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MIXAR
MAGAZINE 03

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PRESENTATION

¡MIXED ABILITY: A NEW MODEL FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION!

By Martino Corazza – IMAS Director

We all know participation in sport benefits our physical and mental wellbeing, as well as creating social change for the wider community. Why – then – are there still so many people who face significant barriers to participating in mainstream sport as equal members? Where are their voices? Why do we still use labels, categories and special projects which belong to the past, dividing people by ability, disability, gender or background?

We believe it's time to look at the future with different eyes.

The Mixed Ability Model embraces and celebrates human diversity, and gives real opportunities for people of all abilities, or facing a wide range of barriers to participation, to work together and empower themselves. Training in a mainstream club, being equal members, striving to improve personal goals, challenging stereotypes and the orthodoxy of sport (and disability sport along the way) and, yes, also taking risks. For some it is a chance to demonstrate their sport know-how and commitment to inclusion, for others it's just about learning new skills or being part of a new family. It doesn't matter, we are all part of the same club.

In the Mixed Ability Manifesto, we do acknowledge that grassroots sports can also engender exclusion. IMAS advocate to democratise sport participation across the world, giving people the right to join in community sports without being identified, separated, classified or labelled, promoting inclusion and equality through a sense of belonging and membership.

IMAS have been developing and sharing the Mixed Ability Model since 2009. Initially working primarily with adults who have Learning Disabilities and involving them in co-producing presentations, accessible resources and delivery, we quickly realised that there was growing interest for the Mixed Ability Model beyond these groups.

We now work with Sports NGBs, grassroots clubs, health support networks, Universities, and a broad range of individuals who recognise IMAS as world leaders in inclusive sport. We deliver theoretical and practical training into clubs, organisations, service providers, and healthcare professionals, reaching thousands of people across Europe every year and we are creating a social movement which can revolutionise the way we think about sport. We would love you to be part of it!

We are delighted to see the exponential growth in rugby, with the MIXAR partners and the IRFU embracing the vision and making sure the rugby family does not leave anyone behind. Rugby has an incredible ethos, based on solidarity, respect, discipline, teamwork, and many grassroots clubs across Europe promote this philosophy with passion. We hope that MIXAR can inspire and support their work through IMAS, affiliating them to a vast network of individuals, clubs and organisations who can be of mutual support throughout the world!

We do acknowledge we are advocating for a radical change in the way we think of, join in and enjoy sports, but the reward awaiting us is a fairer and more equal society, for everyone.

BECOME A SIGNATORY by adding your name and endorsement to the list of people and organisations **www.mixedabilitysports.org**

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The MIXAR project aims to harness the benefits of collaborative and inclusive partnership working and knowledge exchange to expand the potential of MA Rugby to achieve broad, sustainable, social inclusion outcomes for all participants, both disabled and non-disabled.

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COACHES CORNER

GETTING STARTED WITH A MIXED ABILITY RUGBY TEAM (II)

By Maeve D'Arcy - Head Coach Sundays Well Rebels

This is a continuation from Maeve D'arcy's text about "Getting Started with a Mixed Ability Rugby team". In the MIXAR Magazine N2 you cand find the first part, referent to positions, fitness, and mobility and skills.

3. Decision Making and Game Situations:

Be aware of how you set drills or game situations up on the pitch. I always like to set them up so players are playing up and down the pitch, the direction you would play in a match. This makes it easier for players to understand what direction they go in and helps to relate the drill to a game. Game situation drills advance from learning a skill to using it at the right time and under pressure. In a 2 v 1 situation players are putting their handling skills to the test to time a pass and under the added pressure of a defender.

Watch out for some traditional style set-up of drills. Adding in the extra complications of running back to go forward or playing side to side on the pitch can blur the actual goal of what you are trying to do. Keep things simple to achieve the outcome you want. More complicated doesn't always mean better. Playing into the try line can also help when explaining drills – giving players the goal to 'score a try' makes it very easy to understand the objective.

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When it comes to contact situations in training, encourage all players to get stuck in. Putting two groups against each other creates some competition and after one or two goes, also sees peer to peer learning, encouragement and problem solving happening between the players themselves. This is another good example of building team work.

Peer to peer learning is the main advantage that Mixed Ability Sports have over disability sports. But as a coach, don't over depend on the more experienced players. Some may be very good rugby players but may not be good to help out those around them. Remember to coach all players, whatever their experience levels. Highlight good techniques and correct poor ones to prevent bad habits creeping into the squad.

