessy for all their coaching and help with the 1st XV throughout the season, their expertise and enthusiasm are greatly appreciated. Thanks also to Mr Charlie Farrell for his regular input with the senior teams; his contributions were always meaningful and positive for the team. Finally, thanks to the caretakers, and John Kernaghan in particular, for their hard work on Saturday mornings looking after the changing areas and grounds. Without the help of these people we could not have had such a successful and enjoyable season.



U16/2nd XV

Mr O'Shaughnessy

With the current Year 12 having missed out on the Medallion Shield in 2020/21 due to the pandemic, a newly formed U16 competition was set up to allow the players the chance to win some silverware. The U16 XV and the 2nd XV essentially became the same team for the first few months of the season. To get us back up and running again, RS Armagh came to Banbridge to play the U16 XV in a warm up game for the Cup Competition. The home side came away with a hard fought 15-14 victory with tries from Connor Magee, Darragh Knox and Jacques McCauley. The following week the 2nd XV then took on Omagh Academy away and narrowly lost 22-15, with two tries from centre Jamie Gibson and another try from Jacques McCauley. Our final U16 XV warm up game came with a resounding 28-0 home defeat to a very strong Enniskillen RGS side.

The U16 Cup competition drew us in a formidable group with Down HS, Dromore HS and Dalriada knowing that only the winners would progress to the final. First up was an away game against Down HS, which resulted in a narrow 13-12 victory for the Academy side. Fullback Luke Charman put in a superb all round display in horrendous conditions. Next up was Dromore HS at home which was won convincingly, 57-7. Medallion XV player Ryan Hanna scored with two tries, to get his Player of the Match award. Further tries were scored by Luke Charman (2), Jacques McCauley (2), Thomas Williamson, Harry Wan and Medallion XV Captain, Andrew Jackson. With Dalriada having beaten both Down HS and Dromore HS as well, it was semi-final time with the winner guaranteed to progress to the final. The match was played up in Dalriada and unfortunately the



Academy side were on the wrong end of a 15-10 defeat. All the players were superb that afternoon and deserved a place in the final, but it just wasn't to be. With the U16 competition now finished all the players were able to concentrate on either playing for the 1st or 2nd XV's.

The 2nd XV were finally able to put a run of games together against Down HS (twice) in the Cup competition against both Portadown College and Lurgan College. With the results not going their way the players showed remarkable commitment and enthusiasm each week. With injuries and unavailability, it was difficult to find the level of consistency needed at this level. A large number of 2nd XV players did get a chance to represent the 1st XV and definitely did themselves proud. The U16 XV managed to squeeze in an end of season friendly against a determined Rathfriland HS side, winning 42-7. The highlight of the game, and in fact the season, was substitute winger Joba Okikiolu scoring with his first touch in his first ever game of rugby! The season then concluded with the

2nd XV travelling to RS Dungannon. Although the result didn't go their way, it was pleasing to see Year 14 players Matthew Colvin, Angus Campbell and Rory Fergusson being acknowledged for their 7-year contribution to school rugby. A disappointing season overall but with the Medallion XV winning silverware and the U16 XV coming agonisingly close, senior rugby is in a good place for the next few years. Both the U16 and 2nd XV squads would like to thank Mr Leslie for all his help and also thank Roy Stevenson and Robbie Ervine for all their help and assistance too.



Rugby

Medallion XV

Mr O'Shaughnessy

Due to the pandemic, the 2021-22 Medallion rugby squad were able to complete a full season of rugby for the first time since Year 8 (2018-19) and what a season it was! 25 players turned up to our first session in September with a good few players having been to pre-season training in August with the senior squad. Banbridge RFC Development Officer Charlie Farrell and his wife Jemma joined the coaching team and were keen to see what this talented group of players could achieve.

