

Eton Fives Report, 2022-23

Results at a glance

Inter-House				
<u>Y7</u>	<u>Y8</u>	<u>Y9</u>	<u>Y10</u>	
<i>Dilan R & Seb H</i>	<i>Charles A-B & Matthew B</i>	<i>Rocco F & James B</i>	<i>Tom A & Silas C</i>	<i>Ben S & Charles C</i>
Loxwood	Cox's	Greenes	Tilman	Tilman

Nationals Results (boys)			
<u>U12</u> (Qualifier)	<u>U12</u>	<u>U13</u> (Qualifier)	<u>U13</u>
Finalists (yet to be played)	Semi-Finalists	Semi-Finalists	Winners (and Finalists)
<i>Jake B & Zac A</i>	<i>Flynn M & Dilan R</i>	<i>Louie H & Monty H</i>	<i>Ben H & Seb G</i> <i>(Freddie D & Beau C)</i>
<u>U14</u> (Qualifier)	<u>U14</u>	<u>U15</u> (Qualifier)	<u>U15</u>
Semi-Finalists	Winners	Finalists	Finalists
<i>Shaan P & Conall O</i>	<i>Archie S & James B</i>	<i>Kasey T & Alexander W</i>	<i>Theo P & Rishy M</i>
<u>U16</u> (Qualifier)	<u>U16</u>		<u>U18</u>
Quarter-Finalists	Quarter-Finalists		Semi-Finalists
<i>Sam K & Aran K</i>	<i>Finlay W & Charles C</i> <i>Tom A (U15) & Ed H (U15)</i>		<i>Sam K & Ben S</i>

Nationals Results (girls)	
<u>U13s</u>	<u>U15s</u>
Winners	Semi-Finalists
<i>Rosie W (U12) & Indie C (U12)</i>	<i>Hannah M & Hannah M</i>

Derek Whitehead Tournament (Old Berkhamstedian & School pupil Tournament)

Winners: ***Richard Dennis & Charles A-B***

Plate Winners: ***Ashley Hornsey & Billy N***

U13 Individual competition

Winner: ***Will W***

Finalist: ***Ben E***

Pett Plate Winners (U13 National Team Competition)

Ben H, Seb G, Matthew B, Charles A-B, Felix S, Rocky H, Beau C

Hughes Cup Winners (U15 National Team Competition)

Tom A, Ed H, Ollie S, Federico G, Silas C, Theo P

Prep Championships (U13s Invitational)

Finalists: ***Matthew B & Felix S***

Roddy Forman Plate Winners: **Will F & Tom F**

Rugby Fives U13 Nationals

Doubles Champions: **Beau C & Rocky H**

Singles Champion: **Beau C**

Rugby Fives U14 Nationals

Doubles Semi-Finalists: **Josh F & Lawrence F**

Singles Semi-Finalist: **Josh F**

It has been another jam-packed year for Berkhamsted Fives spanning all three terms! With the number of players ever increasing, the fixture card in turn has been expanding, so much so that this year we saw a record 161 fixtures played from Y5 – Y13 and 245 players taking to the courts from the Kings, Castle, Sixth and Prep sites. We had a wide spread of opposition including Ipswich, Eton College, Chesham Prep, Queen Elizabeth Barnet, Harrow, Ludgrove, Holyport, Mill Hill & Belmont, Repton, Sunningdale, RGS High Wycombe, Westminster Under, Aldenham, Summer Fields, Cranleigh Prep, Lancing College, Charterhouse, Highgate, St. Olaves and Sunningdale. It was also pleasing to have some more cross-over Rugby Fives fixtures (another variation of the game) playing against Bedford, Bedford Modern and Tonbridge schools.

Fives kicks-off the annual Inter-House Sport programme, and this year we were able to run tournaments across all boys' senior school year groups. Another record was broken with 411 pupils taking part – a truly staggering number! The standard across the board was extremely high all the way through the year groups with lots of the competitions seeing extremely close matches from the quarter-final stages onwards. Some notable results came in both the Y7 and Y11 competitions. In Y7 we had, for the first time ever, a player who was new to the school in September reach the final stages; in the past the finalists had always been made up of players who had taken up the game early at the Prep, so this was quite the achievement for young Rufus H in Tilman. History was also made with Ben S & Charles C winning the Y11 competition meaning they are the first pair to have won the Inter-House competitions every year from Y7 to Y11. Ben S also adds an extra notch to his belt having won the Prep House Fives event in Y6 as well! The illustrious Paul Dicker Cup for overall House winners across Y7 – 11 was once again claimed by Tilman, making this their 6th year in a row!

Due to growing success in schools throughout the country, the Nationals has adapted over the last few years to see the number of competitions almost double with the introduction of Qualifier events to help cope with the huge numbers. These have proven extremely popular as they allow schools to enter pairs at the right level into the right competitions. Once again Berkhamsted pupils paved the way for success across the year groups in both the Main and Qualifier events with 247 students taking part from January to the end of March. Although not quite the haul with last year's best season in the history of the school, Berkhamsted still came away with 7 National titles of which we can be extremely proud of.

U18s

Captain: *Ashwin K*

As always, the senior programme sees a dip in numbers due to other sporting and academic commitments, but we still had a healthy 14 fixtures across the Michaelmas and Lent terms with a squad of loyal players. They had a good start to the season with a friendly fixture against the Old Berkhamstedians which I hope we can turn into a more regular event as it helps kick the season off for the senior players as well as introduces them to the many OB players who still play and enjoy the game. This year's Captain, Ashwin K, has led by example and worked hard across the season traveling all over the country to represent the school on and off the Fives court. His support has been invaluable in making sure the fixtures went ahead and getting players out on court.

