

RUGBY FEATURE

IAN WADLEY

tackles the girls of Oakmeadians rugby club for one night only

SPENDING the evening with 15 athletic females – all in the name of journalism – was even more enjoyable than I'd imagined.

No, I hadn't been sent on a fact-finding mission to the Playboy Mansion.

I was, of course, finding out what life was like as an Oakmeadian lady... for one night only.

A number of my previous encounters with the fairer sex have come in bars and pubs, with the luxury of alcohol acting as suitable anaesthetic for the inevitable knock-back to come.

But I had no such intoxicant to numb the pain when the Oaks pack started piling into me at a rate of knots.

Crunch came the first hit on the tackle pad I was hiding behind as if my life depended on it.

Captain Cathi Farrer had earlier promised that her and her team-mates would take pity and go easy on a rusty rugby player-turned sports reporter.

So if this was their idea of a light session, my fitness levels had dropped much lower than I could ever have imagined.

When the idea of a night in the company of numerous women was originally put to me, I can reveal that this wasn't what immediately sprung to mind.

I've been asked to do many a thing for work and this was an opportunity I jumped at.

Despite feeling more than a little anxious in the immediate run-up to the 6.45pm start, I soon realised there was no reason to be apprehensive about this task.

The girls were a fun, friendly and welcoming bunch – even to an outsider – and the standard of rugby was impressive.

After a few drills I realised my preparation of over-indulgence during the festive period and one visit to the gym in six weeks was hardly ideal.

But I kept up – just – with the initial ball work and held my own in the face of some hefty blows during the sharp mauling session.

The evening could have been more testing but for the fact the team had endured a particularly physical encounter against Trojans just a few days before.

The levels of intensity were still pretty impressive and I soon realised that giving the fly-half a five yard headstart when playing inside centre was not a wise idea. Quick off the mark, I was not.

But the Oaks ladies don't always have a man slowing them down.

Their form this season is good and they sit second in the RFUW

COACH:
John
Ackerman



MUCKING IN: Echo sports reporter Ian Wadley with Oakmeadians ladies rugby team at Chapel Gate

Pictures by Sally Adams

Ladies' man

Championship South West Two league table.

"It's going really, really well this season," said skipper Cathi. "Since we started under our new coach, training has gone from strength to strength and we're having some really positive results."

The coach is John Ackerman, who commands instant respect as he rules with a rod of iron and provides a refreshingly honest approach.

He is vastly experienced and a real

asset, having coached the Royal Navy, as well as stints in the England set-up and various squads over the country throughout his career.

The good news for female rugby fans in the area is that Oaks are always readily open to new players.

While four members of the squad play for the south of England (Farrer, Becky Riggs, Ali Chambers and Jess Fredrikson) and one has England caps to her name (Jo Poore), anyone from novice level upwards is welcome.

"We always welcome new players," said Farrer.

"You don't have to be experienced or have played before. There are lots of social aspects and it's also about having fun."

So if you're female and keen to get involved in playing rugby, Oaks are always on the look-out for new talent.

And, let's face it, if I just about managed to keep up, you should at least give it a try.

The team are based at Meyrick Park and training is on Wednesdays from 6.30pm. For more information contact 07725 465098 or oaksladies@hotmail.co.uk



NO PUSHOVER: Ian Wadley on tackle pad duty