



Scrum down for a rugby revelation

UNBELIEVABLY, HALF my shrieval year has passed by, bursting at the seams with a variety of engagements ranging from the unusual, such as judging photo competitions and the Chinese UK Song Competition, to the expected mayor-making ceremonies and judges' dinners.

Filling me with inspiration and pride is the incredible community spirit, the 'great' in Greater Manchester. One such illustration is a fabulous project, the brainchild of Bolton Rugby Union Football Club (BRUFC) – www.boltonrugby.co.uk. Bolton is 10 miles north-west of Manchester city centre and BRUFC is run by a committed team of enthusiastic volunteers. As well as the usual rugby teams, they have a unique outreach programme, taking sport to local schools. This started mainstream, expanding to include a number of Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools. It is with these schools in particular that I am involved.

It's well known that sport is a great vehicle through which kids can learn many skills. Revealing and surprising is the real difference that rugby has made to children with a variety of disabilities and learning

difficulties. For example, kids on the autistic spectrum often feel much more at home on a playing field than in a classroom. It has allowed them to be active, learn team spirit, build confidence, co-ordinate and feel part of the community – with coaching adapted to their individual needs.

I was delighted to be invited by Peter Gore, Community Development Officer of BRUFC, to visit Rumworth (www.rumworth.weebly.com) and Green Fold schools (www.theorchardsfederation.com). Both made me tremendously welcome. I saw and took part in a variety of activities, from rugby, to batting in the cricket team (at which I remain 'not out'!!), to building a den during National Den Day. Rugby helps in the classroom in different ways. Lessons are more productive after releasing some tension! Also, each classroom has a rugby ball as a calming tool. Kids ask for a five minute break, hold the ball and re-focus; gaining self-control and learning

to recognise when they need 'time out'.

The great news is that things will soon be even better as BRUFC and Prime Sports NW CIC will work in partnership to extend rugby coaching and other sports to every SEN school in Bolton, thanks to a £52k grant from BBC Children In Need.

I was told that my visits had made a difference, that the kids had lit up when my wife and I arrived. My visit made them feel special; I was there specifically to see them. They were definitely impressed by the uniform – they love a bit of bling!

As all High Sheriffs know, the sword is always the highlight of any visit! At Rumworth, a boy asked me, 'What is the sword for?' While I was searching for an appropriate reply, another child shouted out, 'It's to protect The Queen, of course'. It's a great one liner that I have adopted ever since!

As an epilogue, some Rumworth students have since come to my restaurant and had fun learning to make dim sum and I have been invited to eat cake at their bistro!

This is a relationship that will run and run!

◆◆ **Kui Man Gerry Yeung**
OBE DL

High Sheriff of Greater Manchester 2017-18

Below right: The High Sheriff, Mrs Yeung and the Rumworth School cricketers; The High Sheriff and happy pupils from Green Fold School

Below left: The High Sheriff and the Green Fold School scrum

