



## LANCASHIRE U18 GROUP REPORT

We started the season with same strong and enthusiastic coaching trio of Richard Senior supported by Dave Wilks and Heath Cruikshank, sadly due to pressure of work and other coaching commitments Richard bowed out after the divisional games at the end of November. However Dave and Heath have picked up the reins supported by Joe Kennedy and Ronan O'Brien. The addition of Physio, Matt Shea and his attendance at training nights has proved a major benefit in monitoring and ensuring match fitness of players as even injured players have consistently attended training sessions. We hope this will be a settled coaching and management team for season or two!

Preparations started with three days of pre-season training in late August at Tyldesley RUFC with the climax being the annual game against Ulster for the Sir Robert Atkins Challenge Trophy, this time a home game at Fylde. Once again the three days proved invaluable in the quality group and individual coaching it allowed with the players, not to mention the team building benefits.

The opening game against Ulster took place on a sunny Friday afternoon and lived up to previous hard fought contests, with the score line 10-10 at half time and yet again Ulster managed to seal the win in the second half with an interception try nearly the full length of the pitch the final score being 15 - 22 in their favour. The final warm up game against North Wales took place at Widnes; Lancashire proved the stronger side in a fast flowing game of rugby running out 40-5 winners.

Lancashire 18 Group started their North Divisional campaign at Wigan, with a comprehensive 28-0 victory over Durham, there were some good individual performances but Durham did not prove too testing opposition. This season it was our turn to visit Cheshire this time at Macclesfield, this proved a much more testing game with good attack and strong defence on both sides with Cheshire finally edging out 29-23 winners.

This year we hosted our old adversaries Yorkshire at Preston Grasshoppers, it was a busy day with Cheshire playing Cumbria at the same venue. The game followed the same closely fought tussle of recent seasons with exciting play from both teams, with both North and England selectors scrutinising the players, with Yorkshire running out narrow winners 17-18.

The following players were selected through for North 18 Group Trials.

**Forwards:** Richard Fell (Lancaster RGS), Josh Galloway (Lancaster RGS), Richard De Carpentier (Kirkham GS), Luke Woolley (Holy Cross College & Sedgley Park). **Backs:** Sam Kindred (Kirkham GS & Aspull), Tom Bowden (Kirkham GS & Fylde), Jordan Davies (Denstone College & Eccles). Only three players were selected through to the North, Tom Bowden, Richard De Carpentier and Jordan Davies, with only Davies being successful and going through to the AER Squad, where he acquitted himself well playing in all three games and scoring a try against Italy to help secure third place in the tournament for England.

There has been review and discussion at the RDP on the limited success of Lancashire players reaching both North and England. The considered view of the 18 Group is that players achieved their expected grading and biased selection is not an issue. It is more a reflection of good years and not so good years in player age groups. However the 18 Group has started discussions with Sale Academy to identify ways in which we can work together to improve performance. One issue of ongoing concern is that whilst we are confident that players from high performing Clubs and Schools are being identified, we are less confident that single players of high calibre from less high profile Schools and Clubs are being nominated. This is an area we are giving thought on how to address.

**GRENVILLE HAYMAN-START**, *Chairman, 18 Group*

**HOWARD HUGHES**, *Secretary, 18 Group*