

CHAPTER 51

Grit, a great attitude and willingness to do their best in challenging circumstances



Comments by master-in-charge Mr V Raepsaet in his 2012 report were both encouraging and poignant:

Despite the...lack of a modern playing surface, dwindling player base and a degree of apathy in some pupils, the positive that must be mentioned is that the 1st XI players this year, made up for any lack of pace and skill, with determination, a great attitude, and for the most part, the willingness to listen and learn!

The first half of the season saw us produce some inspired performances against very skilful and often favoured 1st XI opponents from other schools who also find themselves playing in the 2nd league. We fought hard and managed to go unbeaten for the first half of the season.

Captain, Tando Ntsangani, must be mentioned for the experience he brought to the team, as well as his ability to score goals in every match he played and from any angle of the park. Branem Adams proved to be a vital cog in the midfield on both attack and defence, and Milan Jonas's move to right back from the links, proved to be inspirational, as he was a pillar of strength at the back, supported excellently by Ian Stow in particular.

It is with great sadness that we lost the services of our goalie, Zulu 'the wall' Lingani, halfway through the season, due to his tragic and untimely passing. Zulu had taken up the challenge of playing goalie at the beginning of the season, and was definitely a natural. He proved to be the difference between winning and losing many a game. This fact can only be emphasized by looking at our results: unbeaten for the first half of the season with him, and then unable to win a game (even against previously beaten opponents) without him thereafter.

The players were an absolute pleasure to coach. An enjoyable season was had by all, which, at the end of the day, is what the success of a non-professional outfit, should be judged on.

There was a noticeable increase in senior participation by 2015, which meant that from 2016 Open and U/14 teams could once again be fielded in the high school hockey league. Muir hockey had, however, been seriously handicapped in recent years by the lack of a modern playing surface. This was the main obstacle in the way of seeing Muir hockey 'return to its rightful place as one of the leading hockey schools in the province' observed Mr V Raepsaet in his last year as the first team coach in 2015. This was an unfortunate situation indeed, given the school's heavy participation at top level not many years before; and the clusters of 'golden seasons' in the nineteen-eighties, the nineteen-nineties and beyond.

Use of the Kwanobuhle AstroTurf facilities from 2003 had contributed towards making top Muir players more competitive, but was no longer feasible as an option for practices and matches. As could be expected, matches played by the first team from 2016 onwards would prove to be a tale of ups and downs. Participating once again in the top league for high schools, Muir's hockey players had a major challenge on their hands – or sticks – when playing against teams accustomed to AstroTurf surfaces, but fared significantly better against schools that still played on grass fields. It was up to Mr J Downey to steer the fortunes of the first hockey teams from 2016 onwards, when the determination, grit and positivity of the players were inevitably tested to the full.