

# LANCASHIRE COUNTY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

## ANNUAL REPORT

2022-23

### THE SECRETARY'S OPENING REMARKS

My first job is to thank our President, Brian Stott, who has been very busy up and down the County visiting our clubs and supporting them wherever possible. Brian is the first to admit that a phone call from him on a Monday morning is not what most clubs want to receive. As the Secretary to the Disciplinary Committee those calls usually precede a hearing, this season has been a little different and often they have involved a thank you for hospitality. He has been supported throughout his term as President by his wife, Annette and we owe the a great gratitude for promoting the County so well.

As I mentioned above his other role as Disciplinary Secretary has kept him very busy this season and sadly for our game has seen an increase in youth cases that either involve coaches or parents. As Nigel Owens was fond of saying "this is not soccer" and I would call on all clubs to police this behaviour better and support the referee, whatever level, club or society he represents.

To Rugby, both our Senior Mens and Womens XVs got to play on the hallowed turf of Twickenham in their respective Senior County Championship Finals. The Womens XV gave us a great start to the day beating Buckinghamshire with the Mens XV falling short by just two points in the Bill Beaumont Cup to Kent. We will be back to claim what we feel is rightfully ours.

My congratulations and thanks for all who administered, coached and most importantly, played for the County during the season.

In last seasons Annual Report I have noted I wrote "*The organisation of the Competition by the "professional" staff at Twickenham following this campaign could be at best described as poor.*" It has not improved, if anything it has got worse.

Our Ladies XV played away against Leicestershire and North Midlands, with the Mens XV having an away game in the Northern Group against Hertfordshire. These games come at a cost and the funding from the RFU is woefully inadequate to the point that many Counties as well as Lancashire feel there is a plan to let County Representative Rugby wither on the vine due to lack of funding.

This will not happen.

The U20s Competition has faired even worse with the plan to level up the Competition actually level it down. Howard has covered the reasons in his report but if the regulations remain we have a difficult decision as to whether we enter. This is not a financial decision but one of credibility of the competition.

Our Royals had their usually run out at West Park over the Christmas period in their annual fixture against the Anti Assassins, my thanks to all players and coaches for putting this together and to the AAs for providing stout opposition.

Again, financially times are hard with funding centrally from the RFU being inadequate, with only 29% of RFU income being distributed to the grassroots game. The professional staff at the RFU should understand that the strength of a tree comes from its roots, if they are not fed the tree will wither. However, we have a good financial team who look after the funding we get. The team of Chris Smail, Paul Deakin, Stephen Briers, and Catherine Ryan are thanked for their continued work for the County and ensuring that the limited funds we are given are used wisely.

Our Mini & Junior Committee have had an excellent season, its been a real turnaround with new and energetic volunteers joining to spread the workload. Ian and Christine Spivey, along with their team are thanked and hopefully the forthcoming season will go from strength to strength.

The Club & Community committee is our vital link between ourselves and our clubs. I pass on my thanks to Malcolm Worsley and his team for the worthy job they have done his season.

In a few weeks time we will see a Lancastrian become the President of the RFU. Rob Briers will step up to that role, a role that those of us who have worked with him feel he rightly deserves. I have no doubt that in his global travels he'll expound the virtues of Lancashire and his home club, West Park. Well done Rob and of course Anne-Marie, I hope you both enjoy the forthcoming season.

We also have Ken Andrews and Dave Clarke looking after the Counties interests at Twickenham. The many sub committes and groups they are involved with takes up a lot of their time. Ken steps down this season and his replacement will be Paul Deakin who has some big shoes to follow. Ken's Rugby CV is far too long to list here having started with Schools Rugby in 1973 at the start of his teaching career which has just culminated with his retirement after eleven years representing Lancashire on the RFU Council. A great friend and mentor to me and others and above all a gentlemen.

Thanks to Ken & Dave for representing us so well.

The County Schools Union under the Chairmanship of John O'Ryan with Secretarial duties being done by Robbie Jones. Schools Rugby is bouncing back after the pandemic and its good to see new schools coming to the game. The County has invested in schools clubs links this season with coaching and mentoring and hope to continue the project.

Thanks to Mike Dale and Helen Duggan for their work with the Womens and Girls players and teams in the County. This is an area of high investment by our central governing body and something we should always strive to be ahead of the curve. Also thanks to Christine Spivey for working on the sections social media postings.

