



## PENGUIN INTERNATIONAL RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Rugby Football Union  
Kent County RFU

### **Support Coaching to the Ukraine National Team Rugby Europe Trophy Match v Lithuania, Kaunas & Siauliai 31<sup>st</sup> October to 6<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

*By Grant Hathaway and Craig Brown*



Following the successful Penguin Charity Lunch held in London in September 2022 and the successful coaching support to the Ukraine national team in their match against Croatia in October 2022, it was agreed to continue the coaching support for their next European Trophy match against Lithuania a couple of weeks later.

The Penguin International Coaching Academy was delighted that England Rugby's Coach Developer Grant Hathaway was available again to continue his journey with the Ukrainians.



The week was spent in Kaunas, the training base for the match preparation. On arrival into camp and meeting up with the players and staff, the joy of re-connecting with friendships made in Zagreb was obvious with handshakes and hugs. The conversation was a blend of excited rugby discussion as we planned the week ahead but also the very difficult news of the atrocious goings on back home with the conflict.

The first session on the next day was delivered by Grant from Penguin Rugby with a focus on defensive principles. Having learned lessons around communication from last time, there was greater common ground using key language and building on the previous week together.

This was the most intense session of the week and the commitment to physicality from the players was incredible, they showed how ready they were to represent their country. There was a basis set for some technical and tactical elements, which laid a platform for the week.

Throughout the week the coaches looked to take everything that went well against Croatia and find a new level, knowing that Lithuania posed a difficult proposition with a different style of play.

The whole training week looked at how the team and everyone could sharpen every aspect of its/their game, paying close attention to how the strengths of our group were in the physicality and power elements. To support this there was a greater use of video footage during this camp, with a few meetings centred around developing the game plan based on

what was going well in training. The players bought into using the technology to review sessions as an extra method of improving performance.

Every mealtime there was a great connection between the players and some great food provided by the hotels helped ease the fact there were much lower temperatures to endure this time around!

A lovely evening of shared gifts and stories with the Lithuanian Rugby representative on Wednesday, with a spread of local food and a few local drinks (!) was a nice way to spend time. There was a shared appreciation of the game and clearly a long-standing connection between the two countries, socially, culturally and in rugby.

On the Friday we travelled to the location for the match itself in Siauliai, 2 hours north. The energy on the bus trip was noticeable, the excitement amongst the players and coaches had heightened. After booking into the new hotel, the group visited the stadium for a captain's run. The team went through the exact same matchday warm up as previous as a mental and physical rehearsal for the next day, before moving into elements of the team run. This is where the nerves seemed to kick in and it is fair to say the group endured the most difficult session of an otherwise excellent week.

The day of the game started early, with a pre breakfast stretch in the car park of the hotel and it's fair to say the especially fresh temperature woke everyone up prior to some nice warm food. There was a warm confident feel during the build up through the day, the players were excited but clearly in control of this and it bode well for the game. After the previous day's nerves the players had clearly moved forward and this carried into a strong warm up while the crowds filled the stadium and the bands played loudly to create an exciting and hostile atmosphere.

The game itself started well balanced in the phase play but through two defensive errors, where the practiced tactics weren't used, the impressive outside backs of Lithuania took their chances. Despite an early lead being built, the Ukrainian spirit took advantage of a lull in energy from the home side and the comeback was on. There were some fierce carries and tackles, and with the set piece beginning to provide a platform for pressure Ukraine fought their way back into the game. This comeback meant at half time the game was back on and the pressure was on the home side to be able to hold out a team brimming with confidence.



*Grant leading the session*



The half time team talks seemed to work better for the home side who started and ended the half stronger. Despite some surges into the Lithuanian 22 and periods of dominance the organisation of the home side was more sustained at critical moments, and they recorded the victory.

Another brilliant week where Penguin Rugby connected with a superb rugby nation in Ukraine and further strengthened the relationship for a future partnership.



*Managers Dinner*



*Anthems*



*Hosts Stadium*