

Varsity 2015

Full report by Callum Roberts

61 students travelled to Cranfield to play the 3rd annual Varsity tournament. The two universities competed across a range of sports including; table tennis, badminton, basketball, tennis, cricket, football and touch rugby.

This year the cricket team returned having spent 2014 in dormancy and they got off to a good start winning the toss and electing to bat. A strong opening partnership from Hisham Bokhari and Dhairya Patel looked to have put Buckingham in a strong position before quick wickets fell following the dismissal of Hisham. A good knock lower down the order from Bipinlal Baiju steadied the ship as Buckingham set their hosts 132 to win from 25 overs. The Cranfield side are well into their regular season and their experience showed as they put on a fine batting display. Hisham Bokhari removed one of the openers but Buckingham struggled to make inroads. After a Cranfield batsman retired on an unbeaten 50, Buckingham began to show some fight with Dan Morris picking up two wickets in the same over! However Cranfield ran out deserved winners but the Buckingham side can take a lot of heart from their first match back.

Whilst all that was happening in the cricket, inside the badminton side were struggling against a strong Cranfield side. With Cranfield unable to field any female players the match was a series of men's singles and doubles. Despite a valiant effort from all the players Buckingham were comfortably beaten 6-0. After which both Buckingham and Cranfield mixed the teams together, including a few female players who had made the trip from Buckingham to support the guys, and played for another few hours. Both teams were a credit to the attitude and atmosphere that surrounds this tournament every year.

On the other side of the sports hall the Table Tennis side from Buckingham waited patiently for their hosts to arrive, but after an hour the Cranfield Sports Officer declared the match to be a walkover for Buckingham. With Buckingham's first point of the day in the bag, the guys continued to play and practice and were eventually rewarded with a couple of games later in the afternoon. Despite the disappointment of not being able to play the full match the Buckingham players stayed to support the rest of the teams which was really great to see.

Outside on the tennis courts a depleted Buckingham side were struggling against a strong Cranfield 4. Both sides had been unable to recruit any female players so this again was a men's only match. Promoted up the order Ameer Ahmed and Aymeric Gautier battled hard against the top two from Cranfield but were both defeated. Dmytro Savkiv put up a stern test against the Cranfield number 3 (who was also called Dmytro and from the Ukraine!) but he too was brushed aside. Nuno Pegado

kindly filled in as a number 4 player after completing the football and despite having played 90 minutes already that day gave a good account of himself but could not stop Buckingham slipping 4-0 behind. The doubles offered some joy for the Buckingham players who won one of the two but it did not influence the result as tennis finished 4-1 to Cranfield. Giving them a 3 – 1 lead.

The Football had been expanded this year from 7v7 to 11v11. This has always been a strong sport for Buckingham but with pre-season having begun a week before it was going to be a tough test for the men in blue. If Buckingham were rusty they showed no signs of it early in the game as they dominated possession in the first 15. However Cranfield came flying back with a string of goals on the counter attack leaving Buckingham shellshocked. Tobi Akinbiyi pulled one back for the Buckingham side before half-time but the game was drifting away from the Buckingham side, 5 -1 the half time scoreline. The second half started much the same as the first, Buckingham seemed to have much more purpose and belief and started to play some nice football opening up the Cranfield defence 3 times in the opening 10 minutes but failing to capitalise. Cranfield rode out the storm and came back into the game punishing a defensive mistake from Buckingham to settle any nerves. Buckingham continued to push the Cranfield team until the final whistle but the half time lead was unassailable. It finished Cranfield 8 – 4 Buckingham. And with that victory Cranfield had regained the Varsity shield, 4 -1 their lead overall.

As the football finished the basketball began in the sports hall. The Buckingham side devoid of “bigs” faced a strong and tall Cranfield side with a full bench, it was David v Goliath stuff! Despite the height advantage Buckingham acquitted themselves well and can have no shame in the final score of Cranfield 57 -27 Buckingham. The effort and desire showed by all the players was magnificent and a credit to their character. On another day, with their strongest squad it could have been a very close encounter. 5 – 1 Cranfield.

Last, but by no means least, the star performers of the day for Buckingham. Touch Rugby. The team have always relished this match-up and this competition and they didn't disappoint this year. The Buckingham side carved open their opponents with ease running in multiple tries. Theo Mettenheimer and Josiah Rush, who both represent local rugby club Buckingham RUFC, were the standout performers, dancing their way through the Cranfield line to score try after try. A good rotation of players from outgoing president Theo meant that the side didn't lose momentum and everyone who represented the University was in top form. A shout out must go to the only competitive female player of the day, Kristin Brockmann, whose technical ability was on par with many of the guys and was involved in some fantastic flowing rugby moves down the right wing. After the match had ended, in a storming 15 – 6 win for Buckingham, the sides mixed themselves up and played another game. Everyone involved had a fantastic attitude and again totally embodied the spirit of the competition even dragging the Cranfield and Buckingham Sports Officers into the mix!

For the third year in a row Cranfield have won the Varsity Shield, 5 – 2 the final score. However there were a lot of positives for Buckingham. The reformation of the Cricket Club, the camaraderie of the Badminton Club, and the masterclass from the Rugby Club. Next year we hope to have even more students competing and I am determined to get more of our female students playing on the courts and pitches of Cranfield in 2016!