

# Rugby qualifiers get off to a flier

*National tournament has produced top class international players*

By Gareth A Davies

THE Six Nations never fails to inspire a new generation of rugby-playing youngsters and this year was no exception. Over 1,000 schoolboys, aged nine to 11, converged on Epsom College which hosted last week's south-east regional qualifying round of the National Schools Rugby Tournament.

Spectators were treated to a high-class exhibition of running rugby from preparatory school teams throughout the region. Among local schools to qualify for the NSRT finals – to be held at Epsom College on March 1 – were Cumnor House (under nines and under-11s), Feltonfleet School (under-nines), Chinthurst School (under-11s) and Danes Hill (under-11s), while Shrewsbury House had three teams qualify (under nines, under-10s and under-11s).

They will be joined at the finals by qualifiers from regional rounds in the South West, the Midlands and the North, where former France back-row forward Serge Betsen, now playing for Wasps, will be signing autographs and presenting the trophies.

Now in its 14th year, the NSRT, this year, includes 170 teams from eight schools. Many of the players who have participated have gone on to play rugby for England, Wales and Scotland at Under-16s, Under-18s, Under-19s and Under 20s levels.

"We are delighted to be hosting the finals of the NSRT again," said Epsom College headmaster Stephen Borthwick. "Not only does it go a long way towards supporting grassroots rugby in

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this country, but it also lays good foundations for team spirit and the pursuit of sporting excellence."

Elsewhere, frozen pitches at Wellington College forced the school to restage their rugby quarter-final of the National Under-15 Cup against Judd at Broadmoor Rugby Football Club, just down the road. Wellington, the defending champions, put in a spirited display, but lost 21-5.

Greg Woodrow, master in charge of rugby at Wellington, said: "The boys played well but were beaten by a better side on the day." Wellington's under-15 squad had an unusual build-up to the game, hosting a group of American rugby-playing schoolchildren, from one of the toughest suburbs of Los Angeles, an area where the city's most notorious gangs – the Crips and the Bloods – are regarded as the big-hitters.

The 15 Americans – aged between 14 and 18 – are part of a sporting and social experiment in LA in which the underlying spirit of rugby is being taught in the hope that they can be influenced away from a potential life of crime. View Park School team spent last week at the college, where they trained with and alongside the school under-15 XV, and gained valuable advice from James Haskell, the England player and Old Wellingtonian.

Woodrow added: "These young men are from the area in LA which was at the heart of the riots. They were fantastic – and it is a great way for rugby to be involved in the community in Los Angeles. I hope the boys took a lot away from their week here."

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These young  
men are from  
the area of LA  
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