Despite his already fully packed life, Sam K has continued to play and enjoy his Fives despite his 1st XI football and 1st XV rugby commitments (not to mention all his academic work!). A lot of the year he has been playing alongside staff members Mr Theodossi, Mr Campbell and Mr Foster as well as several top level Old Berkhamstedian players in the adult League 1 side including last year's leaver Jack Pemberton. Sam has shown his real quality as a young up and coming player taking on some of the top adult pairs in the country with some close fought matches (the adult League results can be found on the Fives website [here](#)). His efforts were rewarded at the end of season Nationals where he partnered up with U16 squad player Ben S. They had a great run through the competition where they then came up against number 1 seeds St. Olaves. This semi-final turned out to be the match of the whole Nationals week. The Berko boys were certainly the underdogs and a bit of an unknown entity so there was quite the shock across the Shrewsbury courts when people heard Berko had taken the first set off Olaves 12 – 9 thanks to some exceptional top-step play from Sam K ably backed up by some killing shots from Ben S at the back of the court. It seemed to all go wrong very quickly from here though as the boys then lost the next two sets rather convincingly 4 – 12, 4 – 12. What always amazes me is the spirit and belief we seem to instil in the players within the Fives programme and never had it been seen more than in the 4th set where they played probably the best standard of Fives the Nationals week had seen, blowing the Olaves pair off the court in a 12 – 2 dominating game. The stage was set for a 5th and final set and there was certainly a feeling that whoever won this game would go on to win the entire Nationals. Sam & Ben got off to an extremely slow start though and allowed the Olaves pair to take an early 0 – 9 lead. Again though, showing no signs of being fazed, they began to get back into the set claiming a point at a time while denying the opposition any. It was a little too much too late however and the Olaves boys managed to clinch the game 9 – 12. Although a shame for the Berko boys it has set them up in good stead for next year having the chance to play a season together before the 2024 Nationals.

Despite the tremendous result, what was the most pleasing thing to hear was comments from fellow MiC's and coaches regarding Sam K in his attitude and sportsmanship both on and off the court as well as his Fives playing ability. One noted that if a prize existed for a player who best embodies the game and spirit of Eton Fives, Sam K should have won it!

Finally, I must say a big thank you to our leavers Jack F, Sam G, David G, Finn H and Ashwin K for their support and dedication over the years here at Berkhamsted. Without them there would have been no senior programme. We wish them well in all their future endeavours but will hopefully see them all back on court soon as they join the OB Fives club.

U16s

Captain: *Douglas L*

It has been another action-packed season for the ever-talented U16 squad. They participated in 18 fixtures across the two terms against some of the top schools in the country with some great results across the board. To help keep them sharp and on top-form a number of the boys also took part in the adult League 1 side with representation from Ben S, Douglas L, Noah H and Oli F. Again, the boys were able to take on some of the top-level players in the country partnering up with the staff and OBs.

Eight pupils took part in the Qualifying Nationals, and we saw success come from Aran K & Sam K who managed to reach the quarter-final stages putting them through to the main competition week up at Shrewsbury.

Rather frustratingly Noah H, one half of our top pair, suffered an injury before the Nationals and so was unable to compete. Deciding we would then move Ben S into the U18 category to play alongside U18 player Sam K, this left Finlay W & Charles C to enter as our 1st pair at this years' Nationals. They had a great run through the competition before just losing out in the quarter-final stages.

This left Ben S (last years' U15 National Champion) to step up and play alongside Sam K in the U18 competition. As mentioned above, they had a great run all the way through to the semi-final stages. Despite playing a year up, at no point did Ben seem out of place; in fact he was very much in his element never seeming fazed taking on senior players. This belief in his ability certainly came from his experience and results during his time playing across the season in the adult League 1 side. We are very much looking forward to seeing him really get to sink his teeth into next season alongside Sam K once again, enjoying the sport throughout his time in the 6th form here.

Finally, my thanks again go to a few of our leavers heading off to different 6th forms, Patrick Penaliggon, Kiran Maheswaran, Adam Bates and Iteoluwa Adebote. All of them have been stalwarts of the team over the years. Again, we will hopefully see them still on court representing the OB's in the future.

U15s

Captain: *Kasey T*

What a season it has been for the U15 squad! They played an impressive 24 fixtures across the season and were represented by 31 players. The top players often found themselves needing to be challenged by playing up against U16 opposition and still coming out on-top. Good wins came against some of the top Fives playing Schools including Eton and Harrow at the start of the season back in September.

We once again entered the Hughes Cup U15 National Team Tournament at the end of January with the boys hoping to emulate last years' U15s success winning the 2022 event. Ed H & Theo P had already had experience here, having played up a year in the 2nd team at the 2022 event where they reached the semi-finals before losing out to the Berko 1st team! It was really pleasing to get three full teams out once again – 18 players descending on the Harrow courts to compete. There were lots of close matches across the day from all the teams, but some real stand-out performances came from Tom A and Theo P who stepped up in lots of their games holding their nerve to claim the wins in some very tight games meaning Berko won overall by a points difference of just 2!