The season started slowly with the team losing two of their first three games. A comprehensive 69-0 home win over Omagh Academy was sandwiched in between two away defeats to both RS Armagh (36-7) and Enniskillen RGS (31-14). The win over Omagh was significant, as 'stand in' outhalf Michael Porter scored an impressive 29 points with 3 tries and 7 conversions. With the intensity at training starting to step up, the squad then went on a three game winning streak seeing off Limavady GS (40-0), Down HS (34-0) and Belfast HS (57-14). Then came the turning point in the season, a disappointing 21-15 away defeat to Friends SL. The players felt that they deserved to win the game but realised that they had to make the extra effort if they wanted some success from the rest of the season.

Grosvenor GS were next up and felt the full force of the revitalised squad with a 60-0 demolition. Hooker Callum Little scored a superb hat-trick of tries. The start of the Medallion Shield (Round 2) saw us drawn against old rivals Dromore HS away. A resounding 43-0 win set us up nicely for the next round with a hat-trick of tries for number 8



Ryan Hanna, and two more for Callum Little, making their battle for top try scorer a two horse race. 2021 finished with a hard fought away win against a strong Larne GS side, 35-25. Our five tries were once again shared by Ryan Hanna (four) and Callum Little (one).

2022 started with the 3rd round of the Medallion Shield away to Rainey ES. After a titanic battle it was the home side who scraped a 13-7 victory, leaving the Academy side with the chance of some silverware in the Medallion Bowl competition. The quarter-final of the Bowl drew up yet another away game, this time against a determined Antrim GS side. Having conceded an early try the team then scored four superb team scores through Callum Little (two), Noah Bell and captain Andrew Jackson, leaving the final score 22-14.

Finally the home Cup tie came in the shape of Portadown College in the semi-final. With very little between both sides it was a score each from Ryan Hanna and Callum Little and a penalty from Andrew

Jackson to send the home side into the final, 17-7. Limavady GS were the opponents in the final, which was played at Ballymena Academy in horrendous conditions. Having led for most of the game through tries from Ryan Hanna and Jonathan Howard, Limavady threatened a comeback with a converted try five minutes from time, to trail by only four points. Academy winger Alfie Geoghegan had the final say with a try in the corner to leave the final score 19-10 to the victorious Academy side. Having played 15 games and only losing 4, the Medallion squad picked up the Team of the Year Award at the rugby end of season dinner. The four defeats came away from home, meaning that the squad finished the season unbeaten at home. Other winners included:

Captain - Andrew Jackson
 Player of the Year - Ryan Hanna
 Most Improved Player - Peter Lewis
 Top Try Scorer - Ryan Hanna (19)
 Top Points Scorer - Andrew Jackson (110)

Medallion XV

Mr O'Shaughnessy

The squad would like to pay particular thanks to coaches Charlie and Jemma Farrell for all their hard work throughout the season and to Mr Leslie for all his support. A special mention must also go to all the parents who turned up week in, week out to cheer

on the team. Five of the squad gained representation honours with various Ulster provincial squads, so we wish Callum Little, Ryan Hanna, Noah Bell, Andrew Jackson and Elijah Dempsey all the best and congratulate them on their success. Many of this squad will

return next year to fight for a place on the 1st XV, which in turn will only strengthen the 2nd XV. The future is bright for this talented group of players.

U14 XV

Noah Haughey – U14 Captain

The U14 rugby team, coached by Mr Beacom and Jemma Farrell, had yet another fantastic year with the team building in terms of speed and technique.

Despite having lower squad numbers than expected at times, the team still outperformed most of their rivals during games, showing pride, determination and drive.

For a few of the tougher games we were grateful for the support on the pitch by some of U13 squad, who showed their skills and encouraging signs of real talent within the younger age groups at Banbridge Academy Rugby.

Notable games this year included: wins against Larne, Friends' Lisburn, Armagh Royal and Clounagh Junior High (where we came away without 1 point scored against us). Some of the tougher matches were against Friends' at home, where the game was decided in the last phase of play when Max Ireland kicked a penalty to seal a 15-14 win and also against Belfast High, where we turned the game around to win 38-12.