I make no bones about the fact that Club rugby at many levels of league, age and gender is suffering. Our governing body is not helping itself or us at times. My main example of this is the debacle of the tackle height regulations. A serious error in communication from someone, somewhere lead to national furore over an issue that if debated and discussed sensibly would not have become the Aunt Sally that it did.

Our lower teams within our clubs are wonderfully looked after by the NOWIRUL merit leagues, administered by Fred Swarbrick and John Powell and I thank them for all their hard work and Tommy Hughes our County Representative to their committee.

Once again the Disciplinary committee have been busier than ever, sadly again things are on the up, gladly they are our best fundraiser. Thanks to John Greenwood and his team for dispensing justice.

My personal gratitude's go firstly to Brian Stott the assistant secretary for covering for me when I have been unable to attend meetings and being a sounding board for decisions. Secondly, our Chairman, Dave Clarke, Treasurer, Paul Deakin and Director of Rugby, Howard Hughes, a triumvirate who have been invaluable to me. To Carol Baker for keeping us all Safe, Gill Burns for so ably looking after our Volunteers and Gary Morgan for ensuring our Mental Health is looked after. Anne Clarke for her help with minute taking, communications and the website which continues to grow and lastly Anne-Marie Briers, our Membership Secretary, both ladies are invaluable.

To club administrators at all levels, to my County colleagues, players and members, as ever, summer well.

**Mark Downs**

*Honorary Secretary*

## **REPRESENTATIVE RUGBY**

The U20s Season can be summed up as “disappointing”, not due to any failures on the pitch as such indeed a young squad played some good rugby. The disappointment stemmed from the new RFU Regulation not allowing County's to select players associated with Clubs from above Level 5. In our case that meant no players from Fylde, Sedgley Park and Hoppers. Our Trial went well but we certainly saw a drop in standard. Foolishly? we followed the new Regulation to the letter and after our Trial we selected 26 players with Levels 5 to 9 covered. Our first trip to Northumberland saw some interesting selections from our Hosts but we disappointed to come away with a loss despite scoring 4 Tries. Our next game we hosted Cheshire and won a cracker against 2 evenly matched sides which meant our next game against heavy favourites Durham would be crucial in terms of progression. Our squad by this time was looking threadbare due to injuries and we had call several players in to ensure we had 22 players on the day.

Durham choc full of Durham University students all registered at the same Level 7 Club (who finished 7<sup>th</sup> in their League) proved too strong and we suffered a comprehensive defeat. Our scheduled final game against Yorkshire had to be conceded when it was clear we would not have enough players fit and available and more importantly not enough Front Row players. We have never conceded a game before at this level, indeed not many games at this level have ever been conceded but we were not alone as 4 other games suffered the same fate this season. Its worth to Note that 11 of the 23 competing County's suffered point deductions for breaching the new Regulation which seems to point to an issue with the Regulation.

On the Senior Mens front we reached another final (our 38<sup>th</sup> in the County Championship 138 year old history) but we just got pipped at the post (no pun intended) in a pulsating final by Kent who won their first title since 1927. We had an excellent Group stage with victories on the road at Cheshire, Hertfordshire (that great “Northern” county) and hard fought but deserved win over the “old enemy” Yorkshire on a lovely day at Sedgley Park. New Lead Coach Alex Loney was ably assisted by Stephen Briers and Paul Arnold. Guy Lovgreen stood in at Team Manager with Chair of Selectors John Greenwood helping Guy fill the large shoes of previous Team Manager Steve Rigby who stepped down for health reasons this season. We need to mention that Skipper Danny Birchall also helped on with some of the Coaching as well as leading on the Field and recording his 30<sup>th</sup> Cap for the County, quite an achievement. Mark Nelson was still involved as Coach Co-ordinator and provided his wealth of knowledge and experience to a younger looking squad than in the past.

With some in the RFU hell bent on reducing/removing County Representative Rugby you can rest assured that this county will continue to support one of the oldest competitions in World Rugby.

## **Howard Hughes**

Director of Rugby Development

## **WOMENS & GIRLS RUGBY**

### **Women's and girls club and competition report**

#### **Club development**

The focus of this year has been the development of U12s rugby. Lancashire has funding and successfully secured additional funding to support the development of u12s rugby.