A huge 20 players took part in this years Qualifier Nationals over at Harrow school. Our top pairing of Captain Kasey T & Alexander W had been impressing all day with some strong wins against lots of

very competent pairs. It wasn't until the semi-final stages they finally had to up their game and work hard to take down a very solid looking QEB 2nd pair. They held their nerve however and thanks to some fine top-step play and retrieval work from Kasey T they clinched the game in 2 sets. This put them through to the final where they faced last years' U14 National Beginners Champions, also a QEB pairing. The boys knew they were the underdogs, but in true Berko spirit they gave it their all to try and take down the QEB lads. Some very competent back-step play shots from Alex W kept QEB on the backfoot throughout the game, so much so that they had to adjust their tactics and keep the ball away from Alex and the back court area altogether. Despite some excellent rally play the QEB players had some slightly cleaner set-piece play which allowed them to rack up the points while also denying the Berko boys any. In the end it went 2 – 0 to QEB but with two very well battled sets of Fives.

At the main Nationals week, last year's 2022 Champions, Tom A & Ed H were forced to play up a year in the U16 competition due to the stipulation in the rules (players who reach the quarter-final stages of the U14s skip the U15s and go straight to U16s!). They never seemed to be phased or look at all out of place (hopefully thanks to playing lots of U16 fixtures across the year!) and in fact had an excellent run through the competition to the quarter-final stages. Here they faced a very solid looking Eton 1st pair. It was a phenomenal game though with the Berko boys making sure that if the Eton pair wanted the win, then they had to work extremely hard for every point. They were rewarded for their efforts by taking a set off the Eton lads which slightly took them aback losing to a pair a year group below them. They weren't quite able to capitalise on this though and some tight play from Eton allowed them to take the win 3 – 1. A fantastic achievement for our boys playing a year up and promising signs of where they can go next year.

The Main U15 competition saw 8 players competing with Kasey T & Alexander W once again back on court having qualified from the earlier Nationals round. Our 1st pairing of Theo P & Rishy M and 2nd pairing of Federicco G & Silas C had excellent runs all the way through to the quarter-final stages. Rishy M & Theo P showed some real class to win their quarter reasonably comfortably. In one side of the draw Silas & Federicco came up against Harrow 1 whom they had lost to earlier in the season away at Harrow School. It was an extremely tight game, going to the full 5 sets. In the 5th and final set Silas & Federicco found themselves 5-11 down; they dug in their heels though and kept working hard to steal a point at a time, slowly and steadily creeping back into the game. Their hard work and dedication paid off allowing them to level the game at 11-11 meaning they went into extra points, opting to play up to 14. Again, it was tight all the way with both teams taking turns and having the lead. The game reached 13-13 and an excellent retrieval from Silas on match point allowed them to get into the rally before winning the decisive point on a fine volley from Federicco putting them through to the semi-final stage.

In the semi stages Theo P & Rishy M continued their good run in a decisive 3 – 0 victory to put them into the final. On the other side of the draw Federicco & Silas were facing off against QEB 1 who had also had a solid run through the tournament to this stage. The Berko boys never really seemed to get into the game unfortunately; there were lots of great rallies and the score line across all the games were close but in the end they went down 0-3, dashing the hopes of an all Berko final.

And so into the final! Theo & Rishy had shown real class throughout the competition, but they were now facing a pair who were renowned for being able to seemingly always get the ball back into play somehow! The Berko boys got off to a flying start with some exceptional set-piece play from both of them; in particular Rishy's strong cutting and Theo's exceptional cut-returns meant QEB were always on the backfoot. This allowed them to steam through the 1st game with a 12-3 win. In the 2nd set the QEB boys adjusted their tactics by mixing up their cut-return technique allowing them to get more

balls back into play when they were up. They also kept the ball much tighter allowing them to take the 2nd set 7 – 12. A quick team talk about how to now adjust our play and we went back into the 3rd set. Unfortunately, the talk didn't materialize into any of the gameplay, and they continued playing the same brand of Fives allowing QEB to take this set, also 7 – 12. Theo & Rishy then received the 'hairdryer treatment' from Mr Theodossi to make sure they implemented the tactical changes; this time they did so by working the ball more into the buttruss and adapting their cutting techniques accordingly. This allowed them to take charge again and rack up the points quickly taking the 4th set 12 – 5. And so we went into the 5th and final set. The start was nip-and-tuck all the way with both pairs never holding the lead for long. It was also fascinating to watch all 4 players try to use different techniques to outfox their opposition showing just how much of a tactical and thinking sport Fives really can be. Theo had been suffering from a bruised hand unfortunately and this really hampered him in his ability to cut the ball hard and beat the opposition on the set-piece play. He did well to adapt though and made sure if the ball did come back in, he was working hard to finish it on the volley after. Rishy similarly worked extremely hard to back his partner up and again showcased some excellent cutting with the opposition only getting back about 5% of his cuts. In the end though the QEB boys kept slowly chipping away a point at a time while denying the Berko boys any in return allowing them to take the set 5 – 12. It was a fantastic match, not only played to a high standard but in great spirit as well. In particular it was wonderful to see Theo P back on court having missed out on last years' Nationals due to concussion; it shows real grit, determination and willpower to push yourself back into a sport and he did so amazingly well, making himself certainly one of the top players, if not *the* top player, of the U15 Nationals competition.

U14s

Captain: *Zac Scott*

It has also been a busy term for the U14 squad this year with 26 fixtures across the two terms. Huge numbers of players have been taking to the courts every week at training and lunchtimes and this has only been bolstered by new recruits joining the school in Y9.

There were some great results across the season; in particular, the solid wins against Eton and Harrow. It was also nice to see the new Y9 pupils getting to cut their teeth against some experienced opposition winning more than they lost. It was certainly impressive to see how quickly they were able to develop their skills by training alongside the already extremely competent players in their year group.

