

Scottish Rugby have to up their game – and not just on the pitch



As a veteran rugby spectator, I am well used to the cold, the terminally awful catering on offer and the banter that makes for a rugby international.



Great laughs ensued when on the way to the Scotland v Ireland match we met a group of Irishmen so dedicated to the success of their team that they had dressed from head to foot in matching shamrock suits. This is what makes for a great international fixture: good sport, and not just on the rugby pitch.

In the days of terracing you occasionally had difficulty remembering where your friends were, and often the crowd at the 'clock end' would lurch forward as one and you simply had to grin and bear it.

What you also had to grin and bear years ago were the loos. In days of yore the female rugby spectator was not marvellously well catered for, but one would have hoped this might have changed by 2015. Not so.

At Saturday's match the West Stand was littered by queues for beer and longer ones for toilets. Even at the men's loos there were queues and by the time the Scotland v Ireland match was over I am reliably informed there was no running water in at least some of the men's facilities. The ladies toilets were blocked by the end of the day.



Queues for the women's toilets were at least 20+ long. The queue at one point seemed to be moving very slowly indeed and murmuring among those forming the line became a cacophony of complaints. When inside we realised the reason for the slow-moving queue. There were only three cubicles inside what was clearly a former men's room. Half of the area was reserved to urinals (not much use to us!). Let us say that these have seen better days, and not much recent cleaning.

I am sure that those enjoying corporate hospitality yesterday elsewhere in the West Stand were not subject to the same awful mess that the other punters had to face, but I could be wrong.

The fact that someone at the Scottish Rugby Union had had the

foresight to reopen the lower terraces of the West Stand and allow the crowd back into the stadium to watch the England v France decider on the big screens there was very welcome. Everyone was by then behind Ireland to win the Six Nations. But then we realised that the bathroom facilities had not been cleaned in the interim. The queues were again interminably long and the whole experience was quite base.

A spokesman for the SRU explained: "On this occasion the contingency plan we put in place was fully stretched, for a number of different reasons.

"The crowd profile has changed significantly in recent years, particularly with regard to the percentage of women and girls attending rugby events at BT Murrayfield, which doesn't match the historical profile for the facilities we have in place.

"To manage this on busy match days we have converted a number of men's toilets into ladies' to offset the increased demand and in addition we also bring in a significant number of women-only portaloos around the ground.

"The increased female/male ratio on Saturday, and the extended period of time supporters were on-site beyond the time-frame for a normal match-day, did stretch our resources. We had cleaners and plumbers in every stand throughout the day as part of our forward planning but this does not appear to have enabled us to meet the standards we, and spectators, would have expected.

"We will all feedback to help us improve the service in future matches."

That said this is not what we expect of our sporting facilities here in Scotland in the 21st century. I have visited the Dallas Cowboys stadium in Texas where the spectator experience is one of huge luxury, cleanliness and fun. One can only imagine that the Texans would want more than just independence from the rest of the US if their football

spectators had to experience the discomfort we did on Saturday.

Come on SRU sort it out! (oh, and then there's the team....but we're sure you have that in hand!)