**DU Women’s Rugby Charity Match, 30th November 2019.**

If freezing temperatures and last-minute venue swaps deterred spectators, you couldn’t tell. Intrepid fans sat and stood, sometimes five people deep, to make up what some have heralded as the largest spectatorship of any women’s sporting activity in Durham to date.

The crowd’s suffering was rewarded with a steady flow of tries that quickly asserted Durham’s dominance and maintained a strong and unwavering lead against Newcastle University 1st XV. Indeed, had you turned up only five minutes late, you’d have missed two speedy tries and by half time, Durham were already eight tries up with number 13, Coreen Grant, having already scored a hat trick. The game ended 69-5 to Durham with tumultuous applause and a dash for the warmth.

Interestingly, almost as many tries were scored by forwards as backs, with prop Heather Kerr taking two as well as both second rows: Roshini Turner & Trudy Cowan, making decent ground to put points on the board.

Coming into the first game of the term after over two months break and with the pressure of a large home crowd was never going to be easy. Arguably Durham’s supremacy lay in executing the basics, echoing coach Cameron Henderson’s famous adage “do the simple things well”. However, the range of tries scored also showed the adaptability of the girls- an echoing roar went up for hooker Tilly Kidd as she stepped multiple opponents and made impressive ground- displaying agility and speed rarely found in the “Tight 5”. Conversely, the strength of full-back Liddie Harris to break through so many defenders and score Durham’s ninth try was impressive, especially for a back. Indeed, as the commentary noted, she has in fact played 12 of rugby’s 15 positions in her university career, moving on occasion directly from winger to prop. Other tries came from the evening’s wingers, Lydia Otulakowski and Katie Moran, who both displayed Durham’s characteristic rapid pace and finished some beautifully executed moves - impressive feats at the best of times, never mind when sub-zero temperatures make accuracy difficult.

Despite Durham’s dominance, Newcastle gave an excellent performance were not sent home pointless. In the second half a strong attack over many phases brought them close to Durham’s tryline and after a valiant defence from the girls in palatinate, Newcastle prevailed. Indeed, the performance did justice to the supporters from both sides who were rewarded with a well-contested game which highlighted the excellence that can be found in women’s rugby across the country.

The achievements within the game aside, we must draw attention to the occasion that this game represented. After meticulous planning and last-minute ice-induced reorganisation, DUWRFC’s inaugural charity rugby match went down in Team Durham history as a rip-roaring success. The work of 2nd and 3rd team players to deliver such a successful event must be applauded- it highlights the cohesion of the club- from the support of College teams through to the game day organisers, the event could not have gone ahead without such extensive voluntary effort.

Although true success cannot be reduced to a statistic, the on-pitch achievement was arguably second to the success of fundraising: the game raised a grand total of over £1600 for Wooden Spoon- the children’s rugby charity, by supporting Tamara Taylor in her record-breaking attempt to play rugby on Everest Basecamp. Such a sum of money, for a game of egg-chasing on a cold winter’s night, is testament to the dedication of this team and the support of friends, local rugby teams and other university sports to come together for a celebration of great sport and good fun. To everyone who attended: thank you. To everyone else: we’ll see you next time! All in all, a hugely successful evening. One improvement? Next time maybe just bring another jumper…

Erin Collins