The Y9s also had a particularly busy Nationals with entry into three competitions including the Beginner Nationals, The U14 Qualifier and the U14 Main. In the U14 Beginners, 6 pupils who had just joined the school took part. Our 1st pairing of Charlie S & Edward B had a great run through making it all the way to the semi-final stages before losing out a very strong Mill Hill pair. A great achievement and we look forward to seeing how they will progress going forward.

In the Qualifier competition 12 pupils competed with our top two pairings making their way through the early rounds. Our 1st pairing of Daniel T & Lewis G managed to reach the quarterfinals allowing them to qualify through to the Main competition a few weeks later. It was our 2nd pairing of Shaan P & Conall O who managed to go one stage better and make it through to the semi-final stage which was a great achievement.

The Main Nationals week at Shrewsbury saw our highest entry for a single competition with an impressive 24 players taking part, meaning Berkhamsted almost made up a quarter of the draw! One particular mention must go to our Captain Zac S. He had been paired up with Oscar S but due to injury, Oscar had to pull out the night before – a real shame having now missed two years in a row with a concussion in the 2022 season. This meant the pairs had to be re-jigged and Zac graciously moved himself down the pecking order and paired up with Jonny R. He worked tirelessly to support his teammate against some very tough opposition and they managed to reach the last 16 stage which was a huge achievement. It shows real character for an individual (particularly an U14 pupil!) to put others first to the detriment of themselves. He is a testament to what we want to see in our students and what Berkhamsted Fives really represents.

In the quarter-final stage, every game match saw a Berko pair represented – quite the achievement! Archie S & James B, Rocco F & Connor F (U13), Theo L-E & Jack T and Harry B & Bradley B, all played matches of an extremely high quality. Archie & James won reasonably comfortably putting them through to the semi-finals the next day. Harry & Bradley had the toughest draw coming up against Eton 1, but at no point did this seem to phase them, in fact they played some of their best Fives we have seen all season and made a real statement that if Eton wanted to go further, they were going to have to work for it! In the end they went down 0–3 but it was a real pleasure to see the Berko Fives spirit being shown in full view for all to see. Theo & Jack also had a great game against Eton 2; despite losing in 3 sets the game really could have gone either way with every set going to the wire. It was just those crucial times that made the difference between winning and losing the set and Eton managed to hold their nerve and claim the last point every time. The last quarter-final saw Rocco paring up with young U13 squad player Connor F (Connor having to play up after reaching the U12 semis last year). They faced off against St. Olaves 1 and this was again a real feast of Fives to enjoy and watch! The rally play in particular was extremely high and Connor never looked out of place; lots of support and encouragement from Rocco meant they were real contenders throughout. In a similar vein to the Eton 2 pair, Olaves managed to just up a gear when they needed to, allowing them to win rallies at crucial moments in match. In the end it was a 1–3 epic that went the way of Olaves.

The following day Archie & James took on Eton 2 in the morning where they continued to show their class and good form with a strong 3–0 win in the semi-final. The other semi saw Eton 1 against Olaves 1 which was a much closer affair; in the end Eton 1 came out on top 3–1 ready to meet the Berko boys in the final that afternoon.

The boys' final marked the end of our Nationals week at Shrewsbury as well as the last chance to bring home anymore silverware! The 1st set was an absolute belter with both the Eton and Berko boys playing some extremely high-level Fives. Archie & James managed to keep just ahead of their opponents all the way, never letting Eton have the lead. What was most impressive was Archie's consistent and accurate volleying on both his left and right hand. As a lefty he had often shied away from taking on volleys on his weaker hand, usually preferring to let the ball bounce first and then set up a shot with more time. Anyone watching at the back though would have been convinced he was completely ambidextrous with the quality in every volley he hit. James played equally well, particularly at the back of the court, as his tight shots into the buttress either won the rally outright or set his partner up for more of those killing volleys. The second set was an equally tight game and was actually the only time the boys found themselves down with Eton taking the lead. At one point, a couple of unforced errors from both boys rattled them so that they then hit the next 4 or 5 shots in a row down or out, meaning they found themselves 3–7 down. They took a quick 30 second breather and chatted tactics before being able to reset and return to the quality they had been

playing in the first set. That is a real skill, particularly for U14 pupils, to be able to reflect and work out what they need to change or adapt to make the game work again in their favour. And so they did, managing to level the score at 9–9. From here some superb cut-returning from James meant they were able to run away with the next few points all the way over the finish line to clinch the set 12–9. And now, with just one set away from the National title, the boys went on court again, all guns blazing. Eton also found a new gear and began to play the best Fives we had seen from them the whole tournament. What was truly exceptional was despite Eton upping their game so drastically, Archie and James rose to the challenge in equal measure also showcasing the best Fives we have seen from the boys all season. It was an extremely close game all the way and Berko were up by only a point until, at 10–9, Eton levelled the score meaning we went into setting. The boys opted for the long-haul, going to maximum number of points, with the winning pair being the first to reach 15. They took a crucial first point to go 11–10 setting them up well mentally and from here they managed to stay ahead until the game reached 14–12. On match point, it came down to getting a cut-return back in order to play out the rally to win the game. But the Eton player held his nerve and cut both boys down allowing them to go up to claim points. They managed to take one with the first server moving the score to 14–13. Archie cut his opponent down and just needed to take out the 2nd player to get up and claim the winning point. It was a fine cut but unfortunately caught a ledge, putting the ball up for Eton to just get a hand on it and steer the ball back into play. This rally then became the rally of the game lasting a good 50 to 60 shots! It finally ended when James B hit a killing Dossi Special round and into the 'Pepper Pot' to put the boys back up to serve and hopefully take that last elusive point. And so they did! With pressure applied on the top-step from Archie, the Eton player was forced to dump the ball out to the centre back of the court which James took full advantage of playing a winning kill shot straight into the buttress to claim the National title. At this point the defib machine could be packed away from its primed and ready location next to Mr Theodossi. The boys definitely deserved their win!

