

Oxfordshire's brand new sports & leisure magazine

# OFF THE BALL

Free

Issue 2: July 2013



## City or United?

Exploring the relationship between Oxford's two famous football clubs... including Steve Basham on playing for both

Plus

### Oxford RL

Rugby League comes to Oxford

### Water Life!

We meet Oxford's new sailing hopeful





## OFF THE BALL

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Laurie Keys

## Running

Oxford City Athletic Club runner Hannah England started her season strongly in the Diamond League with a World Championship A standard time in the first race of the season in Oregon, USA. Despite running 4:03:38 in the 1500m she came home in 8th. She has also raced in Rome with a time of 4:03:91 behind winner Adebba Aregawi. Of the Rome race she said "Pleased with Rome and another quick time. Crazy race though." Keep up to date with her performances throughout the season at [oxfordcityathleticclub.com](http://oxfordcityathleticclub.com) or [facebook.com/hannengland](https://facebook.com/hannengland)

Running fever visited the normally quiet and peaceful village of Ewelme near Benson in South Oxfordshire when it played

host to the Chiltern Chase in early June. 391 runners finished the picturesque, multi-terrain 10k and 135 completed the 5k route. The winner of the 10k was Nick Jones in 34.37, the fastest woman Kay Walsha who came in 7th. The Chiltern Chase organisers told *Off the Ball* afterwards "We have broken the £50,000 barrier for funds raised for charities during the lifetime of the event. It was also great to see more than thirty children from Wallingford School join us to help to raise funds for The Bone Cancer Research Trust (BCRT) and The Friends of Ewelme School (FOES)." For further race details visit [chilternchase.org.uk](http://chilternchase.org.uk)

There's a 5k fun run/walk/dance in University Park in Oxford on Sunday July 14 - Race for Life, looking to

raise money for Cancer Research. You can register online for £14.99 for 16 and over, £10 for 6 to 15 year olds. Info at [raceforlife.cancerresearchuk.org](http://raceforlife.cancerresearchuk.org)

The British Milers Club Grand Prix on Saturday July 20 gives runners a chance to run a mile on the iconic Iffley Road sports track where Sir Roger Bannister ran the first 4 minute mile in 1954. Minimum age for runners is 11 and it's open to all abilities. There are also open 600m events. There is no fee for race entry, tickets for spectators £4. Get more info from [ouccc.org.uk/events/iffley-miles](http://ouccc.org.uk/events/iffley-miles)

## Women's rugby

Oxford Harlequins are looking for female players to start a woman's rugby team - all ages and abilities should get in touch. The team is being started by experienced player Rachael McGill who herself started as a U16 girl then progressed to regional U16, U18s, and women's rugby. She told *Off the Ball* "My aim this year is to develop a new girls and ladies team with

the help and support from Oxford Harlequins. All abilities are welcome to come along, it's a good way to meet new people and keep fit at the same time. The ladies team will be given kit which is similar to the men's team so [that] we are all one team, and will have coaching staff ready to take on the team." Get in touch at [rachael.mcgill07@gmail.com](mailto:rachael.mcgill07@gmail.com)

## Tennis

The Aegon British Tour, which gives up and coming players the chance to gain valuable competition experience, visits the grass courts of the North Oxford Club near Cutteslowe Park from Monday 8 to



Saturday 13 July. The Tour which has prize money of £174,000 runs from January to November consisting of 40 events and there's an end of year Masters which consists of the top 32 players competing for a £22,000 prize. World ranked players are expected to take part, so it's a good chance to see them in action up close on your doorstep. For times and full entry list visit [www.lta.org.uk/aegonbritishtour](http://www.lta.org.uk/aegonbritishtour)

## OFF THE BALL

Got a sports story or event to tell us about, or want to write for us? Drop us a line: [back2left@gmail.com](mailto:back2left@gmail.com)

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### Basketball

If you're interested in trying out basketball as your sport of choice, you should get in touch with Oxford Hoops (pictured); one of the largest and most respected clubs in the county and are up to Div. 3 of the NBL. They have teams at many ages and levels and are running summer tournaments and coaching. They've even recently teamed up with Oxford & Cherwell Valley College to offer the Elite Hoops Academy of Basketball for 16-18 years olds wishing to have a basketball career. Hoops head coach is Franky Marulanda who won the Sports Partnership's Unsung Hero Award in 2011. Go the club website [www.oxfordhoops.co.uk](http://www.oxfordhoops.co.uk) to find out more. ●

### Triple jump

Nathan Douglas of Oxford City AC has won the Bedford International Triple Jump event with a result of 16.53m. Nathan is 3rd in the all-time British list and has been called up for Team GB

for the European Team Championships. His personal best is 17.64m. For results go to [nathan-douglas.com](http://nathan-douglas.com) ●



### Golf

Friford Heath golfer Eddie Pepperell (pictured), 22, from Abingdon, competed in the US Open recently at Merion GC, Ardmore. He has already had a strong year, coming 6th in the BMW PGA and 8th in the Spanish Open. He turned pro in 2011. He gained his full European Tour card for the first time this year. ●