2021/2022 has shown some real improvement in all the players; notable were Max Ireland and Arturs Jonuss who are both not long into their rugby careers at Banbridge Academy and played significant roles in the points scored this year. In a game against Omagh, Adrian Loggins showed his skill with a hat trick of tries. Also in many matches throughout the season, Alex Anderson was the man we all looked to as he scored up to two tries almost every game.

During this year's rugby awards held

at the Belmont Hotel, Miles Mawson came away with player of the year and Arturs Jonuss with the well-deserved most improved player.

Lastly, we wish to extend our gratitude to Jemma and Charlie Farrell, Mr Beacom and the whole U14 rugby squad for their hard work, dedication and commitment in training and matches this year.

We look forward to a successful new campaign as we enter into the Medallion Rugby season next year.

Rugby

U13 Rugby

Patrick McElroy - Captain

Our U13 rugby team had a mainly successful season. This included a nine game winning streak, which sadly came to an end when we narrowly lost a well-fought battle to Grosvenor 14-28.

The highlight of our winning streak was when we played Friends' School, Lisburn and we were down 14-28, we clawed back one try but with five minutes to go it seemed unlikely we could come back. We persevered and were awarded a penalty. Quickly, Sam Leslie advised Calum McMurray to cross field kick. With pinpoint precision Calum executed the kick and it landed perfectly in the goal area. Ethan scored the try. It was left to Calum with the last kick of the game and he skilfully scored the conversion.

Nearing the end of the season, we had a successful tournament in which we played some beautiful rugby. With close fought games and heart from the team we made it to the final where we had to meet Grosvenor, the hosts of the tournament, and also the team that put an end to our winning streak. Unfortunately we lost the final, but we can build from it and every loss is a lesson that we can use to win games in the future.

At the end of season awards, Sam Leslie won best player and Adam Boggs won most improved player, both highly deserved awards. Two other players that I would like to mention are Luke Wills and Allan Kenna. Luke Wills has improved massively this year, he is a key player in our team and fights for every ball and never backs down from a tackle. Allan Kenna is a solid prop, he is always there putting in a hard shift.



The team would also like to thank our coaches; our main coach Mr Reaney and our games coaches Mr Leslie and Mr O'Shaughnessy for staying with us throughout the year and improving our overall rugby ability. Also thanks to Adam Hanna for coaching us at the start of the year.



Under 12 A & B Rugby

The Under 12 had a great first season as Banbridge Academy rugby players. After two months of training to get everyone up to speed, their opening game of the year was A and B matches against Friends' School in Lisburn. In spite of a valiant effort from our players, unfortunately both teams lost out but it was still two really good games of rugby for their first ever proper rugby matches. The second games of the season were played on a wet and windy day against Down High School and both A and B teams put up a great fight, narrowly losing both matches. The Man of the Match Award was won by Connor McNamee for the A team and Patrick Porter for the B team. The next outings for both teams were against the Royal School, Dungannon where unfortunately again both teams came out on the losing side (but once again the scores were very tight.) Noah Thompson and Danny Scott were the 'Man of the Match Award' winners.

Next up however, we got our season truly underway with two good wins at both A and B level against local rivals Dromore High School. Man of the Match was Dawson Knox for the A team and Ethan Harris for the Bs. This was followed by two more good wins against Royal School, Armagh and here Charlie Geoghegan was the A team's 'Man of the Match' and Vaughan Hamilton was the B team's 'Man of the Match'. Our third set of wins in a row came when we travelled to Clounagh Junior High School; again our A team won well with Man of the Match being Jay Priestley and the B team also won comfortably, with Stephen Comiskey as Man of the Match. These were followed however by a reversal of fortune when Lurgan Junior High travelled over on a terrible winter's day



and won both games at A and B level. The next games saw two more wins, this time away to Killicomaine Junior High school. The As won in a very tight game and the Bs won comfortably; Man of the Match was Daniel Byrne for the A team and Ethan Harris for the B team .

