



LANCASHIRE COUNTY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

Greater Manchester Club Cluster Group Meeting of Lancashire County RFU

Held at Eccles RUFC on Wednesday 1st February 2017.

The President opened the meeting of approximately forty members from sixteen Clubs and other organisations, with an outline of events initiated by the Lancashire County RFU in Coaching and Player Development which included the Academy programme and the development of the "Royals". He urged all Clubs to engage and take advantage of all the initiatives which are in the main open to every and more importantly are free to all our Clubs.

The Chairman covered various new initiatives with regard to Volunteer Reward. The online Groundsman Connect scheme and a change to the Keith Kent Groundsman visits which now are not nominated by the County but are open to an online bid from the Club. Clubs were reminded that the Nat West Work Force scheme was under subscribed by Lancashire Clubs and there were still four days left to get an application in.

In answer to the question which Clubs could report an increase in their player base this season several responded with heartening numbers.

Aspull reported that from a player base of eleven three years ago they were now fielding two sides and had started to recruit junior and girls. This turn around caused by focusing on bringing enjoyment and fun back and not worrying about league points and results. Players enjoying the social activities as a group which the Club had introduced, they also felt that the decline in the playing numbers was linked to when payment to players was introduced.

Oldham were in a much more healthy position this season due to improved Coaching throughout the Club and good committed Volunteers who were valued by the Club. The introduction of Standing Order payment for subscriptions for player membership brought a feeling of ownership and commitment to the Club.

Tyldesley who had suffered in the last couple of years due to the modern player not willing to commit time to the game. Whilst playing in the North Lancs/Cumbria League they saw playing numbers decline from three side to one by taking a level transfer what in effect was a relegation to South Lancs/Cheshire Two they have turned the corner and are now back to running three sides and an increase in Volunteers.

Eccles raised an interesting point that if Clubs analyse their membership age profile they will note the changes in education 30/40 years ago were overnight School Rugby almost disappeared having a significant knock on effect to Colts Club rugby has over recent years has been one of the effects of playing numbers. The resurgence of Colts Rugby dovetailing with the growth in Clubs of mini/junior sections 15/20 years has gone some way to addressing the Schools problem. The net result of this has created a two generation gap which meant Veteran players have hung on waiting for younger players to come through and also there is a lack of Volunteers.

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Sedgley Park have found that encouraging girlfriends, wives and children of players to be part of the match day experience using the Clubs as a family with an outside safe fenced play area for Children was beneficial in keeping players in the game. The use of social media to arrange meet ups and get togethers for a drink and chat.

Southport were of the opinion that each club had a realistic player target player base and maintaining that was fundamental to Club growth in the community the provision of first rate facilities is a massive plus. Growing the game with Women's teams and Friday night Vets Rugby was a way of increasing playing numbers.

Alan James felt that a vibrant County Cup Competition could engender more interest, there seem to be little interest due to the lack of space in the structured season. It was pointed out that the Intermediate League Cup was a huge success financially to clubs and great interest from players.

Debate as to the impact of regulation relating to payment to players was not considered to be any assistance in player recruitment. But a return to a game based on social activity and enjoyment more than competition seems to be what young players want. Travel and time away from family, seven day working patterns all have an impact on player availability. It was raised by Ernie Neely that that the North should be considered a special case by the RFU and a sub group in the North should be set up to put pressure on the RFU to for additional funding to compete with the Rugby League influence in the North.

Lostock ask for advice as to how to recruit players now that they have access to their new facilities but have a player base of nil. The Chairman pointed out that there were several new Clubs in the Manchester area would be able to give valuable advice, the RDO's would assist. Alan James asked when would the impact of the All Schools programme be felt in Clubs. The Chairman pointed out that if clubs engaged and involved themselves it would be immediate his club had recruited 40 junior members in the first year from the two Widnes Schools involved in the programme.

A question as to what constituted an "AT RISK" club was answered by the Chairman, there was no one factor but a gut feeling from visits to the club, poor results, conceded games lack of response by club officers to Board members and the RDO/CRC. The County can help in many ways but need to be able to communicate with the clubs, we can't offer advice if it is not wanted. It is interesting that the Clubs that have folded recently never asked for advice before taking that decision.

The President thanked all for attending and closed the meeting at 9:15pm.