### Sports

People in the over 50 age bracket wishing to take part in sports should visit [generationgames.org.uk](http://generationgames.org.uk), run by Age UK in Oxfordshire. They recently got together with Oxford City Council, the Oxon FA and Oxford City to offer over 50s football opportunities at the Community Stadium with FA standard coaches. A host of other sports and activities are offered.

coming 3rd out of 84. Their coach is Peter Haining 3 times World Champion single skuller. Young Sports Person of the Year was Annie Rose from Falcon Kayak Club ([falconrcc.co.uk](http://falconrcc.co.uk)) who took part in a race in Belgium for the GB development team. She also won silver in the U16 Girls at the National Sprint Championships in Nottingham. Ray Sweeney won an award for people contributing most to their sport in the area. Ray is from the Washinkai Karate Club – he set up the first karate club in the UK for disabled people. He has recently become Chairman of the Special Olympics.

There will be a strong sports presence at the Leys Fair this year which is at Blackbird Leys Park on September 7, 2-4pm. There will be giant Zorbing balls, play activities, dance, bungee run, sports, martial arts, penalty shootouts, and lots more. Entry is FREE and all activities will be either free or very low cost. Contact Jane Gallagher at Oxfordshire Play Association on 01865 779474 or email [jane.gallagher@oxonplay.org.uk](mailto:jane.gallagher@oxonplay.org.uk) for more information or to get involved. ●





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# The Oxfordshire Track and Field Championships, Horspath Stadium



Quad kids get ready

The Oxfordshire Athletics Association (OxonAA) represents the 19 local athletics clubs in Track & Field, Road Running and Cross Country for all ages and abilities. They select teams for national and country events. Visit [oxonaa.org.uk](http://oxonaa.org.uk) for more information

At first glance, this looked like a family-orientated day out as a sun-drenched Horspath Stadium was packed with picnics, tents, pets, and even music. Looking closer though, it became evident that this competition was serious business as the results are used to determine athlete selection for the Inter-County representation at national level. It was exciting stuff – a number of County athletes are now well-placed as a result of these Championships – Emma O'Hara with a 55.60 hammer throw putting her 2nd in the national rankings. Records were broken too – Oxford City's Ashley Johnson broke a long-standing Championship record by a 100th of a second in the 110m hurdles after a photo finish.

You could sense the tension prior to the events, but afterwards it was handshakes and mutual admiration for what everyone achieved – and there were many personal bests reported.

This annual meeting was held jointly held by Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Athletic Associations, and teams arrived from Eton, Slough, Milton Keynes and Windsor to compete with local athletes, the range of competitors from Quadkids (U11) to Masters (40+).

Notable previous competitors at these Championships have included Hannah England (Oxford City) and Lawrence Clarke who finished 4th in the 100m hurdles at the London Olympics and who broke the 100m county record here in 2012. ●

Words: Emma Fletcher. Pictures: Emma Fletcher/OxonAA

Full results for Oxfordshire here:  
[mcs.open.ac.uk/mkac/13oxontfresults.htm](http://mcs.open.ac.uk/mkac/13oxontfresults.htm)



Senior men's 1500 won by Abingdon's Dan Hamilton (no. 255)



A gold and a silver for 100/200m runner Kyle Ennis (no. 200) of Banbury Harriers



# Oxford City I : I Oxford United

(Extra time being played:  
120 years so far)

Next City v Utd match: 23 July



Oxford is very lucky indeed to have two successful football clubs that are "friendly rivals". The route each club took in their development was completely different, but they ended up playing in the same leagues at one stage. Let me explain... United were at one time in the Spartan League, City were once in the South Midland League (now the Spartan/South Midland League) and both clubs had a period of time in the Southern League. They weren't always leagues apart as they are now...

## Beginnings

City played their first matches in 1884 and quickly established themselves, so much so that they managed to get to the final of the Amateur Cup in 1903, 1906 and 1913, winning in 1906 (they were only defeated in the other two after replays). In 1907, they entered the Isthmian League, staying there for about eighty years. They had many great Cup games including coming back from two down to draw, in 1966 against Bristol Rovers (a game I managed to see). The six matches in the FA Cup against Alvechurch\* cannot ever be beaten – I managed to see two of them in 1972 and you always had the feeling that each team knew it was going to be a draw

whatever happened – they seemed to have lost the will to live and were going through the motions by the end.

## Whitehouse ground

I always enjoyed visiting the Whitehouse ground – the stands and changing-rooms had a feeling of history, the large jugs of tea were always waiting for the officials, as were the rubber bricks (from Cornmarket Street) that were on the changing room floor. There was a sense of permanence there, old musty stands, dimly-lit, echoing corridors – you half expected to see a City team of 1906 file out... a great amateur club with history you could almost taste. In fact, my old sports masters at school were the legendary Jack Guilfoyle and Percy James, who had amassed 652 appearances between them – it seemed things would carry on with little change, almost seamless, but eventually changes came to be.

## Court Place Farm stadium

At Court Place Farm, City have established, maintained (and improved) their enviable reputation as one of the leading community clubs in England with over twenty teams playing regularly. A friendly club, a family club.

