



Our first Ealing Colts Tour.....Destination: Holland!

On Sunday 26th October Ealing Trailfinders Colts departed on our first overseas tour. Leaving the club at 8 pm that evening, the team headed by coach to Holland, via the Dover to Calais channel ferry crossing. 12 hours later, after an evening of singing, bonding & sleeping on the coach, 51 players, parents & coaches arrived at Centre Parcs De Eemhof in the early hours of Monday morning. Breakfast, followed by a relaxing afternoon in swimming pool & fun factory and then evening in various restaurants, left the group ready for a good night's sleep ahead of our first rugby fixture.

First stop, Nijmegen Rugby Club 'The Wasps'

Tuesday saw us gather for a Team Meeting in the conference centre where the team line-ups were revealed, tour captains announced, and the coaches & players talked through the tactics, hopes & aspirations for the week ahead.

A 90-minute coach ride later we arrived in Nijmegen to take on one of the most well-known rugby clubs in Holland. Established in 1971, 'The Wasps' were delighted at the opportunity to host English opposition. Their gracious hospitality was amazing, with head coach Ingeborg giving us a warm welcome and effusing how her team were both very excited & slightly nervous about the match ahead.

What followed was the best 70 minutes of rugby that Ealing Colts had put together this season, as we romped to a 42-0 win with 8 different try scorers. The teamwork was exemplary, with the 2 days of team bonding coming to the forefront as 'Spirit of Tour' took hold. Despite the comfortable scoreline, the match was very competitive throughout and the celebrations, camaraderie and awards presentation in the clubhouse awards were a fitting end to our first match on foreign soil.

Amsterdam Adventure.....

Despite not getting back to base until nearly midnight after the match, everyone was up and ready to roll to Amstelveense Rugby Club on Wednesday morning for team training session. The players picked up where they left off the night before with as much enthusiasm, if maybe a little less energy, as the coaches put them through their paces to get the squad ready for what we expected to be a tougher 2nd tour match.

But the training session was only the start of the day's adventure. Following a few refreshments in the ARC clubhouse we departed for Amsterdam for an afternoon of sightseeing & culture. After being dropped off by central station we split up into smaller groups to explore what Amsterdam had to offer, by which of course we mean museums, clogs and pancakes.....

The Court is in Session....

On Thursday we met once again in the conference centre for the team meeting, but the coaches had something else on the agenda.....

The Right Honourable Judge Robert Fallon presided over the 'Colts Tour Court' as various tour 'offences' by players, parents & coaches had been brought to light. The court was of course held in behind closed doors, with no reporting allowed, so the charges & fate of the guilty will forever remain a mystery.

"What goes on tour, stays on tour" as the saying goes, but rest assured much fun & frivolity was had!

On to Groningen Rugby Club

With everyone still chuckling from the court proceedings we boarded the coach once again to head to our 2nd and final rugby tour fixture at Groningen in the far northeast corner of Holland.

News of our 42-0 win earlier in the week had already reached tonight's opposition, as Groningen head coach Henk and his team, including a few Dutch national team players, greeted us to the sound of cheers & pumping music. Our hosts had laid down the gauntlet and made it clear that they weren't here to make up the numbers.

What followed was the most pulsating game of Colts rugby. Ealing taking an early lead, before being pegged back with the final play of the first half and score delicately poised 14-12 to Ealing at the break, after an intense 35 minutes of high-octane rugby. The 2nd half continued in the same vein, neither side giving an inch in an absorbing battle as they both scored tries, Ealing first and then Groningen. This time with execution of the conversions switched round, to leave the scores locked at 19-19. Despite a brief wobble after conceding the equalising score, Ealing rallied to pin the opposition on their try line for the final 5 minutes. Several 5m scrums followed as we desperately looked to secure the winning points but alas Groningen finally grounded the ball in their own try area with the clock in the red and spoils were shared.

Another great '3rd half' was enjoyed in the clubhouse afterwards as the captains & coaches gave speeches & presented awards, the hospitality flowed and we all took part singing Groningen's club song in our most confident & fluent Dutch, despite not knowing any of the words! Afterall, that's what rugby is all about.....

And then it was over.....

We left Groningen full of adrenaline & excitement at what had unfolded and left wondering what might have been. Another coach journey back to base, a short sleep and then homeward bound to Ealing on the Friday.

We weren't quite finished there though. As the coach trundled its way round the M25 in the pouring rain we took the opportunity for one last set of speeches and presented our Tour Awards, with Taylor picking up the 'Player of Tour' award and Oisín winning the 'Spirit of Tour' award. Well done to both of them, and to all the players, for their excellent performances and teamwork on tour.

And thank you to all tourists; coaches, players & parents alike, who helped make this week so amazing.

It has been legendary!