



UNDER 18 DEVELOPMENT (Under 17s)

The Development Group brought together a large, talented squad. In total 37 players from a squad of 39 donned a County shirt and played some excellent rugby. There are positive signs the combined Clubs/Schools approach is established and working, but as always there is room for improvement. Of the 39, 5 were solely from the Schools, 6 from Clubs the balance of 28 have a foot in both camps.

Schools represented: Burscough Priory HS, Clitheroe RGS, Hutton GS, Kirkham GS, Lancaster RGS, Montgomery HS, Ormskirk School, Rainford HS, Ripley St Thomas HS, William Hulme GS, St Edwards College, St Mary's Crosby, Merchant Taylors and Stonyhurst College.

FE/6th Form/Tertiary Colleges represented: Liverpool College, Myerscough and Winstanley College.

Clubs represented: Aspull, Ashton on Mersey, Broughton Park, Leigh, Liverpool Collegiate, Oldham, Ormskirk, Preston Grasshoppers, Rochdale, Tarleton, Vale of Lune and Waterloo.

Our first game was again to give the North Under 16s a training game. This proved a useful opportunity for both sides to evaluate their players in a game situation, with Lancashire squad defeating a useful North U16 squad 27-12 at King Edward and Queen Mary School, Lytham.

The second game proved much more the close tussle we have come to expect against Yorkshire after a long trek over the Pennines to Driffield. Lancashire struggled with the line out in the first half the absence of two key second rows being evident. A single unconverted try by Yorkshire whilst Lancashire was one man down due to an offence at a ruck was the only score in a fiercely contested game.

The next game was against Staffordshire previously not played at this age so a bit of an unknown quantity. This was altogether a better performance by Lancashire, albeit against a weaker opposition so we run out comfortable winners at 33-5.

For the fourth game Cheshire entertained Lancashire at New Brighton. Lancashire rightly expecting much stronger opposition went out determined to show they could meet the challenge. The display of rugby they gave was described by one Cheshire Official as the best half of rugby he had seen all season, with Lancashire's forward control, against a stronger Cheshire pack, linked with the backs running rugby seeing the score standing at 36-0 to Lancashire at half time. Lancashire made seven changes at half time and Cheshire understandably changed their game plan and came back holding and controlling the ball in their forwards. Lancashire showed that their defence was equal to the task and very nearly scored on two further occasions when we managed to get the ball wide. This was truly a game of two halves and an excellent performance by, Lancashire in both attack and defence.

The final game of the season was against North Wales Under 17s Academy. At stake was The Royal Air Force Cup, won last year, the inaugural year, by Lancashire with a clean sweep over Cheshire, Yorkshire and North Wales Academy. This year Yorkshire was replaced by Staffordshire. The game took place on a wet, windy cold afternoon at Broughton Park, Lancashire went into the game confident of a win after their fine display of rugby against Cheshire, but a young North Wales side responded better to the weather conditions and Lancashire not having taken advantage of the prevailing wind went into half time trailing 7-10. North Wales' kicking game took full advantage of the wind in the second half and, despite Lancashire beginning to get their act together in the last 15 minutes, went down 14-20. Whilst losing on the day, due to the benefit of points difference, Lancashire had the consolation of retaining The Royal Air Force Cup.

A recent visit to watch the evening European Challenge Cup Quarter Final, Sale Sharks v Brive, whilst not the achieving the attendance hoped for due the short notice, was very well received by all who went and gave a great opportunity for the Under 17s to meet Lancashire players who had progressed to Sale Academy. If repeated next season, with more planning, even greater benefit can be gained. Overall it was a very successful and a promising season. The Management and new Coaching Team are looking forward to building on the progress made and use the pre-season training tour to Ulster this August, playing both Connacht and Ulster, as a springboard to lead into equally successful Under 18 programme.

We would like to thank the 16 Group coaching and management team for their assistance in identifying players from the previous 16 Group with the right skill levels and more importantly birth year to bring into the Development squad, plus all the Clubs and Schools for their co-operation and provision of facilities to us over the season.

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