

Guildsmen Retain Sparkes Cup 2022

The Sparkes Cup made a welcome return to the Imperial Sporting Calendar after a 3-year pandemic-enforced absence. With a reinvented format, the competition saw City and Guilds play the Royal College of Science across the best of 3 games of 7s. A last minute injury for the Captain of the Royal School of Mines scuppered any chance for the smallest and pluckiest of the colleges to field a team, enforcing a change of format! The holders, City and Guilds, would play the Royal College of Science and the competition would be decided on the best of three games of seven-a-side rugby.

C&G won the toss for the first fixture and opted to kick off. Clearly no one had told the RCS side that they were playing 7s, as they kept the ball tight with one up runners for several phases in their own 22. Eventually, they remembered that summer rugby is meant to be expansive and ran the ball out to the halfway line. Unfortunately at this point, only seconds into the game, RCS lost their captain A. Brzosko to injury, having been cleared out of a ruck by his own player. With a man on the deck for RCS, C&G capitalised, turning the ball over, with B. Zhang running under the posts to dot down and converting his own effort. Following this try, the game began to open up. With brilliant end to end rugby, both teams were still feeling fresh. Both sides scored again before the break with a halftime score of 14-5 in favour of the Engineers. Halftime substitutions were made by each team to utilise fresher players. RCS struck first after the break, in order bring the scores to 14-12, before the C&G team reasserted their dominance with three further tries without reply to win the first game 33-12.

With such a strong end to the first game, C&G were confident heading into second leg. But RCS got off to a strong start, scoring first and converting. The Engineers responded quickly but missed the conversion. The back-and-forth nature of the contest continued throughout the half, with direct carriers from RCS such as K. Joshua, H. Fox and F. Weller resulted in another score before the break to lead 14-5. The C&G captain M. Speechley motivated his team at the break by reminding the squad that if they won, they wouldn't need to play any more games! Clearly this was all the motivation required, as from a scrum the ball found W. Ridge on the wing who ran in from his own half to dot down under the posts and convert. C&G quickly followed this up with a second try to take the lead for the first time in the second leg – the Sparkes cup was seemingly in their grasp with only a few minutes left to play. However, the RCS were resurgent as the guildsmen tired, with E. Saw scampering through a broken defensive line to level the scores. After the conversion was missed, an extended break (to deal with a player who'd gone a bit too hard at Ascot the day before) gave both teams time to compose themselves for the final minute to try and win the game to seal the trophy or take the event to a final deciding game. From the restart, the ball was hung up on the 10m line for C&G to chase and compete for, but the scientists gathered the ball, broke a couple of tackles, and ended up scoring under the posts again.

The final game of the day began with two very tired sets of players. Very similar to the second game, both sides traded scores and matched each other throughout, but C&G led narrowly at halftime 14-12. In the second half, RCS scored back-to-back decisively, to bring the score to 24-19 in favour of the scientists with just over a minute left on the clock. RCS attempted to close out the final few minutes by reverting to their 15-a-side tactics of kicking for territory and using their heavy forwards to take it into contact and run down the clock. However, a single loose pass was picked off by D. Bedford on his own 22 and was chased down until scoring underneath the scientists posts to level the scores at 24-24. W. Ridge kicked the winning conversion to ensure that C&G retained the Sparkes Cup for the fourth time in succession.

We're extremely grateful for the continued support of all the college associations for the Sparkes' cup.

C&G Player of the Tournament – D. Bedford

RCS Player of the Tournament – F. Weller