



## PENGUIN INTERNATIONAL RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Rugby Football Union  
Kent County RFU

### Bologna Tour Report Italy 21 to 25 May 2025

Report by Craig Brown, Steve Hill & Sandra Soler-Gomez

17 years was way too long. The last time the Penguins were playing in Italy was 2008 although the Young brothers from Redcar did visit in 2019 in a coaching capacity. We have great contacts in Italy – The Penguini as they are affectionately known. So organising a tour to Italy was always on our must do list.

Thanks to Carlo Casagrande for the contact and Francesco Paolini the President of Bologna Rugby for readily accepting the challenge. In true Penguini fashion we had nothing to worry about.



Penguin CEO Craig Brown set about assembling the management team with experienced Penguins Steve Hill and Sandra Soler-Gomez heading up the respective teams.

Dates confirmed, hotel book and the next challenge was to select the players.

Most of the tour party landed in Bologna on Wednesday and we had a muster that evening including heading to the Bologna Rugby club for a welcome dinner.

It was great to see the four King Penguins on tour and they were busy meeting the locals and also

preparing for their prison coaching visit on Thursday.

Thursday morning and things began to orientate toward the reason we were here – we have games of rugby to play. Great to see all players up and ready to go for training one.



Craig Brown led the team briefing meeting where health & safety, medical, logistics, hotel, kit, meals, behaviour, and schedule details were discussed.

Some early awards were handed out as well, including youngest on tour per team (dead heat in the men's team so a first with 2), the infamous Mr Freeze hat (Calum was first up) and Sandra's Penguins!



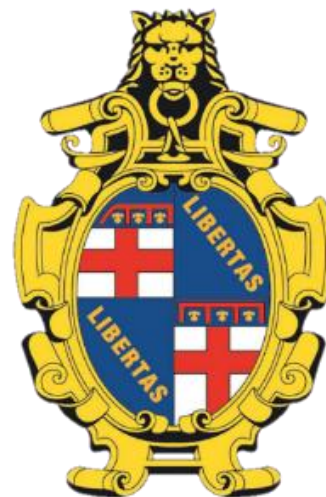
Our schedule was training Thursday morning and then again in the afternoon. Our last training session was Friday morning. The entire tour party had Friday afternoon off and were free to tour our local environment. Next muster was Sat breakfast.

The respective captains were named after lunch on Friday.

Men's: Alex Seers Captain; Gregor Gillanders Vice Captain

Rockhoppers: Jessica Taylor-Roberts Captain; Francesca Sberna Vice Captain

- ❖ A special shout out to our medical team. Ting, Marc, Zailene, Aisya and Sue did a fantastic job in keeping all 48 player up and running. Their job is not glamorous at times with a number of hours behind the scenes. They are fantastic.



Three sharp and to the point training sessions behind us and we were ready for the matches on Saturday. The run schedule was the Rockhoppers, followed by a local U18 fixture then the Men's.

On Saturday morning two special Penguins arrived at the hotel to present the respective squad jerseys. Abby Moonbeam-Brown presented the Rockhoppers jerseys. Abby was the first female academy coach for the Penguins specialising in sessions for the younger children. She run session as part of our coaching work in partnership with HSBC and coached alongside legends such as Lawrence Dallaglio, John Kirwan and Jonah Lomu. Stuart Buchanan-Smith presented the jerseys to the Men's team. Stuart played for the Penguins in the mid 1990s including the tour to the COBRA Tens in 1995.



### Rockhoppers Match Summary



The Penguins came out flying, setting the tone early with a dazzling team effort that saw Evie Tonkin slice through the defence for a well-earned opening try. But the Rockhoppers weren't just ready, they were relentless. Their fluid handling, creative flair, and lightning-fast support play saw them rack up five sensational tries in just 25 minutes, turning the first quarter into a showcase of attacking brilliance.

Yet the home side showed heart. Undeterred by the scoreboard, they stuck to their game plan with some thunderous carries off the breakdown and slick offloads in the tightest of channels. Their persistence paid off and cheered on by a roar from the crowd they crashed over the line following a gritty series of pick-and-go drives along the right hand side.

As the second half unfolded, the Rockhoppers extended their lead with clinical precision. In a great display of sportsmanship, they loaned players to bolster the depleted local side, who were down to just three subs. The final quarter brought renewed fire from Bologna, who began dominating the scrums and even drove the Rockhoppers backwards on occasion, shifting momentum and igniting the crowd once more.

The locals came tantalizingly close to a second try with a thrilling surge toward the line, but the Rockhoppers' disciplined defence held firm.

🍌 **Final Score:** Rockhoppers 97 – Bologna 7



A thrilling spectacle that blended fast-paced rugby with gritty determination and sportsmanship, a game to remember!