Except for the odd "friendly" match it was only in the Oxfordshire Senior Cup or a similar competition that the two teams met – City Reserves would play United up to the late 1940s, (they were the colossus of local, Oxfordshire football), United were not good enough, City ruled the roost for about sixty-five years. I think one reason for the "friendly rivalry" was the clubs hardly ever saw each other – no one hated the other, the "other" team was a fact of footballing life.

It all changed in 1949.

## Turning pro

Headington United first played in 1893 and played junior football until 1921, moving up to the Oxfordshire Senior League, then the Spartan in 1947 and turned semi-professional in 1949... City thought about it and decided "no", they would not go the same route, and things were never quite the same again, but the clubs still rarely played each other. There was always rivalry, but until 1949 and Harry Thompson\*\* arriving at Headington United, it was very one-sided in favour of City.

## United at the Manor

In many ways the Manor was like the Whitehouse ground, but with less history and less wood in the buildings and stands. United moved into the Southern League when I started watching (standing on my stool) and I was there for the first league game against Lincoln City.

United went up another couple of gears when eventually moving into the current stadium, unfortunately the owner knew nothing about football (not only Mr Kassam but Mr Maxwell didn't either) and local rivalries were forgotten. How could you compare the Kassam with Court Place Farm? Well increasingly you could, and you can. More seats now, extra turnstiles, expanding players' tunnel, City have it all in Conference North, just two leagues below United. If City had turned professional, the landscape of football in the city would have changed even more than it did for Headington (Oxford United in 1960).

## Roles reversed

We will never know if the current situation could have been reversed – was it a wise or foolish decision at City in 1949?

(People tell me Tranmere Rovers and Everton could have been the two major clubs on Merseyside, founded before a certain team called Liverpool).

To understand the decision by City to stay "amateur" and not join the "Johnny come latels", you have to look at the whole picture. They had been in the Isthmian League for over forty years, were still attracting large "gates",

and the players and coaching staff possibly did not want to be professional – they had trades or careers so there was no real financial necessity. I know Percy James and Jack Guilfoyle, for instance, had jobs working for Oxford colleges. It is likely with pensions at stake it was not a real option for the backroom staff let alone the players. Also the Whitehouse ground would (at sometime in the future) have had to be improved or re-developed – it was looking fairly tired in the 1950s.

## Future rivals

Fierce rivalry will not occur unless United and City are playing in the same league. Even in the Oxon. Senior Cup, both teams do not play all of their best players if promotion or relegation are a possibility and injuries need to be avoided. With City's new status in Conference North, the chances of them being given United in the F.A. Cup are higher than they were as they are now excluded until the later qualifying rounds.

So, the pre-season curtain-raiser on July 23 at Court Place Farm should be enjoyed for what it is... a friendly match between two great Oxford sides – it would be different if it was a certain team from down the A420. ●

Mervyn Hughes

\* Harry Thompson managed United for nine years, winning the Southern League and Southern League Cup twice. He also guided Utd to 4th Round of the FA Cup.

\*\* In the first round of the FA Cup in 1971–72, Oxford City's tie with Alvechurch had to have five replays. The tie lasted eleven hours and made the Guinness Book of Records. The record will never be beaten due to the introduction of penalties at the end of the first replay. Alvechurch won the last tie 1-0.





# The Boys from Up the Hill: the United v City view



In big footballing cities like Manchester and Liverpool, young supporters quickly learn to pick a side among the febrile atmosphere of local rivalry. This sees the city carved in half along club allegiances and the eternal tussle for supremacy being renewed with each passing generation. The situation has always been rather different in Oxford. With a considerably smaller population of supporters, the area is able to sustain just one reasonably-sized club and fans gravitate towards the city's senior side, with little competition for supporters or league honours to fan the flames of rivalry with Oxfordshire's other clubs.

Prior to World War Two that 'senior club' was undoubtedly Oxford City and local football fans flocked to the White House Ground in their thousands to watch City in Isthmian League action. All of this changed when United adopted professionalism in 1949 and joined the Southern League, with crowds migrating from the White House to the Manor Ground due to the appeal of professional football.

Any ill-feeling caused by the reversal in fortunes of the city's clubs, however, failed to be converted into a footballing rivalry due to the fact that the sides rarely met in competitive matches. The exception to this came in an FA Cup first round tie, which pitted the two Oxford clubs against each other for the first time in the

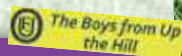
Cup. United's position as Oxford's foremost club was confirmed with a 3-0 victory at the Manor Ground in front of more than 8,000.

United, since then, have become clearly established as Oxford's Football League team, with many supporters looking to non-league City almost as a little brother to United. In more recent years the two sides have met almost annually for pre-season friendlies, and City marked the opening of their Court Place Farm ground in 1993 with a friendly against their local neighbours. Meetings between the two sides have mostly been good-natured affairs, but tempers flared after a horror challenge from City defender Andy Baird on United's talismanic striker James Constable in 2009.

