

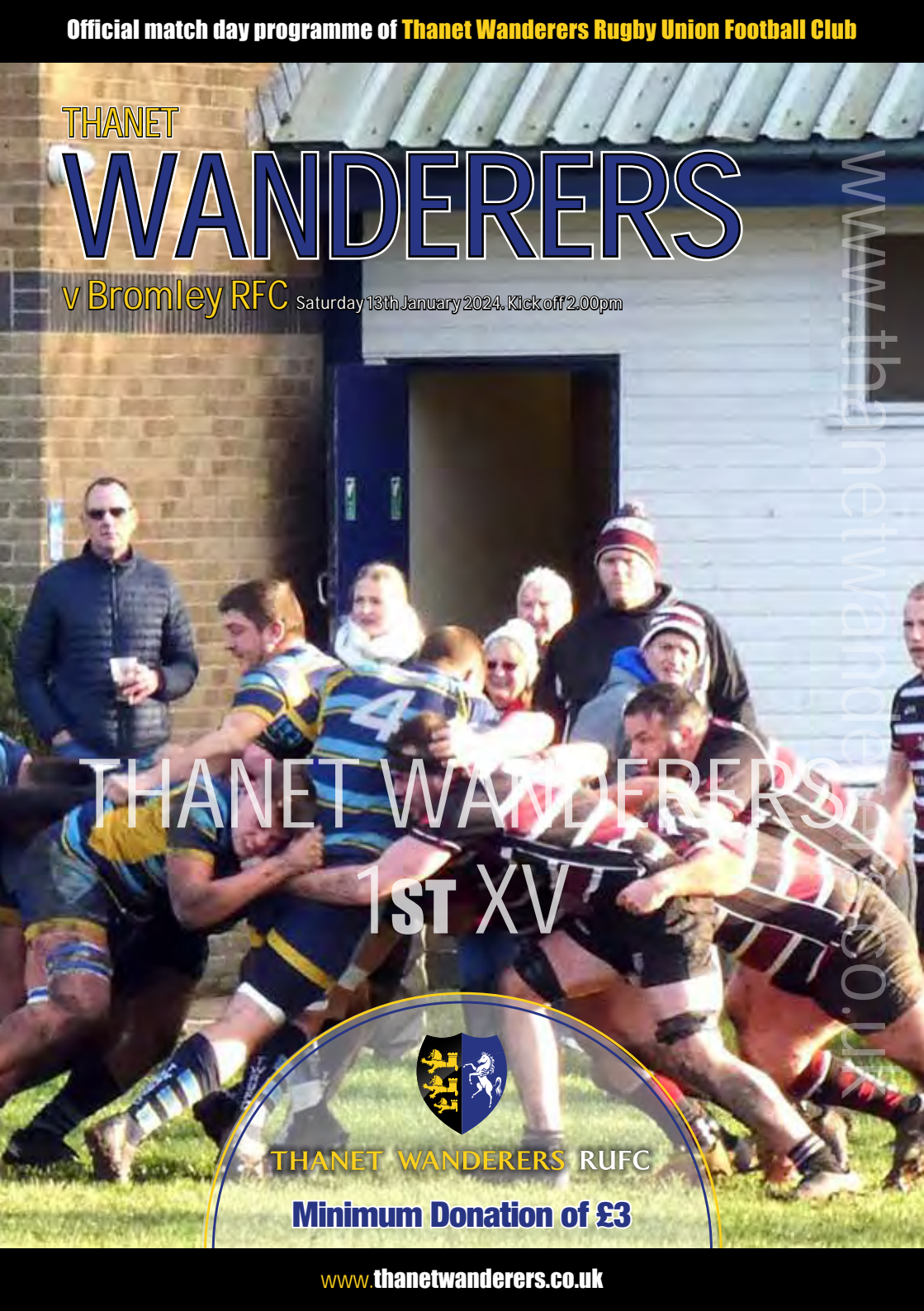
Official match day programme of **Thanet Wanderers Rugby Union Football Club**

THANET

WANDERERS

v Bromley RFC Saturday 13th January 2024. Kickoff 2.00pm

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THANET WANDERERS
1ST XV



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PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

We extend a warm East Kent welcome to Bromley RFC and hope you initially enjoy the afternoon and our hospitality and then experience some attractive Rugby.

Today's Counties 1 Kent League game has Bromley placed in 5th position with 8 wins out of 13. Our last encounter with them in October (Away) saw a Thanet 47-18 defeat. On that day we saw two players make their 1st Team debut, Owen Read & Oskar Wallace and Leon Doody made his debut playing at Scrum Half, freeing up Tom Walton to play in the backs. Thanet's two tries were scored by Noah Dan, one in each half.

This narrative has dogged Thanet all season with injuries and availability which has seen in excess of 45 players play so far for the 1st Team. Although a problem for stability this does show the willingness and determination of Wanderers to play and compete.

Today's match official is Oliver Smith, and we extend a warm welcome to him at St Peters and hope for a clean, fast paced game evenly competed and without injury.

Back in September we reported that officials have a difficult job with new laws being applied and the habits of players who have played for years having to adjust, sometimes against their subconscious to change and adapt to a new playing style. In the October game Bromley had a player yellow carded for a high tackle. All we can ask for from referees is consistency. As we have completed the first half of the season trends nationally and in Kent suggest that the new tackle law variations have been introduced sensitively with few red cards for high tackles.