A number of the U14 boys also competed in the Rugby Fives Nationals after their success from last year. Unfortunately trying to step-on court having not played this variation of the game for a whole year becomes a real challenge as you move into the more senior years. Josh F & Lawrence F still showed real class by being able to reach the semi-finals of the doubles and Josh F the semi-final of the singles: a real achievement.

U13s

Captain: *Charles Allum-Brown*

It has been an absolutely packed two terms for the U13 squad players. They played 27 fixtures, more so than any other year group, and found themselves with an impressive 82% win ratio (the next closest being the U12s with a 67% win ratio). The one thing this year group has more than any other is real depth, so much so, I would say the top 8 pairs would cause a serious headache for any opposition schools 1st pairs (as we will see later!). Some great wins came early in the season against some of these top Prep Fives playing schools including Ludgrove, Sunningdale and Cranleigh Prep. We also had a couple of great block fixtures against St. Olaves over at Eton College where they had kindly let us use the courts to play 32 players across their 16 courts.

Three pupils also took part in the U13 Individual competition hosted over at Highgate school. This is where players enter as an individual and get paired up with a random partner each match, after seven rounds the top four highest scorers enter a final which is then also randomly decided. Connor

F was probably one of the, if not the best player at the competition but a couple of tough draws meant he just missed out on making the final. It was extremely pleasing though to watch him support and help coach any partner he was put with to try and get the best out of them and make sure they enjoyed their day of Fives putting his own enjoyment second highlighting the true great spirit of a Fives player. In the end Ben E and Will W both had max points by the end of the day so were put through to the final alongside two Olavian players. It was then a 'blind date' random draw so each one paired up with an Olaves boy, so it was a Berko & Olaves v Berko & Olaves final. The final was a single game to 12 and it looked like an extremely balanced match with both sides leading at certain points throughout. In the end it was Will's hard driving back court shots to the left hand which helped him and his Olaves partner push ahead and take the match with a 12 – 9 win.

At the end of January, the boys competed once again in the illustrious Pett Plate (U13 National Team Competition) named after our very own retired MiC Mr Pett himself. This was actually the second time the boys had competed in the tournament having played last year at U12 level where they reached the final and lost to the Berko U13 squad at the time. In total 7 teams took part hosted here at Berkhamsted with 3 of the teams being Berkhamsted; the U13s an U12 team and for the first time an U11 team. The competition was played as a round robin with all teams playing each other once. In the end the U13s dominated across the day, though the U12 and U11 teams came 3rd and 4th overall respectively. This is now the 4th year in a row Berkhamsted has won the competition since its creation.

The U13s also kicked off the earliest Nationals competition in the form of the Qualifiers at the end of January. Due to the huge strength throughout the year group just 3 pairs competed at this level. Our 1st pairing of Will W & Hugh G managed to reach the quarter-final stages, but it was our 2nd pairing of Louie H & Monty H who went one better pushing through to the semi-finals. Here they lost out to a talented Cranleigh pair, one of the players who was none other than a young Hopcroft, one of our own former staff here at the school of Mr Brett Hopcroft who left a few years back to go to Cranleigh.

With two pairs qualifying we then took a huge 20 players over to Eton College to compete in this year's main Nationals. Again there were lots of great results across the day and it looked like it could be only Berkhamsted pairs in the Quarter-finals onwards! However, some dubious rejigging of the draw from the organiser saw all the Berko pairs in one side while all the other schools battled it out in the other half. It was a bit disappointing for the boys having to knock each other out, particularly as they get to play against each other all the time anyway at school. Nevertheless, they made sure they played all their games in good spirit and the right attitude as if they were playing against other opposition schools and not their own teammates. When we reached the semi-final stages, we had our 1st pairing of Seb G & Ben H taking on Highgate 1 while Freddie D & Beau C faced off against St. Olaves 1. Seb & Ben got off to a flying start in their semi winning the first set reasonably comfortably. They then let their concentration waver and the 2nd set went to the wire before Highgate managed to claim the winning point levelling the match at 1-1. The final set was also quite close though the Berko boys managed to hold the lead for the majority of the game before finally closing it out to take the win and reach the final.

Freddie & Beau got off to a far less positive start going 0 – 6 down very early in the game with the Olaves boys blasting them off the court. That Berko Fives spirit then made itself known however as they began to fight back and find some flow and form to slowly rack up the points and close the gap. Thanks to some superb cut-returning from Beau and some winning Dossi specials at the back from Freddie they took the 1st game 12 – 7. The boys then went into the 2nd set on a high but unfortunately started in a similar vein to the first game going 0 – 7 down! Just as the last set showed

though they dug their heels in refusing to admit defeat and find another gear to start beating back their opposition and again closing the gap in the score line. The game reached 9 – 9 and it changed hands a number of times on this score with neither side able to gain a point but also denying their opponents from any. Once again, some exceptional cut-returning from Beau got them back into the game to take a point putting them 10 – 9 up. The change of hand put Freddie up who also adjusted his tactics and opted to return the cut from under the wall; this proved extremely successful allowing them to take another point moving them into a winning 11 – 9 position. With just 1 point needed Freddie then made an exceptional retrieval from what seemed like a killing cut into the buttress on match point getting them into the rally. They then proceeded to keep the ball tight and safe just getting it back and waiting for their opposition to make the error, which they did so allowing them to claim the set and the match 12 – 9. And so we had an all Berko final! With the day having run over due to the later arrival of an opposition school we made the decision to head back to Berkhamsted and play the final in our own time.

