Written by Pat Clifton
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Life University got a taste of life in the College Premier League Sunday when they met Navy in Charlotte. The Running Eagles won the encounter 31-17, but unlike many of their non-CPL collegiate matches, this one was tightly contested.

Life jumped out to an early 10-0 lead (business as usual), but Navy rebounded to close the gap at 10-7. The Running Eagles would slot a penalty to take a six-point lead into halftime and score first again in the second stanza to extend their lead to 20-7, but Navy again responded with a converted try. Life outscored the Midshipmen 12-3 the rest of the way, but Navy made the Running Eagles work for everything they got, something they haven't often had to do.

“It was a great match for us. It’s good for the group,” said Life coach and director of rugby Dan Payne. “We haven’t been able to find a match with our peers yet that could really push these guys, and it was nice to get that today. They definitely got that from Navy today.”

Life, this being their first season fielding a fully undergraduate side, have a lot of youth, including eight freshman starters against Navy.

“They got a chance to play, and we’re still getting patient with the ball and learning that it’s safer to play another phase than try to score on that immediate possession if you have a line break,” said Payne.

“We know that the truth is we’re a young team and we’ve got a lot of growing and improving to do and everybody in our program knows that we’re not quite up to the hype yet. It’s a process. It’s a long-term plan. It’s just year number one, and we’ve got to go through these types of experiences.”

If winning 32-17 over a solid CPL program is an experience Life has to “get through”, perhaps the hype is warranted. When pushed to say something glowing about his team’s performance, Payne talked about the play of his young front row.

“I was really happy with our scrum. Our loosehead, hooker and tighthead were all freshmen, 18 and 19 year old kids, and I know coach Mike Flanagan always has a strong scrum and I was nervous about that, not sure how we would step up, but we were able to provide a good enough platform and won enough ball to do some things with it.”

Up next for both Navy and Life are their March 5 debuts in the upstart College Premier League. The Midshipmen prep for Ohio State and Life for Tennessee.