**Women's Team:** Carys Graham (Richmond RFC), Jodie Turl (Old Albanian Saints), Sophie Benavent (Leicester Tigers, British Army), Karis Stevens (Bonymaen Rugby Football Club), Nina Moore (Sale Sharks), Maria Teixeira (Sporting Clube de Portugal, Portugal), Licia MacCutchan (Old Albanian Saints), Francesca Sberna (CUS Milano Rugby, Italy – Vice Captain), Ella Jenkins (Canterbury RFC), Jemma-Jo Linkins (Saracens / Sutton & Epsom), Amelia Burton (Liverpool St Helens), Hannah Roberts (Liverpool St Helens), Makeda Lewis (Old Albanian Saints, Jamacia), Hannah Thornhill (Thurrock RFC), Evie Tonkin (Sale FC, Scotland), Daria Costantini (Villorba Rugby), Isabelle Kuhn (Medway/Brunel Uni), Abby Middlebrooke (Exeter Chiefs / Exeter University, England U18), Chloe Hill (Cullompton Ladies, Devon), Emily Davies (Hove RFC), Matilde Goes (Sport Lisboa e Benfica, Portugal), Jessica Taylor-Roberts (Barnsley Ladies, Wales - Captain), Sophie Merryweather (Dartford Valley Rugby Club), Kara-Mai Herbst (Henley Hawks), Sandra Soler-Gomez (Coach/Manager), Ting Low (Physio), Zailene Deliza (Physio), Aisya Amnoradi (Physio).



## Men's Match Summary

As is the case on most tours the standard of the opposition to be played was very unknown. Rumours of them being under strength abounded in the lead up to the match. However, like most rumours these were very unfounded. Bologna RFC, strengthened by a number of players from local rivals Colorno RFC, proved to be a real handful and the Penguins were truly tested in the first forty minutes of the game. The Italians were strong in the scrum and competed feverishly at the breakdown. The Penguins conceded the first score of the game after a strong attack from the hosts and knew from the off they were in for a good battle. As the first half progressed the Penguins began to find their rhythm and a couple of excellent scores took the visitors ahead. However the first half ended all square at 12-12.

A host of substitutions for the Penguins at half time took a while to bed in. Eventually the stronger skill set and better discipline of the Penguins began to break down the home team's defences, particularly in the driving maul and out wide on the wings. In the last twenty minutes the Penguins finally appeared to have run off the excesses of previous evenings and went on to secure a 33-17 win. The whole squad, led superbly by fly half



Alex Seers, contributed to a very hard fought win and should be congratulated on a fine display against a very tough and determined opposition.



**Men's team:** Vaughan Bentley (Richmond), Antonio Rippata (Camberley, Cook Island, Croatia), Rory Marsh (Blackheath, Kent U20), Calum Harris (Westcombe Park, Sco U18, Edin age groups), James Weaver (Bourneville), Grigor Gillanders (Rosslyn Park, Eng age groups – Vice Captain), Tom Bell (Rosslyn Park), Ben Meakin (Bourneville), Hamish Buchanan-Smith (Aberdeen Uni), Jon West (Sidcup, Kent, South East), Tom Campbell (Billingham), Will Plessis (Scarlets, Wales U18, 19, 20), Aaron Myers (Billingham, Eng 7s, Newcastle, Eng age groups), Danny Taylor (Dartfordians, Findland), Fredy Morgan (Bourneville), Alex Seers (Camberley - Captain), Tom Whitaker (Horsham, Mid-Canterbury), Sam Grimshaw (Bourneville), Leo Jowett (Blackheath), Eldon Myers (Billingham, Durham County, Royal Navy, Bradford Bulls RL), Jack Rossiter (Camberley, Eng U20, Students, Students 7s, GB Students 7s), Joe Ross (Billingham, Durham County), Louis Keeley (Sidcup), Finley Matthews (Barnes), Steve Hill (Coach), Craig Brown (Manager), Marc Daniel (Physio), Ramsay Urquhart (Manager), Brendan Plessis (Manager), Matt Price (Coach), Sue Olovsson (Medic & Social Media)

### Tour Quotes

**Will:** For my first Penguin tour I thought it was brilliant fun, with brilliant people, playing brilliant rugby

**Hannah:** More than a tour it was a family, a team, and a once in a lifetime Italian adventure 🐧.

**Izzy:** Playing rugby in Bologna with the Penguin team built from many different clubs felt like stitching together a patchwork of passion, fun, and sisterhood — each player bringing their own excitement, but all chasing the same try line! It was an unforgettable experience, something I'll carry with me for a long time.

**Jessica:** I am thankful for the opportunity to not only put on a Penguins shirt but to captain such an amazing group of ladies. The experience was amazing and I'm still talking to my friends about it now. Memories made for a lifetime.

**Sophie:** An unforgettable experience — training and playing alongside women with such incredible skill and being coached by people with such deep knowledge and passion. Instant friendships were formed, and I'll carry every second of it with me for the rest of my life.





Chole: I feel so grateful for the opportunity to go out and play rugby in Italy with an amazing bunch of women, everyone was so welcoming and the coaching, management & physio team were all so organised and helpful! The laughs and memories I had out there will last forever and friendships I will always cherish. Such an amazing experience! Thank you once again for inviting me 😊

Abby: Playing for Penguin RFC in Bologna was truly the best experience of my life. From the moment I arrived, I felt part of something bigger- sisterhood, passion, and pure joy for the game. The friendships, the culture, the laughter, and the unforgettable moments on and off the field made it all unforgettable. I'm deeply thankful for every person who made it what it was. If I could do it every year, I would—without hesitation.

