

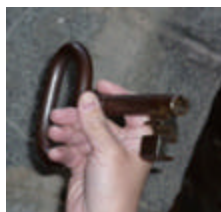
St. Joe's Prep Rugby – 2010 Spain & France Tour Summary



In the tradition of rugby touring, Prep Rugby initiated its third tour, second international tour, to Spain and France over Easter Break 2010. Encompassing Bilbao, Biarritz, Toulouse and Barcelona, Prep Rugby took 50 players, 3 coaches, wives, children, families and supporters across the Atlantic Ocean for 9 days of rugby and fun.

The tour kicked off with the announcement of the tour captains for the first game on the flight. Air Europa was kind enough to allow Coach Farren 30 seconds to announce – to the entire transatlantic flight! – that Dan Wallace '10 and Chris Grande '10 would be those captains. The first day of the tour was – unfortunately – part of a pattern: late arrival. No problem, onto the bus and on the way to Bilbao in Northern Spain – a mere five hours by bus. Upon arrival, the team took a light jog along the river and up to the Guggenheim Museum to work out the kinks and focus in on the upcoming rugby. The next day's tour of the Guggenheim offered a glimpse of modern art, as did the Spanish celebration of Palm Sunday, with processions of hooded and robed faithful through the streets surrounded by thousands of onlookers.

Then, it was off to the first game of the tour v. Gernika RT Gazneak – a Basque team noted for its physicality. It was a tough back and forth game, with neither side giving in and with Gernika putting on an incredible kicking display. At one point, they kicked for a drop goal and even the Prep sideline had to applaud the skill. But, appreciation did not mean capitulation, and Prep continued on, pushing down a try and taking the lead and were able to win it – the **FIRST INTERNATIONAL VICTORY IN PREP RUGBY HISTORY: 17 – 12**. For his impressive energy and smart playmaking, Dillon Phillips '11 was the Man of the Match. B Side came out hard, hoping to seize the momentum, and after a first half, it looked like Prep was going to be able to take the day. Gernika would not stop, however, and slowly were able to pull away and take the game: 35 – 17. The post game social was one of the best Prep Rugby has seen with traditional Basque berets and Prep Rugby scarves exchanged. The Basque Sporting Office offered a small trophy as a gesture of appreciation and the host team and members were extraordinarily gracious with the open air/team pub barbecue. A Prep Rugby scarf, signed by all the Prep Rugby players, was hung in the team pub! And, yes, several of the students were able to practice their Spanish language skills.



Waking up the next day, Prep Rugby was on its way to Azpeitia, the birthplace of Iñigo de Loyola – St. Ignatius. On arriving, the team was captivated by the Basilica de Loyola, encompassing St. Ignatius' home and land, yet disappointed that on Monday the house was closed. However, inside the cathedral, Fr. Alberto Iñurrategui (a resident Jesuit) was happy to hear that a Jesuit High School from Philadelphia was visiting. He said a few words, blessed the team and had the birth home opened for a special visit by St. Joe's Prep Rugby – using the original key from the 15th Century front door!

Onward to Bayonne/Biarritz for the first training session with Nigel Osborne. Nigel founded The French Sports and Language Centre Ltd. 10 years ago and has lived and played rugby professionally in France. The team was able to use the actual practice pitch of the professional Biarritz French Top 14 rugby team. Nigel did a great job and ran the guys for close to two hours. The next morning found some tour members and Coach McCloskey trying out surfing on the North Atlantic Coast, while others went into Bayonne or Biarritz. That afternoon, the team traveled to Nay, France for its first French game and for a visit to a school in spirit: Collège Lycée St. Joseph, a local boarding school specializing in equestrian arts, dance, and theater. As one parent astutely observed, despite sharing the name of St. Joseph, “the boys may not know much about the school itself, but the very attractive and bubbly French tour guide (a senior who is the star English language pupil) turned more than a few heads and made them wish they knew more French!”

For the second game, Conor Magee '10 and Albert Vélez '11 were the tour captains. The rugby game to follow against a local Nay team was one of the most aggressive in Prep Rugby history, with the French relentless in their attack. The cold night was hard fought and through the pressure of the night, the team was able to pull together and focus on making their efforts count.