4. Match Time:

Ultimately as a coach, if you can get a player to score a try they will come back next week whether it's in training or a match. Have a listen in any rugby club to parents picking up kids after blitzes, or adults coming out after training or a match – if they scored a try then that's what they're talking about! Try and use lots of game situations in training – if you have a big group then split up into smaller teams, like 6 v 6 and have 2 games on a smaller size pitch. This gives all players a better chance to be involved and get the ball.

For a Mixed Ability team, one of your goals as a coach should be to get every player involved in the game on match day. Pausing game play to hand a player the ball and let them run a few yards isn't coaching them how to play rugby. Set pieces are the ideal opportunity to achieve this. Coach some simple first phase plays that use strike runners to get the ball into their hands. This gets players involved several times throughout the game by playing rugby and doing their job well in their position.

There are no quotas for how many players with or without disabilities should line out on a team. A good guideline is at least a 50/50 split at all times. Once the game starts, it can be hard to manage game time for all players if you have a big squad. Pre-plan your substitutions if needs be – so write out the starting 15 then after 20 minutes, have the next 15 ready to come on.

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<< Ultimately as a coach, if you can get a player to score a try they will come back next week whether it's in training or a match. >>

You can try balancing the two 15's to be of similar ability, like you would in training and they were playing against each other.

If you want to give stronger players a hard run for 20 minutes of the game then do this – but still aim for your 50/50 split. Then you can then give weaker players a 20 minute run out, still with a 50/50 split. Include some good communicators with this line-up and though the pace of the game may slow down, the standard of rugby should be just as good and keep everyone involved in the game.

If you have smaller numbers and go ahead on the scoreboard in a game, don't be afraid to put on more than 50% players with disabilities. As long as you have one or two good communicators on the pitch at all times then things will still run well. Effective communication is a rugby skill too and not just shouting the loudest. Those who are good at it, may not be the best at some of the other skills but it's invaluable for Mixed Ability Rugby. Coach effective communication between players in training to see it improve during games.

Head coach of the Rebels, Maeve D'Arcy has given talks and practical coaching demonstrations at the MIXAR transnational meetings in Bradford, Cork and Gent. Following on from this, the Rebels are creating some instructional coaching videos that will assist coaches of Mixed Ability Rugby and reach a wider audience. The videos, will be available soon via the MIXAR Facebook page and on the 4th edition of the MIXAR Magazine.

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COACHES CORNER

MY JOURNEY TO BECOMING A MIXED ABILITY COACH

Mike O'Regan - Head Coach of Surrey Chargers

Mike O'Regan began a life changing journey as he assisted his son, other players and their families, his own rugby club and now a Rugby Union Premiership side to join the Mixed Ability movement.

I started the Surrey Chargers after reading an article in Rugby World about Mixed Ability rugby and got in touch with IMAS. My own son is on the Autism spectrum and although he had previously played for 3 years in the Chobham RFC minis section, found conventional training to be a bit too intense, so I was really pleased to find a form of the game that emphasised inclusion and participation but was still competitive, irrespective of the fact it includes people with Learning Disabilities and Autism.

<< I was really pleased to find a form of the game that emphasised inclusion and participation but was still competitive. >>

IMAS arranged to come down and delivered a whole club presentation which really helped get the committee and club members on board. With theirs and the RFU's support we set up an exhibition game with a Chobham XV running out against the Letchworth Braveherts an established Mixed Ability team. It was so successful we set up taster sessions under local RFU community coaches before moving to weekly Saturday sessions the following year.

Since last season we have been playing regular matches against other clubs, all really enjoyable and the development of all our players has been a joy to watch – particularly pleasing is the number of dads who play alongside their sons (currently six sets), including one who has never played before.

On a personal level, it is safe to say that my life has changed because of Mixed Ability rugby.

Last year I took early retirement from my desk job, gained my level 2 coaching qualification and started taking community sessions for Chobham, as well as the Harlequins Foundation and Community Department – I have also been asked to head up the Community Department at Chobham RFC and am really looking forward to involving many more people with and without disabilities in the life of our grassroots club. None of this would have happened without the Chargers or IMAS so I am very grateful for this – two years ago I never dreamed I would be where I am now!

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Clubs support

We need to support mainstream, grassroots sports clubs to ensure they are truly open and welcome to everyone with an emphasis on participation and wellbeing.

The Mixed Ability model

MA sport involves disabled and non-disabled participants playing non-adapted sport together and socialising in the same mainstream club environment.

Changing the society

Opportunities for social interaction help break down perceptions around dis/ability and MA sport often results in diverse and rich friendships.

Our goal

We believe we need to radically change the way we think of, join in and enjoy sport, particularly at the grassroots level.