On the whole, however, relations between the two Oxford clubs remain friendly, with former United stars often pitching up at City later in their careers. Former U's favourites Steve Basham, Jamie Cook and Chris Wilmott have all been influential figures for City in recent seasons and can expect a warm reception from both sets of fans when the two sides meet in July.

But with United and City now separated by just two levels in the football pyramid and recent senior personnel changes at City suggesting a greater ambition to go further still, we could soon see a time when matches between the city's two sides are more than just friendlies. ●

Matt Bruce



For all Oxford United news and views visit  
[theboysfromupthehill.blogspot.co.uk](http://theboysfromupthehill.blogspot.co.uk)

# The view from the pitch

With former Oxford Utd, now City striker Steve Basham

I think there is a good, friendly atmosphere between City and United fans. We get quite a few Utd fans watching us when Utd play away. I also know quite a few city fans that watch Utd and always look out for their results. Of course you can support both clubs. I do! I don't think Utd fans lose any sleep knowing I play for city. I had five great years at Utd with a lot of ups and downs. Probably a few more downs than ups, but, nevertheless, I really enjoyed my time there.

I think you get fan loyalty at every club. There are your die hard fans who go to every game come wind, rain or shine. You get your fans that come to home games, and then you get the fans that come to some games when they can, and then when they can't make it they always look for the results. They are the all-important people to the football club, however many there are.

I enjoy playing for City and I enjoyed playing at Utd but the experiences are completely different – you just can not compare. Utd are a huge league club with an average gate of 6,000. It was amazing playing at the Kassam every week. It was my full time job. It was my dream to be a professional footballer and to do it for 14 years is a real achievement. Something I'm very proud of.

Of course the rivalry would be greater if City were in the same league as Utd but only the same as if any teams met in the same league. But I can not see that happening any time soon. Utd have massive potential and could easily be playing League 1 football in a couple of years.

City have just had their first season in the Conference North. The highest the club has ever



been. So for now I think everyone at the club is delighted with the way things have gone. If we can improve on last year then we are definitely going in the right direction.

The club has never looked in better shape, on and off the pitch. It is run extremely well and we have the foundations to progress further.

It would be great to see more Utd fans at our home games. Most of the football played is of good quality with some great players on show. Young and old! ●

**STEVE BASHAM**

Position: Striker

Oxford United (2002-2007, 43 goals, 168 appearances)

Oxford City (2011-present)





## Town & Gown IOK run, Oxford Sunday 12 May

A gorgeous, sunny morning in May saw around 4000 runners gather in the middle of Oxford for the 32nd Town & Gown run, voted, rightly, given the fabulous setting, one of the best road runs in the country. The route took the runners, some serious, some less so (lots turned out in fancy dress costumes) round the University buildings, ending up in University Parks. David Mulvee was top male at 31:30, while Lisa Da Silva was fastest woman on 37:43.

This was the biggest turnout in the history of the Town & Gown with an added number of university students turning out with fundraising exceeding expectations. Toya Champ of the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign, for whom the event raises funds, told Off the Ball "The 2013 race was the biggest Oxford 10k to date. It was fantastic to see that we are starting to attract

runners from farther afield and that more disabled participants of all ages are getting involved. We saw a sharp rise in the number of university students taking part this year too. The Town and Gown has always been intended as an event that the whole Oxford community can enjoy, so it is really encouraging to see the pool of participants diversifying. We have far exceeded our £112,000 fundraising target and donations are still coming in." ●

Words: Stewart Garden. Pictures: Maya Wanelik

Runners can register interest for next year's event at [www.townandgown10k.com](http://www.townandgown10k.com)



## Blenheim Palace Triathlon 8 & 9 June



Over 7000 competitors and around 15,000 spectators converged on Blenheim Palace for the Blenheim Palace Triathlon, the second biggest triathlon in the country – and certainly one of the most challenging. The challenge wasn't just for the competitors – the organisers had to contend with a bus running into one of the temporary bridges, which made crossing the route difficult for people watching.

Nobody can doubt the profile of the event – last year's was won by the Brownlee brothers, their last one before racing at the London Olympics.

This year's Elite race was won by 2011 Windsor Triathlon Winner Tom Bishop, on a time of 1:00.21, and Team GB triathlete Vicky Holland on 1:06.58. Tom, who has just finished a degree, said of the race afterwards "I had about 30 seconds on the chasers, but my transition was slow and they closed that gap to about 15 seconds. I approached the run, the same as my bike and just looked to find a rhythm and stay as relaxed as possible. This was

enough and I held on to take the win in just over an hour for the race time."

It was Vicky Holland's first race of the year after coming back from injury. She said of the Blenheim win "The toughest part was, by far, the transition to swim, trying to get moving after that is so hard, especially as, when you get off the bike, the underfoot is unclear, but it was a great feeling to be back on form racing again."

