

Teddington U9s Qualify for Twickenham Showdown

A string of fine performances over two days in Nottingham against some of the country's best mini rugby sides has seen Teddington U9s rewarded with a game at Twickenham on Guinness Premiership Cup Final Day in May.

Eight games over the weekend, often in atrocious weather conditions, at The Gullivers Festival – widely recognised as the national championships - climaxed with the Antlers beating Old Brodleans in the plate play-off for a deciding game at the home of rugby against Old Northamptonians.

Teddington's U9s kicked off their campaign on Easter Friday with a match against Brighton, one of the country's strongest sides. Teddington took an early lead against their south coast rivals but early in the second half slipped a score behind despite dominating both possession and territory in windy conditions. The Antlers, however, stuck to their high tempo game allied to powerful rucking and soon equalised. With the clock ticking down, Teddington mounted a final attack only to be thwarted inches from the try line by a fantastic last ditch Brighton tackle.

Buoyed by the bright start against Brighton, the U9s went into their second match, against West Norfolk, full of confidence. The two clubs met on tour two years earlier and a tight match was expected. Within minutes it was obvious that the contest would be close and despite Teddington always having their noses in front, they only ran out winners by a single try with a 3-2 victory.

Game three pitted Teddington against one of the pre-tournament favourites in Old Northamptonians. Teddington went behind early on when a Northampton centre powered through but quickly hit back with a try in the corner and then dominated for the rest of the half.

The second half was tight and Northampton again muscled their way over the try line with a penalty set piece. The Antlers fought back hard but they started to lose their discipline as time slipped away, knocking on and giving away penalties, and Old Northamptonians held on comfortably in the end for a win.

The first day's final game saw Teddington drawn against Ashfield and the U9s needed a win to boost their confidence and stay in the hunt for a spot at Twickenham. In gusting winds and showers of hail, the boys truly delivered, running in seven tries and conceding only one, putting them in a strong position for day two.

Evening bonding at a local Chinese restaurant seemed to have a positive effect on the Teddington U9s and day two of the Gullivers Festival saw them come out

of the blocks with a bang against Leighton Buzzard. By half time the Antlers were three up without reply and doubled this by the final whistle, securing their first clean sheet of the tournament.

A very strong Amersham & Chiltern were Teddington's next opponents in what was seen as a key game in deciding the final positions in the tournament. Like the Antlers, Amersham had drawn against Brighton and the clash between the two home counties sides was predictably close.

Teddington went a try down early in the first half but struck back after sustained pressure to be level at the break. The second half remained tight as the teams swapped scores before Amersham's pace proved too much for the Antlers and they snatched a decisive try near the end.

Despite the defeat, Teddington knew that a win against York would give them a shot at qualifying for the plate final at Twickenham with a game against opponents from Pool A at Gullivers. In a slightly stuttering performance, Teddington duly ran in three tries with just one in reply to book a showdown against Old Brodleians from Halifax.

Some positional switches appeared to galvanise the boys who produced probably their best rugby of the tournament, with dynamic rucking and quick handling along the line. At half time, The Antlers were 3-1 ahead against a side that had only been beaten once before in three years and coasted home in the second period to an eventual 5-2 victory and a chance to gain revenge on Old Northamptonians in May.

Teddington U9s showed that they are a side to be reckoned with and are more than capable of giving anyone a tough match. The boys still need to concentrate on some of the basics like straight running and tackling low but when they do this, coupled with being quick to the breakdown, they are a very good side.

Despite the extremely cold and windy conditions the boys enjoyed themselves and returned down the M1 better players than when they traveled up to Nottingham. The Gullivers Festival was very well organised but special mentions should go to Teddington coaches Michael O'Hagan, Neil 'tent' Meadows and Alex 'the guvnor' Tosetti for their efforts in the lead up to the trip as well as over the two days.

Roll on Twickenham!!!

Squad: Laurence Willson, Tobias Clarke, Sam Sweetland, Adam Lee, Alex Roach, Bruce Gilbert, James Meadows, Harry Kilby, Tadhg O'Hagan, George Fraser-Smith, Tom Tosetti, Miles Wakeling, Matthew Wallace, Alexander Cozens.

Coach: Michael O'Hagan

Reporter: Julien Cozens