

Rugby



1st XV

B. Leslie



The 2023-24 season will long be remembered as one of the best in the history of 1st XV rugby at Banbridge Academy. It was a season where the team went undefeated right up until the Schools' Cup quarter final loss to RBAI. Along the way we had some fantastic wins and put in some epic performances, not least in the Schools' Cup group games and last 16 tie against Portadown College.

Pre-season began in mid-July with Athletic Development sessions at Banbridge Rugby club under the watchful eye of our S & C coach Marcus Graham. The on-pitch sessions started in mid-August and the players really bought in with great turn-outs and lots of hard work and commitment. Our season began strongly at the Grosvenor Grammar tournament, where we beat Antrim Grammar 21-0, Rainey Endowed 5-0 and then the hosts Grosvenor Grammar 14-0 to win the Ian Graham Cup.

This was followed by a number of friendly games, where we experimented with different combinations of players to find the best blend. We beat Portadown College 33-7, Larne 26-14, Omagh 27-12, Enniskillen 21-7 and Limavady 55-7 before our first Schools' Cup group game v Carrick Grammar. (See below for Cup reports). In further friendlies we then beat Regent House 31-14 and Belfast High 45-7 before our 2nd Cup game v Ballyclare High. This was followed by a win over Grosvenor Grammar 50-14 before our final Cup game v Limavady Grammar. Further friendlies in January, just

prior to the Cup knockout campaign, saw a 19-12 last minute win over Down High, and a 12-7 win over RS Dungannon.

Schools' Cup Group Games

Our three Schools' Cup group games started brilliantly with a comprehensive win away to Carrick Grammar (40-0) and this was followed by a really good win (21-0) against Ballyclare High School at home. Ballyclare are always a strong side and it took some real determination and persistence to wear them down. Game 3 was a winner-takes-all battle, where we defeated Limavady Grammar 36-7 to qualify for the last 16 of the Schools' Cup. The five try win meant a try bonus for the Academy and as a result we topped Group E of the Schools' Cup.

Going into the game the Academy and Limavady were tied on 9 points, so this was a group decider and was always going to be a tight affair. The 36-9 victory was hard won however, as Limavady got out to an early lead and it took 30 minutes for the Academy to fight their way into the game and then press home their advantage in the 2nd half to take the win. Tries from Noah Bell x 2, Luke Charman, Noah Haughey and Darrah Knox alongside 4 conversions and a penalty from Andrew Jackson accounted for the 36 points.

Schools' Cup last -16 v Portadown College

Portadown College were our opponents in the last 16 of the Schools' Cup. The side put in an outstanding performance to record a 40-0 win and advance to the

quarter finals for the first time in 12 years. On a pleasant, but breezy morning, the Academy played the first half with the light wind at their back. Portadown had the better of the early exchanges, but the Banbridge defence dealt comfortably with whatever was thrown at them. 18 minutes into the game, some sustained pressure from the powerful Banbridge forward pack led to a great attacking opportunity and the ball was moved quickly to the left wing where Darragh Knox scored an excellent try. Outhalf Andrew Jackson was just wide with the difficult conversion. Shortly after 24 minutes, Irish Schools' Hooker Connor Magee powered over in the corner to score a fine try. Jackson was successful with this difficult conversion. On 32 minutes, Connor Magee scored the second of his tries when he executed an excellent line break and again crossed the line, this time under the posts, to score. Jackson was once again successful with the conversion. Just minutes later, Magee completed his hat-trick when he made a midfield break and showed excellent pace to outstrip the cover and score under the posts; Jackson again made the conversion as the Referee blew for halftime. With the score of 26-0 at halftime, the Academy were in a commanding position and knew that a strong start to the second half would go a long way to sealing the victory. Five minutes into the second half, Banbridge ran an excellent attacking play off a scrum and scrum-half, Fergus Alway, ran around the cover and beat the last defender to score under the posts; a fantastic individual effort! Jackson once again slotted the extras to take the score to 33-0.

