

# **Corstorphine's remarkable journey to the top of women's rugby**

**Corstorphine Cougars have capped an unbeaten league season by winning the Arnold Clark Scottish women's rugby premiership with a 22-20 victory over defending champions, Stirling County.**

Tries by Merryn Gunderson, Katie Lindsay and Kiyomi Honjigawa added to seven points from the boot of Lisa Martin secured the silverware in front of a bumper crowd at Union Park, Edinburgh.

Afterwards proud coach Eric Jones summed up both the occasion and the team's journey to the top of the podium.

"Corstorphine Cougars have had remarkable growth in the last seven seasons since the Club returned to Union Park after the merger between Corstorphine and Royal High fell apart ending a 14 year project.

"In the first season there were sometimes only three players at training and the range of experience among the players went from a fairly new player to a then current Scottish International, Karen Dunbar.

"During that first season players were borrowed from other clubs

and we even picked up players on the way to games who had never trained with us.

“We always fulfilled our fixtures and always put out 15 players, but this isn’t what Women’s Premiership Rugby should be looking like and it’s understandable why so many of the talented players around that time headed to the English Premiership to get good training environments and top quality matches.

“Fast forward from 2017 to 2024 and we’ve just won the Premiership without losing a game in the League season. We’ve had a really good vision at the Club about what we want to achieve. We’re still working at it, but there are a lot of players that have put in an amazing amount of work to get to where we are today.

“We’ve gone from having three at training to having over 30 players at training which opens up so many options about what you can do as a coaching team to develop the players.

“The average age of the squad in 2017 was 28 and there was no youth programme in place. Whilst we’re still working at developing a girls youth programme the average age of the team that won the Premiership was 24.5 with the average age of the bench being 20 years old and 2 months.

“We used 29 players in the 1st XV League campaign this season across the 15 games and our 2nd XV has competed in the Regional One League.

“We had 15 players invited to the Celtic Challenge (for district teams) this season, with 10 eventually being selected for Edinburgh or Glasgow.

“Whilst the season structure needs looked at to give both the Women’s Premiership and the Celtic Challenge their own space, it show’s that we have a good record of preparing players to play at the Celtic Challenge level and to International level

with the only

current Scottish capped player, Alex Stewart, playing in Scotland.

The game last weekend was a proper arm wrestle. We went 10-0 up, then 10-5, 10-10, 10-15 down, 17-15 up, 17-20 down and then with four minutes to play Kiyomi came back after her yellow card and scored in the corner for us to go 22-20 up and then I thought we managed the last, long, four minutes well.

“The squad have shown some real resilience all season in the games where it’s mattered and to do it at Union Park was a great occasion and celebration of the Club game and where it’s at.

“Some who played with Corstorphine men when they were in the old Division Two said that they’d never seen the place so busy, which is a good news story in itself as many clubs aren’t reporting the same stories.”



Corstorphine rugby women celebrate their Arnold Clark

Premiership win