

**LANCASHIRE COUNTY RFU**  
**MERSEYSIDE CLUB CLUSTER GROUP**  
**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD AT LIVERPOOL ST HELENS RUFC**  
**ON WEDNESDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2017.**

The meeting was opened by the CB Chairman David Herriman, who welcomed members from ten clubs and four different organisations. He introduced the Lancashire President, Tom Fitzgerald who gave a brief update on the latest County initiatives in Player and Coach Development. He was followed by Ken Andrews, RFU Council member who chairs a RFU sub-committee looking at Volunteer Recognition and Reward.

The President outlined the five main initiatives currently being run and supported by the County.

- Coach Mentoring scheme were by a highly qualified coach spends five sessions in a club develop and assist the Club Coaching Staff.
- Regular Coach Development Workshops open and free to all Club Coaching and Schools Rugby Staff in the County.
- Annual Coaching Conference usually Staffed by high profile professional Coaches.
- Player Development Academy, who are mentored on a one to one basis a potential quality young players who are not part of the RFU Sale Academy. There are currently fifteen players
- The "Royals" a County Representative side for players from Level 5 and below, nine clubs nominated fifty players for consideration for selection for the first game at Christmas. This was a great success and it is hoped that a second game will take place at the end of the season.

Ken Andrews reminded those clubs present that the RFU produced monthly Community Game Update highlighting key initiatives from the RFU

- NatWest Rugby Force 2017, so far only 10 Lancashire clubs have applied. Last season 20 Clubs received £500 and one an additional 2K . To receive this money clubs are asked to attend a workshop and commit to an improvement project to the Club house or Grounds over the weekend of 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> June.
- Mitsubishi Motors are the new RFU sponsor of a Volunteer Recognition Award program and are promoting a 'Club Volunteer of the Year Award'. Information about the simple online application system is now open to all Clubs and will close on 20<sup>th</sup> February. Nationally 42 award events are being planned with two being held in Lancashire in June. Successful winners will be invited to an expenses paid 'Black Tie Dinner' at Twickenham in September.
- Lancashire County are in the process of appointing a new CB Volunteer Co-ordinator and deputy to co-ordinate the work done in the CB and in clubs. They will be tasked to co-ordinate the two Volunteer Award evenings scheduled for 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April . Nomination forms will be sent out in the next couple of weeks. They will conduct an audit of Club Volunteer Co-ordinators as held on GMS and are looking organise two workshops in March/April.

The third item of business discussed at length was the apparent decline in Adult Rugby players.

The debated was opened by Firwood Waterloo .They felt that whilst 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> teams need to play in competitive competition, rugby at 3<sup>rd</sup> team level and below should be played as a more friendly and social game with fewer regulations that at present. This view had some support,

Ruskin Park expressed their view that travel was a major issue in the NW Intermediate Leagues. LSH and Wigan both spoke in support of this view as a major obstacle in fulfilling lower team fixtures.

Callum Donnelly of Merseyside Sport Development informed the meeting that he had surveyed all local 3<sup>rd</sup> Team players and from the 60 responses the view was that 30 Miles or less was the preferred distance to travel for away games and a more flexible interpretation of the Rules and numbers per team etc would be of benefit.

NWIRUL Reps pointed out that most of what was being requested was already part of their Rules any change to time and day the match takes place and numbers involved are acceptable if both sides agree.

The issue of 3<sup>rd</sup> XV social sides being required to play 1<sup>st</sup> XV's was a concern and there was a view that clubs were allowed to hide in the NWIRUL gaining easy wins. Dave Clarke pointed out that the RFU or Lancashire could not dictate to a club where it played their Rugby.

Orrell said that if sides who obviously should not be in the NWIRUL where in the RFU Leagues it would help them to find some consistency as currently they were only guaranteed 21 fixtures in North Lancs League.

In answer to a question of having more Cup Competition or introducing sevens tournaments, there was little support.

