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# Exeter Chiefs Newsletter February 2025

Dear Stakeholder:

I hope you are all enjoying the 2024/25 season. As per the last newsletter, I want to start with a huge congratulations to Nick Lilley, Louie Gulley, Benjamin Coen, Josh Mann, Nic Allison, Kane James, Campbell Ridl and Oscar Beckerleg on their England U20s call ups and unbeaten start to the Six Nations. Also, to Jamie Stewart for his Scotland U20 call up and Luke Evans for his Wales U20s selection; Luke is a current Exeter Chiefs u18s squad member and Exeter College student. Well done to all players, parents/guardians and junior clubs/coaches of all players.

Further good news and congratulations to Rory O'kane and Ollie Batson who have been selected in the England U18s training camp for their upcoming Six Nations campaign.

This season has also seen a couple of our senior academy players make their Exeter Chiefs senior debuts, CONGRATULATIONS to Joe Bailey and Charlie McCaig. Plenty more appearances for them in a Chiefs shirt, I'm sure.

## U18s

The Exeter Chiefs U18s league came to its conclusion on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> February with the Finals Day held at Kingsholm v a Welsh invitational side RGC, who proved to be tough opponents, however the Chiefs came away with the spoils 19-0 with tries from Reuben Ramirez, Rory O'kane and Ollie Batson with O'kane converting two of the three tries.

It's been a tough year in terms of results however 34 players have experienced elite level rugby where they have gained valuable learning experience which will help improve them as rugby players but more importantly as individuals as they move forward to their next chapter.

Alongside the U18s fixtures, our U17s have been getting some valuable exposure to Academy rugby. Some outstanding individual and team performances over the last few weeks with games against Harlequins, Gloucester, Saracens and Bristol with further games against Sale and Coventry to come, as well as an RFU festival over the Easter holidays. Well done to all players involved.



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## **PDG**

As you will be aware from the last stakeholders newsletter, the PDG started this season replacing the DPP programme. Whilst the PDG programme has provided us with lots of challenges, it has shown the short-term pain is starting to flourish as we get towards seeing the players play in matches against other academies starting with Bristol and Coventry in March and an RFU Festival and Sale Sharks in April. We are looking forward to seeing the players put all their hard work into games.

### ***PDG North***

This season's PDG programme has been really successful to date. The 16's have been operating with a smaller group of 24 players that has allowed the coaching staff the time and space to maximise their coaching time to really work with those players.

The new programme of Robustness led by our Academy Strength and Conditioning Coach coupled with the Rugby content, on and off the pitch has shown itself to be successful and a highly enjoyable programme for the young players, who have benefitted from this blended approach.

The PDG have a number of game opportunities, the first one was on the 15<sup>th</sup> December against Bath PDG. This was the first time this group of players had played together as a team; the result was a very convincing win for Exeter. The PDG also have the RFU Warwick festival to look forward to at Easter where a selected squad will play against 3 other Academy U16's teams. An opportunity I know the lads are looking forward to.

This exciting group of players are grasping the opportunities afforded to them and maximising their learning and showing everyone just how coachable this group is and revealing glimpses of high talent and potential.

The 15's programme started on the 13<sup>th</sup> January, this was delayed by a week due to extreme weather. A larger than anticipated squad was selected based on the quality of the final stage of the trial process that was in the form of games. This group has the benefit of taking part in a completely new style of programme. Each session is split into position specific training for all units and subunits throughout the game (front row, back row, scrum halves, fly halves etc). There they receive intense coaching by Academy coaches around the skill sets and strengths particular to where they play. The other half of the session is split between Robustness with the Strength and Conditioning Coach, an identified core skills input and a section for high intensity games, where they can put the skills learnt into game practice under various pressures thus reinforcing their learning.



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This is proving to be a highly regarded training programme with lots of positive comments from grassroots coaches of players, coupled with parents of players involved. This squad of players will have the opportunity to play against their peers in Cornwall in May, so they will see some game benefit to the training.

### ***PDG South***

The PDG this year so far has been absolutely outstanding. There have been changes to the programme design this year which has meant we have taken a smaller group of 35 players at U16s.

The U16s this year are a very talented bunch, they are so enthusiastic and have a real passion for learning, development and pushing the boundaries of what they learn. We are really excited to see where this group can develop over the year and we are looking forward to the upcoming fixtures we have against Bristol Bears, Sale Sharks, Coventry and the RFU Warwick Festival.

This year we have a powerful, dynamic and very skilful bunch of forwards, alongside a group of backs who are exciting, electric and have a real desire to attack and find space. Overall, this year the group work hard, absorb the knowledge we ask and are willing to find space, try new things and be very excited.

## **Exeter Chiefs Rugby Academy**