

RADLEY

10 December 2024

Dear all,

It is late in the game. Despite our best efforts, Radley are behind. By eight points . . . with less than five minutes to go. The Sherborne defence has successfully frustrated us all afternoon, effectively slowing the ball at the breakdown, preventing our expansive game at source. Despite us being level at half-time, they have gradually ground us down, opening up a healthy lead: more than a score ahead. Game over. Heads are dropping. But there is still time for another score, to make it close at least. A consolation. We go again. And, with the opposition tiring too, we manage to control possession, advance down the field and score under the posts. Within three . . . with an easy conversion to come. The clock is almost out of time, though, and, once the conversion is taken, probably will be. Still, a decent final effort in the final game of the season; lose by a point away at Sherborne. Not bad.

The captain approaches the referee. In the polite way one would expect of a Radleian, he asks a question. ‘Sir, would it be ok if Radley did not bother with the conversion and just restarted the game?’ The referee pauses, reminding himself of the laws. The captain is sure he has seen it happen in some professional match. The referee agrees and the game restarts. Radley gain possession and control it. We put some phases together. Time is up but we still have the ball in play and keep it alive. We press forward and, remarkably, score in the corner. Then, to add insult to injury, the conversion. From the sideline, admittedly: the most acute of angles. But step forward the fly-half to add the cherry to the icing on the cake. A magnificent kick . . . and the ball creeps over the posts. Radley win 26-22. Cue pandemonium. A famous win.

As anyone who knows me well will attest to, I love sporting drama. The 1979 Arsenal FA Cup win; the 2004 Boston Red Sox; the England Cricket World Cup triumph in 2019. The Midgets 6 win away at Sherborne in 2024 joins the list. Not that I saw it, sadly: I have to rely entirely on the eloquent report of the stand-in coach of the day.

I love it not just because it is a great moment of drama, though. In microcosm, I think it says a lot of what I hope is true of the College. Firstly, it was Midgets 6. I love the fact that we can offer so many teams and, while it is not always easy to find enough opposition to play against, it is great that every boy will have the chance to represent the College. The Rugby WhatsApp group was immediately hot with comments and congratulations: testament to the spirit of the club amongst coaches as well as boys. Spare a thought for the schoolmaster referee who actually knew one of the more obscure laws. Then there is the quick thinking of the captain. The determination not to give up. The kick under pressure. The boyish delight at what had happened. The fact that they care so much. And that they now have a memory for life.

I was interviewing a member of staff for an Art job recently and I asked him what he hoped a boy who only studied Art in the Shells would gain from it. He paused, and then said, ‘I hope they could take away a memory’. I think it is a great answer; all too often our educational thinking and planning concentrates on outcomes and measurements rather than memories. The best elements of boarding are time together, shared experience and good relationships, all points that are stressed by the Senior and Second Prefects when they speak to parents at Open days.

So, continuing the theme, it has been a memorable term. For one boy, I note a particular weekend where he learned that he was one of 14 boys selected for an amazing work experience opportunity next July, played for

Bigside on the Saturday afternoon, starred in *Les Mis* the same evening and was then Confirmed on Sunday. That certainly counts as making the most of the opportunities available!

Les Misérables was spectacular. So many boys and parents have come up to me to say how much they enjoyed it, and it was wonderful to see the Theatre packed for all four performances. There were many stand-out moments - the Senior Co-Curricular Prefect (who played Javert) had been telling me over breakfast for weeks how excited he was by his 'death scene' . . . he was right to be. The sight of the barricade covered by dead bodies. The haunting 'Look Down' that started the whole show. But it is the sheer amount of hard work of the whole ensemble that stands out most: on and off the stage. Not the only drama in the term, of course: as ever, the Haddon Cup produced some memorable performances and well done to H on winning it. But it is *Les Mis* we will remember.

Term has finished with its usual feast of Music. In the last week, we have had a concert in Coventry Cathedral (where the choir joined hundreds of children from local primary schools as part of a partnerships project which seeks to establish choirs in schools); two lunchtime concerts; three carol services; a Christmas Concert (with D reprising their Partsong triumph) and the 'Winter Jam'. So much variety as well as skill in the music on offer . . . and that is just one week. The department deserve particular praise for the way in which they have managed the term given that, as any visitor to the site will recognise, there is a crane where most of the Music School used to be. I know they would want me to extend a thanks to all the operational staff who have made it possible for the department to be spread effectively around the school. In fact, it has been so successful that I wondered whether we needed the project . . . I am assured we do, however, and it is good to see it begin to take shape.