The RFU Staff defended the statistics which showed more 15 a side Adult Rugby was played last season than the previous one, and in answer to a question NWIRUL stated that in England the percentage of conceded games in London was more than 50%, in the SW more than 30% with the NE and Yorkshire similar and in the NW only 10%.

It was also pointed out that whilst three Clubs Pendle, Hutton and St Edwards had folded last year five new Clubs had joined the County; Leyland, Mancunians, Wythenshawe, Liverpool Tritons and Liverpool Engineers. It is also hoped that Manchester Medics and Liverpool University would become full RFU voting status this year.

LSH bemoaned the decline of Rugby in schools but sadly accepted that in most state schools, school sport in general was not prioritised. It was pointed out that the RFU had introduced the All Schools programme to boost rugby in local schools. 45 schools in Lancashire are in the programme and the key to success is the strong links with their local dedicated clubs. Widnes are a shining example, as they who supported enthusiastically the All Schools project in the town and as a consequence have recruited 40 players to the Junior section which includes a u15' girls side.

Orrell are still finding the overlap of the RU/RL seasons a challenge to their Junior sides and feel that the RDO Staff should revert to targeting primary Schools in an attempt to catch and enthuse children early. Widnes suggested their answer to the problem was that each age group is only allowed to register 4 players who have dual registration. Waterloo felt that the pressure from Rugby playing schools on 16/17's and exams at that age was a major problem for Colts team development.

Again the Rules and Regulations of the NWIRUL were raised and it was pointed out that regulations could be changed at their AGM by a vote of Clubs when amendments have been put in writing prior to the meeting. It was also apparent that some clubs were not au fait with the current Rules and Regulations.

Widnes stated that from a situation three years ago when struggling to field three side they now had an abundance of players this brought about by having three places on the Club Committee reserved for Players and the Executive taking note of their ideas and concerns. With a very active recruiting strategy targeting parents of mini/junior players they had found the answer was on their own doorstep. Clubs need active Volunteers keep players informed with a vibrant social scene and use of social media.

Callum Donnelly agreed with this view, Cricket has gone through a very lean time of late and was in serious decline, listening to players who stated they wanted a Friendly, social and flexible, fun games of shorter duration. They have now introduced many changes and even shortened the season.

It was evident that where clubs are actively involving players via social media in the running of their Clubs and by listening to their requests it is possible to reverse the current trend.

In answer to a question what had been done for the clubs that folded both the Chairman and the RFU Development staff assured Clubs that the 'at risks' clubs are regularly visited and a great deal of time and money is expended trying to support them. However, at the end of the day Clubs need to find the Volunteers to buy in to the All Schools program and the free Coaching and Player development that is available.

With a robust debate still continuing the President eventually closed the meeting at 9:10pm.

#### **ATTENDANCE RECORD.**

<b>Lancashire County Committee:</b>	President, Chairman, Treasurer, Two RFU Reps, Chairman of C&CR Committee, Stuart Kohler C&CR,
<b>RFU North League Committee:</b>	Dave Clarke, Ian Scott-Brown
<b>NWIRUL Committee:</b>	Andy Thompson, John Powell
<b>Merseyside Sports Development Dept:</b>	Callum Donnelly
<b>RFU Development Staff:</b>	Dave Southern, Andy Soutar, John Fodster.

#### **Clubs.**

Littleborough :	Brian Hurst,
Liverpool St Helens:	Kate Poulton, Ray French, Paul Poulton, David Matthews, Dennis Woodcock.
Orrell:	Jim Lloyd, Graham Winstanley, Bill Lyon.
Oldham:	Iain MacCorcandale.
Ruskin Park:	Ben Mousley ,Stuart Fisher.
Sefton:	Bill Jones, Peter Merriman.
Firwood Waterloo:	Graham Moore, Mark Frett, Paul Weare, Steve Wood.
West Park:	John Bradbury, Colin Hilton, Mike Simpson.
Widnes:	Sharon Miller, Neill Street.
Wigan:	Martin Rigby.