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SCIENTIFIC

Normalising the inclusion of disabled people in sport.

This contribution was published as part of the call for articles by Sport for Development Coalition in the UK.

In order to make disabled people's inclusion in sport the norm, we need to support mainstream, grassroots sports clubs to ensure they are truly open and welcome to everyone with an emphasis on participation and wellbeing. This involves a significant shift in culture as – although many clubs perceive themselves as inclusive – there are many, often unknown and unconsidered, barriers that prevent people from getting involved. These can result, for instance, from the lack of accessible infrastructure, costly membership models, or an excessive focus on performance and competition, but may also stem from people's perceptions of sports clubs as being elitist, exclusive, and accepting only people form a certain background or who are already good at sport. Many potential participants worry they won't fit in and won't be welcome. For disabled people this is even more often the case if they don't know for sure that the club will be able to understand their barriers and accommodate their needs.

International Mixed Ability Sports (IMAS) seeks to break down these barriers through championing the Mixed Ability (MA) model, which promotes social inclusion through sport, education and advocacy. MA sport involves disabled and non-disabled participants playing non-adapted sport together and socialising in the same mainstream club environment. MA education and advocacy sees participants of all abilities delivering training into community sports clubs and other mainstream organisations such as NGBs, around inclusion and diversity. These clubs and organisations are then supported by IMAS to establish MA activities, recruit participants from diverse sections of the community and to shift their focus from encouraging disability sport to removing barriers for everyone to play sport together. The IMAS Manifesto has been signed by organisations from the grassroots level through to national and international bodies such as Sport England, England Rugby and the Activity Alliance.

The positive impact that introducing MA to grassroots clubs has is substantial. At the individual level, both disabled and non-disabled participants report all the usual physical and mental health benefits that result from regular physical activity, but also report increased self-confidence, a raised awareness of, and reflection on dis/ability and diversity, a sense of belonging and feeling part of something innovative.

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Mixed Ability bowls participant: "Some of our [boccia] team have become members here and I intend to join as well. It's the fact that this takes us on the path to mixing with the regular members and not just playing against visually impaired opponents that I like."

At the club level, there is evidence of more inclusive and open cultures, where members are happier to discuss issues affecting them, improved club-level communication, new members who are more representative of the local community, more accessible infrastructure and coach development. These impacts then spread beyond the clubs to broader society with those involved with MA sport stating that their perceptions of dis/ability have shifted, they have raised awareness of potential barriers to participation that others may face and enhanced communication skills.

Mixed Ability tennis coach at Heaton Tennis and Squash Club: "Mixed Ability has massively changed the club! When we first mentioned the words 'Mixed Ability' and 'disability' it was like.... just because it's a very traditional club, it was a members-only club so the fact that non-members would be coming in, it's 'well this is a tennis and squash club, you can't start doing boxing and dance..' But now [the members have] seen the effect it's had on people and the fact that these participants go and socialise upstairs and they've met them and they've got involved themselves, it's massively changed and they're all 'we want more Mixed Ability sports, we want more classes on'."

Mixed Ability tennis coach at Heaton Tennis and Squash Club: "The biggest impact on me has been the change in my attitude to all people I come across now... I do not worry about whether I'm saying or doing the right thing ... I see the person first."

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<< The biggest impact on me has been the change in my attitude to all people I come across now... I do not worry about whether I'm saying or doing the right thing ... I see the person first >>

In promoting MA, we frequently encounter challenges around the dominant social perceptions of disability. For example, in most cases, early perceptions are that non-disabled people involved with MA sport are 'volunteers' rather than equal participants, that MA sport will be less competitive and that disabled participants' skills and abilities will be lower. After involvement with MA sport these perceptions change and people realise they can have a very meaningful and competitive sporting experience whoever they are participating with. Opportunities for social interaction also help break down perceptions around dis/ability and MA sport often results in diverse and rich friendships.

Member of the Bradford Amateur Rowing Club Mixed Ability rowing squad: "I did feel [a bit uncomfortable] but once I started becoming personally involved and being in a boat with [the Mixed Ability participants], all that went away... And I just thought 'It's done me some good really, being part of this'. For me it has made it easier to be around people when I don't understand what they're saying."

Member of the Bradford Amateur Rowing Club Mixed Ability rowing squad: "I'll be honest and say I was expecting [the Mixed Ability beginners] to be slower to get to this level. One thing I wasn't sure about was how good their co-ordination and balance would be. And with both of them their balance is superb which makes a huge difference. As I've got to know them, I can see they spend every day being very active – probably much more so than an adult with a desk job."

