

Our stay at Muir College, South Africa

We left Dublin at 4 pm Irish time on April 15th, and by 1pm the following day had landed at Port Elizabeth. We were greeted by Mr Gouws, his wife Lynne and two children Carter and Emily. We drove 40 minutes from PE International Airport to Muir College in Uitenhage, which was nothing compared to our 21 hours of travelling from Dublin to Port Elizabeth.

We have both settled in extremely well to life at Muir, mainly thanks to the warm welcome we received from both staff and pupils. There is a heavy religious ethos in the school. We pray before and after meals, at assembly, and the entire First XV pray together before games. We train three times a week – Monday's, Tuesday's and Thursday's after school from 2.15 pm to 4pm. Our first few sessions were tough, as we were doing heavy fitness and contact sessions in much hotter conditions than either of us are used to, but coaches Mr Van Wyk and Mr Van Schalkwyk are ensuring that we are keeping our training to high standards. Luke sat out the initial contact training and match v's Union High School during our first week due to a concussion picked up at home prior to our departure.

We travelled 2.5 hours to Graaff-Reinet which meant waking up at 4.30am and returning at 6.30pm. Match day here is very different to home. Each game is played one after the other, beginning with u13 and finishing with 1st XV. This means that by the time the 1st XV game kicks-off a large crowd of parents, school staff and pupils has gathered, consisting of several hundred people and anyone who is there from the beginning is treated to multiple fantastic rugby matches from all age-groups.

William started at second-row for the 2nd XV and was solid, although it is taking us both time to adjust to the game structure here. Our 1st XV lost 21-20, but Muir managed to win 9 out of the 11 matches that day.

Last week we attended the Grey High schools festival at Port Elizabeth playing two matches in three days. This was an incredible opportunity to watch some of South Africa's best rugby schools go head-to-head. First up was Parktown from Johannesburg. William and I were presented with our jerseys and took our seats on the bench before being brought on at half-time, William at lock and Luke on the left-wing. We both had solid performances despite the team losing 26-7 and were rewarded with starting places for the game v's St David's, another strong rugby school from Johannesburg. William started at lock and Luke at full-back in what turned out to be a 25-0 loss.

Muir underperformed but both opposition teams were slightly flattered by the final score. We have also been brought to see many of the Eastern Cape's sights at the weekends, such as the Boardwalk Shopping Centre, Holmeleigh Farm, Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium and Nelson Mandela Municipal University with more trips planned to Jeffrey's Bay and Addo Safari Park. The trip to the stadium was undoubtedly our favourite as we got to see the local Super rugby team the Southern Kings take on the Melbourne Rebels. The Southern Kings recorded a 44-3 victory, their largest ever in Super Rugby.

At Muir we attend six classes every day with a range of subjects such as Maths, English, Afrikaans and Biology. These last from 7.45am until 2pm with two breaks in between.

Each day after sport, we use the gym from 6.30pm until 9pm. Muir has fantastic facilities such as two swimming pools, tennis courts, many cricket fields and a hockey pitch.

The two of us cannot thank Muir College, The King's Hospital and Mr O'Rourke enough for giving us this incredible opportunity to improve ourselves as rugby players and experience the South African way of life and we eagerly await all there is to see during our three-month stay here.

Luke Gilmartin & William Hendy
Current 4th Year students at King's Hospital