

The Penguins fly to Italy – May 25-26 2008

The GKT rugby club fourth fifteen are known colloquially as the Penguins. The nickname derives from a series of whimsical and unfunny jokes that the team originator and recent past rugby club president was forced to deliver at social events. The team is comprised mainly of older players and the fact that penguins are slow of foot and have chosen to abandon flight is incidental.

This was the third excursion of the Penguins to Italy, the first being in 1989. It was distinctive however and may have set a trend. Wives and children accompanied the players and in mature fashion each team member arranged his own flight. Consequently, arrival times varied from midday to very late or not at all. One player missed a connection in Munich, another with his wife and small sons were bumped off a flight at Heathrow. The semblance of a team nevertheless met in the evening at the house of Pasquale and Meena Giordano overlooking the Bay of Paoluzzi. The beautiful vista, the faint odour of sulphurous steam from the adjacent Solfatera volcano, the home made wine and the piles of Italian food made for a memorable introduction to the tour. The team hotel was built on the rim of the extinct volcano and was situated even higher over the bay. The views were spectacular.

The rugby started early the next day. The Stadium Collana not only has capacity for many hundreds of spectators but is set against a pretty backdrop of lush vegetation quite unlike the flat muddy landscape of Surrey club pitches, the usual venue for Penguin gatherings. The crowds did not materialize and support was confined to families, friends and boys who after playing mini rugby, had little more to entertain them on a Saturday afternoon. The first game in a three way tournament was against Naples Old Boys. The pitch was hard and dusty but the referee had officiated at international games. The Penguins started well when Jamie Coombes intercepted a wild pass and accelerated for the line. There were excellent passing moves between Pat Gush, Jamie Coombes, Mark Kinirons and Graham Hill. Errors were few. On occasion, Rhodri martin joined in attack and added to the spirit of running, tourist rugby to which the Penguins were half committed. Naples seized on an interception to level the score. The defence of the visitors was outstanding. Wayne Llewellyn, Pasquale Giordano and Jamie Barwell held up the opposition attack aroundt he scrum and mauls and the

determined Rhodri Martin made two try saving tackles. In the second half, tries by Paoli and Pasquale settled the issue. Only one was converted and the Penguins won 17-7.

The second game was against Frascati whose physical size and black and white strip were reminiscent of a Barbarians team. The sun became hotter and the ground harder. The stadium did not echo to the roar of lions and the Penguins were neither Christian martyrs nor gladiators. They had however, one advantage over previous Penguin visitors to Naples, they had not expended their reserves the previous evening. Was this the civilizing effect of the accompanying women? It cannot be denied that this new found philosophy, no matter how derived, worked to their advantage. Furthermore, the big Frascati boys proved to be slower and less aggressive than feared.

The pattern of the game was similar to the first. The forward exchanges were not especially robust but the backs relied on passing to create overlaps and openings. This reduced the need to run too far and had the merit of keeping the ball away from the Frascati pack. A guest player for the Penguins, Enzo, scored first. The opposition answered with an opportunistic score and at half time the teams were equal. The second half saw continued good defence by the Guys team and all the pack played some role in frustrating the rolling mauls and wild charges of the big Frascati boys. It was Pat Gush who scored a second try. He converted both so the Penguins won their second game 14 – 7. The team enjoyed fine hospitality at the stadium before returning to the hotel and then a long evening in the centre of Naples. The voices of the singing Welshmen in the team were much appreciated by the opera loving Neapolitans we think. Next day the team visited Pompeii and a local beach and ate in style at their hotel. The tour party dispersed on the fourth day, some to Ischia and other to London.

Team Photo:



Standing (left to right)

Rhodri Martin, Wayne Llewellyn, Mark Kinirons, Paolo, Simone Falco, Pasquale Giordano, Clive Hudson, Simon Holmes, Jamie Barwell.

Kneeling

Chris Howell, Graham Hill, Pat Gush (Capt), Terry Gibson, Jamie Coombes, Enzo

The Wags

Imogen, Sarah, Ann, Louise, Charlie, Brenda and Jane – Charlotte, Tom and William were not there.