Rugby



10 minutes later, Captain Daniel Hutchinson eluded the defence and powered over to score and Jackson once again converted. On 55 minutes, Connor Magee scored his fourth try, a remarkable feat in any game, never mind in a Schools' Cup last 16 game. A powerful maul from the Academy drove over the College line and Magee dotted down for the score. Jackson was just wide with this conversion attempt. The final score of the game came in the 65th minute when substitute Nazie Mulligan completed an excellent back play by rounding his winger and scoring in the corner. The conversion attempt was just wide.

Schools' Cup ¼ final v RBAI

Banbridge Academy 1st XV bowed out of the Schools' Cup in an exciting match against the holders, and eventual repeat winners, Royal Belfast Academical Institution. A huge crowd gathered for the important game and it was a wonderful occasion and event for the whole school community. The Academy started the game very strongly and an early penalty attempt went wide, but on 5 minutes another RBAI infraction led to Andrew Jackson kicking a penalty to take a 3-0 lead. RBAI however came back strongly and scored tries on ten, fifteen and twenty-two minutes but Banbridge rallied at the end of the half however, despite significant pressure, they were unable to score. The 2nd half started as the first ended with Banbridge throwing their all at RBAI, but again there was no reward and RBAI took advantage of some uncharacteristic mistakes to score three more tries to take the game away from the Academy. Banbridge never stopped fighting though and after another period of pressure, Hooker Connor Magee scored off the back of an impressive maul from the superb Banbridge forwards. Andrew Jackson slotted the conversion. The game finished however with another RBAI score, to leave the final score 10-43 to the Belfast school. While it was a disappointing end to the season for the Academy, they can be very proud of their efforts on the day. Unfortunately, the intensity of the game led to too many errors and RBAI are too good of a team to be given

such opportunities.

The Forwards

Loosehead prop was Jonathan McCrum, who has matured into an excellent rugby player and a strong ball carrier. At Tighthead prop was Thomas Williamson. Thomas is very mobile for a prop and his high workrate was always an added bonus to his strong scrummaging and effective ball carrying. Yr 13 Adam Jones also made a number of appearances at prop. Adam is a strong carrier and is sure to be a fundamental part of future teams. Alex Andersson, Yr 12, also featured for the 1st XV at prop and he is another dynamic player who loves to carry and get involved. At Hooker was Connor Magee. Connor gained Irish Schools' U18 recognition throughout the season, playing in several tournaments and cemented himself as the No 1 U18 hooker in Ireland. He was also in the Ulster Schools' U18 squad that competed well in the Interpro series in August and September and his performances have been so good that he was included in the IRFU National Talent squad for 23/24. Callum Little was a starting player either at Hooker or in the back row, but an unfortunate knee injury in November kept him sidelined until mid-January. Callum is a power-house of a ball carrier and one of the biggest tacklers in the team. In the second row was Yr 13 player Noah Bell, who went from strength to strength as the season progressed. Noah was selected for the Irish U18 Clubs & Schools' team and at half term he participated in a camp in Dublin and then flew to Italy to play a test match, where gained his first cap. Noah had previously Captained the Ulster U18 Clubs & Schools' side during the interpros. Jack Shaw was the other 2nd row and he had a brilliant season, combining strong ball carrying with workrate at the breakdown. Fynn Niblock, Yr 12, also played regularly and he is a high energy forward and good at the lineout. Fynn was selected for the Ulster Schools' U17 team against the NSW Raptors. In the back row at number eight was Yr 13 Ryan Hanna. Ryan is an excellent rugby player and he played the full interpro series for Ulster Clubs & Schools' U18 and he had a strong series and has been included

in the U19 training panel for next year. At open side Flanker was Adam Logan who was dynamic on the ball and worked tirelessly in defence. He was awarded the Clubman of the Year Award for his commitment to training and workrate. Our Blindside flanker was Thomas Humphries, who worked hard around the pitch and was an excellent ball carrier and high workrate tackler. Thomas won the Most Improved Player Award for the season. Flanker Noah Haughey, Yr 12, also played many of the 1st XV games and he is a brilliant all-round player who has broken into the Ulster set-up and played for the Ulster Clubs & Schools' U17 team against the NSW raptors.