In conclusion, we believe we need to radically change the way we think of, join in and enjoy sport, particularly at the grassroots level. The more clubs that embrace MA sport, the more the disabled people's inclusion in sport will be the norm. Although mandatory targets for inclusion may lead to more disabled people playing sport, we think working with grassroots clubs and organisations across the sports and disability sectors would be a more effective way to increase inclusion and embed the long-lasting, sustainable change our society need.

If you would like to find out more about IMAS' work and the research that has been carried out by the University of Leeds and Loughborough University please contact us at contact@mixedabilitysports.org or visit the website www.mixedabilitysports.org.

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THE MIXAR PROYECT IN...

UNITED KINGDOM

On a typically rainy English summer day IMAS welcomed over 100 Mixed Ability players from across the country to Derby RFC to take part in the first ever 'XRugby7's Mixed Ability' tournament. XRugby7's is the RFU's newest full contact, half-pitch format of the game aimed at getting more people playing socially. IMAS Project Manager, Mike Hawkes explained, 'Considering the number of players we have involved and the variety of playing experiences, XRugby7's is the perfect format to ensure contact rugby is delivered in a social way. Aside from a winner's trophy the teams are also competing for the 'Spirit of Rugby' trophy, awarded to the team that best represents the RFU's core values'. The tournament provided a great opportunity to showcase the progress of teams involved in the 'Try for Change' project, giving them a chance to compete against some more established teams.

The day doubled as an Erasmus+ multiplier event, providing the platform for teams to show the reasonable adjustments they have made to ensure Mixed Ability rugby is as inclusive as possible.
IMAS Director, Mark Goodwin commented that 'It's great to see how new teams have developed over the season. It's particularly pleasing to see teams helping each other out, sharing players where needed and generally exemplifying everything positive about the Mixed Ability format. Whilst you can see the differences in adjustments and playing styles, ultimately everyone is playing mainstream contact rugby in an inclusive way!'

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Aside from the teams involved, the event also helped with the growth of Mixed Ability by educating people involved with the organisation and delivery of rugby around the country. All of the fixtures were brilliantly officiated by volunteer Young Match Officials (YMO's) from across the area who were experiencing Mixed Ability for the first time. Furthermore, each YMO was supported by an RFU Community Coach and referees from the local area. Feedback was extremely positive with one local referee and referee trainer describing it as 'the most enjoyable day of the season'.

Whilst the day was full of individual highlights one stood out in the Derby Bucks v Hessle Vikings game when Martyn Murney, club chairman of Derby RFC, took to the pitch with two of his sons for the first time. Without Mixed Ability this wouldn't have been possible and we're looking forward to seeing many more similar stories as the number of teams continue to grow!

Overall, despite the weather spirits weren't dampened and it was incredibly positive day for the growth of Mixed Ability rugby. Thanks, must go to all of the clubs involved including: Derby Bucks, Hessle Vikings, Worcester Mixed Ability, York RI Steamers, Northampton Hellhounds, Longlevens Mixed Ability & Shropshire Stags for playing a great tournament in the right spirit. And finally, congratulations to our tournament winners Worcester Mixed Ability and the Spirit of Rugby winners York RI Steamers!

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<< Multiplier Events are a key part of the MIXAR project to celebrate and disseminate the Mixed Ability message. >>

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THE MIXAR PROYECT IN...

BELFAST (IRL)

"The first mixed ability match on the island of Ireland."

Organiser of the match, and a Malone Tornado player / manager, Tim Craig said:

"We were looking at what teams in Scotland, England and Wales have been doing and we wanted to building on it. "We wanted to introduce it to Belfast because it's been going for about five years in Cork through our competitors, Sunday's Well Rebels.

"With mixed ability rugby we're about inclusion – promoting everyone's ability rather than disability. We want to see rugby played in its true spirit.

