

## **GRAEME COLLEGE RUGBY FESTIVAL**

### **MEDIA RELEASE: Festival preview**

**March 11, 2024**

**Caption:** Graeme College and SACS players tussle for possession in last year's Graeme Rugby Festival in Makhanda. Although the tournament will be confined to Eastern Cape teams this year, an exciting array of first team matches have been lined up for Friday and Saturday. Picture: Graeme AV Club

### **Intensity set to rise at Graeme Rugby Festival**

As the schools rugby season starts to take shape, the intensity will be raised a few more notches when the exciting first team programme for the Graeme College Rugby Festival gets under way on Friday (March 15).

This annual sports extravaganza in Makhanda is again set to attract big crowds to the Graeme campus and the action kicks off with a series of age-group matches on Thursday.

Already there have been some interesting results in the early season games and although not too much should be read into the scores at this stage of the year, there were notable performances this past weekend by Daniel Pienaar (29-19 winners over Graeme) and Cambridge (22-20 winners against Dale in the Grens Festival).

Coach Jonty van der Meulen's Graeme team will be looking to absorb the lessons from the Daniel Pienaar clash as they face one of the powerhouses of Eastern Cape schools rugby in Selborne in the festival's final game on Saturday.

It is to the host school's credit that they do not shy away from a proper challenge in their own tournament and Van der Meulen's relatively young side are ready to step up to the plate.

"We do realise that Selborne are, and always will be, a force to be reckoned with in Eastern Cape rugby, but that is a challenge we are ready to embrace and we will need to make sure we are at our best on the day," the coach said.

Cambridge, meanwhile, kick off the proceedings on Saturday with a 10.30 match against Muir College from Kariega, which should make for an entertaining encounter.

These two teams last met in Makhanda in the 2022 tournament, with Muir taking the honours 24-7.

It's an outcome Cambridge will be particularly keen to reverse this time, buoyed, as they should be, by Saturday's result.

And yet there will be no easy pickings against the Kariega side, who will feed off the positive memories of their previous encounter.

The Friday programme in Makhanda throws up some particularly fascinating match-ups, with Grey High and Hudson Park featuring in the final match of the day at 3.30pm.

The Gqeberha team did not have the best of seasons in 2023 and it will be interesting to see if they can lift the level of their performances this year.

They will start as the favourites against Hudson, but the East London school would like nothing better than to take down one of Eastern Cape's top guns, having had a useful warm-up by outclassing Hangklip 46-7 in the Grens Festival at the weekend.

They know it will be much tougher on Friday.

Dale will be looking to bounce back, but face a testing fixture against the competitive Nico Malan side, who were edged by three points against St Andrew's this weekend.

With both sides preferring an attacking brand of rugby, this should be one of the most entertaining matches of the day.

That fixture will be preceded by a blockbuster showdown between Kingswood and Marlow, with the Makhanda outfit aiming to build on the winning form they showed during last season.

Coach James Winstanley, however, is all too aware of the threat posed by the Cradock team.

"If you don't get into the match early against Marlow you will be in trouble, because they always come out hard and you have to make sure you are up for the challenge from the start," he said.

Besides the Graeme-Selborne clash on Saturday, the main curtain-raiser between St Andrew's and Brandwag will be one of the big clashes of the day.

Both sides will be ready for battle as they continue to find their best combinations after some useful warm-up games at the weekend.

Brandwag competed in the Grens Festival in East London and received excellent preparation with wins over Hangklip (33-7) and Port Rex (36-12).

St Andrew's, though, after their thrilling win over Nico Malan, will be well prepared for another testing fixture.

The 1pm match is another which will provide a proper contest as Pearson continue to prove they can match, and beat, the best in the Eastern Cape when they take on the tough Queen's College combination.

The first team fixtures are:

March 15, Somerset Field

9am: Graeme 2<sup>nd</sup> v Port Alfred High 1<sup>st</sup>; 10.30: Port Rex v Mary Waters; 11.45: Union High v Daniel Pienaar; 1pm: Kingswood v Marlow; 2.15: Dale v Nico Malan; 3.30: Grey High v Hudson Park

March 16, Somerset Field

10.30: Cambridge v Muir; 11.45: Stirling v Framesby; 1pm: Queen's v Pearson; 2.15: St Andrew's v Brandwag; 3.30: Graeme v Selborne

Ends

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