Today, the 2nd XV is away at Folkestone, whose 1st Team are running away in Counties 2 Kent League and are likely to gain promotion next season. The 3rds are at Home against Weaving with the match official Elly Cole taking charge.

Thanet Wanderers Ladies returned to league action for the first time in 2024 looking to get back to winning ways after their defeat at Southend shortly before Christmas. Lordswood Valkyries were the visitors and although Thanet had won the game convincingly in October at their ground in Chatham, there was no complacency in the Thanet squad of 22. The conditions were very different, with mud and wind as opposed to sunshine and a fast surface and these are always a good rugby leveller.

Captain Gee Cordell won the toss and decided to go with the elements with the wind and slope behind her side and it was not long before the Lordswood line had been broken by rampaging forward Milly Thurman-Newell, this week plying her trade in the second row. She attacked the line, broke the defence and then handed off the full back to go in under the posts. The extras were added by fly half, Alex White for an early 7-0 lead.

As in many of these NC2 league games, a lot of the action then took place in the middle of the park with two strong packs going at it against each other. Brioni Reah, in at number 8 for the first time in a few months and forward of the match, Holly Thurman-Newell led the way with bullocking runs and dominant tackles in attack and defence respectively. Austerberry, completed a hat-trick of tries in the dying minutes of the game to take her season's tally to 15 which takes her to the top of the league scoring charts. The final score was 46-5 to Thanet.

Rugby in Kent is on the decline and the County has adopted "Game On." Game On is an initiative and playing philosophy to help keep the fixture being played. It builds on some of the work and initiatives already happening to get games played.

A match can take place with a minimum of 10 players on each team at the start of the match. It is encouraged that the number of players on each team is equal, subject to the laws of the game. It is testament to the dedication of all Thanet Wanderers who fulfil these fixtures home and away when sometimes we feel that other teams do not wish to travel to our hallowed shores. Is this why we have "Wanderers" in our Club name?

Tomorrow the U14s (Old Alleynians) & U15s (Dover), both have league games at home and there will be rugby at St Peter's on Sunday from 11.00am , so come along and support your Club and blow the New Year cobwebs away

Please respect today's referees; I hope for competitive and injury-free matches.

TEAMWORK RESPECT ENJOYMENT DISCIPLINE
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Clive Lewis
Club President

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FROM THE HEAD COACH

This week we welcome Bromley to our home. Bromley are a good team and club, community focussed and have built their success on a strong youth section and that has reaped rewards.

We are going through a transition phase as a club. I'm really proud of the boys and the culture that they are building. Results aren't going our way, but our focus is on building a team for the future. While we are focused on development, we appreciate all of your loyal and continued support to ensure we continue to represent our community club with high morals and pride.

The coaching team is looking at a number of ways to boost what we offer. We have reflected on our training and we are exploring other avenues, so watch this space.

We have had some strong young talent come through during this year, Dennis has settled well and is becoming a formidable second row. Charlie has transitioned into the team and is working hard in training and he is always learning. Then there's Gabe, what a find! That's without our usual outstanding suspects, Harrison, Max and Andrew. We have the potential, but they need time to grow.

We need your support so get behind us - I always say positive attitudes create positive performances!

Elliot Blackmore
Head Coach



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Membership is not restricted to members of Thanet Wanderers Rugby Union Football Club and supporters are welcome to participate. Members will be notified by email of the winning numbers each month and monies won will be paid directly into the winners bank accounts.

Please contact either Andy Bull (07710-456225) or Kelly Smith at the clubhouse if you need further details or fill in a direct debit form available either at the clubhouse or from Kelly.

If you are already a member of the 450 Club why not double up and have twice the chance of winning!!! Now there's a thought.

The prize draws carry on throughout the year so there's always the possibility of a rugby surprise even in the cricket season.

So go on give it a go, your support could be well rewarded!

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CODES OF CONDUCT

PLAYERS CODE: Play by the Rules and Laws of the Game **DO NOT SWEAR**

Play for fun Be a good sport Improve your skills Never give up Be fair
Do not be selfish Do not show off Control your temper
Do not argue with the referee Do not use non-prescribed controlled drugs

COACHES' CODE: Teach players to play by the Rules and Laws of the Game

Get the right equipment and facilities Be reasonable Avoid mismatches Be generous with praise
Do not favour your best players Being a coach should be fun too Never condemn
Give your voice a rest Good coaching-running with the ball Doctor /Physio knows best
It's the players who matter most not their won/lost record

PARENT'S AND SPECTATORS CODE:

Never force a child to play rugby especially if he/she feels unwell
Always remember children play rugby for their enjoyment not yours
Encourage your child to play by the Rules and Laws of the Game
Teach your child that victory isn't everything Never yell at a player for making a mistake
Encourage your child to improve his/her skills through coaching
Applaud good play by either team Stay off the pitch!
DO NOT ABUSE ANYONE (ESPECIALLY THE REFEREE)

Thanet Wanderers does not tolerate bad behaviour by any player or spectator and asks everyone to abide by the above codes

MATCH REPORT

Thanet Wanderers RUFC 5 – 53 Beccehamian RFC

Disappointing start to the New Year for the Wanderers.