I think I am right in saying that for the first time ever, certainly in my time, a whole year-group has gone unbeaten on the rugby field. A serious achievement. The senior squads built on the successful Argentina tour and Bigside had some impressive wins in a 7-3 season. Well done to the U14 D squad on their unbeaten season; and many of the squads with fewer games were without defeat. In preparing for the Warden's Assembly at the end of term, I note the many sports that have had their moments in the sun this term: sailing, rackets, polo, cricket, real tennis, squash and climbing. Appropriately, given that as I write, the boys are about to run the Steeplechase, I also want to congratulate the cross-country team which has qualified for the National Cross-Country Cup Final for the first time.

We had another excellent inter-Social debating competition with D narrowly defeating H in the final. In a quirk of calendar planning, the boys v dons debate was the following night and a biased view from the first speaker (me) is that the dons did well to secure an honourable draw while proposing the motion 'This House regrets the fall of the British Empire'. The fact that both debates were extremely well attended is evidence of the continued health of the Debating Society . . . a very good thing.

In other academic news, I would like to highlight the record 39 gold awards in the Senior Maths Challenge, with seven boys selected for the next round and one boy selected for the UK training camp. Impressive. And an academic initiative I would like to draw your attention to is the Serpentes Prize, run by the Academic Prefects, which encourages boys from all years to submit an essay in a subject of their choice. We would urge all boys with an academic passion and an aspiration to be much more than an exam machine to have a go; further details can be found in Bulletin. There are lots of prizes on offer!

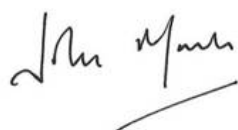
As you may have seen from Bulletin, we are being a little clearer on what holiday work expectations we have from the boys; we would very much value your support on this and please do keep an eye on it over the break . . . clearly boys will find themselves in different positions – and the expectations grow in exam years - but it matters for all. Our thinking is simple: it becomes increasingly clear to us that such an approach helps mitigate two problems: wasting time each term getting back up to speed and the inevitable anxiety that can grow as exams approach. Consolidation and effective revision, alongside much needed rest and relaxation, will be of real benefit, particularly if it becomes a healthy habit.

As you will be aware (I hope for the right reasons!), we have introduced a new system of sanctions and rewards this term. The aim of the new detention approach is to be more immediate and more consistent and while it will take time to bed down, it allows issues to be dealt with in a timely fashion and for patterns to emerge (individually and collectively) that can be addressed: pastoral, behavioural and academic. At the other end of the scale, there has been a push on distinctions and I know that boys have enjoyed the theatre of the weekly draws in Socials for 'distinction dining'. Also, in what I think is a very 'Radley' initiative, we now give 'postcards': hand-written congratulations on specially designed department cards for those who have particularly impressed their dons. I know first-hand from boys how much they are appreciated . . . we hope they are an incentive for them to try their very best to get them!

Though not strictly my domain, I have given two postcards myself. One to a Shell boy who over cocoa conversation at Park End could name - without prompting - all seven swing states in the US election; the other to a Vth form boy who engaged me in conversation after Chapel about a question on democracy which then developed into a wider discussion on a whole raft of geopolitical issues. I was late home for supper and he was late for Prep (I think I probably got into more trouble . . .). I mention them because both conversations remind me why I do the job: a young lad keen to show off his knowledge and his peers excited that he could impress me and voting for him to get a postcard; the other as a conversation which genuinely made me think about things. And on that same point, well done to the young man who challenged me on a moral issue after a chapel talk, arguing that I should have used the opportunity to make a stronger point. If we can encourage these three things: pride in knowing stuff, developing ideas and having strong principles and being willing to defend them . . . then we are getting things right.

We recently received a letter from a prospective parent whose son had been offered a place. A talented boy, he had been offered places at several schools. They wrote explaining why they had chosen Radley, and I quote one sentence: "Every face we have met at Radley exudes warmth, kindness, and integrity - qualities that feel genuine and deeply reassuring". As we finish another term full of achievements and successes, let that always be the measure of what matters and the hallmark of who we are, what we do, and how we do it.

Diana and I wish you all a very Happy Christmas.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Moule', with a horizontal line underneath.

John Moule
Warden