

Australian Schools UK Tour Final Newsletter (Number 5)

Thursday 17th December – This morning the team went through their recovery session at Hartpury College Sports Hall. After a very physical game the previous day the players enjoyed the Hot and Cold Tubs and a weights session. After lunch our much anticipated tour of Gloucester Cathedral had arrived. Gloucester is only 15 minutes away from Hartpury and this was where a lot of the scenes for the Harry Potter movies had been filmed. This didn't disappoint anyone with some excellent history of the cathedral explained and the unique architecture seen in the fan-vaulted cloisters and magnificent stained glass windows. The guides kept the boys captivated with their descriptions of the settings of each of the Harry Potter movie scenes and the lives of the monks who had lived here centuries before.

That evening we shouted the group ten pin bowling which provided some interesting techniques and some varied scores with a lot of fun had by all. It was interesting to see the mid game snacks that were ordered as seen below in one of the photos.

Friday 18th December – Today the main focus was recovery and preparation for the final game. We awoke to one of the coldest days we had been faced with all tour. The temperature was minus 5 and there had been a dusting of snow across the whole campus and surrounding areas. It certainly made for a cold day. After much discussion we arranged for our final Captain's Run on the Hartpury College synthetic training field. This is a synthetic grass covered with rubber fillings or "crumb" as the locals call it. This was to be our only alternative as all the rugby fields were frozen solid. After Tiny and Tim had completed their final preparations with the team we headed for lunch.

An opportunity was offered to the group to travel to Cheltenham village for some retail therapy. This is a thriving village with all the designer labels and plenty of shops to choose from to cater for everyone's needs. On returning to Hartpury the coaches finished a final team briefing and everyone was really looking forward to the game and had some new plans for the opposition that hadn't been seen before. As night fell and the temperature dropped even more than the maximum of zero degrees for the day, we could only pray as to what we might face in terms of the conditions of the game venue for the match against England U19 the next day.

Saturday 19th December – Unfortunately we awoke to find that there had been a big frost overnight that left all the country side frozen white with a sprinkling of snow that must have fallen in the early hours of the morning. Our final game today was to be played at Cinderford Rugby Club in the foothills about 30 minutes drive from Hartpury. This area is well known for its cold temperatures and frozen grounds and by mid morning the decision had been made to cancel the game due to a frozen pitch. Even though the day had beautiful sunshine and hardly any clouds, the air temperature was so cold that the sun had no chance of melting the frost on the grass.

Once the decision had been made to cancel the fixture, I spoke to the President of the Cinderford Rugby Club and let him know that we would still bring the team to Cinderford that afternoon and enjoy the excellent hospitality of the local community. We weren't disappointed as they had prepared a magnificent Christmas feast for all the players, management and our parents who were still with us supporting at each game. Speeches were still given with our heart felt thanks passed onto the club for

all its efforts. Cinderford Club members were devastated that the game had been cancelled but took heart in seeing the President of the RFU, Mr John Owen in attendance as were five trustees and the President of the England Schools Rugby Football Union. Pleasantries were exchanged, presentations made and just before departure from the club our tour squad were asked to come forward. Over the loud speaker system a rendition of "Waltzing Matilda" started and all the squad joined in and sang the house down. We departed the club to the strains of "Advance Australia Fair" and, although the cancelled game was a huge anti-climax for everyone concerned, the Cinderford club and its volunteers succeeded in their efforts to make the afternoon a memorable one.

The evening was spent scrubbing boots, cleaning and washing any muddy clothes and packing everything into their wheelie bag in readiness for an early morning departure to London.

Sunday 20th December – This was to be a long day for all the team. We awoke yet again to a heavy frost and some further snow showers that made the roads icy. These conditions caused our bus to be delayed and, after a later departure than anticipated, we headed for London with all the hinterland covered in a light dusting of snow. Our first stop was Lord's, the home of cricket. Our guide Bryan was a source of information and provided some excellent running commentary of the history of cricket, the buildings surrounding the Lord's oval and the new media centre which is like a space age bubble at one end of the ground. We were fortunate enough to be shown through the members' "Long Room" and sat in the visitors' change room where the Aussies were during "The Ashes" series. After completing the tour we were all dropped off in London. Starting at Trafalgar Square the boys were given a few hours to see some of the sights. The most popular sights included Westminster Abbey and Big Ben, London Eye, Changing of the House Guards and some last minute shopping. (Of course I was assured these were presents for home).

We arrived at our accommodation for the night, St Giles Hotel which is close by Heathrow airport. A final team dinner was arranged and followed by a team presentation ceremony in our own conference room. Proceedings started with a slideshow of all the photos taken on tour and there were plenty of laughs and great memories. Congratulations from our management team were passed onto the group for their efforts. As Manager, I could not have been prouder of their behaviour both on and off the field. They were outstanding ambassadors for their country and it was a privilege to be part of such a wonderful group of young men. All the tour party were presented with their playing jerseys for the last time by their coaches Rob Nowlan and Tim Wallace to finally keep as mementoes of the tour. A new team award was also presented on the night called the Greg Cornelsen Award for the players' player. Points were accumulated over all the games played and the inaugural winner was Captain Jordan Tuapou who narrowly beat runner up Liam Gill.

The Merv and Iris Allen Award was also awarded for the best Team Man for the tour and this was awarded to Angus Hamilton. Both Jordan Tuapou and Liam Gill passed on their thanks to all the management and most importantly to their team mates for making their tour so special. The final duty was to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and we finished with our Team Song, "I am Australian", followed by lots of hugs and thank yous.

Monday 21st December – An early start with a 5.30am departure to Heathrow Airport went well with everyone ready to go home to some good Aussie warm days. The flight departed at 9.20am and will stop off in Abu Dhabi and everyone except me will be arriving in Sydney on Tuesday night at 7.30pm on Etihad EY 454. I have to apologise for not returning with the team as my wife Jayne and I are celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary in the French Alps for Christmas. The boys are being well looked after by Andrew Elliot and the rest of the management team. Thank you again to all those parents who have supported our boys and management while we have been away. To everyone at home have a safe and Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.



Regards,

Graeme Dedrick