Injuries sustained in the pre-Christmas match at Canterbury mean that the experienced centre pairing of Nick Herbert and Henry Mirams plus scrum-half Tom Walton were not available for selection. It was good to have Gabe Hayden back at hooker with Luke Browning at loose-head prop and Louis Marshall returned to the centre for Wanderers. The West Wickham-based opposition are among the league's promotion candidates and remain in third place after today's match.

Despite the recent heavy rains, the pitch was playable as Thanet kicked off with the wind behind them. Wanderers competed well during the opening quarter, stealing a line-out and exerting pressure to draw two penalties. After ten minutes, the visitors went ahead when the Beccehamian right-wing rounded the defence to touch down for an unconverted try. Captain, Sam Taylor, went close as Wanderers continued to exert pressure. Beccs missed a straightforward penalty opportunity when Thanet were offside but on 22 minutes added a second unconverted try as the home defence was slow to regroup. A third followed, seven minutes later, that was under the posts making the conversion easy. Rogers led

a good break for Wanderers that faltered after a knock on but the visitors' bonus point try was secured minutes later. Halftime was reached with the visitors leading 25-0 after they converted a penalty in the closing minutes of the half.

Kurt Pearson and Lenny Brown left the bench for the second half as Browning and Dennis Davies took a break. The visitors continued to dominate during the second half as their outstanding number eight was quick to initiate movements that set his elusive backs free to pressurise the Wanderers' defence which buckled on several occasions during the half to concede four converted tries. The Wanderers pack had kept parity for most of the game and in the closing minutes of the game they were rewarded with an unconverted try following a determined attack on the Beccehamian line which saw Pearson claim the touchdown to make the final score 53-5. During the aftermath of the score, a Beccehamian forward received a red card from referee Simon Bingham for throwing a punch. The result means that Thanet remains in bottom place in the league.

Colin Whiteley





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LADIES RUGBY

Our Ladies 1st XV compete in NC2, level 5 of the RFU pyramid and have league games most Sundays.

The whole ladies squad train together with their own coaching team headed by Ian Lodge and supported by Patrick Liddle, Lee Halliday, John White, Sam Rolfe and Tony Boyce.

Training is every Tuesday evening at the club between 6.30pm and 8.00pm with matches taking place typically

on a Sunday with early afternoon KOs during the playing season (from September to April).

If you are interested in trying out ladies rugby at the club, get in touch with Ian Lodge on 07890 426685. And you don't need any experience at all, just a good attitude and work ethic. We can teach you the rest!





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THE KINGS WHO MISSED THEIR CORONATION

Ten years after rugby had gone professional, one club had risen to the top of the domestic game, but with the introduction of playoffs to decide a winner, Gloucester would never see themselves crowned champions.

With 74 minutes gone on the clock and the cries of "Glawster, Glawster" thundering through Kingsholm, Gloucester were one point down, but driving into the opposition 22. Lawson to Stokosch, but he can't penetrate the defence. A slow ruck followed with tired players working hard to retain possession. Carlos Nieto picked and stole another metre and the ball was set. Lawson looked back to Lamb, the defensive line set itself and Lawson set himself. The pass goes instead to Willie Walker behind the ruck; drop goal. The thunder had retreated to a murmur; seconds feel like years. The ball hits the upright and falls, as if pulled by destiny, to its left; Gloucester have three points, the score is 25-23 and the thunder returns.

With five minutes to go Gloucester are on course to beat Leicester in the semi-final of the Guinness Premiership, but without being pushed to the limit in the second half. Four penalties from the boot of Ryan Lamb had brought a half-time lead of 12 points to 3, but after the break Leicester had slowly clawed their way back into the game.

Going into the fixture Gloucester were sat atop the 2007/8 Premiership table, whereas Leicester on the other hand had scraped into the last four with a final round result over Harlequins and their form had been patchy. Gloucester were the favourites and no away side had won in the semi-finals before. Given Gloucester's loss to Leicester in the final of the previous year, they also had some ghosts that needed laying to rest.

All they needed to do was to control possession from the kick-off and they would be on their way to Twickenham. They did and yet they found themselves defending. For Leicester, Harry Ellis popped the ball up to Martin Corry who made five metres before hitting the floor on the Gloucester 10 metre line and popping the ball up to George Chuter, who made another five yards. Corry back up off the ground cleared out and Jordan Crane picked up from the base and made another ten metres and into the Gloucester 22. Ellis secured the ball and passed

to Corry again who linked up with Mauer. Gloucester defended strongly, but Ellis looked back to Andy Goode who was in the pocket.

Gloucester with their tag as favourites and their strong display in the first half must have wondered how they found themselves in this position. When the teams had met the previous year, Gloucester had been blown away by Leicester's physicality and specifically by Alesana Tuilagi. However, they had learnt their lesson and brought in players like Lesley Vainikolo and Akapusi Qera to add some brawn. Indeed a great run by Qera and a simple draw and pass had put James Simpson-Daniel over in the 56th minute for a try that Lamb converted to make the score 22-13 in Gloucester's favour.

