



DOWNSIDE SCHOOL

Rosslyn Park National Schools 7s Vase

March 2019

Tuesday 26th March saw Downside School's 1st VII compete in the Rosslyn Park National Schools 7s Vase, the largest school rugby tournament in the world.

Last year's 1st VII performed fantastically, topping their pool before narrowly losing out in their play-off game to continue onto the Vase quarter-finals. The 2019 squad set themselves target of going one better, reaching the Vase quarter-finals on day two. Downside's opening game was against a resilient Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys side who kept the score close at half time with Downside 12-7 ahead. However, in the second half Downside converted their pressure into points and pulled away to a 31-12 victory.

Next up was King Ely School, and Downside began to hit their stride in a 36-7 win. Downside then faced what looked to be a pool decider against Coventry College, who had won their first three matches. Downside produced a near faultless display in both attack and defence, starving Coventry of possession and showing exceptional defensive work during the few attacks Coventry had. Downside ran out 22-0 winners leaving only one more pool win required to set up a play-off match to make the Vase quarter-finals. In another dominant display, ours boys completed a clean sweep of the pool with a 45-5 win over Lycee International de Londres Winston Churchill School, and were then drawn against Exeter School in the play-off, who had also topped their pool with a clean sweep.

Throughout the day the boys had set the tone in all their matches by scoring first, and this was no different. Dominating possession in both halves Downside secured a 33-5 win to qualify for the Vase quarter-finals, putting them in the top 18 schools out of 180 in the competition. In order to make the semi-finals, Downside would need to overcome Gower College Swansea and Oakham School. With Gower up first the team produced their best rugby of the tournament, scoring four unanswered tries in the first half, running out 35-7 winners. Oakham defeated Gower to set up a winner-takes-all clash for the semi-final place. Downside started brightly, with a couple of early chances but couldn't quite convert. Oakham then scored a breakaway try against the run of play, with momentum swinging Oakham's way. Sadly, Downside were unable to get a foothold in the game, with the score ending 36-7 to Oakham.

The bitter disappointment within the team at this loss was a testament to the belief they had in their potential to go all the way. Their ability to reflect on achieving their goals, and the manner in which they did so was exceptional to see. The future is bright, with six of the 12 players returning next year to Downside. For the remaining six leaving the school, it was a fitting send off at the end of their Downside Rugby journey. Thanks must go to the parents,

family and friends who travelled to support the team throughout, and a special mention, Downside's previous Head of Rugby, Mike Baxter, who laid the foundations for this success in his final season at Downside during the Michaelmas term.