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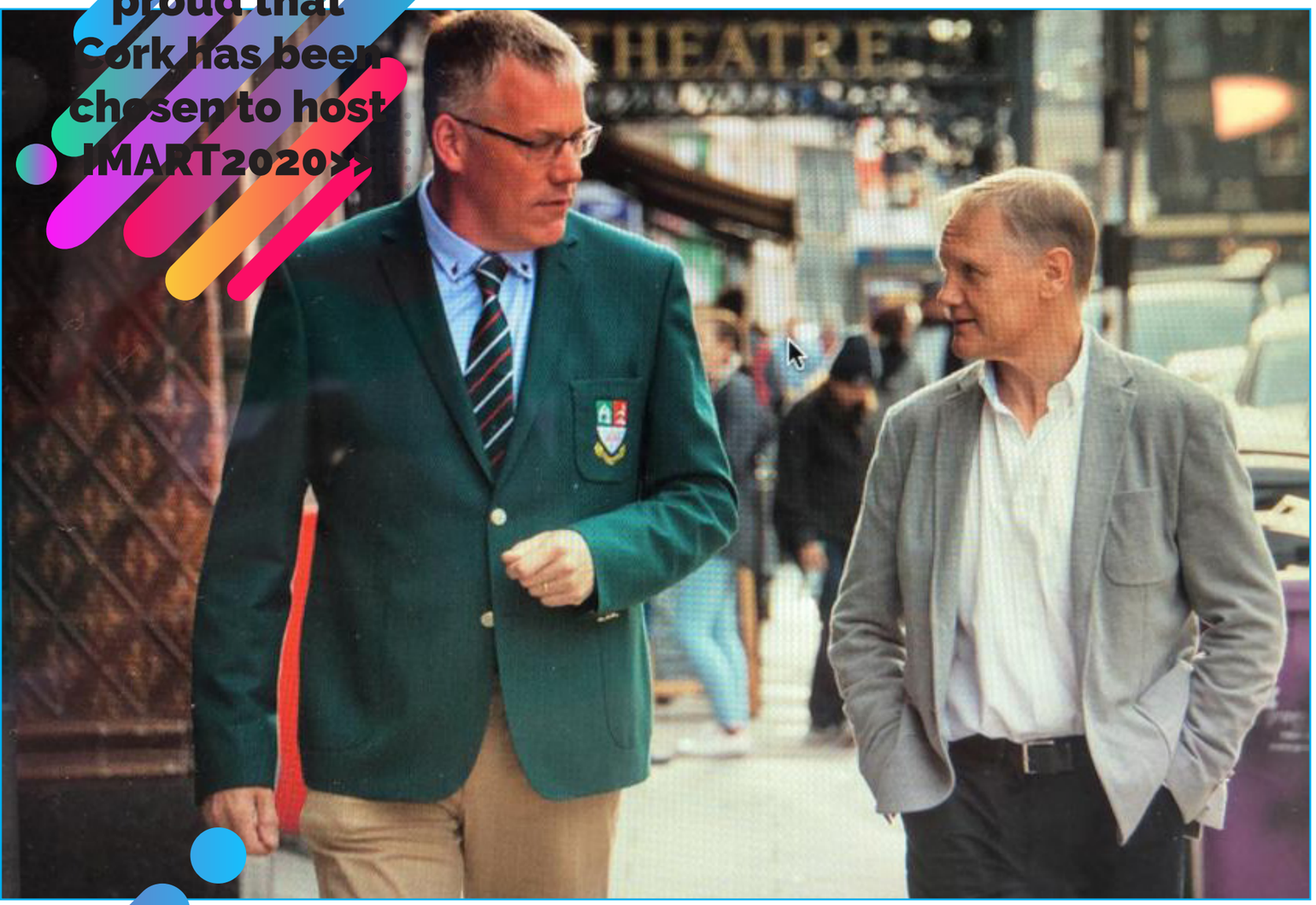
SUPPORTING MIXAR...

JOE SCHMIDT

Schmidt backs IMART Cork event

Liam Maher: << We're really proud that Cork has been chosen to host IMART2020>>



Ireland coach Joe Schmidt reflected on his illustrious career when he appeared at the Everyman Palace Theatre in Cork.

Ireland rugby coach Joe Schmidt teaming up with broadcaster Matt Cooper for a special fundraiser in support of the 3rd International Mixed Ability Rugby World Cup (IMART), being hosted in Cork next year by MIXAR partners Sundays Well RFC/Rebels.

The two were on stage at a sell-out Everyman Palace Theatre on Monday, May 6. It was to be Schmidt's last public appearance in Cork before departing for the World Cup and leaving Irish Rugby. Mr Schmidt reflected on his amazing career to date and discuss Ireland's performance over the past number of years and his hopes for the Rugby World Cup.

Organised by Sunday's Well RFC, the interview will be conducted by Cork-born Mr Cooper. Liam Maher of Sunday's Well Rugby Club and the chairman of the IMART 2020 organising committee said they were very grateful the pair had agreed to support a very deserving cause. "We're also really proud that Cork has been chosen to host IMART2020," he said. "That decision, I think is in part due to Ireland's international reputation as a rugby powerhouse but it also has much to do with our growing reputation in mixed ability sport. "Mixed ability is about valuing everyone's potential and celebrating what's at the heart of true sport — participation, passion and fun."