As Andy Goode's drop goal attempt sailed inexorably towards its destination the thunder in the crowd rolled away to be replaced by the muted smatter of Leicester cheers. The life had been strangled out of Kingsholm. Unable to regain the restart Gloucester fought in vain over the last final minutes until eventually Goode put the ball out of play for the end of the match.

The pitch was littered with the spent bodies of the Gloucester players and their coach Dean Ryan wandered aimlessly on the touchline. Leicester, like thieves in the night, had gate-crashed and spoiled the party. For the second season in a row they had denied Gloucester the ultimate trophy in English domestic rugby.

Leicester's head coach, Richard Cockerill had deliberately played down his team's chances going into the match. After the game, Dean Ryan commented "We committed suicide in the second half", indeed they did.

Throughout the ages great teams have won games against the odds and Leicester have been masters at this. Arguably this was the biggest failing of Gloucester's "golden generation", they nearly went all the way, but not quite. Their 2007/8 season had been one of mostly ups and rarely downs. A win on the road against Wasps in the penultimate game of the regular season



had cemented their place at the top of the table going into the playoffs and although they weren't head and shoulders above the competition they were certainly the team to beat.

Their rise to prominence began in 2005, when their chairman Tom Walkinshaw put in place changes that would help the club keep pace with the growing professionalism of the game. These were well founded and the 2005/6 season saw an upturn in the club's fortunes. Before then in 2003, despite romping to a 15 point lead on top of the Premiership table, they were beaten in the final. Fourth and sixth place finishes then followed in subsequent seasons. The 2005/6 regular season closed with a defeat to Wasps at Kingsholm which saw them miss out on a play-off place in the league, but they did have success in a European Competition winning the Challenge Cup.

Despite losses to Bath and Saracens, Leicester were continuing to keep pace with the Cherry and Whites and would continue to do so all season. With both teams finishing tied on 71 points at the top of the table. In fact Leicester would have finished ahead of Gloucester had they not been docked one point for fielding an ineligible player in a game. Despite the two teams finishing level, Gloucester had the better win record and so finished top of the table. In the play-offs a strong semi-final win against Saracens, fifty points to nine brought Gloucester their first Premiership final, against Leicester.

Gloucester worked hard in the final going ahead early on, but after half an hour they were trailing by seven points to six as Leicester began to get a grip on the game. From a Lamb clearance that hung in the air, Alesana Tuilagi fielded the ball and after an interchange of passes with Geordan Murphy he charged down the wing before touching down over the line. At half-time Leicester were leading twenty two points to six.

After the break Gloucester snatched another three points, but they were swimming against the tide. Leicester's physicality up front had turned the game in their favour. The old idiom "Forwards win games, backs decide by how much" was certainly true in this final. Three tries in the space of twenty minutes, one for Andy Goode, a second for the irrepressible Tuilagi and one for Shane Jennings, ultimately ended the game as a contest. Gloucester were left dreaming of what might have been and went on to lose the game 44-16. Leicester would celebrate a domestic cup double while Gloucester would leave with plenty of lessons to be learnt.

Despite the defeat Gloucester started the 2007/8 season with a feeling of optimism and this proved to be well founded. There were strong performances from James Simpson-Daniel and Lesley Vainikolo who combined to score 19 of Gloucester's 65 tries over the course of the season, set them on their way to the top of the table. Their aim for the season, as well as performing well in the league, was to establish themselves in Europe, but despite topping their group, they lost out to eventual winners Munster in the quarter-finals.

The following season would see the club fall to a disappointing sixth position in the Premiership and after a defeat to Cardiff in the 2009 Anglo-Welsh Cup final, Dean Ryan left the club.

Gloucester had been kings, but missed out on the ultimate domestic prize and there would be no coronation. While they did manage third place in 2011 they have since failed to finish on top of the pile.

FIRST XV FIXTURES

2023 – 2024

2023

Sep	16	ASHFORD	AWAY
	23	CANTERBURY 2nds	HOME
	30	BECCEHAMIAN	AWAY
Oct	7	BROMLEY	AWAY
	14	CRANBROOK	HOME
	21	HEATHFIELD & WALDRON	AWAY
Nov	4	DARTFORDIANS	HOME
	11	DEAL & BETTES	AWAY
	18	DOVER	HOME
Dec	2	CHARLTON PARK	AWAY
	9	CROWBOROUGH	HOME
	Fri 15	CANTERBURY 2nds	AWAY (7.45pm K.O.)

2024

Jan	6	BECCEHAMIAN	HOME
	13	BROMLEY	HOME
	20	CRANBROOK	AWAY
	27	HEATHFIELD & WALDRON	HOME
Feb	3	DARTFORDIANS	AWAY
	17	DEAL & BETTES	HOME
Mar	2	DOVER	AWAY
	16	CHARLTON PARK	HOME
	23	CROWBOROUGH	AWAY
Apr	6	ASHFORD	HOME

