

Australian Schools UK Tour Newsletter Number 1

We started our campaign with a very successful pre tour camp at St Ignatius' College in Sydney in oppressive heat and our main concern was not getting the team too dehydrated. Some excellent training was carried out throughout the day and the group had the privilege of meeting cricketering great Alan Border and test player Michael Kasproicz who played for Australian Schools Rugby Team in 1989. On Friday night 20th November a farewell gathering was held for families and players held at Knox Grammar. Guest speaker, Australian Rugby Union CEO, Mr John O'Neill addressed the group and wished the team well on their tour. At the completion of the function an internal trial was held to give all players in the squad an opportunity to mould some cohesive units together and some important match fitness.

We departed on **Sunday afternoon 22nd November** flying to Abu Dhabi with a two hour wait over and then onto Dublin. Etihad provided the team with excellent service and a smooth flight all the way. We arrived at 6.50am on **Monday morning 23rd November** to be met by our coach driver Peter for the day who took us around some of the sights of Dublin. We were dropped off in the city centre for breakfast at Grafton Street and the group enjoyed the brisk 6 degree temperature and take in this popular shopping area for the morning.

In order to adjust as quickly as we could to the playing conditions, our first training session was held at Terenure College situated only 20 minutes from the city centre. We were met with open arms by Mr Eddie Geraghty, who was to be our main contact for the next 6 days with the College providing for all our training needs and guidance around the city. Ireland on the whole has had one of the wettest months on record, so we were very lucky and thankful to be able to use their grounds as many other grounds around Dublin were closed.

The remainder of the day included some additional sightseeing and we moved into our team hotel, Jury's Inn at Christchurch late that afternoon. By this stage everyone was feeling the jet lag and dinner was moved forward to 6pm. We had a lot of the squad including staff nodding off to the point that food wasn't the priority and many had very little of their dinner and just went to bed for a big nights sleep.

Tuesday 24th November saw the group cover two training sessions and a very hearty and enjoyable lunch at the local hotel just up the road from the school called "The Morgue". This was to be repeated the next day as well as they provided an excellent carvery with a hot roast lunch and several variety of potatoes. That afternoon all the players met their billet families from Terenure College and St Mary's for the first time for the next 3 nights.

Wednesday 25th November saw the group consolidate on training, although the first session of the day was cut short due to driving rain and gale force winds. It was so bad the Dublin airport was closed for the day. This provided an opportunity to use the weights area and some improvised indoor training in the Terenure Gym for the day.

Thursday 26th November was a relaxed morning providing the group with time to survey the city centre and do some sight seeing of Trinity College and visit “the Book of Kells” which is a medieval illuminated manuscript of the New Testament and some attended the Dublin Wax Museum and of course some fashion shopping for some. That afternoon we were lucky to have the game venue, UCD (The Bowl) made available to have a Captain’s Run which we greatly appreciated.

Friday 27th November started with all the squad being dropped off by their billets at Terenure College. As has been the case for the last few mornings, the squad joined in with many of the junior boys of the College in the playground playing touch rugby, soccer and just standing around and chatting. Many of the staff made comment of how well our boys made an effort socialise with the students and they were greatly appreciative. The players were given an hour to return to Grafton Street for some further sight seeing before returning to Jury’s Inn for a team lunch followed by the jersey presentation with guest speaker Chris Whittaker. Chris stressed to all the players to enjoy the experience and challenges and take the opportunities in front of them both on and off the field. The team departed the hotel at 1pm for the UCD ground for our first game against Irish Schools. The rain had held off all day and we presented with a dry pitch and overcast conditions. After a slow start we trailed 14 – 12 at half time. A strong second half and some good incisive runs saw us speed the game up and control the ball better to run in four second half tries to over power the Irish 31 – 14. A full match report is also attached. An excellent after match function was held at the Montrose Hotel for players and management where a nice buffet meal was provided, followed by speeches at which time our parents who had travelled over to support were able to join the team’s formal proceedings to listen. Many of the parents then joined us back at Jury’s Inn to catch up with the team.

Saturday 28th November. Today we will be travelling through the Irish countryside as we head towards Cork. Due to the recent floods the team will now be accommodated at the Carrigaline Hotel for the next four nights in preparation for Irish U19’s that will be played at CIT in Cork at 7.30pm on Wednesday 2nd December.

More information will be forwarded in the next newsletter. Thanks for everyone’s support so far on the tour.