The match was all set to be played on the 11th of March, but an injury to one of the players meant we decided to postpone it until the summer term, a very mature decision made by all the boys I might add as they wanted to play the final instead of just a walkover match. And so on Saturday the 10th June the final took place at 3pm on the Prep courts after a morning of cricket. The U13 final is usually played as a best of 5 but with the exceptional heat we decided it would be sensible to go for a best of 3 game instead. This was once again an extremely high-quality final with both pairs playing out of their skins and highlighting just why they deserved to be the finalist pairs. It was also great to see such a high standard considering none of them had really stepped back on a Fives court since March! The first game was extremely close with both sides holding the lead at some point. In the end it was the 2nd pairing of Beau & Freddie who caused an upset winning the first game 12 – 10. The 2nd set went early doors to Ben & Seb who took a commanding 5 – 0 lead. Once again though Freddie & Beau dug in to try and close the gap and so they did, but Ben & Seb were able to keep a point or two out of arms reach. They then managed to close the game out 12 – 10 putting us through to an exciting final set. In a similar vein to the previous game, Seb & Ben took an early lead which Beau & Freddie then had to chase down. Once again, they managed to do this and level the score to 7 – 7. Some solid cut-returning from Seb and excellent top step retrievals from Ben allowed them to take a few more crucial points. Beau & Freddie again caught up, but it was Ben & Seb who found an extra gear and managed to close the game out 12 – 9 taking the 2023 National title.

This really does highlight the huge amount of strength and depth within this year group as our top two pairs of Felix S & Matthew B and Connor F & Charles A-B weren't even playing in this competition with the rules stipulating that players having reached the semi-finals or further in last year's U12s puts them into the U14s this year. As we already heard Connor had a great run through to the quarters alongside his U14 partner Rocco F. Felix S & Matthew B also had a great battle just missing out on a quarter-final position losing in a very close game against St. Olaves 11 – 12. A great result though and putting them in good stead for the 2023 – 24 season.

With the success of last year, we decided to enter the boys once again in the U13 Rugby Fives Nationals over at St. Paul's School. They had never set foot on a rugby Fives court, so an early arrival time allowed the 6 players an hour's session to the basics of the game and the rules. Once again, we managed to pick up silverware with Beau C winning the singles title and Beau C & Rocky H claiming the doubles. Quite an achievement to win two years in a row and showcasing the pupils ability to quickly transfer their skills over to another variation of the game. A report can be found on the RFA website [here](#).

The final tournament of the season was the Prep Championships, an invitational only competition where schools may bring their top 4 pairs. Due to a school losing a pair at a late stage we were asked to enter a 5th pair and so 10 boys descended on Harrow courts for the 54th annual Preparatory Schools Championships. The competition is quite a brutal straight knock-out event with only the top pair in each group of 4 qualifying through to the main competitions and those who don't go into a variety of Plate and Shield competitions based on where you finish overall in your group. On one side of the draw were Berko 5 who had the top seeds in their group. Despite losing out to them 1 – 15, I quickly had a number of opposition Masters and coaches in surprise that this was only our 5th pair who were playing some excellent Fives and making sure that the Sunningdale pair had to work for the win. In the other half of the draw were our other 4 pairs and what was a first in the history of the competition for a number of years Berkhamsted won every single one of the groups on this side of the draw! The shock of the competition was Beau C & Rocky H who managed to play some phenomenal Fives to knock out the 3rd seeds Ludgrove 1. This tournament really did highlight more than any other the true strength and depth this year group has to offer. The downside to this was it meant the boys were once again playing matches against all their fellow teammates in one half of the draw knocking each other out. Both the Berko v Berko quarters were very close and went to 3 sets with Felix S & Matthew B (Berko 1) knocking out Seb G & Ben H (Berko 3) while Connor F & Charles A-B (Berko 2) knocked out Beau C & Rocky H (Berko 4). This left Felix & Matthew taking on Charles & Connor in a semi-final stage and it was clear fatigue had caught up with Charles & Connor after this epic 3 set match against Beau & Rocky meaning they lost out in two straight sets 12 – 5, 12 – 4. The final was always going to be a tough game, and it didn't help that Sunningdale had a relatively easy run all the way through to the final while our boys had battled hard against one another to get to this stage. Despite this though both Felix & Matthew worked hard to get into the game but unfortunately always found themselves behind with the Sunningdale pair having more fight and energy in them while our boys were flagging. It was still an exceptional game of Fives but they went down 8 – 12, 6 – 12.

Despite their early set back Will F & Tom F (Berko 5) managed to walk away with some silverware winning the coveted Roddy Forman Salver beating Cranleigh in the final rather convincingly 12 – 3. All in all, it was an exceptional day of Fives for the boys to showcase their real strength and depth as a year group.

U12s

Captain: *Flynn Murray*

It has been an equally busy year for the U12 squad who played an impressive 26 fixtures across the two terms. The Friday afterschool club has also exploded with numbers each week averaging out about 40 players, quite tricky to accommodate with 6 courts and a maximum number of 24, but Mr Foster has run the club exceptionally well. The numbers are a combination from all the players continuing the game from the Prep as well as a huge influx of new players joining the school in Y7. It has been very beneficial having the new pupils jump straight in with the more experienced pupils as they have come on leaps and bounds in a very short amount of time being able to train alongside them.