The Backs

Scrum-half was Fergus Alway. Fergus has an excellent rugby brain and eye for a gap, and he was duly awarded Player of the Year at the End of Season Rugby Awards Ceremony for what was an outstanding season. At Outhalf was Yr 13 Andrew Jackson, who was the fulcrum of the team. He is an energetic attacker who loves to play running rugby. Andrew was also included in the training squad for the Ulster U18 Clubs & Schools' squad and he is young for the team, so has another year to try to force his way onto the senior panels after some impressive outings for the Ulster U17 squads. Harry Wan was also involved in most 1st XV games as a utility player who is happy playing either 9, 10 or 15 and never failed to impress when he played; a talented player who epitomised the team ethic. At first Centre was Captain Daniel Hutchinson. Dan is a wonderful rugby player who runs silky lines and picks good attacking angles. His strength in defence belies his svelte frame and he was a rock at No 12. Outside centre was Luke Charman, who has pace and power in equal measure. Luke was also a very effective defender and loved to knock the opposition back at the gain line. On one wing was Elijah Dempsey who is another pacey runner with a gliding action, while the other wing was Darragh Knox who loved to jink and dodge and had a good eye for the try line. Darragh was the 1st XV top try scorer for the season. At fullback was Joey



Mackrell who slipped seamlessly from attack to defence and was excellent in both areas. Nazie Mulligan played a number of games on the wing and was always a threat and Arturs Jonuss also played a considerable amount in the centre or on the wing and his strength and pace were huge assets. Arturs was included in the Ulster U16 in-season training program.

In addition to those detailed earlier the following players also represented the 1st XV during the season: Ollie Kelly, Will Kennedy, Benjamin Quigley, Jonny Howard, Miles Mawson, Peter Lewis, Sam Dorman and Joshua Thompson.

Gary Clarke Cup

At the end of the season an U17 squad played in the Gary Clarke Cup hosted by Lurgan RFC, and the team had a wonderful night beating Friends' School, Lurgan College and a Barbarians XV to win the trophy.

Ulster 7's Competition

We also entered a team in the Ulster 7's competition hosted by Queen's University Rugby and after getting knocked out of the group stages we went on to beat Regent

The 1st XV playing record was:

Played 18, Won 17, Lost 1, Points for 564, Points against 160

Top points scorers:

	Tries	Penalties	Conversions	Drop Goal	Total Points
Andrew Jackson	4	1	48	-	119
Darragh Knox	10	-	-	-	50
Dan Hutchinson	7	-	4	-	43
Noah Bell	8	-	-	-	40
Luke Charman	8	-	-	-	40
Connor Magee	7	-	-	-	35
Callum Little	7	-	-	-	35

House, Limavady Grammar and Campbell College to win the Shield Competition.

Thanks

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

Firstly, to all our valuable sponsors for their incredible generous contributions to Banbridge Academy rugby: Little & Company – Main Sponsor providing playing kit, warm-up tops, match balls etc. Banbridge RFC - for use of Gym facilities during pre-season.

Thanks to Mr Brian O'Shaughnessy, Mr Robbie Ervine, Mr Charlie Farrell, Jemma Farrell, Jack Chapman & Mr James Campbell for all their coaching and help with the 1st XV throughout the season, their expertise and enthusiasm are greatly appreciated. Thank you also to Marcus Graham, our Strength & Conditioning coach, for his hard work with the pre and in-season programmes for the players. 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.



Rugby

2nd XV

Mr O'Shaughnessy



The 2023-24 2nd XV season will once again be remembered for the Cup run that almost secured a quarter final spot, just like the class of 2022-23.

The season started with superb away victories against Portadown College (12-47) and Larne GS (10-29). Scrum half Jonny Neill and flanker Miles Mawson scoring five tries between them across the two games. The squad then suffered their first defeat of the season away to Omagh Academy (12-14). Having played most of the rugby this was a game they knew that they should have won. The first home game of the season saw a very strong Enniskillen RGS side record an impressive 10-50 victory with injuries in the senior squad starting to take their toll. Two superb wins followed against Limavady GS (17-0) and Regent House (29-26). The Regent game will be fondly remembered, with captain Harry Wan kicking the all important three points in the final play to secure the victory.

