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CLUB IN FOCUS: LANSDOWNNE

BY DES BERRY

FROM SMALL ACORNS MIGHTY OAKS GROW.



A strange saying to stitch into a story about one of Ireland's most formidable clubs Lansdownne.

Strange, but true.

On Halloween Night, Lansdownne finally launched Women's Rugby at a club which has been crying out for it for some time.

This has all been transformed by the completion of the purchase of the YMCA's sports grounds, just off Claremont Road in Sandymount.

"We have wanted to get Women's Rugby up and running for some time. The intent and desire to have a team have been there for quite a while.

"The reality is that we have been restricted, in terms of our rugby resources, our pitch space," says Stephen Rooney, the club President.

"We were limited to training on the back pitch at the Aviva or out in Ballycorus, a good distance away from the city centre. We already had a full youth programme and we had had a small girls' rugby programme, it has to be said.

"Dublin 4 is our home. That is where we want to train and play," he says.

This summer, the acquisition of Claremont Road has been the catalyst behind the expansion of the rugby programme, all across minis, youths, and pushing to develop an adult women's programme.

The financial complications that come with such a significant acquisition meant



the deal was done late into the summer. This stifled the ability to recruit players for the season ahead.

"It is not the most ideal time in the world to go looking for players or coaches. We have had to put in a lot of work over the last number of months to push this forward.

"There are great facilities here and there are fantastic coaching resources" he states

"At the moment, the idea is to get women's rugby up and running and, all going well, perhaps we can enter into cup competitions a little later in the season.

“The intention is to pack the schedule with friendlies so that we can start next season at full pace”.

Lansdowne is located smack, bang in the middle of rugby heartland where Railway Union and Old Belvedere are two of the dominant forces in women’s rugby. This is not lost on Stephen.

“It will take a lot of effort and a lot of commitment to make it happen. We’ve got the full resources of Lansdowne behind it. That, in itself, is very positive.

“We are very aware we are located in a very competitive landscape for Women’s rugby,” he says.

The challenge to eventually bridge the gap between a start-up and the embedded clubs in the area is one Lansdowne looks forward to.

“Our message is that this club doesn’t do things by half. We will give it a proper launch and back that up with the right amount of resources”.

Indeed, the plan is to root Lansdowne in the local community in Clermont Road as a multi-sports venue for the neighbouring sports clubs.

“The campus isn’t going to be all about just rugby. The old hockey pitch has been completely re-laid and will be used by Loreto on the Green and Railway Union”.

The launch of the Women’s Programme needed the right kind of person, someone with a working knowledge of the ins-and-outs of it.

Lansdowne forwards coach Phil Horan knew there was someone perfect for the project.

Tullow man John Tobin has a serious curriculum vitae as South-East Technological University (SETU) head coach in 2017 and SETU’s Head of Rugby for men and women in 2021. He has also coached the South East Girls U18s,

He has been convinced to make the considerable trek from his home in Ballon, County Carlow, twice-a-week to drive the launch of Women’s Rugby.

The question had to be asked. Why? “It is simple. I love building things,” says John.

“I’ve coached with Tullow at all levels and I was involved in coaching the club to the Provincial Towns Cup a few years back”.



“Lansdowne is a positive club, a very driven club, one of the best men’s senior clubs in Ireland. Now, they want to do the same in the Women’s game.

“It is going to be a long road,” says John. “It is going to be a slow process. I think we can get to where we want to go.”

“It is a win-win situation. If it goes well, it could grow into something great and very special.

“We are planning on going into schools and colleges around the area to convince girls to play rugby at the club.

“We are looking for players of all levels varying from seasoned veterans to players with little or no experience.

“We want to create a fun, enjoyable environment in which to compete at the level appropriate for our players.”

“We are developing a three-to-five year plan to create a competitive Women’s team and at the same time build the under-age structures, providing U16s and U18s teams that can feed into senior rugby.

“The long-term goal is for the Women to reach the same status as the Lansdowne men. That is more like a seven-to-eight year goal.

“That is my vision and I think it is shared by Stephen (Rooney) and the club. There is a lot of work to do.

“We are on the same page as regards what we want and what we view as attainable. That will be the key to its success.

“This is a chance to be a part of history in one of the most historic clubs in the country”.



Stephen Rooney (left) & John Tobin (right)