Money raised from the event goes to Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research – Matt Lawley from the organisers said "The whole event has been a runaway success and raised over £200,000 for the charity. All the money raised will help us in our mission to beat blood cancer and improve patients' lives." ●

Words: Stewart Garden. Pictures: RB Create

You can register interest for next year's race at [www.theblenheimtriathlon.com](http://www.theblenheimtriathlon.com)



# Piers Hugh Smith

18 year old Oxford starlet sets sail for the Poland Grand Prix and Marseille World Championship races

## What boats did you start off with?

PHS: I started off sailing some small one man dinghies with my school – I got into racing on recommendation of one of the coaches and it all went from there. Currently I am sailing the Olympic Men's High Performance Class – called the 49er Skiff, which is a two man boat.

## How did you get into sailing?

PHS: I got into sailing after receiving an email from my school when I was about 13 which was quite late compared to a lot of my rivals. I thought it looked like a laugh and went along for a session and was hooked.

## Have you been a member of a local team?

PHS: When I started out racing I was a member of the Oxford Pirates ([oxfordpirates.co.uk](http://oxfordpirates.co.uk)) team, and now I'm really pleased to be involved with the Virtual Rigger GUL Race Team.

## Where locally do you train?

PHS: Farmoor Reservoir is the best spot round Oxford, and it is where I started sailing and still occasionally sail from. However, there are plenty of local clubs such as Bowmoor and Burghfield SC which are great.

## Do you think coming from inland has been a disadvantage compared to competitors living at the sea?

PHS: Yes and no. Inland sailing has been great for getting good tactical skills. However, sailing on the sea can be a whole different style, with tides and waves involved.

## Do you think training on lakes/reservoirs prepares you properly for racing at sea?

PHS: If you train hard and well, then, compared to many sea sailors, you can prepare easily well

enough. However training on the sea is a very important part of developing skills.

## What do you think is the best race you've competed in is?

PHS: I've had some great races, but one of my favourites has to be where after 10 races, me and another sailor where tied on points, so we ended up having a one-on-one 'duel' for most of the last race! It was really tight, but I managed to scrape the win in that race to get past him in the overall results.

## Is it war at sea or friendly – any stories of any 'dirty tricks'?

PHS: It depends – in the major championships events the racing can be ruthless. Often if you get sailors tied on points at the end of a week's racing it can result in one sailing the other down the results in the last race to get a few points advantage and take the win. It can get pretty heated during those races!

## How competitive is sailing generally?

PHS: A lot of the racing in the 49er is against full time pros and there is a massive amount of talent in the class, so it is very competitive – you really have to work and commit to get to the top, not just on the water. Your fitness and organisation have to be spot on as well.

## Who are your biggest rivals?

PHS: Probably Jack Hawkins and Chris Thomas who moved into the 49er at a similar time to us – we will next race each other at the World Championships which should be a good showdown.

## Any other local teams/up and coming local sailors we should look out for?

PHS: The Oxford Pirates have been growing year on year, which is great for local youth sailing, so I'm sure they will be ones to watch!

## Who are your biggest heroes from the sailing world – have you met any of them?

PHS: I've been really lucky to meet some of my heroes and even luckier to race against some of them. The one who really stands out for me is Andrew Simpson – I couldn't think of a better role model for anyone, on the water and off it. He will be well remembered and it's a great loss to the sport.

## WHAT IS A 49ER?

It's a 2 person, high performance, sailing dinghy (the fastest single hull)

Both crew are on a trapeze and handle the sailing while 'flying'

The 49er takes its name from its hull length which is 4.99m

The 49er first appeared at the Olympics at Sydney in 2000 and has been in every Olympics since then

There is also a '29er' design

Piers says: "The 49er is a strict one design, which means it is a pretty level playing field as far as tech is concerned. The change to a carbon fibre mast has made the boat much faster and easier to handle though, and everyone has spent a lot of time working out the best settings, so they tend to be pretty closely guarded!"

## How important is it to be fit for your sport?

PHS: The 49er is a really demanding boat, so I do some fitness training involving about 130 miles on the bike, and 4-5 weights sessions a week on top of all the on the water training we do. Fitness is really key to being able to push the boat and stay in good shape for racing up to 6 hours a day in a week-long regatta.

## Who are your mentors?

PHS: My first coach, George Barker got me involved in racing and really helped me develop my skills so I owe a huge amount to him. I've also been really lucky to be coached by Mark Asquith, who is a world class 49er sailor, so learning from his wealth of experience has helped my sailing come on a long way.

## How often do you end up in the water?

PHS: More than I'd like! My favourite has to be during a winter training session – I forgot to mention to my team-mate that we were about to start a pretty big manoeuvre, resulting in the boat cart wheeling, and me and him ending up catapulted about 10ft away into the water, a bit confused!

## Any pre/post-race routines? How do you get yourself hyped up for a race?

PHS: Just before a race we will do a bit of upwind/downwind sailing on the course and ▶





get the boat into racing mode and in the zone. This also helps to see if we need to change our race plan at all. Post-race, when we get onshore we have normally spent about 7 hours on the water. The first thing is to get the boat packed up and then a big bowl of pasta and some sleep after a race debrief and some analysis of the day and what's expected the day after.