The first round of the 2nd XV cup saw Larne GS make the trip south. A similar scoreline (27-5) to the previous encounter ensured that the home side progressed safely to round 2. Tries were scored by Caleb Cromie (2), Fynn Niblock, Nazie Mulligan and Freddie Elliott. Down HS were the hosts for round 2 and in a remarkable game it was the Academy who progressed 19-20 thanks to a superb defensive display from the entire squad and a hat-trick of tries from winger Nazie Mulligan.

A home draw in round 3 against Belfast

Royal Academy proved a step too far with the Belfast school coming out on top 47-19. The Academy did get within a converted score early in the second half but a flurry of late tries saw BRA advance to the quarter-final. Special mention must go to winger Rio Pinion who scored his first try for the school.

Defeat meant a spot in the quarter-final of the 2nd XV plate and a home tie against Bangor GS. Tries from Adam Jones, Peter Lewis and Alex Andersson saw the Academy progress comfortably to the semi-final 17-0.

The final game of the season saw us battle to the end against a very strong Ballymena Academy side who just had too much fire power to win the semi-final 51-5. The scoreline would suggest a very one sided game but in fact it was anything but. Ballymena took their chances while unfortunately we did not. However replacement hooker Callum Little returned from injury to pick up a well deserved try.

Several of the 2nd XV went on to represent the 1st XV during their impressive Cup campaign which was just reward for their excellent performances for the 2nd XV. With a 3rd XV being fielded for the first time in a few years, it was great to see so many players getting game time. Special mention must go to captain Harry Wan who was superb week in week out and led the team admirably.

At the end of season awards dinner, the winners included:



Captain - Harry Wan
Player of the Year - Harry Wan
Most Improved Player - Peter Lewis

The squad would like to pay particular thanks to senior coaches Mr Leslie, Charlie Farrell, Robbie Ervine, James Campbell, Jack Chapman, and to Marcus Graham and Jemma Farrell (S&C) for all their hard work throughout the season. With a good chunk of the squad returning next year and the addition of the victorious Medallion squad, Banbridge Academy senior rugby once again looks promising.



Rugby

3rd XV

B Leslie



After a few years without a 3rd XV 2023-24 marked the re-introduction of this important team within Banbridge Academy rugby. The team only played a few games but were reinstated into the 3rd XV Cup and enjoyed the outings that they had. The first game of the season was against Royal School, Armagh, this unfortunately was a 7-43 loss but the team enjoyed themselves and improved throughout the game. The next game was a 31-19 win against Enniskillen Royal Grammar School. Two tries from Adrian Logins were added to by scores from Henry Niblock, Gordon Porter and Jonny Reid. The next game was the long trip away to Limavady Grammar. This was a tight loss of 17-7 against a very good side.

The team then played in the Cup where they were drawn at Home to Methodist College Belfast 4th XV. This was an epic game of rugby with both sides giving as good as they got but in the end they came up just short and lost out 17-10 with the tries coming from Will Kennedy and Ben Quigley. This put the team into the plate competition where they were drawn away to Ballyclare 3rd XV. Ballyclare proved too strong and ran out 46-17 winners but it was a very exciting game of rugby with lots of free flowing movement. The final game of the season was a friendly away to Royal Belfast Academical Institutions 4th XV where two enthusiastic sides fought out a 14-41 game. While this was another loss it was a good way for the boys to finish

out their season.

It was great to have the 3rd XV back on the field; with so many players vying for spots on the 2nd XV it meant we were able to get players extra games and keep them all playing rugby on a Saturday morning. Hopefully next year numbers will allow us to play more fixtures and we may even have a 4th XV!

At the end of season award ceremony Jonathan Reid was awarded player of the year and Rio Pinion was awarded most improved player.



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Rugby

Medallion

Mr O'Shaughnessy.

