



WINCHESTER COLLEGE

The 64th XVs of the Common Time Epoch* will be played on Friday 26th March at 14:30. It is the latest in the year XVs has been played in living memory. The score stands at Commoners 34, OTH 27 and 2 draws.

Weather: 11°C, light showers & sunny spells, 16mph west-south-westerly wind (from Science School towards New Hall, at about 45° to the canvas).

Conditions: By this point in the season it is usually hard to find a blade of grass on the canvas, but with only just over a week's use the ground is green and lush. It is slightly easier to strike the ball cleanly, although down kicks lose pace more quickly. This creates a conundrum for the second line; standing higher should be possible as the ball will roll through to them more slowly, but pushing too high will leave the kicks behind them with too much ground to cover.

Ropes Play: It is easy to focus on those who score the goals by kicking busts and fliers, but it is often the work of the hotmen that set up the chances to score. With no hots in the middle possible due to COVID restrictions, it will be the specialists at the hot on ropes that dominate this year. In the first Junior Part training sessions of the year the new men quickly realise that, unlike association football, there are no freekicks after an offence; every restart is contested. Some teams utilise a pair of players; one knocks the ball past the opposition man, the second, called a *parallel*, runs in at an angle to block any return. Some individuals master the toe poke into the net which contacts the flat-footed opposition player, allowing the poker a second kick in quick succession. Some take the brute force approach, outmuscling the opposition through a combination of strong kicks and shoulders, some of which contact the ball.

Beloe's Golden Generation? In 2018 Beloe's won Jun XIs. The core of that team successfully transferred to the Commoner Canvas the following year, and it would be no surprise if nearly half the Commoner roll is made up of Beloeites. Commoner captain Johnson (G) will be hoping they fulfil the promise they have shown coming up through the school. Vancoillie (G, unable to be in the UK) will be missed.

Byers Monopoly? Since I assumed the reins from Mr MacKinnon in 2017 one family has dominated the OTH side. The third coming, captain C Byers (I), will be hoping that the dynasty finishes as strongly as it began. As a kick he relies on his generals higher up the pitch; compatriot Nutting (I) can *usually* be found arriving first at the breakdowns. He can *always* be heard directing his troops.

Whether you are lucky enough to be spectating on Meads or watching the (first ever!) live broadcast, I hope you enjoy the game on Friday.

* College stopped playing XVs and started playing Xs against Commoners & OTH in 1957, marking the start of the Common Time Epoch.

MJR