Jak: What an incredible tour! For some, it was a chance to travel and meet new friends, while for others, it was a chance to do the former and reconnect with old tour mates from years gone by. It was a perfect blend of social and rugby, well, maybe not perfect. A double session on the Thursday after the all important first night of the tour might have been a bit of a struggle for some... In true Penguins fashion, we managed to bond as a group very quickly, likely due to a shared love of having a drink, some slightly silly antics, the occasional passing of an egg shaped ball and some through other group activities. Bologna hosted us brilliantly and gave us a great game on Saturday afternoon. From all of the players, I'd like to say an enormous thank you to the Penguins management for allowing us the opportunity to tour with this storied team and create some amazing memories!

### Prison Visit

The Bologna Rugby club are active in a community program supporting rugby players in Dozza Prison which is about 2km from the club. The program aims to help the physical, social and educational recovery of in-mates and troubled youth through playing rugby. The program started in 2014 and is funded by local companies such as Marconi, Emil Banca and Faac. About 40 prisoners are in the program, support is provided through regular coaching sessions and they play in the local level 3 league. Of course all games are at home with the visiting teams going into the heart of the prison where the field is. The team is called Gial-lo Dozza – referring to the yellow card used in rugby – if you have done wrong you are given time to think about what you have done before returning to the action. Most of the players have never played rugby when they enter the program but soon get into the action.

A number of them, on release, join Bologna Rugby Club and enjoy a ready-made local family and support unit.

Thanks to the Penguin coaches Steve Hill, Sandra Soler-Gomez, Gary Coulthard, Pierre Azapoldi, Matt Price and Derek Robb who went through the 15 big steel doors to get to the centre of the prison and the playing field.

This is our second visit to the Dozza Prison following our first visit in 2019.





## Thank Yous

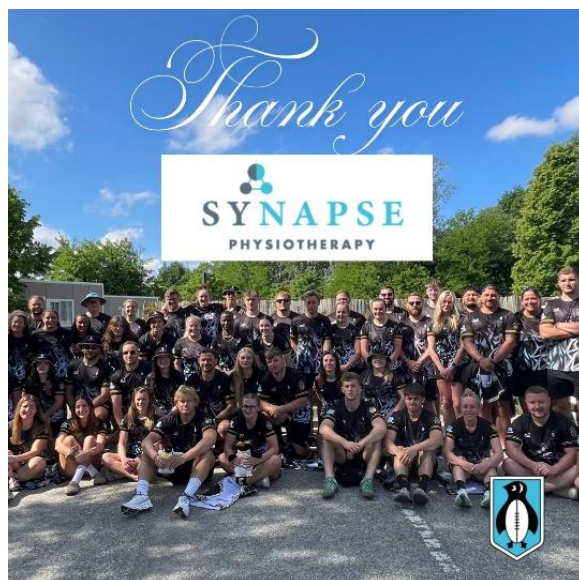
There are many people to thank who have contributed to this amazing tour and Penguin Rugby acknowledges them all.

- Synapse Physio who were a major contributor to the tour through providing physio services and sponsoring a day on tour
- Francesco Poalini and his team from Bologna Rugby Club
- Andrew and his team from Tsunami for once again providing outstanding kit designs and advising on the latest fashion trends in Italy.
- Steve, Matt and Sandra for coaching
- Steve, Matt, Sandra, Derek, Gary and Pierre for undertaking the coaching session in the prison
- Ramsay, Sandra, Craig and Brendan for managing
- Sue for keeping the Social Media ticking over in a most excellent way
- The Penguin supporters and parents who turned up to support the teams



## Epilogue

Is it true Bologna rugby was formed in 1928? Well, yes it is. Centenary in 2028? – watch this space.













## Women's Scoring Timeline

Time	Try	Conv.	Score
3	Evie Tonkin	Jemma-Jo Linkins	0 - 7
6	Jemma-Jo Linkins		0 - 12
11	Matilde Goes	Jemma-Jo Linkins	0 - 19
14	Hannah Thornhill	Jemma-Jo Linkins	0 - 26
17	Makeda Lewis	Jemma-Jo Linkins	0 - 33
21	Chloe Hill		0 - 38
25	Opposition Score	Opposition Con	7 - 38
27	Amelia Burton	Evie Tonkin	7 - 45
31	Jessica Taylor-Roberts	Jemma-Jo Linkins	7 - 52
34	Chloe Hill	Jemma-Jo Linkins	7 - 59
44	Amelia Burton	Jemma-Jo Linkins	7 - 66
48	Amelia Burton		7 - 71
52	Matilde Goes	Amelia Burton	7 - 78
57	Team Try - Special move		7 - 83
61	Makeda Lewis	Amelia Burton	7 - 90
63	Hannah Roberts	Jemma-Jo Linkins	7 - 97