Actor Gareth John Bale also made an appearance. He has toured internationally with a highly acclaimed one-man show Grav, about legendary Welsh rugby player Ray Gravell, extracts of which he recently performed in the Welsh rugby team's dressing room in Cardiff before their epic win over England in this year's Six Nations.

Also featured were West Cork's Laura Guest, an inspirational speaker who was a member of the Irish squad which took part in the 2014 Women's Rugby World Cup, where she was part of the first Irish international team to beat a New Zealand international team.

WHO IS?

Josef Schmidt is a New Zealand-born rugby union coach, who is currently the head coach of Ireland. In five years under his leadership, Ireland have won three Six Nations Championships, and recorded their first-ever wins over his home nation of New Zealand.

Schmidt has dual citizenship, having become an Irish citizen in 2015.

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SUPPORTING MIXAR...

SERGIO PARISSE

Captain of Italy rugby national team

<< I want to encourage to follow the MIXAR proyect and continue to go fordward for the values of rugby >>

For Italian Rugby Union the Mixar project - Mixed Ability Rugby for All is very important. To understand the importance of this European project for the FIR, which is its leader, it is enough to know that a group of athletes from the Mixed Ability team of the Union Rugby Capitolina Roma met, during the last Six Nations, the Italian national coach Conor O'Shea and some players.

An opportunity to express the profound meaning of the idea of a team in rugby not only as a group work and discipline, but also as shared fun, mutual encouragement and positivity. this is the secret of the presence of players with and without disabilities in the field. a radically sporting attitude in accepting lights and shadows, victories and defeats, technical and human errors, with full naturalness.

The national captain Sergio Parisse has instead left a message of support for the Mixar project, and for all those who are working hard on it.

DON'T MISS THE VIDEO

"Sergio Parisse supports MIXAR rugby "

WHO IS?

Sergio Parisse is the current captain of Italy. Parisse is Italy's most-capped player, and currently tied for 4th most-capped player worldwide.

He was the first Italian rugby union player to be nominated for the IRB International Player of the Year, first in 2008 and again in 2013. Parisse is widely considered one of the greatest number eights of modern rugby.

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A CASE OF SUCCESS...

MIXAR Project members on Live Podcast

Three Blokes, a ball & BOD is a well-established Facebook page which broadcasts a weekly podcast live. It deals with all things rugby from the top of the professional game to what's going on around the world at grassroots level. In March 2019, Rebels coach Maeve and IMAS were invited to join the host, Joe to discuss all things Mixed Ability.

The IMAS crew made up of Martino Corazza, Mark Goodwin (Gooders) and Ahsan Sakandar beamed in from Bradford, England to join Maeve in Cork and Joe in Waterford Ireland for what was over an hour of information, chat and banter about Mixed Ability Rugby, the European Erasmus+ Project MIXAR and IMART 2020.

<< The podcast is shared into 45 forums globally and this was an amazing opportunity to spread the Mixed Ability message to all corners of the world. >>

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A CASE OF SUCCESS...

Rebels are Guests of the IRFU

"After 5 years Rebels and Mixed Ability Rugby received official recognition from the IRFU"

<< Four representatives from the team were invited to the Aviva Stadium in Dublin to attend the IRFU Presidents pre-match lunch function in advance of the Ireland v England game >>

The Six Nations 2019 was kicking off and it was an extra special day for the Sundays Well Rebels.

Four representatives from the team were invited to the Aviva Stadium in Dublin to attend the IRFU Presidents pre-match lunch function in advance of the Ireland v England game. Team Founder Alan Craughwell, Head Coach Maeve D'Arcy, Team Manager Liam Maher and Player Garrett D'Arcy doned the club blazers for the day.

After 5 years of blood, sweat and tears the Rebels and Mixed Ability Rugby received official recognition from the IRFU to fall under their system and governance.

Two Sundays Well RFC members who are representatives on the IRFU main committee have been supportive of the Mixed Ability model at the highest level. Nicholas Comyn (IRFU Vice President 2018-2019) and Michael Collopy (IRFU Committee Member) took the opportunity to invite the Rebels up to the AVIVA Stadium in recognition of the work that has been done at grass roots level in our club.

Unfortunately the result didn't go Ireland's way but that certainly didn't dampen the spirits. The Rebels greatly enjoyed the entire experience and are delighted with the support from our Union and in particular, the representatives from Sundays Well RFC.

The MIXAR project has created great links between the Rebels and

(Garrett D'Arcy, Maeve D'Arcy, Liam Maher & Alan Craughwell)

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A CASE OF SUCCESS...

