

MINUTES OF A GENERAL MEETING
LANCASHIRECOUNTY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION LTD
HELD VIA MEDIUM OF ZOOM 8th APRIL 2021

President Gill Burns MBE welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that it had been a difficult year but Rugby would be back and thanking everyone from the clubs regarding all the background work that was going on regarding the return to rugby.

1. **Apologies:**

K Potter S Whittingham

2. **Minutes of the Financial AGM and General Meeting held on 2nd December 2020 via Zoom**

These were accepted.

3. **Matters arising**

No matters arising.

4. **Future Competitions Review Proposals**

i. Ken Andrews – Timescale

Ken briefly explained the Proposed Structure as outlined below. The process had been going on for the past two years and Council members were now being asked to approve the new structure. The meeting that the vote was due to be taken at was on the 16th April and there were to be two meetings before then for further discussion. The meeting tonight was to ask the clubs present on their views with regards to how the Council members might vote.

To clarify:

The principles on which this review and its recommendations are based are:

That the future competitions structure should be;

Player centred considering player welfare and needs

Appropriate travel time and distance

Quality of player experience and quality of competition

Club sustainability

Approvals for the proposals will be made at RFU Council Meeting which will be held on Friday 16th April. However, Council Members are being asked yet again to participate in further meetings with RFU personnel on Saturday morning and Monday evening.

To help us decide which way to vote Dave, Rob and I are keen to hear your views this evening and will take note of the results of any survey vote taken this evening.

What has been already approved at Council are;

- a. Implementation of new structure in season 2022/23
- b. The size of leagues at Levels 5 and below to be capped at 12, and at Levels 3 & 4 to be capped at 14
- c. At all levels there will be a protected two-week break over the Christmas period and protected weekend breaks (at points to be determined through the season)
- d. National knockout cups will be introduced (per level) from level 5 down with optional entry for teams
- e. A rapid review of competition structures will take place every three years

For Decision on 16th April:

Council Members are asked to approve the recommendations below:

1. That, from season 2022/23, the English Clubs Championship at Level 3 and below will consist of:

- a. One league at Level 3
- b. Three leagues at Level 4
- c. Six leagues at Level 5
- d. Twelve leagues at Level 6
- e. approximately sixteen leagues at Level 7*
- f. approximately 20 leagues at Level 8*
- g. at Level 9 and below will be determined by the relevant organising committee*

*Exact number of leagues to be determined by final size of leagues, number of team entries and local need.

It is proposed that at all levels leagues would be organised aligned to the key FCS principles (minimising travel, player welfare/need, quality of competition and club sustainability), and that at Level 4 to 6 this would be implemented on a regional basis, whereas at Level 7 and below this would be implemented on a broadly Constituent Body basis (retaining some flexibility where it makes sense for clubs on CB borders to play in different CBs).

2. That, from season 2022/23, cup rugby will be delivered after the league season (per level, from L5 and below) with mid-season (optional) entry for teams. The competition format will be determined

such that pools will operate at Level 5 and top tier of Level 6, and with regional knockout waterfall competitions at bottom tier of Level 6 and for Level 7 and below, all culminating in a 'Community Game Finals Event'.

3. That from season 2022/23, Lower XV teams will be able to play in the English Clubs Championship up to and including Level 7 subject to specific criteria to be set out in the RFU Regulations.

You have received the documents from the Secretary and we look forward to hearing your views and trying to answer your questions.

Ken then handed over to Howard Hughes for a further explanation regarding specific leagues.

ii. Explanation of structure.

Howard presented a series of slides showing various effects of what might happen dependent on what clubs agreed to do and what might happen as a result of the options. The RFU had produced a set of criteria that had to be met by Lower XVs if they were to be allowed into the new structure.

Howard emphasised that all the scenarios were just that as nothing had yet been decided.

The scenarios would all depend on what clubs decided to do eg ADM clubs return to the RFU Leagues or not, the inclusion of Lower XVs or not plus the inclusion of the IOM clubs was also not known but whatever decision was made had to keep in mind the 4 principles of the new structure :

Player centred considering player welfare and needs

Appropriate travel time and distance

Quality of player experience and quality of competition

Club sustainability

There was also a proposed Cup Competition which again was difficult to judge as would depend on what clubs entered but could possibly be L5 – Tier based, L6 knockout/waterfall? L7 Waterfall then knockout linked to regions, but again nothing had yet been decided and there were only possible scenarios.

iii. Questions from the floor:

There followed a discussion about the information that had been provided.

