

Amsterdam 2017 (Charlie Openshaw)

2017 was memorable as it was the 10<sup>th</sup> time we have entered a side into the Amsterdam Vets. With each year the tournament gets tougher and our squad gets older placing ever more emphasis on the recruitment of new talent.

The squad assembled on the Friday night for a meal with the academy and the ever present Alan Burns, Rod Speed and their respective minders (Angela and Marian.)

The group traditionally moved on to The Grasshopper, where some were thirstier than others! An early night (or morning) for the squad, quick breakfast and we were off to the stadium in our new kit. Huge thank you to the key sponsors (Greg Cox <https://www.moneyguru.com/> and Danny and Joe O'Keefe <http://evolveestates.com>) for providing the playing shirts and training kit, it makes a huge difference being in the same colours and ensures we all feel part of that special Millfield team.

Our first game on the Saturday was against a local Dutch side. Despite being a bit rusty, and with a few sleepy heads, Messrs Mahony and Dann marshalled the side confidently. They created space and the sprightly Will Lush grabbed himself a brace of tries to help us run out 29 – 0 winners,

Next up were another Dutch side The Old Beachcombers and it was more of the same with free flowing rugby. Taking the ball at pace and moving the opposition around the field with control and precision the halfbacks created space on the outside for new recruit Joe Alikier to get on the score sheet. More tries following with Dan Masters surprising everyone crossing the whitewash to seal a 33 – 7 win.

With a long break for lunch it was time to prepare for a much more difficult opposition, the Mo Bros. Boasting a host of international stars the filled the rest of their side with biggest and fittest over 35s known to man. We lined up in the tunnel and ran into the stadium to an expectant crowd. How far could Millfield push this team of all stars? As it turns out, not very far. If the combination of a wide pitch and a late lunch wasn't enough the sight of Samoan international Terry Fanolua running full tilt at Mahony made you want to cover your eyes! When they weren't carrying it up the middle with Fanolua and Tuilagi they were carving it up with their All Blacks. Alas they made it look easy, winning 36-0.

Somewhat crestfallen the rest of the afternoon was spent supporting the Academy and enjoying some well-earned downtime. This is always one of the best bits of the weekend, sitting with old friends discussing the school, old players, teams, memories and moments, and of course everyone has a Rod Speed moment to share.

Saturday night was a steak with the Academy team, a chance to properly mix with the young superstars, sit together, share experiences and talk tactics.

Day two and first up were pool winners Vets 4 Kika. A strong side, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that we would be up against it. A ferocious warm up by Mahony had everyone on point. It became clear that this would be an evenly matched game. We took the lead with scores from a powerful running Greg Cox and a pacey Joe Alikier. However Kika struck back to stay in the contest. In the end another try by Cox sealed a hard fought 19-12 victory.

A walkover against Dam Busters and a quirk of the draw meant that we would play Mo Bros again in what was effectively a semi-final.

After a disappointing result the day before we were determined to give a good account of ourselves and were really fired up. From the kick off we pressured them on and off the ball, forcing turnovers and controlling possession. Outstanding work in the tight from Wesley Mulder and James Clark meant that ball was recycled effectively and we were able to play our own game. Shortly before half time the deadlock was broken when after sustained pressure Paul Heslop crossed for a well worked converted try. Perhaps it was the result of the late night team bonding, perhaps it was the Swedish Ladies 7s team who had come to support but everyone on the team

was firing and causing havoc for the Mo Bros. Despite this they responded with a, crucially unconverted, score to narrow the score to 7-5.

Deep into the second half and with things not going their way the Mo Bros realised they had taken us a wee bit lightly. They hurriedly made substitutions, bringing on their big guns. With just 3 minutes remaining and Millfield sniffing a place in the final All Black Scott Hamilton broke through to score. To add insult to injury a mistimed kick-off receipt ceded possession to them again and they scored at the death to win 17 – 7. The results show that this was by far their hardest game in the tournament.

It was disappointing not to make the final but the players gave an excellent account of themselves mixing it with the best in the business.

All in all, a brilliant weekend that reminded you why Millfield is so special. Most of us have played rugby for a long time, but rarely do you find the culture of teamship where playing for a group means everything to everyone in every match, this weekend allows you to get close to that feeling again with OM's of all ages that all experienced the same thing.

It goes without saying that there are a couple of important cogs in the wheel, Alan and Angela, Rod and Marian and coach/water boy Charlie Openshaw and not forgetting James Haste. Thank you.

Amsterdam 10's 2018 will take place on 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> June.

Most of us will stay the Sunday evening returning on the red-eye Monday 11<sup>th</sup> June.

See you there....

To view accompanying video: <https://vimeo.com/220289850>