Fixtures in BLOCK Type are Counties 1 Kent League dates

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Thanet Wanderers

Home team colours: blue, black and gold hoops

1 Daniel Clement

Position sponsored by: Peter Hawkins

2 Michael Whitehead

Position sponsored by: Bill Hurley

3 Gulliver Goodall

Position sponsored by: Ernie Blakemore

4 Andrew Letts

Position sponsored by: Mark O' Riordan

5 Dennis Davies

Position sponsored by: The Four Candles

6 Warren Riddell-Broomfield

Position sponsored by: Michelle McClean

7 Sam Taylor (Capt)

Position sponsored by: Chris Marson

8 Brett Scott

Position sponsored by: Dave Brown

Head Coach

Elliot Blackmore

Position sponsored by: Colin Whiteley

Assistant Coach

Kieran Hopper

Position sponsored by: Andy Buli

Team Manager

Michelle McClean

Position sponsored by: Carmen Glover

9 Leon Doody

Position sponsored by: Jeremy Ward

10 Charlie Panteli

Position sponsored by: Ray Roby/Peter Tierney

11 Lewis Downer

Position sponsored by: Pegasus Storage Solutions

12 Max Rogers

Position sponsored by: John Keohane

13 Harrison Quittenden

Position sponsored by: Paul Glover

14 Louic Vroninks

Position sponsored by: Terry Tuttle

15 Andrew Dolan

Position sponsored by: Geoff Redmond

Replacements:

16 Chris Hood

17 Lenny Brown

18 Henry Mirams

Referee

Oliver Smith

Touch Judge

Clive Lewis

Bromley RFC

Away team colours:

1 Ben Ripp

2 David Banfield

3 Aaron Miles

4 Robbie Brown

5 Harrison Pullen

6 Henry Edmonds

7 James Haisell

8 Michael Haisell

9 Tom Powell

10 Johnny Griffiths

11 James Powell

12 Charlie Laws

13 George Rice

14 Alex Griffiths

15 George Hawkins

Replacements:

16 Steve Griffiths

17 Tommy Scott

18 George Scott

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MATCH REPORT

Thanet Wanderers Ladies 46-5 Lordswood Valkyries Ladies

Thanet Wanderers Ladies returned to league action for the first time in 2024 looking to get back to winning ways after their defeat at Southend shortly before Christmas.

Lordswood Valkyries were the visitors and although Thanet had won the game convincingly in October at their ground in Chatham, there was no complacency in the Thanet squad of 22. The conditions were very different, mud and wind as opposed to sunshine and fast surfaces which is always a good rugby leveller.

Captain Gee Cordell won the toss and decided to go with the elements with the wind and slope behind her side and it was not long until the Lordswood line had been broken by rampaging forward Milly Thurman-Newell, this week plying her trade in the second row. She attacked the line, broke the defence and then handed off the full back to go in under the posts. The extras were added by fly half, Alex White for an early 7-0 lead.

As in many of these NC2 league games, a lot of the action then took place in the middle of the park with two strong packs going at it against each other. Brioni Reah, in at number 8 for the first time in a few months and forward of the match, Holly Thurman-Newell were leading the way with bullocking runs and dominant tackles in attack and defence respectively.

After winger Megan Bish had suffered a dead leg and had to be replaced by Jess Anderson, it was not long until the ball was brought out to the left wing where Anderson lurked and she outpaced a number of cover defenders to score, once again converted by White for a 14-0 lead after as many minutes.

With the wind and slope tiring the Lordswood defenders, the last 20 minutes of the first half saw three further first half tries. The first by Rachael Austerberry who had moved to outside centre to accommodate the returning and aggressive inside centre, Izzy Lodge. It

was Austerberry's 13th try of the season. The other half of the Bish pairing, Léonie, then got the next followed shortly by Keira-Leigh Gallup getting her first try in the sport both after good unselfish work by full back Thahseen Ali. Half time 29-0.

The second half was always going to be a tighter affair now that Lordswood had the elements in their favour and their front five were doing some damage around the rucks. Thanet defended this well though and it was to be the home team that scored next, once again it was Lodge who fed Austerberry who went over from 30 yards out. Next after some good work wide on the left, Gallup fed Anderson and she went over to take the lead out to 41-0.

But Thanet's discipline had started to fail them and after an unacceptable number of penalties, White went for a 10-minute sit-down for a cynical foul. This was Thanet's fifth yellow card of the season having gained none last season, so is an area in which team improvement is required. Now with the one player advantage, Lordswood went looking for the holes and after Thanet had been pegged down in their left corner, the Lordswood number 8 went over to open their scoring.

But the final word went back to the match, Austerberry who completed a hat-trick in the dying minutes to take her season tally to 15 and take her to the top of the league scoring charts. Final score 46-5.

Thanet Ladies return to league action on Sunday 21st January 2024 at Ashford RFC before they travel to Hammersmith & Fulham for their last 16 match in the RFU Junior Cup.

Ian Lodge

Head Coach TWRUFC Ladies Section



Photos by: Ade Davies Photography

WOMEN'S NC2 SOUTH EAST (EAST) LEAGUE

2023-24

Team	P	W	D	L	P/F	P/A	P/D	T/B	L/B	PTS	ADJ
Thanet Wanderers Women	8	6	0	2	296	130	166	0	0	33	
Westcliff Ladies	8	6	0	2	252	96	156	0	0	33	
Southend Saints Ladies	7	4	0	3	169	129	40	0	0	25	
Thurrock Ladies 2nds	5	5	0	0	298	52	246	0	0	24	
Gravesend Ladies	8	3	0	5	94	255	-161	0	0	24	
Ashford Ladies	8	3	0	5	62	264	-202	0	0	24	
Lordswood Valkyries Ladies	8	2	0	6	156	253	-97	0	0	20	
Cranbrook Ladies	6	0	0	6	36	184	-148	0	0	-6	-10

WOMEN'S NC2 SOUTH EAST (EAST) LEAGUE RESULTS

Sunday 7th January 2024

Gravesend Ladies 38-10 Ashford Ladies

Thurrock Ladies 2nd XV P-P Cranbrook Ladies

Thanet Wanderers Women 46-5 Lordswood Valkyries Ladies

Westcliff Ladies 24-17 Southend Saints Ladies




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THORLEY TAVERNS

WHAT'S IN A NUMBER?