#### What do you enjoy the most about your sport?

PHS: So many things! It's hard to pick one... but the fact that there are so many variables is a big part of it – you can't just be quick in a straight line, you have to be good all round to do well. That's one of the things I love about sailing.

#### What are your future plans? What are your chances for the next Olympics?

PHS: I'm really excited to be going to the Poland Grand Prix this summer, as well as the 49er World Championships in Marseille along with some other big European races, so a very busy season! I think I am too new to the class to think about the next Games – there is a massive depth of talent in the 49er, and some top athletes, but ask me in a few years time and I might have a different answer. ●

*Piers Hugh Smith speaking to Stewart Garden*

Keep up to date with Piers at [facebook.com/PHSsailing](https://www.facebook.com/PHSsailing) and @PiersHS\_Sailing

# Matt Goolding takes a look at Oxford Rugby League



## A new club with mighty ambition

As a city, Oxford is distinguished for many different reasons, including its sport. From Roger Bannister's four minute mile, to the University's participation in the most famous boat race on the planet, Oxford has served up some unforgettable sporting moments over the decades. Oxford United's glorious league cup win in 1986 is a highlight, arriving during the three year period they spent in English football's top flight. This season, their ground has welcomed some of the world's best Rugby Union players as they play host to London Welsh's Premiership home games.

But it's not only Rugby Union that has been kicking off in Oxford this year. 2013 has seen the evolution of a new era; step up Oxford Rugby League.

In the UK context, Rugby League is most popular in the North of England, having broken away from the RFU and Rugby Union jurisdiction back in 1895, partly due to the success of working class northern teams and players' demands to be compensated for missing work to play. This has created a strong culture of



support for Rugby League in the North, with teams like Leeds Rhinos, Wigan Warriors, and St. Helens having dominated Super League in recent years.

Oxford Head Coach Tony Benson knows all about League's popularity in that part of the world, having been in charge of Leigh Centurions in the Super League and more recently Oldham Roughyeds, who he left in 2012, eventually taking six players with him from Oldham to Oxford.

But Rugby League is an international sport, and this popularity has been spreading, inspiring ►





new teams like Oxford Rugby League and fellow newcomers Gloucester Old Golds and Hemel Stags to form. The autumn of 2013 also sees the arrival the Rugby League World Cup in England & Wales, which should encourage more people to tune in and buy tickets to witness the world's best do their thing on the biggest stage.

Locally, Oxford University has maintained a Rugby League team since 1976, and Oxford Rugby League has been received well so far, but what does Benson think about the future of fan support for the club?

"I'm focused on coaching the team. If I get the performances right, the support will come and hopefully grow."

Benson isn't a shouter. He projects a calm exterior on the touchline, and you get the sense that he is quietly confident about the development of the club, as well as how they will continue to perform on the pitch. He's a man that concentrates on the team, and when asked about individual performances, he expresses;

"We are a team, not individuals. Having said that, I'm pleased with how local lads have responded to the challenge of professional rugby league."

Oxford Rugby League compete in the UK and Europe's second tier – the Kingstone Press Championship 1. An admirable level to begin their days, and they have applied themselves exceptionally well in this debut season; currently flying high in second place with 15 points, just behind North Wales Crusaders and edging ahead of Oldham in the table. Their statistics also make for impressive reading, and they have scored 30 tries in their seven games this season. They are also attracting decent support, gates averaging between 350–380 for their home games so far this season.

I sampled a bit of this atmosphere on Sunday 2nd June during their league match at Iffley Road against Gateshead Thunder. It was a gloriously sunny day, perfect for free-flowing, fast-paced rugby. Though hardly raucous, the atmosphere was impressive, and everybody seemed to be enjoying the good weather.

Oxford started well, and both teams were showing good defensive prowess in the opening five. It was the home team that got points on the board first, with JJ Baird crossing the line after just seven minutes. Oxford were 12-0 up after a quarter of an hour, with Jonny Leather

breaking through the defensive line, side-stepping a tackle, and gliding in under the posts.

Despite the ideal playing conditions, the first half descended into a fairly loose game, with Gateshead being denied two tries; one by the referee for infringement, and one due to good defensive hold-up play on the line by Oxford. Towards the end of the first half, Gateshead began to dominate play and managed to get a try through Luke Hardcastle just before the whistle. This pleased a group of Castleford supporters, whom Oxford Rugby League had welcomed as match day guests, and who were rather lively after a beer or two in the Fir Tree.

Oxford came out of the dressing room for the second half 16-10 up, and instantly extended their lead through strong right wing running by man-of-the-match Lucas Onyango, finished off with excellent support by Clough. The Thunder rallied, and fifteen minutes into the second half, managed to get over the line after an impressive set completion and kick out to the right wing. Gateshead then brought the game to 23-22 with another well worked try, keeping the pressure firmly on the hosts.

But perhaps the finest moment of the match came in the 74th minute, with Sean Morris putting the game to bed after a delightfully

judged crossfield kick by Tommy Connick. Game over, 27-22. Another important win for the league debutants.