We have a simple policy within the Fives programme in that if pupils come to training, we will find them fixtures and they are part of the squad no matter their level or ability. With so many players attending on a regular basis it has become a bit of a challenge (but an enjoyable one!) to find enough

fixtures to both accommodate the numbers and find the right level for players to participate. This can be seen with our top pupils being challenged taking on the likes of Summer Fields, Sunningdale, Ludgrove, Highgate and Cranleigh Prep, while many of the beginner or less experienced pupils had the opportunity to represent the school against similar starter level schools such as Ipswich, Aldenahm, St. Olaves and RGS High Wycombe just to name a few.

We also had the always enjoyable internal Prep Y6 players v Senior Y7 players once each term. In the first term the senior boys had the upper hand winning all 6 matches reasonably comfortably. It was a much closer affair with the Lent term rematch which saw the Prep come out on top 3 – 2 overall. A good sign of the work rate they have put in over the two terms to be able to challenge the seniors as well as a bit of a wake-up call for the Y7s to get on court and practice more!

We once again also entered a team into the annual Pett Plate U13 Team Competition where the boys performed extremely well managing to come 3rd overall out of 7 teams. Hopefully they will continue the trend and look to take the win next year for the 2024 competition.

At the end of season Nationals an impressive 22 players took part in the Qualifying competition. There were lots of great results across the day but of particular note was our 2nd pairing of Jack R & Luke G who managed to make the quarter-final stages. Unfortunately, Jack had to retire due to a nasty bruised hand (not surprising with how hard he strikes the ball), a shame as they had certainly could have gone further and challenged some of the top pairs there. Still an extremely impressive result for two boys who have only taken up the game having joined this year! Our first pairing of Jake B & Zac A had a great run through the competition. They came up against Prestfelde 1, a new Prep school on the scene who had just started playing using the courts up Shrewsbury school over the year. It was an extremely high quality game and some excellent set-piece play from Prestfelde allowed them to take the 1st game 7 – 12. A quick team talk, and Jake & Zac went on to adjust their tactics. Zac took up position under the wall to cut-return the ball which proved extremely effective as the Prestfelde pair were unable to hit a good line or length meaning the ball popped up easily for him to retrieve or came round the walls for Jake to attack head on. This allowed them to reverse the game and take the 2nd set 12 – 6. In the 3rd and final set the Prestfelde boys really upped their game and took a dominating lead and went up to match point at 6 – 11. As we have seen so often though the Berko spirit and determination came though to never give up and so Jake and Zac battled hard to stay in the game and stop the opposition from getting that elusive last point while slowly chipping away a point at a time to their own score. They somehow managed to keep this up and levelled the game at 11 – 11. The Prestfelde boys heads dropped a bit at this point while Jake & Zac kept the momentum going and managed to power through the last few points to take the win 14 – 11. A truly impressive result and positive attitude to never give up. Unfortunately, due to the organisation and late running of the competition the final wasn't able to be played on the day and is currently still yet to be completed, hopefully we can find a time in the Michaelmas 2023 term to make the final happen.

The Main Nationals competition saw another great entry with 16n players taking part. Again, there were lots of great results across the day and the strength and depth of the year group was demonstrated with all 8 pairs qualifying out of the group stages claiming either the 1st or 2nd place positions in their respective groups. Of all my years at Berkhamsted I had found this year group the most difficult to select who would be 1st pair with so many strong players at the top end. In the end it was our Captain Flynn M & Dilan R who represented Berkhamsted. They had an excellent run all the way through to the semi-finals where they met a well drilled Sunningdale pair. The first game was a real fest of Fives with all 4 boys playing some exceptional rally play along with some fantastic set-piece play with their cutting and returning. Often it seemed a rally was over with what looked

like a killed ball only for a player to somehow dig it back up into play again thanks to some full floor dives! The game reached 11 – 11 and the Sunningdale pair had just had the edge on the back court play which allowed them to take the first set 14 – 11. Not to be phased though Flynn & Dilan found another gear in the 2nd set; in particular was Flynn's top-step play and attacking volleys which really put Sunningdale on the back step. His aggressive also controlled play allowed them to rack up points quickly always leaving Sunningdale chasing. This allowed them to take the 2nd set 12 – 7. The 3rd and final set was of a very similar standard to the 1st with all four players throwing themselves into the game. Both sides lead an numerous times with each side leap-frogging the other to take the lead now and then. Dilan seemed to be flagging a little bit near the end of the set and the Sunningdale pair noticed this by powering all their shots deep to the back left court making him have to work extremely hard trying to get them back on his weaker hand. Flynn did what he could to protect his partner by again intercepting a huge number of difficult volleys. In the end the Sunningdale game plan paid off and they just managed to get over the finish line 1st 10 – 12. What was pleasing to hear from many other masters and coaches was their feedback that Flynn was certainly the player of the tournament that day and probably the strongest there. It was also then slightly frustrating that in the final the Sunningdale pair withdrew due to a sore hand; a shame as Flynn & Dilan had beat the other Ludgove pair who were in the final earlier in the season and fancied their chances. Still though it was a great day and huge achievement by the boys so well done.