An intriguing question recently reared its head, one that asked if a certain player can play in a given position; the answer goes to show just how tactically in depth this game really is.

Perhaps this question is asked more of international fixtures than club fixtures by virtue of the increased exposure, as well as pressure, the teams are under. It is a question that seems to raise its head more often than not, and one that shows rugby's ever increasing tactical nature.

The catalyst for this article was a question that asked whether a certain player can play in a given position; similar to when people questioned Chris Robshaw at seven for England, or Owen Farrell in the centre. Other players across the world switch in and out of positions, to some extent regardless of whether they can play there or not.

As a sport, rugby is about managing, manipulating and controlling space, be that with skill, pace or strength. This is similar to both Association and American Football; yet it is neither at the same time. Where American Football plays through phases, with play books as deep as your fist, Association Football is much more fluid, constantly in a state of flux.

Rugby sits comfortably inbetween. Whether from a scrum or lineout, rugby starts in the same place as American Football, and allows for similar plays, but from there, its nature shifts to that of Association Football; fluid, allowing the players to play what they see in front of them. There are of course still structures within this open play, but the onus is on the players to read and understand the situation, and react accordingly.

This then highlights why the number on your back becomes moot.

Once play has become more fluid, control of the space is in the hands of the players. Those players on the field however, will fit into the overall attacking threat the coach believes will break down the opposition, for which they would have picked accordingly.

In England's case, the selection of Farrell along with Ford allowed the team to retain arguably their best game manager, alongside one of their best playmakers. Their selections though, were predicated on England's focus at maintaining two man rucks, and delivering quick ball. This system saw pods of two forwards alongside Ford and Farrell, that offered screening runs, or options for carrying into contact.

Once this system had been found out and compromised, especially by Scotland in the 2018 Six Nations, England moved to increase the numbers at ruck time. As a result, this drew the forwards tighter, bringing

them towards something akin to a three player pod setup (though if you watch closely, one of the second pod perhaps appears to have a slightly freer role). The impact of this on England's shape has brought around two needs.

Eddie Jones noted on several occasions that England's backline is not the largest, and by increasing the number of forwards in each pod, the physical impact of the side had been decreased in the wider channels. This put an onus on finding a player capable of taking the game to the opposition in the wider areas. Against Japan, that player was Jack Nowell, but it seemed likely that this was a role that was waiting to be filled by Manu Tuilagi.

Furthermore, this shift pulled England's playmakers in tighter, with Ford and Farrell, sitting alongside the forward pods. This then meant there was little playmaking ability in the wider areas, which went a long way in supporting the selection of Elliot Daly at fullback. He was a player who regularly played in the centre for Wasps, but the position he filled for England at fullback was remarkably similar to that filled by his then club colleague Willie le Roux. Indeed England's attacking structure at the time had shades of Wasps running through it.

The important point that each of these areas raises however, is that the structure of the team has (and needs) little resemblance to the numbers that are placed on the backs of players. Will a fit again Manu Tuilagi play alongside Ford and Farrell with a 12 on his back or a 13? Does Henry Slade with a 13 on his back alter his position within the structure of the side? Of course not, they're just numbers.

The same can be said of forwards to a point, look at how Courtney Lawes and Maro Itoje have provided different roles for different situations, alternating their positions at the set piece as the need arises. Whether one wears 4 and the other 6, or vice versa, is moot; they have a job to do within the structure of the game plan.

And that is the key point; rugby is a game of structure and systems, and how players fit into and benefit that system is the core focus of those in charge. If that means a player has a number on their back that we don't often see them wearing, the question is not whether a certain player can play in a given position, but what position has that player been given.



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SAVING RUGBY

Rugby is a game steeped in tradition and romance, however it is the same sentiment that holds it back from what it could become. The entire structure of the global game is built around where the sport has come from, and not where it is going; it is heading towards a major juncture in its history.

To my mind, many of the major contemporary issues revolve around the same base point; rugby is entrenched in its traditions. Until it can throw off the shackles of its past, it will never be able to embrace its future.

The two greatest junctures in the history of the sport have undoubtedly been those that involve professionalism; the Great Schism in 1895, when the northern clubs ceded from the RFU and created the Northern Rugby Football Union; and in 1995, almost 100 years to the day of the first event, when the IRB declared Rugby Union an open game. When the sport turned professional, it caused a seismic shift that is still reverberating today.

The power within the game has shifted away from those who organise it, and gifted more to those that pay for it, and those that pay for it want more of the same. Competitions such as the Six Nations and the Rugby Championship pull in huge audiences, both at the stadiums, and on television. These competitions remain exclusive however, with smaller nations looking on in envy at the money generated in the top echelons of the sport.