Flanders Open 10s Tournament

"The first international mainstream rugby tournament to have a mixed ability category"

<<All the Mixed Ability teams gathered centre stage to receive a massive ovation from large crowd, the Rebels raised the roof as they collected Mixed Ability Winners Trophy. >>

The tournament is the largest 10 a-side rugby tournament in Europe.

Four teams committed to participating at the Flanders 10s, The Rebels from Ireland, Chivazzo from Italy, Flanders Barbarians and an IMAS / MIXAR selection from the UK, Spain, Ireland and Belguim

The support and interaction of all the other participating teams was amazing! All Mixed Ability teams were firmly welcomed into the mainstream rugby family.

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Mixed Ability Rugby for All

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NEWS

MIXED ABILITY RUGBY FOR ALL

Expressions of Interest open for Mixed Ability rugby 'World Cup'

Over 1000 players will participate on the 3rd Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament

In June 2020 over 1000 rugby players from 14 countries will be participating in the 3rd International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament in Cork. IMART 2020 will be a showcase for social inclusion, sportsmanship, and will be a game changer on how sport and being part of a community can truly change lives.

Following the success of the inaugural tournament (Bradford, UK, 2015) and the 2nd IMART in Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain, 2017), the International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament will see growing numbers and teams travelling from countries such as New Zealand, Canada, Argentina, Spain, Georgia, Scotland, Wales, Belgium, Ecuador, Italy and England.

The International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament (IMART) is a competition for Mixed Ability clubs promoted by IMAS and hosted by Sunday's Well RFC. The tournament will raise the aspirations of people with learning and physical disabilities irrespective of creed, colour, class or ability, bonding people from all walks of life with a mutual respect, camaraderie, and understanding of each other's strengths and frailties. If you are a Mixed Ability rugby team and are interested in participating in IMART 2020 please contact imart@mixedabilitysports.org or visit www.imartworldcup.org

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Munster Association of Referees (MAR) are readying themselves for IMART Cork 2020

The Rebels were invited to a meeting of the Munster Association of Referees

The Sundays Well Rebels began as Ireland's first Mixed Ability Rugby team in 2014. The team and club have now created links with rugby federations across Europe through the Erasmus+ project - MIXAR. A direct result of this European Project is that the IRFU, the Irish Rugby Football Union have now included Mixed Ability Rugby under their 'Spirit of Rugby' program, starting for the 2018 / 2019 season.

This recognition from the Irish rugby union has opened doors for the Sundays Well Rebels throughout the local rugby community and the Munster Branch. On Tuesday the 5th March, the Rebels were invited to a meeting of the Munster Association of Referees to give a presentation on Mixed Ability Rugby. Over 30 referees were in attendance and they were extremely keen to hear about Mixed Ability Rugby and the Rebels story.

The presentation gave an overview of how the team started and effectively conveyed all the benefits of having a Mixed Ability team in your local club. Several speakers involved with the team told their stories of what Mixed Ability Rugby and the Rebels means to them. All aspects were covered with players both with and without disabilities, coaches, club representatives and a parent's point of view all taken in by the captive audience.

Once the referees heard the presentation and had a few questions answered, the usual banter that is part and parcel of any rugby crowd began. Both players and referees delighted in their chance to get a few digs in while off the rugby pitch. The evening ended with a stronger understanding of what Mixed Ability Rugby is all about and a great bond formed. The support from the MAR for all upcoming matches, and in particular the hosting of the world tournament, IMART Cork 2020 was fantastic. We are hoping to see some of our local referees come along to Rebels training in the near future to get a feel for Mixed Ability Rugby.

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It's a Family Affair

Fathers, son and siblings line out together at the Flanders Open Tens

Mixed ability rugby has a uniqueness in sport, you can have the thrill of training, playing and going on tour with your sibling but it's made sweeter if you can also share that experience with your father. This is the case for many of mixed ability teams worldwide.

At the recent Flanders Open 10's the family connections were very strong on all sides. You can see the family pride in the photos bellow. We would love you to share your mixed ability family connections post a photo of your family in mixed ability rugby action on our MIXAR Mixed Ability Rugby for ALL Facebook page who knows there could be a prize for the best photo!!

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Inclusive training with “Las Leonas”

They gave a masterclass to all the inclusive players of Granada.

The female team of seven were training in the C.A.R. of Sierra Nevada, where they have been preparing the Olympic Qualifiers, as well as the last World Series of the season, which took place last June 15 to 16 in Biarritz (France).

Last Sunday, the team of Pedro de Matías were able to transform one of there sessions in the field to an inclusive training in Granada, in collaboration with the C.D. Rugby Escoriones, the Granada Down association and the “Diputación de Granada”.