Decompressing the next day, Prep Rugby went white water rafting in the Pyrenees Mountains, with some parents and players going on a mountain hike (which afforded them the only experience with “pelota”, the Basque handball game). The team pulled into Toulouse for the next training session with Trevor Brennan, an Irishman who played rugby for

the Irish national team as well as professionally in Ireland and Toulouse and has since set up shop there. Dinner that night was also at Trevor's restaurant: De Danú of Toulouse – an Irish restaurant with a rugby theme. On the night before the game, Trevor was kind enough to do two things: 1) he hung a signed Prep Rugby Jersey in his rugby themed restaurant and, 2) announce our third set of tour captains: Kevin Byrne '10 and Tony Newton '11.

On Thursday, April 1, the team was to play two matches: A Side v. Balma and B Side v. AS L'Union. Both games were well fought by both sides, with Prep showing it had decided to play as a team on both pitches. The two sides played smooth, fluid rugby, but Prep dug down and were able to make some impressive runs. Thus far scoreless in France, Prep Rugby was able to make a smart read and take a first pod line-out down near the Balma try-line. With a good push and some hard support, Prep touched down their first try in France and avoided the shutout! The post game social was an event that neither team will soon forget. With weeks-long anticipation of our visit, the French sides were ecstatic to be able to share rugby songs, chants, stories and cheers. The clubhouse was booming as both teams sang and chanted back and forth with raised voices, sharing their teams, their countries and themselves in a memorable rugby night where the sport was celebrated by its players from America and France.

The tour then took the final leg back into Spain, to Barcelona. With some free time, everyone took to the city to explore. Barcelona has an incredible reputation as friendly, cultured, and culinary. It did not disappoint, as Prep Rugby invaded both Poble Village and *Las Ramblas*, the long pedestrian walkway in the middle of the city leading to the port. At the final dinner, the team celebrated the tour and the player achievements. Also, the final game tour captains were Jon Sharp '10 and Bill Manion '10. Also the team was able to celebrate with traditional awards of "Best Decision" (for the line-out call in the Balma game that led to a score) – Ian Glatts '10, Nate Crowley '10, Pat Davis '11 and Brendan Murphy '10, "Best Try" – Tony Newton, as well as more tour-centered awards, such as "Best Matador" – Dan Wallace '10, and "Best AT&T Spokesperson" (for engaging in international communication with a French girl) – Chris Lezynski '10. And we will not even mention the dancing awards!

The final day of the tour was packed from 7:30 a.m. until midnight, with a tour of La Sagrada Familia, the famous cathedral conceived by the artist Gaudí and being completed still. Then, off to the FC Barcelona Stadium for a tour that morphed into a pre-game prep as the FC Barcelona had a last minute game change to the stadium. From there, the team went to Stiges, a beach community where the game was rugby on a sand field against an eclectic mix of Spanish, Italian, Welsh, British, Irish and South African players. The local community of Argentine ex-pats (another rugby mad country) came out and put on an Argentine BBQ for both teams.

At check-in that night, several parents were able to get some one descriptions of the tour from the players. The more popular ones were: fun – exhausting – exciting – bus ride – spontaneous – Bilbao – Biarritz – Toulouse – Barcelona – bread – learning experience – tiring – unplanned bonding – grueling. Other fun phrases include: "I wish I had taken Spanish instead" (and then he apologized for 7 words!!); "This was THE BEST experience of MY LIFE"; "I wish I had done my homework already."

Possibly the best snapshot of the tour came on the day of departure from the Madrid Airport. Due to the early departure, Easter Mass was difficult. So the team sought out the chapel in the airport only to learn that Mass had already occurred. Coach McCloskey asked everyone to think about the characteristics of the Grad at Grad – Open to Growth, Intellectually Competent, Religious, Loving, Committed to doing Justice. Each member of the tour shared our view of the tour and how it exemplified one of those characteristics. Just as the team was about to depart, there was a knock on the door and a traveling Argentine priest, P. Marcos Coduti, who is working in Rome and spoke some English, came by to do his daily mass. He was delighted to find a group of 80 people and to be able celebrate Easter Mass for them. A memorable and very personal Easter Mass. (And he played Second Row!!)

What an incredible tour! It was exhausting and trying, exciting and memorable, and the team is fortunate to have been able to make this tour with 80 wonderful players, parents and coaches. Off this tour, the team was ready for the challenging EPRU schedule of the 2010 Season.

¡Hasta pronto! - À bientôt!