Rugby is continuing to grow the world over however, not least in countries like Argentina, and certainly Japan where many players are choosing to play their domestic rugby. While the inclusion of Argentina in the Rugby Championship has accelerated their growth, it is clear that a burgeoning domestic game has had an effect on the progress of Japan, not least their victory over South Africa at the World Cup, and with the continuing influx of quality players to their league, who would bet against it continuing?

While both Argentina and Japan now have Super Rugby franchises, they certainly feel like they are shoehorned into a competition in which they don't belong. With increased travel taking a big strain on players, and murmurs of imbalance between conferences, it remains to be seen how long they will last, and perhaps this shows a short term fix, where a long term solution is required.

It is clear that Japan is continuing to improve as a result of the quality players coming into their domestic league, but where can the national team go from here?

The Brave Blossoms started 2016 with the Asia Rugby Championship, where they played Korea and Hong Kong, amassing 242 points over four matches, and conceding just 23. With the exception of 2002, and a South Korean victory, Japan has not failed to win the competition since 1992.

This success is reflected in Europe too; in the 14 competitions of the Europe Nations Cup since 2000, there have only been four occasions where both Georgia and Romania were not in the final, and indeed only one occasion where neither of them have won the competition. Where do these teams go from here? They have reached a ceiling, and without playing better quality opposition on a more regular basis, their skills will stagnate.

This takes me back to my original comments; the tradition surrounding tournaments such as the Six Nations and the Rugby Championship stop rugby from developing itself as a global sport. The belief that the traditions of the sport can be accommodated for the future are a prejudice to the arguments of many; people don't want rugby to change. In order to move forward however, it must. Moreover, it may have to take a step backward in order to take two forward.

One of the contemporary issues that I alluded to above, is the global season. To my mind, one of the key issues with the current discussion on this point is that the powers that be are trying to take pieces from different existing jigsaws to build a new one. Taking this further, how do we accommodate the Pacific Island nations into a quality competition; do they play in the Rugby Championship? Does Japan join the Rugby Championship? That could be four new teams, which adds more and more fixtures to an already turgid calendar. What about the teams outside those four?

How can the sport maintain full domestic calendars alongside seasonal tours and the major international competitions if they continue to grow in order to accommodate new teams? To my mind, we would go about building a global season differently if we didn't have preconceived ideas about the competitions it should entail.

I believe wiping the slate clean and building new competitions would perhaps be too much of an overhaul for even the most ardent supporter of change, and while it would mean throwing away an incredible amount of tradition and history, sometimes the right decision is the hardest decision of all.

Don't get me wrong however, I love the Six Nations and the quality of rugby on display, but the competition in its current form ostracises any aspiring rugby nations in Europe, and is precisely one of the tournaments whose tradition holds back the wider game of rugby. For as long as it exists, rugby will never be able to thrive in Europe. Indeed I wonder sometimes at the level of disillusionment that must exist in countries like Romania and Georgia; when do they get their chance?

Well, in short, it won't be anytime soon; the CEO of the Six Nations, John Feehan recently commented, 'There's no vacancy. World Rugby have no input. Our primary role is not to develop other unions.'

So, it is clear that the Six Nations will continue to inhibit the growth of European Rugby, but what are the alternatives? Perhaps a European Championship style tournament, with qualification, or a pool system that would allow the inclusion of a wider pool of nations, though it would be important not to add too many more games to the calendar. The same could take place in the Southern Hemisphere, with a Pan-Pacific Cup that includes Australia and New Zealand alongside Japan, Korea and the Pacific Nations among others.

Another alternative, and a discussion that has slowly been gathering pace revolves around the inclusion of relegation into the Six Nations. This has also included talk of a playoff between the bottom team in the Six Nations and the top team in the European Nations Cup as an option. To my mind, this only opens the door enough for the nations of Europe to sneak a peak at the top of the game. It remains as isolationist as if there was no playoff or relegation. Even relegation, to my mind, does not go far enough.

Hypothetically, if relegation was introduced, we could justifiably assume that Italy would be the team to go down. We could, equally justifiably, say that given their exposure to top level rugby, they would win the secondary competition and be promoted the following year. In short, aside from the to-and-fro of Italy, one

nation would get a crack at the big teams once every two years; it would most likely be Georgia.

Does that help anyone outside the top 5 nations in the slightest? In truth, it might lead to an even greater rift between the 'them and us' that already exists, you just throw Italy into the mix too.

I go back to one of the points I talked about early on; the big downside to disrupting the current calendar with the removal of traditional fixtures, and this includes summer and autumn touring too, is the financial toll this will take on the Tier 1 nations.

The average attendance per match for the Six Nations remains the highest for any sporting event in the world, and the rivalries that have built up over the duration of the tournament ensure these remain strong. Removing the yearly battle for bragging rights amongst supporters will undoubtedly have a substantial impact on the revenues created within the sport, but would the same numbers still turn out for a match between England and Belgium, or New Zealand and Korea?

To begin with, almost certainly not. Give it time however, and as the smaller nations begin to provide better quality opposition, the crowds will grow. Indeed, while the Tier 1 nations will perhaps take a short term financial hit, their loss of revenue will likely be shared out amongst the other nations included in the competition, which helps strengthen their ability to provide quality opposition in the future.