The 2023-24 Medallion squad started the season hoping to emulate the classes of 2021-22 and 2022-23, by winning some silverware and completing a remarkable treble for the school.

The season started with great numbers at training and the boys were ready to give it their all. Expectations were high in September when the side started with three fantastic wins in a row against Portadown College (10-12), RS Armagh (34-12) and Larne GS (51-7). These three games produced 11 different try scorers to show just how the team planned on playing. The squad were then brought crashing back down to earth with back-to-back defeats against Omagh Academy (7-35) and Enniskillen RCS (36-19).

RS Armagh were up again next and although this game wasn't as one sided as the first, the Academy managed to come out on top 28-21 in a closely fought contest. With numbers at training continuing to grow, the entire squad made the trip to Antrim GS to play both an 'A' and 'B' fixture with both sides suffering defeats. The 'A' team narrowly lost 21-7, with the 'B' team coming out on the wrong end of a 35-10 scoreline. The squad then went on another winning spree this time against Friends' School Lisburn (45-12), Regent House (17-24) and Belfast HS (45-12). The Regent game was particularly impressive, with the side having to come from behind several times to secure the win.

Tough games then followed against Ballyclare HS (7-15) and Grosvenor GS (27-5) to leave the squad going into the first round of the



Medallion Shield on the back of two defeats. Antrim GS were the visitors and despite a heroic performance from the home side on the back of several injuries, it was Antrim who came out on top 24-17 with impressive out-half Sam Leslie keeping us in the game with a hat-trick of tries. The squad then entered the Medallion Trophy and knew that the treble was now a realistic possibility.

Three further friendlies followed with two narrow defeats against RS Dungannon (22-21 and 26-31) and a morale boosting win over Down HS (41-7). The quarter-final of the Trophy saw a tough trip to Ballymoney HS with the team coming away with a hard fought 15-0 win with tries from Sam Leslie, Conor Patton and Syd Moore. Bangor Academy were then the visitors for the semi-final with the home side producing one of their best performances of the season to record a 43-14 win with tries coming

from Sam Leslie (3), Luke Wills, Syd Moore, Conor Patton and Sam Williamson.

Having won the Medallion Bowl in 2021/22 and the Medallion Trophy in 2022/23, the class of 2023/24 completed the '3peat' by retaining the Trophy against a determined Belfast HS side at Friends' School, Lisburn. It was the Academy side who looked certain to score first, only for a loose pass to end up in the hands of the High School centre, who sprinted in under the posts from his own half to leave the score 0-7. The Academy forwards began to carry well through captain Patrick McElroy and second row Conor Patton. After several phases, out half Conor Comiskey fed full back Sam Leslie who sliced through the defence to score a crucial try out wide. Comiskey was unsuccessful with the difficult conversion, leaving the Academy trailing 5-7.

Centre Ethan Houston was beginning to assert his dominance in midfield and was duly rewarded when he bounced off two would-be tacklers to reach out and touch down for the Academy's second try of the afternoon. With another unsuccessful conversion, the game was finely poised at 10-7. With half-time fast approaching both sides knew that the next score would be crucial and luckily it came in the form of a fantastic individual effort from flanker Syd Moore. He spotted a gap in the High School defence and left several defenders in his wake to touch down under the posts. Comiskey added the easy two to leave the half-time score 17-7. The Academy coaching duo of Charlie and Jemma Farrell knew that their side were going to have to work even harder in the second half to have any chance of keeping the resolute High





School side at bay. The second half didn't start too well, with Academy openside Leo O'Neill receiving an unfortunate yellow card. High School now began to assert some dominance, but the Academy defence held firm until O'Neill returned to the fold. With ill-discipline at the breakdown costing both sides territory and possession it was High School who found a way to make it count by crossing for another converted score to make it 17-14. It looked as though they were then going to take the lead when their winger made a fantastic break down the touchline, only for fullback Leslie to make the all-important try saving tackle. This seemed to galvanise the Academy players and supporters and it was indeed Leslie who sliced through the defence once again for the match winning score, with Comiskey adding the extras. With the clock in the red High School responded by scoring their third converted try of the afternoon to leave the final score 24-21. Forwards coach Charlie Farrell was naturally delighted with the result

and performance. "The players have worked incredibly hard all season and deserve this success. Credit to High School who fought right up until the final whistle and didn't make things easy for us. We had to dig deep but once we went 24-14 up with a minute to go, we knew we had it all wrapped up."