Oxford undoubtedly deserved the victory in the end, but were aided by inconsistency in Gateshead Thunder's play. The quality was clear to see, and it is easy to understand why Rugby League is attracting so many more fans across the country. For Oxford Rugby League, coach Tony Benson says that his hopes for the season are to "develop players and the club." Between you and me, they have a strong chance of winning the league. It would be a remarkable achievement for such a young club. So don't miss out – if you're a fan of relentless, fast-paced rugby with unforgivingly big hits, get down to the Iffley Road ground to support Oxford Rugby League. ●

All club information is on the website  
[www.oxfordrl.com](http://www.oxfordrl.com)

Home fixtures coming up:  
v Gloucestershire Old Golds  
(30 June – KO 3pm)  
v Oldham (7 July – KO 3pm)  
v London (1 September – KO 3pm)





# Schools Of Sport

Inspiring coaches,  
inspiring children

This summer, Oxfordshire's hopeful young sportsmen and women have the opportunity to be coached by top international and national players and coaches as part of the Schools of Sport 2013 elite sports coaching academy programme.

With eight Schools of Sport academies running this summer in Athletics, Hockey, Netball, Rugby, Rowing and Dance, children in Oxford will have the unique opportunity to be personally coached and inspired by some of the country's leading players and coaches.

Coaches will include GB hockey players Sarah Thomas and Crista Cullen; Olympian decathlete Dean Macey; Commonwealth bronze heptathlete Grace Clements; England netball player Rachel Mulloy; Ryan Demaine, Director of Rowing at Headington School, the UK's top girls rowing school; Steve Hill, Director of Rugby at Richmond RFC and formerly England

students' Head Coach and England Rugby Player Michaela Staniford, IRB 2012 Women's Rugby Player of the Year.

"After recently retiring from GB hockey, it's great to be coaching children to improve their hockey skills," explains Sarah Thomas. "Giving children the opportunity to be coached at great venues with other young, aspiring athletes makes a huge difference to their motivation on and off the pitch."

The Oxford-based academies will be run at Oxford University Sports Complex, Headington School and St. Edward's School, which offer outstanding sports facilities and an inspiring environment in which children can make spectacular progress in a short space of time. ●

Visit [www.schoolsofsport.co.uk](http://www.schoolsofsport.co.uk)  
or call 0844 870 9077



# The Sainsbury's School Games Summer Festival

## 3-5 July

The 2013 Sainsbury's School Games Summer Festival will see 170 School teams and over 1,400 local young people from across the county compete in 12 sports at 3 venues: Horspath Athletics and Sports Ground, Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre and Oxford University Sports Complex Iffley Road on 3, 4, 5 July. Sports that the children will compete in include cricket, rounders, softball, athletics, tennis, squash, golf, rowing and many more.

The Sainsbury's School Games in Oxfordshire is part of the National School Games funded by Sport England. It's a key part of the Government's programme to develop a meaningful sporting legacy for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The School Games is a year round sporting initiative, aiming to encourage more young people to play sport.

Young people aged 7 to 16 from Primary, Secondary and Special schools, both able bodied and disabled, compete in large scale

multi-sport events and in single sport events at a range of venues in and around Oxford.

Schools from across the county have been taking part in qualifying tournaments within their own schools and between schools in their local areas. The local area winners will represent their school and their district at the showpiece County Finals.

Fraser Long, Chair of the Local Organising Committee (LOC) and Headteacher of BGN School said "The School Games is an amazing project. It enables children and young people to compete in sport and provides opportunities and experiences including volunteering, officiating, leadership and cultural activities. This develops a meaningful sporting and cultural legacy for the future."

*Natalie Hayward, School Games Organiser*

For more information about the  
School Games, visit  
[www.oxfordshiresport.org/schoolgames](http://www.oxfordshiresport.org/schoolgames)



# 2013 Oxfordshire Sports Awards

Now in its 8th year, the 2013 Oxfordshire Sports Awards will be taking place on Friday 29 November at the Kassam Stadium, Oxford. The Sports Awards are organised by the Oxfordshire Sports Partnership in partnership with Oxford Mail and BBC Oxford.

Nominations will be open in August for a range of different categories. You can put forward your local sporting heroes, clubs and teams for their commitment and achievements in sport in the community, and put them in with a chance of winning one of eleven coveted awards.

On launching the nominations, a spokesperson told *Off the Ball* "We are looking forward to receiving nominations from across Oxfordshire for sportsmen, women, teams and clubs".

2012 winners included rowers Andy Triggs-Hodge, and Lily van de Broecke, Bicester Hockey Club ladies, Banbury Rugby Club and Tessa Horn (Netball coach).

