



## **RFU Representatives Report – May**

After what has seemed a long and tiresome season for players, coaches and volunteers alike we hope you are enjoying a well-earned off-season. However, with the implementation of the Future Competitions Structure (FCS) we hope that all clubs are excited by the prospect of playing new teams, more local derbies and embracing the challenge of league rugby with both aspiration and jeopardy returning. It is important to remember that FCS was introduced following consultation with players who have a desire to play less league fixtures, a meaningful cup competition and less travel time. Whilst some clubs may be frustrated by still having to travel as far or feel they deserved to be playing at a higher level, FCS has been initiated to benefit the game as a whole. We hope that the structure serves its purpose by providing a fresh start and players and clubs make the most of the opportunity. The fixtures for the new season will be published on 15/16 June.

### **Lower XV's joining the league structure**

As a Constituent Body (CB), Yorkshire voted against allowing Lower XV's to enter the league. However, it is important to report that as part of FCS, 96 clubs from around the country applied to enter their local leagues and most met the criteria. Following the vote in Yorkshire, the competitions committee have recognised that 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> XV teams want to play competitive fixtures and some excellent work is taking place behind the scenes to implement Merit tables to facilitate this.

### **Adult Male Game**

There has clearly been a decline in playing numbers within the adult male game and the statistics demonstrate this. Players are playing less, and clubs have used more players in their 1<sup>st</sup> XV than before. Ted and Joe have been invited to sit on an RFU oversight task and finish group to looking at increasing playing numbers next season. A group of RFU staff members have been seconded by the RFU to investigate how the downward curve in participation can be halted. They will carry out research and feedback to the working group on a weekly basis. It is hoped that by the start of pre-season the RFU will be able to support clubs and CB's with examples of good practice, campaigns and initiatives to increase playing numbers.

### **Game On**

The contact game (Game On) working group that Joe was chairing has concluded. Several recommendations were made including a framework of Game On rules, a Merit table scoring system and support for developing front row players and match officials. The focus of the group was to encourage more fixtures to be played when a team could not fulfil a full 15-a-side game. It is hoped that these recommendations can make a difference in the forthcoming season.

### **The County Championship**

Ted and Joe would like to start by congratulating both the Men and Women senior county teams on an excellent County Championship campaign. To do the double over Lancashire in the 'Grand Day Out' at West Park Leeds was a fantastic achievement. Unfortunately, both teams missed out on a final at Twickenham on points difference and a bonus point respectively. A big thank you must go to the players, coaches and management teams for their effort and commitment to the programme. It once again demonstrates the importance of county rugby to all involved and the role it has to play in the community game.

## **Women's Rugby World Cup (WRWC) 2025**

The RFU were delighted to be chosen to host the 2025 WRWC in England with support from the government. A decision over host cities and venues will be made very soon and it is hoped that Twickenham can be at capacity for the final. This is another major step forward for the women's game and will hopefully continue to drive interest and participation in the women's and girl's game.

## **Women's AP15's Redevelopment 3.0**

The Women's Performance Management Group (WPMG) are looking to re-develop the AP15's competition to further enhance the women's game in England. The aim is to increase commercial sustainability and performance by potentially reducing the number of teams in the competition to between 8 and 10 and ensuring a competitive balance as well as a geographical spread. At the RFU Council meeting in April it was agreed that WPMG would take control of the redevelopment process and devolution of the minimum operating standards needed to enter the league.

## **RFU Financial Outlook**

It was reported at the last RFU Council meeting that finances are in good health due to the sale of £80m worth of debenture shares. However, operating costs are under significant pressure due to a price hike in utility bills and insurance. Following a loss (£3.8m) in 2021-22 post-covid, which is usually a breakeven year due to only two home Six Nations matches and three Autumn Internationals, the 2022-23 season is typically a large profit year. In 22-23, there are four Autumn Internationals at Twickenham, three home Men's Six Nations fixtures and one Women's International. The projection for 22-23 however, is now a £6m loss due to the increase in operating costs. This is followed by a loss-making year due to the RWC in Autumn 2023.

## **England Men's Head Coach**

Work is already well underway, and a number of succession consultation meetings have taken place with players, DoR's and other nations regarding the next appointment. This work is ongoing and will take place behind the scenes as the England Men's team build towards the world cup.

## **Other developments - Global Calendar and Professional Game Agreement (PGA)**

Work has been ongoing by World Rugby to develop a global calendar to ensure all nations are aligned in relation to their playing calendar. A partial launch is due in 2024 with a full launch in 2026. It is aimed at aligning the Northern and Southern Hemisphere's playing calendars to ensure international rugby is played at the same time. They will look to integrate the emerging nations with a tiered approach that would include promotion and relegation from

The PGA is due for renewal in 2024 and constant dialogue is taking place between Premier Rugby Ltd and the 13 clubs. The PGA is in place to ensure player release for international fixtures and is a substantial financial commitment for the RFU.

The next and final RFU Council meeting of the season takes place at the Lensbury Club in Teddington on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> June along with the AGM. We hope as many clubs as possible can join us either in person or via Teams as the AGM will take place in a hybrid format.

Ted and Joe would like to wish you all a relaxing summer and hope you are excited for the new season when it arrives.