At the end of season awards dinner the following players were recognised:

Captain: Patrick McElroy
Player of the Year: Sam Leslie
Most Improved Player: Harry Purdy
Top Try Scorer: Sam Leslie (20)
Southern Region Development Squad (Ulster Rugby): Sam Leslie, Ethan Houston, Harry Davidson, Charlie Geoghegan (Year 10) and Conor McNamee (Year 10)

The squad would like to pay particular thanks to coaches Charlie Farrell, Jemma Farrell, James Campbell, Jack Chapman and Marcus Graham (S&C) 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 and to the three Year 10 players who made the squad, Conor McNamee, Dawson Knox and Charlie Geoghegan. Many of this talented squad will return next year to only enhance an ever improving senior section.

Squad: Sam Leslie, Harry Davidson, Theo Wan, Ethan Houston, Harry Purdy, Conor Comiskey (VC), Mathew Curry, Oliver Neill, Matthew Christie, Calum McMurray, Conor Patton, Josh Hine, Syd Moore, Leo O'Neill, Patrick McElroy (C), Conor McNamee, Sam Williamson, Joshia Rogers, Ellis Humphries, Dawson Knox, Charlie Thom, Jack Lewis, Adam Boggs, Luke Wills, Charlie Geoghegan, Harry Steenson, Adam Freeburn, Dawin Widdis, Isaac Balfour.



Rugby

U14

Dawson Knox, Captain

Banbridge Academy U14 team have had a very up and down season; we started off with a good 21-15 win over RS Armagh. The season continued apace with matches against the likes of Larne Grammar, Clounagh Junior High, Omagh Academy and Enniskillen RGS before the final game against Regent house before the Halloween break.

November began with games against Belfast High, Friends' Schools and Grosvenor

Grammar and in these matches we found the going tough at times, but we picked up form closing in on Christmas break where we beat Killicomaine Junior High and Friends' School Lisburn in a blitz day.

We continued our good form after the Christmas break against Down High School, where we beat them 40-17 and nearing the end of the season we had a good run by beating Dromore High (to help clinch the

Masters' Shield), Royal School Armagh and Rathfriland High very comfortably.

Our player of the year this season was Connor McNamee and most improved went to Ross Niblock. We would also like to thank Mr Reaney and Mr Livingstone for coaching us and for all their hard work across the season. As a squad we now look forward to our Medallion season next year!



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Rugby



U13

Mr Chapman (Coach) & Zach Watson (Captain)

The U13 experienced a turbulent season, featuring ecstatic victories, hard fought losses, and some iconic individual performances.

The first fixture of the season was away to the Royal School of Armagh. Both the 'A' and 'B' teams lost their games, with Fergus Lowry having a stellar performance, indicating early that he was a first team player. The squad then went on to play Larne Grammar and Wellington College, suffering a narrow seven-point loss to the latter team. Clounagh JHS were the next team to challenge Banbridge Academy. This was a difficult loss in tough conditions, with many players becoming accustomed to the challenges of 15 aside rugby.

At this stage of the season, the squad struggled with injuries, yet the team's enthusiasm remained strong. Numerous positives were taken from the following run of matches, with Daniel Cairns, Rylee Edwards and Jack Agnew having industrious individual performances. During this period, Patrick Hayes and captain Zach Watson earned a call up to Mr Reaney's U14 team and embraced the step up seamlessly, highlighting their strong skill set and unwavering enthusiasm. The U13 fell short to Limavady Grammar 43-19, featuring one of the best displays of attack all season. The squad went on to win three out of the four subsequent fixtures against Methody College Belfast 'C', Friends' School Lisburn 'B' and Belfast High 'A', winning 13-12, 29-7 and 27-19 respectively.