Unfortunately, weather put an end to ties against Wallace High School so our next outing was a squad tournament at Down High where we had narrow losses to the hosts Down High School and then Royal School Dungannon. This was followed up by a good win against Dromore High in the Bowl semi-final but unfortunately we lost out to Killicomaine in the final. Our last games of the season were in the Master Shield Competition against our local rivals Dromore High once again. The B team had a comfortable win with Jesse McCauley as Man of the Match and the A Team followed a fantastic 6 tries to 5 victory to seal their points in the Master Shield, which was enough to help the Banbridge Academy

Medallion, U14, U13 and U12 win the Master Shield overall.

The Under 12s thoroughly enjoyed their first season at the End of Season Award Ceremony there were four A team players of the year: Dawson Knox, Daniel Byrne, Charlie Geoghegan and Conor McNamee. The B team players of the year were Riley Dixon and Carter Kenny.

All the players would like to thank their coaches Mr Erskine and Mr Baxter for all of their help on Wednesday afternoons and at matches. Adam Hanna should also get a special mention for all of his help and assistance with the under 12 teams this season.

The players now look forward to next year when they will play their first full schedule of fixtures; playing every Saturday and a number of mid-week games throughout the season.

Rugby

Rugby Awards Ceremony

Banbridge Academy held their annual Rugby Awards Ceremony in late March to mark the end of their season and honour the teams and standout players for all seven rugby teams in the school. The dinner took place in the Belmont Hotel on Wednesday 30th March, with 125 players and staff gathering to celebrate the school's rugby successes.

The special guest for the evening was the Ireland U20s Grand Slam winning Captain, Reuben Crothers. Reuben is a combative Back Row player who left Wallace High School in 2020 as a Schools' Cup winning Captain and was immediately signed to Ulster on an Academy contract. He has been involved in the Irish U20 Squad for 2 years and Captained the team to their very recent Six Nations and Grand Slam triumphs. Reuben spoke to congratulate all of the players on their efforts and encouraged those not fortunate enough to have received an award to keep working hard on their game and keep improving.

Headmaster, Mr Robin McLoughlin, passed on his congratulations to the coaches and players alike. He commended the players on their hard work throughout the season and congratulated them on another fine year in terms of results and performances. He also commented on the commitment of the coaching staff, namely the school staff of Brian Leslie, Brian O'Shaughnessy, Tim Baxter, Jonny Erskine, Chris Beacom and Jonathan Reaney and the outside coaches Roy Stevenson, Robbie Ervine, Charlie Farrell, Jemma Farrell, Adam Hanna, Troy Pinion and Harry Patterson; and paid tribute to their hard work in coaching, refereeing and organisation

of teams.

The performance of all the teams was commended and with five teams playing each Saturday and two Under 12 teams playing each Friday, the numbers playing the game are certainly on the rise. The highlight of the season was the fantastic performance of our Medallion XV to win the Medallion Bowl Competition and indeed the juniors in general to win the Masters Shield against Dromore High.

A full breakdown of the individual award winners is below:

U12 'A' XV

Players of Year: Dawson Knox
Daniel Byrne
Charlie Geoghegan
Conor McNamee

U12 'B' XV

Players of Year: Carter Kenny
Riley Dixon

U13 'A' XV

Captain: Patrick McElroy
Player of Year: Sam Leslie
Most Improved: Adam Boggs

U14 'A' XV

Captain: Noah Haughey
Player of Year: Miles Mawson
Most Improved: Arturs Jonuss

Medallion XV

Captain: Andrew Jackson
Player of Year: Ryan Hanna
Most Improved: Peter Lewis

2nd XV

Captain: Fergus Alway
Player of Year: Jacques MacAuley
Most Improved: Joey Mackrell

1st XV

Captain: Ben Bradshaw
Top Try Scorer: J. McCauley/
R Quinn/M Daly
Overall P.O.Y.: Marcus McNeill
U6 P.O.Y.: Marcus McNeill
L6 P.O.Y.: Ryan Matthews
Yr 12 P.O.Y.: Conor Magee
Most Improved: Ollie Norris
Clubman: Joel Good

Team of the year

Medallion XV – Medallion Bowl Winners

