

Proudly sponsored by Avonmore Milk, Munster Schools Rugby is celebrating over one hundred years in existence.

To commemorate this occasion Avonmore Milk is looking back at some of the great heroes of this competition, which provides a platform on which rugby players can catapult themselves onto a national rugby stage. In many instances players have gone to succeed at both a provincial and national level.

Former Irish International Hooker Frankie Sheehan gained 29 International caps, as well as having a distinguished career with the Munster team, where he captured two Heineken Cup medals. He finished playing for Munster at the end of the 2008-2009 season after playing 153 games in thirteen seasons.

Frankie's rugby career started at Presentation Brothers College, Cork, where he played for the Junior and Senior Cups. Ahead of the Avonmore Milk Munster Schools Cup Final on the 17th of March, Frankie Sheehan spoke to Avonmore Super Milk to find out more about his time playing Munster Schools Rugby.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE MUNSTER SCHOOLS CUP TO YOU?

At the time, the schools cup was the single biggest thing in your life. It meant everything to play at that level. Looking back, there is more pressure on you for the Munster Schools Cup than there is when you go on to play for your Province or your Country. When you play for your Province or Country you are playing big matches every week, so while you are nervous you get used to the pressure and learn to cope with it. However when you are going to play for the Junior or Senior Schools Cup, you have never played at that level before, it's a complete unknown, and a lot of pressure.

WHAT'S INVOLVED ON GETTING ON THE MUNSTER SCHOOLS TEAM?

I was lucky enough to spend two years on the senior team, Declan Kidney was our coach at the time. We worked extremely hard, we had some of the hardest fitness and training sessions I have ever done in my career, during that time. It was extremely competitive and everyone wanted to win. PBC dominated the schools cup at the time so you needed to maintain a very high standard, there were 25 to 30 serious contenders going for 15 places on the team so it was very tough. We had three to five training sessions every week, they were much longer sessions than they are now, today they would probably have six to seven shorter training sessions per week. You had to be very committed, focused, and motivated.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHERS CURRENTLY SEEKING TO REACH THIS LEVEL?

Belief is very important. You really have to believe you can do it. A lot of people spend

HEROES of the PAST



most of their time on the physical aspect of the game, and although you need to do a lot of physical training, the mental aspect is equally as important. When you are working that hard its good to have some 'down time', other things off the pitch to focus on, like study or hobbies. Try to spend at least two to three times each week working on the mental aspect of the game, visualisation is an extremely effective tool, also try to set goals and targets. Diet and nutrition are also extremely important however don't let it consume you, as the saying goes 'everything in moderation'. If you're disciplined during the week, then you can afford to have a 'cheat meal' or treat once a week.

HOW DID IT IMPACT ON YOUR LATER CAREER?

I was lucky enough to win junior and senior cup medals during my time with Munster Schools Rugby. However the thing I remember the most is when we lost to Crescent in the Senior Cup final, David Wallace was on the opposition team at the time. You learn a lot more from losing a game than you do from winning it, when you loose you reflect more on your performance, the things you did that were right or wrong. It helps you deal with the disappointment, how to come out of it, and to move on. I definitely think that particular experience taught me some valuable lessons for my later career, more so than any of the wins.

HOW DID THE EXPERIENCE YOU GAINED FROM THE MUNSTER SCHOOLS RUGBY COMPETITION STAND TO YOU IN YOUR LATER CAREER?

I was lucky to be playing on a very good team during my time with Munster Schools Rugby, with other very strong dedicated players, and that really helps to keep you motivated. Learning to play as part of a team, and focusing on the team effort, as opposed to just your own individual performance is a really valuable lesson to learn. Most of the players that succeed in rugby played on winning teams at some point and have learnt it's about playing for your team.

DO YOU HAVE ANY REGRETS ABOUT YOUR TIME IN THE MUNSTER SCHOOLS RUGBY COMPETITION?

If I was doing it all again, I think I'd express myself more as player, its difficult to do this when you are under so much pressure. I wouldn't be as regimented or strict with myself. I would encourage younger players to express themselves as much as possible on the pitch.

WHAT'S YOUR STRONGEST MEMORY FROM YOUR TIME THERE?

Winning the senior cup, walking up to the podium on the day and lifting the cup was a really great moment I will always remember.

**The Avonmore Milk Munster Schools Senior Cup Final
Rockwell v PBC Cork will be held on: St. Patrick's Day**

Wednesday, March 17th in Thomond Park - Kick off 3pm

For more information visit www.munsterschoolsrugby.com