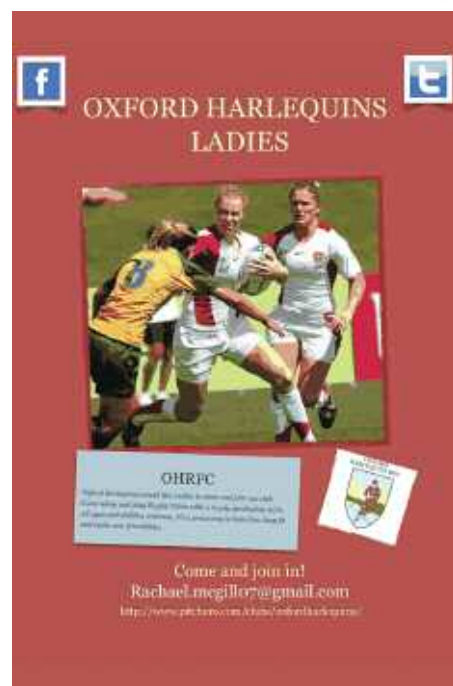
## You can vote for people in these categories

- Active Workplace Award
- Club of the Year
- Coach of the Year
- Disability Sports Award of the Year
- Junior Sports Person of the Year
- Junior Team of the Year
- Sportswoman of the Year
- Sportsman of the Year
- Team of the Year
- Unsung Hero
- Young Volunteer of the Year ●

To find out more about the awards, visit [www.oxfordshiresport.org](http://www.oxfordshiresport.org)



The 2012 award winners



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Weds 10th July • £6 adv

## The Temperance Movement

Sat 13th July • £6 adv  
7pm - 11.30pm

## Upstairs ft. Adian Coker

in association with BBC Introducing

• ShaoDow & Zubu  
• Death of Hi Fi • Yungstar  
• BG Record DJ Set

Thurs 18th July • £12.50 adv

## Two Gallants

Sun 21st July • £15 adv

## Bam Margera

from Jackass is F\*\*kface Unstoppable

Sun 21st July • £10 adv

## Headbangers Balls

ft. Aethera

• Reign Of Fury  
• Divine Chaos  
• Furyborn

Thurs 25th July • £9 adv

## The Strypes

Sun 28th July • £15 adv

6pm - 11pm • over 14s only

## Hyper

ft. Charlie Sloth

• The Harry Shotta Show  
• Mic Righteous

Sat 10th Aug • £8 adv  
7pm - 11.30pm

## Bleed From Within

• Bricks&Mortar  
• God Speed • I Cried Wolf

Mon 19th Aug • £23.50 adv

## Eels

Fri 30th Aug • £12.50 adv

## Pokey La Farge

Fri 13th Sept • £23 adv

## Babyshambles

Sat 14th Sept • £8.50 adv

7pm - 10pm • Rescheduled show - original tickets valid

## Janet Devlin

Sun 22nd Sept • £12.50 adv

## James Blake

Mon 23rd Sept • £10 adv

## Swim Deep

Tues 24th Sept **SOLD OUT**

## The 1975

Weds 25th Sept • £15 adv

## Madina Lake

Farewell Tour

• Fearless Vampire Killers  
• Super Happy Fun Club

Fri 27th Sept • £8 adv

## Mike Dignam

Tues 1st Oct • £22.50 adv

## Fat Freddy's Drop

Fri 4th Oct • £6 adv

## Evarose

Sat 6th Oct • £7 adv

## Zico Chain

Mon 7th Oct • £15 adv

## The Quireboys • Bonafide

Weds 9th Oct • £8 adv

6.30pm

## Nina Nesbitt

Thurs 10th Oct • £13.50 adv

## Kids In Glass Houses

• Propellers

Sat 12th Oct • £10 adv

## UK Foo Fighters

(The No.1 Foo Fighters Tribute)

Sun 13th Oct • £7 adv

## Nadine Shah

Fri 18th Oct • £18 adv

6.30pm

## From The Jam

'All Mod Cons' 35th Anniversary Tour

Fri 18th Oct • £10 adv

6.30pm

## Guns2Roses &

## Metallica Reloaded

Sat 19th Oct • £20 adv

## Gathering Festival

Multi venue festival

Weds 23rd Oct • £20 adv

6.30pm

## The Cat Empire

Fri 25th Oct • £18.50 adv

## Blue

Sun 27th Oct • £16.50 adv

## Tyler Hilton

Thurs 31st Oct • £15 adv

6pm

## Wretch 32

Fri 1st Nov • £9 adv

## The Family Rain

Fri 8th Nov • £11 adv

7pm - 10pm

## The Doors Alive

Fri 15th Nov • £25 adv

6.30pm

## Gary Numan

Sun 17th Nov • £14 adv

## Gabrielle Aplin

Thurs 21st Nov • £20 adv

## Turin Brakes

Sat 30th Nov • £15 adv

6pm

## The Naked and Famous

Sun 1st Dec • £25 adv

## Ocean Colour Scene

Marchin' Already Tour

Mon 2nd Dec • £22.50 adv

## Black Star Riders

Thurs 5th Dec • £10 adv

## Night Beds

Sat 7th Dec • £12 adv

## Absolute Bowie

Weds 11th Dec • £17.50 adv

6.30pm

## Airbourne

Thurs 12th Dec • £25 adv

## The Darkness

Thurs 12th Dec • £18.50 adv

## Adrian Edmondson & The Bad Shepherds

Fri 13th Dec • £28 adv

## Happy Mondays

'Bummed' 25th Anniversary Tour

Fri 13th Dec • £12 adv

## Electric Six



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