Steve from Broughton Pk asked for clarification about the question about promotion and relegation, after 21/22 there would be no relegation.

Burnage raised the question about why two clubs on the same points had ended up in different leagues, DC said that all the promotion and relegation had been done by calculations and no club had had the same number of points.

There was a query about the Cup Competition as to whether it would be regional but DC again said that a lot more work needed to be done and nothing had yet been decided.

ISB queried what would happen if a club chose not to enter the Cup Competitions as the league games ended in March , the answer was that in effect those clubs season would be over if they chose not to enter , although Lower XV may be allowed in.

The next question raised was concerning the possibility of the IOM clubs , would there be any money for travel , and if the RFU did not help then would Lancashire be able to help. DC replied that if the RFU were not providing money then Lancashire would be unable to as their funds were provided by the RFU.

Martin from Preston again raised the question regarding the relegation issue , would this be applicable to the future as the information from the RFU did not seem to make it clear, he was concerned that spectators would not maintain their interest if 'nothing to play for' and the season would not be competitive.

The reply to this was that everything was still undecided , negotiations were still going on with the Premiership and Championship clubs and what the out come form that was would have an effect on lower Leagues.

The next query from Alan Marsland was regarding the lower XVs , if they entered the Leagues then what would happen to the NW Intermediate Leagues , DC answered that that would be dependent on what the Management of the NW Intermediate Leagues decided to do.

The next question was about promotion from L7 to L6 , would this be regional? DC said that the NCA would not agree to this in the original proposal so there was not a compromise and any club promoted would be placed in the nearest cluster.

Another question was raised about travel funding , again DC said that there were no plans in place to give funds to clubs , however there was a fund that clubs could apply to but there was no guarantee that a club would automatically receive funding.

A further question was raised regarding the Lower XVs being admitted to the leagues , what consultation had the RFU done regarding this? DC replied that the RFU had written to clubs , 31 clubs in the North had said they would enter their lower XV , however there was some concern as dependent in the area it could mean that L2 players could end up playing against L8 players , KA then interjected to say that it was very much a regional concern , eg the SW L7 clubs had very few Lower XVs and so the problem does not arise. MD then said that there would be a 'ceiling' to try to stop this happening.

A question was raised about the voting tonight , it would not be a binding vote but was merely an attempt to find out the clubs feelings in order to help the Council members and how they should vote. At the Competitions Committee any vote had to have a 2/3 majority but tonight it would be a straight majority.

Nick from Rossendale asked about the ADM clubs and what they wanted to do, as stated earlier they may or may not vote to rejoin the RFU but the vote tonight was not binding and was merely to aid the Council Members.

Barry from Lostock asked that if at the end of next season , would a club with only one team have to go on the ADM Leagues , he was assured that he would still be in the RFU Leagues as clubs were free to determine what system they wanted to play in.

i. The meeting then moved on to the voting:

iv. Question to all

Do you agree to 2nd/Lower XVs being allowed into the RFU League Structure?

92% Against 8% For

v. Question to L3 – L6 Clubs

Do you agree to the changes in the League Structure as set out in the Documentation

75% Agree 25% Disagree

Would you wish to enter your Lower XVS in the RFU Structure if allowed?

18% agree 82% Disagree

vi. Question to <L7 RFU Clubs

Do you agree to the changes to the League Structure as set out in the documentation

40% Agree 60% disagree

vii. Question to all ADM Clubs

Would you be prepared to rejoin the RFU leagues?

47% Yes 53% No

viii. Question to all RFU League Clubs

Would you be prepared to enter the RFU Cup Competitions?

88% Yes 12% No

ix. Open Discussion using hand function/chat feature

There were no questions as there had been a lengthy discussion previously but all had the opportunity to ask further questions, but no takers

5. Correspondence

There was nothing appertaining to this meeting.

6. Date and Time of Next meeting

TBC The next meeting would be the AGM

7. **AOB**

- ISB informed the meeting that there would be information sent out the next day regarding Women's Rugby.
- KA said that there would be information released tomorrow regarding the AGE Grade rugby and what they would be allowed to do over the Summer.
- There was a query regarding when fixtures would be released as if a club had a long trip and wanted to arrange accommodation etc then the sooner the better. DC said he would pass this on to the Competitions Committee who had a meeting the following Tuesday.
- Martin from Preston Grasshoppers would like it on record that he had been 'dreading' the zoom meeting but would like to commend Lancashire for organising and running a very professional meeting and they were to be commended.