The team went through a turbulent period, epitomised by the 25-7 loss away to Limavady GS in December. This stage of the season saw the emergence of promising neophytes such as Elijah Myles, Reuben Jones and Noah Bingham to name a few. Arguably the most impressive feat of the year is how comfortably the eight or so new players integrated themselves into the team, becoming key members of the squad by the end of the season.

The next big test was against Friends' School Lisburn and Killicomaine Junior High School, with the team recording two losses. The 19-5 defeat against an impressive Friends' side featured our most courageous and commanding defensive performance all season. The improvement in character



continued over to the subsequent fixtures, with multiple impressive scores being recorded in losses to Down High and RS Dungannon. The team's progress paid dividends against Friends' 'B', with a 38-12 victory. Impressively, the match boasted six unique try scorers, highlighting the team's selflessness of play.

The penultimate match against rivals Dromore High in the Masters' Shield resulted in a 17-12 loss, with a legendary comeback spearheaded by Isaac McCrum falling just short.

The U13 squad rounded off a memorable season at the Grosvenor Grammar School

Tournament. Defeats in the pool stages against Methody, Killicomaine and Grosvenor saw the team play Antrim in our final game of the season, which resulted in a 14-0 win.

At the End of Season Awards, Patrick Hayes won Player of the Year and Liam Kirkpatrick was awarded the Most Improved Player. Thanks to Mr Chapman, Mr O'Shaughnessy, Mr Baxter, Mr Leslie, Adam and James for sacrificing their free time to make our season happen; it has been greatly appreciated. Not only as a team, but as individuals we have come a long way since the start of the season, developing a lot of skills vital for 15 a side rugby that we will build on next year.



Rugby

Under 12 A & B



The under 12 A & B teams had a very successful first season as Banbridge players winning the majority of their games and playing some excellent rugby along the way.

The first games of the year were against Friends' School in November after two months of intense training to get everyone up to speed and ready to play matches. Both games were excellent matches with the Academy winning both by good margins in the end. All players involved showed enough to suggest that these teams could be very good teams and go from strength to strength this season.

The second set of games were against very strong Down High School sides, unfortunately both teams came out on the losing side but again showed great progress with the work they had been doing in training. This was followed by the teams

playing against both Rathfriland High School and Friends' School. The Academy were successful in all matches beating both schools at A & B level. This was followed by an Ulster Rugby 'gamification' blitz where rather than counting just 'tries scored', points were awarded for successful passing, tackling and other useful skills within Rugby. After several matches against Royal School Dungannon and Royal School Armagh, the Academy came out on top with the revised points system. A really enjoyable and novel way to play rugby.

In early January Banbridge teams took on RS Dungannon again and these were closely contested matches, but the Academy emerged victorious in both games after playing some really scintillating rugby. The next games were really tough encounters against incredibly strong Wallace High School sides. The A team were second best and were well beaten but the B team however

fought bravely and came away with a very impressive draw. Next followed another blitz this time against Omagh Academy and Enniskillen Royal Grammar School. We once again performed very well, winning all of our games and showing fantastic progress.

The final matches of the season were at the annual Down High School tournament. The team lost in the group stage to Wallace High but beat Killicomaine Junior High and then went to defeat RS Dungannon in the trophy semi-final and then beat Royal School Armagh in the final to win the Down High Trophy!

It was a great first season of rugby for this very talented and hard-working group of young men and they now look forward to U13 rugby next season when they get to play 15-a-side and full pitch.

At the end of season awards dinner trophies were awarded to several players for talent and work rate. In the A team the four players of the year were: Harry Major, Callum Marshall Junior Szczeszek and Olly Jardine. The B team players of the year were Oliver Cairns and Alex Bond.

All the players would like to thank their coaches Mr Erskine and Mr Baxter for all of their help on Monday afternoons and at matches, along with Mr O'Shaughnessy, Mr Chapman and Mr Leslie for helping out at matches and games. 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

Awards Ceremony



Banbridge Academy once again held an End-of Season- Awards Ceremony to honour the teams and standout players for all eight rugby teams in the school. The awards dinner took place in the Belmont Hotel on Tuesday 26th March with 125 players and rugby staff gathering to celebrate the schools' successes.