And so this brings me back to my belief, as heretical as it is, that for the greater good of rugby, tournaments such as the Six Nations and the Rugby Championship should be axed in favour of more inclusive tournaments. As I said, I love the Six Nations, but we can't continue to think about ourselves; something needs to change. While the immediate disruption caused by these changes will undoubtedly be monumental, the long term gains for the wider rugby world and the sport as a whole are well worth fighting for.

Though in all likelihood, nothing will change. Rugby will continue to be what it was; it will be a long time before it looks back and realises it has stubbornly taken the longest path to its future.

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COUNTIES 1 KENT LEAGUE 2023-24

Team	P	W	D	L	P/F	P/A	P/D	T/B	L/B	PTS	ADJ
Canterbury 2nds	13	13	0	0	546	187	359	12	0	64	0
Dartfordians	13	11	0	2	418	240	178	11	1	56	0
Beccehamian	13	10	1	2	443	194	249	9	1	52	0
Crowborough	13	9	2	2	322	226	56	6	0	46	0
Bromley	13	8	0	5	300	263	37	6	2	41	0
Deal & Betteshanger	12	5	0	7	242	337	-95	5	2	27	0
Dover	13	4	1	8	272	321	-49	4	3	25	0
Heathfield & Waldron	13	3	2	8	256	295	-39	4	5	25	0
Ashford	13	5	0	8	217	306	-89	3	0	23	0
Charlton Park	12	3	0	9	212	319	-107	3	2	12	-5
Cranbrook	13	1	1	11	211	451	-240	1	4	11	0
Thanet Wanderers	13	1	1	11	216	476	-260	3	2	11	0

COUNTIES 1 KENT FIXTURES

Saturday 13th January 2024

Ashford v Dartfordians

Charlton Park v Dover

Beccehamian v Cranbrook

Crowborough v Deal & Betteshanger

Canterbury 2nds v Heathfield & Waldron

Thanet Wanderers v Bromley

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RESULTS GRID COUNTIES 1 KENT LEAGUE

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Home Team ▼	Ashford	Beccehamian	Bromley	Canterbury 2nds	Charlton Park	Cranbrook	Crowborough	Dartfordians	Deal & Bettes	Dover	Heathfield & Waldron	TWRUFC
Ashford			19-32	0-19	AB	21-7			14-26		21-17	28-10
Beccehamian	33-12		46-0		32-14				58-3		36-31	57-7
Bromley		10-20				33-28		22-26		39-17	45-5	47-18
Canterbury 2nds		30-23	36-10			76-0	43-10	52-7		43-14		60-24
Charlton Park				16-50			16-31	21-22	29-25		25-11	41-17
Cranbrook	20-27	5-26		19-43	19-24				17-10		15-15	
Crowborough	28-8	20-20	14-10			41-19		21-19		34-15	31-27	
Dartfordians	37-26	33-13			96-10	74-14	38-17		29-7			
Deal & Bettes			16-19	21-32			35-53			27-20	32-25	25-7
Dover	28-14	24-26	18-33		34-17	22-17		17-32	34-5			
Heathfield & Waldron	46-7			18-34			3-3	15-20		12-7		31-19
TWRUFC		5-53		25-28		39-31	13-19	10-33		22-22		

RESULTS FROM COUNTIES 1 KENT LEAGUE

Saturday 6th January 2024

Bromley 39-17 Dover

Deal & Betteshanger P-P Charlton Park

Cranbrook 19-43 Canterbury 2nds.

Heathfield & Waldron 46-7 Ashford

Dartfordians 38-17 Crowborough

Thanet Wanderers 5-53 Beccehamian

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INCLUSION @ THE WANDERERS



As a club Thanet Wanderers is committed to improving all aspects of equality, inclusion and diversity within the club. I'm sure most of you will have seen the re-emergence of our ladies team after an absence of nearly 20 years. The girls section is growing steadily with the help of a strong team of volunteers, coaches and sponsors. During lockdown we were one of a handful of clubs to receive large grants for a capital project to renovate our back changing rooms and showers primarily for female use. We have also been one of the first clubs in the South East to introduce a SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) group and this has been amazingly well received. Our Schools and Community Programme has been marching forward with coaches going into local schools to introduce children to rugby that might not normally get the chance to play the game and experience the TREDs ethos (Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline and Sportsmanship) that lies at the heart of rugby. We have a mental health first aider who is available to listen and support anyone if they feel they need help.

This is only the beginning of the club's journey and we hope that everyone at the club, whether as a player, coach, parent or spectator will get behind us and help make Thanet Wanderers a welcoming place for ALL.

With this in mind we are introducing some new codes of conduct that you will see highlighted around the club and the grounds. These will explain what is considered good practice and what will not be tolerated. They will also give details of who you can contact if you have any concerns, issues or need help or support.

We live in a constantly changing society and if we want to play a positive, relevant and meaningful part in our community, both local and our rugby community, we need to adapt and be more accepting of the diverse society that we are all a part of.

Please work with us to make Thanet Wanderers a club where everyone is welcomed and made to feel part of something special.

Safeguarding Officer
Thanet Wanderers RUFC

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