Senior Girls

With the success of last year, we were keen to try and rebuild the girl's programme. It was therefore extremely pleasing to see so many Y7 girls continue to play and enjoy the game turning up every week to the Friday afterschool club alongside the boys. This also added to the reason for the huge numbers of pupils attending each week (we just more courts!). Playing alongside the boys has also helped the girls rapidly improve, but more importantly shown them how good they really are more often than not being able to compete with the boys on an equal level. This is also another real benefit for the Fives programme with girls and boys being able to play alongside one another on an equal level.

It is often hard to find fixtures for the girls, but we still managed to cram 13 into the season. With their skill and ability, we will certainly look at trying to play more fixtures for them against opposition boys' schools if we can.

The youngest age category for the girls' Nationals is U13 and so we entered all our U12s players with 10 pupils representing the school. Our top two pairs had competed well all day and really only met some tough opposition in the semi-final stages. 1st pairing of Rosie W & Indie C had a reasonably comfortable win against Highgate 1 to put them through to the final. In the other side of the draw our 2nd pairing of Jemma M & Mila W were taking on Cranleigh 1 who had looked like favourites throughout the competition. The strength that comes from being a year older allowed the Cranleigh girls to overpower ours. Jemma & Mila did battle back hard though making sure the Cranleigh pair had to work for the win but in the end, they lost out 0 – 2. The organiser had made the girls play a ludicrous number of games across the day and so with time hitting almost 6.30pm both schools opted to play the final at a later date.

And so a few weeks later we on a Friday morning we headed over to Eton College with the one pair to take on Cranleigh in a best of 3 final. Rosie & Indie had actually played this U13 pair before back in November in the Michaelmas term and had just come out on top in a very close game 12 – 9, 12 – 9. Nevertheless, we were considered the underdogs being a year younger and Cranleigh having had more time on court as Fives was their main sport in the Lent term at their Prep. The first set was a

very close game as expected. It was marred slightly by both sides making some questionable calls, not in anyway trying to cheat it was just what they all felt they had seen. In true Fives player style though they all chatted about it and managed to come to their own sensible decisions which was very pleasing to see. In the first set it was Rosie's set piece play which kept them on top with her strong cutting and excellent cut returning. Indie had struggled to return cut most of the game but she more than made up for this with her great movement and retrieval of shots at the back of the court, particularly on her weaker left hand. They kept ahead most of the set by about a point throughout before managing to close the game out 12 – 8. We looked at adjusting Indie's cut-return technique and opted for an under the wall approach. This proved extremely effective at the start of the set with the Cranleigh pair either unable to kill the ball in which case Indie was able to get in back into play off the buttress, or the ball missing the buttress and coming round to Rosie at the back and being able to play a killing shot into the buttress. This allowed them to steam into a 7 – 0 lead. The Cranleigh girls then began to slowly find their form and with cuts hitting the buttress slowed the points flow of Berko dramatically while also being able to narrow the score line. In the end the game levelled at 10 – 10 and the Berko girls opted to setting with step at 12 first to 13. It was nip-and-tuck all the way with both pairs keeping the ball very tight and rallies really only being lost on winning shots as opposed to unforced errors. The game really could have gone either way, but some fantastic retrieval from Indie again at the back of the court kept them in the rallies and allowed Rosie to work the top-step to set up some winning volleys. The game reached 12 – 12; Rosie held her nerve to cut both opponents down on match point before going up and, getting the cut return back in within 3 shots later they had won the match and the 2023 National title. A great achievement to win the competition a year early and setting them up in a great position to claim the title again next year.

Up at Shrewsbury we had three girls take part in the U16 Nationals alongside the boys on the same day. Genevieve L, Claudia L & Ella L were all desperate to be able to represent the school having trained well over the two terms. Despite the odd number they were very happy to play as a three and mix around across the day. They faced extremely hard opposition particularly in the form of the U16 Shrewsbury players but acquitted themselves extremely well against all the pairs they faced.

In the U15 category we just had the one pair in the form of Hannah M & Hannah M (yes confusing I know!). Despite all their numerous other sporting commitments (not to mention their academic studies) the girls still gave up their Sunday to travel all the way to Shrewsbury to compete in this year's Nationals. Despite not having much time to get on court and train this year, both Hannah's played an exceptionally strong brand of Fives. In particular was their set piece play both of whom cut and returned cut extremely well allowing them to steam through all of their group matches.

The quarter-final stages were where they first met any real opposition where they came up against Repton 2. Though the rally play was good Hannah & Hannah still had a huge advantage with their superior set-piece play allowing them to stop Repton really evert getting on the scoreboard and taking the match 12 – 1, 12 – 2 to put them through into the semi-finals the next day. Here they then faced a well drilled Shrewsbury pair, and with the added challenge of Shrewsbury having the home court advantage it was always going to be a difficult match. Both teams had great cuts, but it was Hannah & Hannah's superior cut-returning that allowed them an early lead and a bit of an edge. It was tight all the way with the game reaching a tense 10 – 10 score line. Shrewsbury managed to step up and push through the next few pints to take the first set 10 – 13. With confidence on their side, Shrewsbury went into the second set with all guns blazing; Hannah & Hannah worked hard to battle back the onslaught, in particular was their rally play on the top and back step. The Shrewsbury girls now had the edge though as they were winning the set-piece game denying Berko many points and

when they did come it was slowly. In the end Hannah and Hannah lost out 6 – 12. A great effort though particularly from a pair who have managed to stay at stage a high standard despite the restrictions on their time to get onto court.

We look forward to the 2023-24 season in both what the current pupils will achieve going forward as well as the new influx of Prep and new pupils joining us in Y7 & Y9. Fives is always on the up!

Anthony Theodossi