Headmaster Mr Robin McLoughlin spoke to congratulate the players and coaches 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, Jonathan Reaney and Jack Chapman. He also thanked the outside coaches who come into school to help coach; Robbie Ervine, Charlie Farrell, Gemma Farrell, James Campbell, Brian Livingstone, Adam Hanna and the Athletic Development coach Marcus Graham. He paid tribute to all their hard work in coaching, refereeing and organising teams.

A special award was presented to Mr Tim Baxter, who is retiring this year, to mark his 25 years of service to Rugby in Banbridge Academy. Mr Baxter coached the Medallion XV for over 20 years and latterly was the U12 coach, but his involvement in rugby was so much more helping across all age groups and being heavily involved in the planning and rugby administration. He will be sorely missed by all at Banbridge Academy.

The school would also like to thank their main sponsors this season without whom it would be very difficult to provide the best experience for the players: Little & Company (under the directorship of Mr and Mrs Andy Little) for their investment in the school rugby programme and Mr & Mrs Curry for their financial support to the Medallion XV. Academy rugby would also like to thank Banbridge Rugby Club for the use of their gym facilities over pre-season.

Individually the Academy also had a number of players who represented or trained with Ulster and Irish age group squads; Connor Magee - Ulster U18 Schools & Irish Schools U18 Six Nations Squad, Noah Bell - Ulster U18 Clubs & Schools Interpro team (Captain) & Irish U18 Clubs & Schools team, Ryan Hanna - Ulster U18 Clubs & Schools



Rugby

Awards Ceremony



Interpro team, Andrew Jackson – Ulster U18 Clubs & Schools Squad, Fynn Niblock U17 Schools v NSW Raptors, Noah Haughey U17 Clubs & Schools v NSW Raptors, Arturs Jonuss Ulster U17 Training Squad and Regional Development U16 – Ethan Houston, Sam Leslie, Harry Davidson, Connor McNamee and Charlie Geoghegan.

The performance of all the teams was commended and with six teams playing each Saturday and two Under 12 teams playing each Friday, the numbers playing the game are certainly on the rise. The five highlights of the season were the fantastic performance of our 1st XV to go undefeated all season until their epic Schools' Cup ¼ final; the Medallion XV winning the Medallion Trophy Competition; the Junior teams winning the Masters Shield against Dromore, the U12 team winning the Down High Trophy Competition and the Senior 7s team winning the Ulster 7s Trophy at QUB.

A full breakdown of the individual award winners is below:

U12 'A' XV

Player of Year: Harry Major
Callum Marshall
Junior Szczeszek
Olly Jardine

U12 'B' XV

Player of Year: Oliver Cairns
Alex Bond

U13 'A' XV

Captain: Zach Watson
Player of Year: Patrick Hayes
Most Improved: Liam Kirkpatrick

U14 'A' XV

Captain: Dawson Knox
Player of Year: Connor McNamee
Most Improved: Ross Niblock

Medallion XV

Captain: Patrick McElroy
Player of Year: Sam Leslie
Most Improved: Harry Purdy

3rd XV

Captain: Peter Lewis
Player of Year: Jonny Reid
Most Improved: Rio Pinion

2nd XV

Captain: Harry Wan

Player of Year: Harry Wan
Most Improved: Peter Lewis

1st XV

Captain: Dan Hutchinson
Top Try Scorer: Darragh Knox
Overall P.O.Y.: Fergus Alway
U6 P.O.Y.: Fergus Alway
L6 P.O.Y.: Noah Bell
Yr 12 P.O.Y.: Noah Haughey
Most Improved: Thomas Humphries
Clubman: Adam Logan
Ulster Rep: Connor Magee,
Noah Bell,
Ryan Hanna,
Andrew Jackson,
Fynn Niblock,
Noah Haughey

Team of the year

1st XV – Best playing record & Schools' Cup ¼ final