The activity, which took place in the Rugby Field Ciudad Deportiva-Diputación de Granada, was developed in a playful environment and the participants, boys and girls with this syndrome as well as without it, enjoyed a great experience with the hole squad.

It has been usual to see the “Leonas7s” get involved in the practice of inclusive rugby, with several training previously done of this type. There is no doubt that this is a truly booming modality in Spain, which is one of the best recent news for our rugby, and we hope this dynamic is maintained.

Good news from Ireland!

Alan Craughwell new representant for the IRFU Spirit rugby committee

Irish Mixed Ability Rugby founder and MIXAR project team member Alan Craughwell was recently appointed as the new Disability representative for the IRFU Spirit rugby committee, in the role he will also chair the disability working group for the IRFU.

The members of this group represent all aspects of rugby available to those with a disability, including wheelchair rugby, deaf rugby, adapted tag rugby and mixed ability rugby.

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Cork Sports Ability Day

The anual event to showcase inclusive and disability sporting options.

The annual Cork Sports Ability Day was held in the UCC (University College Cork) Mardyke sports Arena on Saturday, 6th April 2019. The event is run every year by Cork local authority Sports Partnership. It invites clubs and organisations to showcase and share inclusive and disability sporting options that are available in the Cork city and county area for people with disabilities. It also marks the start of Sports Ability Week in Cork, a weeklong event with wide variety of sporting taster and information sessions held throughout Cork from Para-sports, Special Olympics to now mixed ability sports.

Sports Ability Week increase awareness of sports clubs and physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities in Cork City and County. Many people attend including those with disabilities or barriers looking to get involved, parents, teachers, sports coaches, health professionals and fitness instructors all with an interest in making sport and activities accessible for people with disabilities.

The Rebels attend every year and this year, we had the added extras of being a partner in the Erasmus+ project MIXAR and also hosts of the next IMART, Cork 2020. Players from the Rebels manned the stand throughout the event and we also had the opportunity to put on a demonstration on the pitch during the event.

II Inclusive Regional Spanish Championship

Castilla-La Mancha was again the winner of the competition.

The last weekend of June held in Valladolid the Second Edition of Spain´s championship for Inclusive rugby within school age. The participants were the regional selections of the Balearic Islands, Asturias, Castilla-La Mancha and Castilla y León. The players enjoyed a fantastic day of rugby in which they were able to put all their skills into practice and have fun with their teammates and rivals.

After some exciting games and very tight results Castilla-La Mancha again won the Spanish championship title, with two wins in their locker against the Balearic Islands 25-20 and Asturias 35-15, and only one defeat against Castilla and León 10-15 .

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Rebels Host the Inaugural 'Bluebird 10s' in Irish Independent Park:

They host their fist tournament, Bluebird 10s competition.

The Sundays Well Rebels hosted their first tournament, the inaugural Bluebird 10s competition in Irish Independent Park. There were four teams togged out in what ended up a wet and rainy Friday night. The weather didn't dampen the spirits as two Rebel teams competed, the Rebel Tigers and Rebel Ninjas along with Sundays Well J3 team and a President's XV.

The Rebels aim to spread the Mixed Ability experience to other teams with in our club and our community. The Rebels hope to make the 'Bluebird 10s' and annual event, attracting more teams from more clubs around Cork and Munster.

The Rebel Tigers took home the winner's trophy with the Rebel Ninjas picking up the 'Spirit of Rugby' award. There were more presentations to come with the annual club awards night taking place in the clubhouse.

There was some great rugby on display from all teams and all matches were played in the true spirit of the game. Once the trophies were awarded by Don O'Riordan from team sponsor Bluebird Care, all players enjoyed the BBQ and festivities on offer.

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Player of the season

Michael Croning was the winner.

Michael Cronin was awarded Rebels player of the year at the Sunday's Well RFC end of season awards night.

Michael has shown great development as a rugby player over the past few seasons and has really stepped up his leadership skills on the pitch this year. A hard working second row / backrow with a positive attitude makes Michael a great example for all players on the team!

Spanish Clubs commitment for inclusion

They could sign an agreement document, avaliable online.

DOWN ESPAÑA is a non-profit organization that seeks to facilitate the inclusion of people with Down syndrome in all areas of their lives, as well as ensuring compliance with the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Spain. The objective of DOWN ESPAÑA is that all people with Down syndrome develop their own life goals, as well as determined and fully active citizens.

This organization has designed a very detailed agreement to collaborate with sport clubs to inform, develop and support inclusive sports.

You could sign the agreement here.

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