

Another Season Begins – Was that Summer?

Back in the swing of the new rugby season are we?

It doesn't seem 5 minutes since the last season finished and the List was compiled by gimlet eyed Rugby Mums across the County (and beyond) of The Things That Need to Be Done Now That We Have More Time At Weekends. Yes, I know you've got one of these lists too!

Much negotiation (and blackmail) takes place along the lines of "I've spent hours ferrying you to training and matches and all I'm asking is for you to do a few simple jobs around the house. I have known this List strike fear and terror into entire rugby families and there is much muttering of "better tick a few things off the darned List and keep her happy".

Our List included painting fence panels, emptying the bike shed, mucking out the car boot of rugby mud, power washing the flagstones in the garden.....and the Big One – the deep dive into the Rugby Kit basket that is commonly known in our house as The Abyss.

Once upon a time before I had boys I bought an enormous 2 feet deep log basket which looked rather nice next to our fireplace. This item then quickly morphed into a toy box, the best toddler den ever and now does sterling service as the rugby basket in the utility room. It is a festering mess of rugby paraphernalia added to by my eldest son's rowing attire when home from University (full thermals and a balaclava are essential – you try rowing at 6am in Durham). Don't get me wrong – we start each rugby season with 4 lots of kit in their respective bags: school, club, training and spares. Solemn promises are made to me about boot cleaning and kit bag re-filling. Within one week the utility room looks like an explosion in a sports shop and I am climbing over the mountain just to go into my garden.

The dreaded day arrived. Number 2 son was comfortably ensconced on the sofa watching cherished rugby highlights, texting friends and solemnly eating his way through the contents of my fridge. I took a deep breath and told him the time had come to sort out the Abyss. What got him off the sofa was the threat of a change to the Wi-Fi code if he didn't play nice.

The Abyss was upended (I would have preferred he do that in the garden but wasn't going to quibble at this early stage in proceedings) and together we surveyed the contents. A couple of pounds of finest dried Lancashire mud were sent across my tiled floor. Two embarrassed looking spiders scurried away and a faint whiff of stale Flanker quickly pervaded the air.

Picture the scene...I was braced with my bin liner for what he was going to throw out. My stance was that of Dan Cole about to engage in a scrum. The boy was ready for me - also bracedwith an attitude that said "I'm going to fight you every step of the way". We locked eyes and I knew this wasn't going to be a clean fight.

First thing up was a solitary sock from a Club he hasn't played for in 2 years. The boy was furious and snatched it back- "I scored 4 tries in one game in that sock- that is a potential family heirloom". I snarled and we agreed that we would put it to one sidefor now. Next we found the wooden boot scraper (that looks like a mutant lavatory brush), purchased at his request in Skipton as the answer to his boot cleaning prayers. It was in what EBay would describe as BNWT condition- untouched by schoolboy hand. Dear reader I then counted 11 odd school rugby socks of various sizes and was told in no uncertain terms to leave them well alone as his supply had saved many a fellow player from the wrath of Sir when someone had forgotten their socks. A motley collection of boot laces were dispatched to my gardening supplies basket- useful for tying plants in I thought.

Next up were the “skins” - under shorts now so impossibly tight that if he were to wear them he wouldn't be able to walk in a straight line - never mind ruck. Into the bin liner they went (one for the Mums!). Upper body armour that had twisted out of shape worse than a Wonderbra were also sent on their merry way. Numerous woolly hats and gloves lovingly placed by me in training bags for arctic evening training sessions? -“they can go - I'm not wearing them and getting called soft”. Quick recycle to the charity bag on that one. Then came a scrum hat with tiny flecks of mould that smelt like a bad drain – “it'll do another season”- it jolly well won't son!

By now I could see the whites of his eyes, his nostrils were flared and he was giving me the look he usually reserves for opposition number 8s. On we went. A couple of bottles of now frothy sports drinks surfaced, together with mouldy apples and carrot tops (he likes his veggies), several furry glucose energy tablets and armfuls of used gaffer tape he uses for keeping his socks up (why would you even keep that after a game?). One forlorn Croc, a congealed tube of Deep Heat, a pair of grotty boxer shorts, a new white school shirt obviously used for wiping down a pair of rugby boots and an assortment of rugby ball pumps and stud removers. By now I am struggling to retain my composure and I've taken refuge behind my professional work face so as not to give away what I'm really thinking and risk a full scale row. Then came the piece de la resistance. A pristine un-used shower kit and towel that he swore he had lost on tour many moons ago. I contented myself with an arched eyebrow and watched him squirm.

Slowly and laboriously we reloaded the kit bags with the correct kit, The Abyss basket was cleaned and he was sent off to put the kettle on. I then decided to be too clever and popped a fabric conditioner sheet at the bottom of each bag to keep it all smelling fresh (Good Housekeeping Magazine readers tip). Too late – he spotted me. To roars of rage he immediately removed them saying “this is rugby - not knitting!”

Later on that evening we were sat in the garden feeling very pleased with ourselves and we were friends again. My pride and boy then turned round to me, smiled sweetly and said these immortal words – “of course if I do turn professional I will get LOADS of free kit and boots” .. and then laughed and laughed at my face.

What he has yet to realise is that the odd sock that he scored 4 tries in is now storing our winter onions. I think I won that one on points don't you?

Wishing you all a wonderfully jolly and successful season!

Jayne Dolloway