Through Try It rugby it has delivered a combination of school based and club holiday camps for U12s, with the aim of transitioning girls into club u12 rugby. Try It has also been supported by a newly recruited young volunteer to help deliver parts of the programme.

The plans have been agile to adapt to each school and work with clubs on helping them achieve their aims. We have managed to support 10 clubs across Lancashire and linked in with twice as many schools. There are some additional camps taking place at the time of this report. It is hoped that we can learn from the success. There have been some success with 10% of pupils transferring across to the club but also some challenges with engaging with the schools in areas where clubs are based.

We hope to build on this work next season.

All clubs were invited to webinars by the RFU on building strategies to grow the women's and girls game. Learning from good practice that other clubs have adopted. More than 15 clubs in Lancashire took part and have since been offered vouchers for coaching awards. With the focus moving towards the 2025 world cup Lancashire will be creating a women's and girls' strategy, aiming to build a legacy for the games. One area is understanding how we can improve the offer within our clubs and prevent the drain to league rugby within the North.

The RFU ran a competition to encourage the competition of games, including friendlies in the spirit and core values of rugby. The winner of the competition got to compete at Twickenham in a community take over event. Southport Ladies won the North competition and represented Lancashire and North rugby on 1<sup>st</sup> May at Twickenham, in a day of competition friendly rugby. An experience many of the players will never get again.

#### **Competition**

Three teams were promoted within Lancashire this year –

- Ormskirk was promoted from NC3 to NC2
- Liverpool St Helen's were promoted from NC2 to NC1
- Southport were promoted from NC1 to Championship North 2

Congratulations to all teams that took part in the leagues and well done to the league champions!

This year we ran the first Women's Lancashire Cup in several years. The competition will be reviewed before being run next season after many walk overs and feedback on some, certainly not all,

of the finals not being appropriately matched. However, that should not and must not take away from the players commitment on the final's day. On 23 April eight teams came together at Liverpool St Helen's with a large supporting crowds and showed how passionate we are in Lancashire for women's rugby.

The winners were

- Lancashire Cup – Liverpool St Helen's
- Lancashire Trophy – Trafford MV
- Lancashire Plate – Southport
- Lancashire Bowl – Ormskirk

Congratulations to Liverpool St Helens who competed in two national finals this year both times facing Ding Crusaders. Their U18s were crowned national finals at Six Ways in April, learning the lessons from last year's final and coming back to the North West as Champions beating Ding Crusaders 38-5.

A massive well done to their women's team who also reached the National final in the junior Papa John's cup. In a highly competitive game, they lost out 24-12 to Ding Crusaders from the South West.

## **U16 DPP**

A new concept this year for girls' rugby was U16s Development Player Pathways (DPP). Although this has been run in the boys game it was a new concept to girl's rugby and did not fit within either the leads for competition and club development or representative rugby. So, we worked together to get it set up.

It is a large undertaking from Lancashire who is running the programme on behalf of the RFU with a dedicated funding stream. Plans were being worked up through the off season and cleared by the RFU player development team in late Summer. The trials took place in November and 50 girls were offered a position on the programme.

The focus of the DPP is around development of the players and coaching as well as bringing female coaches into the programme. The programme did not come without its initial teething problems, including finding appropriate venues to accommodate the players as not to clash with club rugby session. Thanks must go to the clubs who helped accommodate the sessions, Burnley, Trafford MV, Southport and Eccles.

The first programme completed in March but due to poor weather several the regional festivals were cancelled and moved at short notice.

Lancashire received a good review from the RFU at the end of the season and intend to build on and expand plans for next season. Helping the players focus on off field development as well as the core skills of being a player.

## **U18**

We had 86 girls' trial for Lancashire U18 this year, thank you to all the clubs who supported us despite the adverse weather conditions. England rugby have asked that players who are selected don't take part in county, this is due to training load and as there are more games this year with COE and will also be higher demand for all players involved.

The u18 girls played four fixtures (3 of which at a festival) the results were

34-0 win v Durham at Billingham

5-0 win v Durham

19-0 win v Yorkshire

45-0 win v Cheshire

### **Lancashire Women**

Gill Burns County Champions 2023

Excellent results throughout the campaign, thank you to clubs for hosting training and games over recent months and the coaching staff for their time and commitments. This year we had a slightly reduced turnout at trials with 78 women trialling.

Leicestershire 22- Lancashire 24

North Midlands 19 -Lancashire 36

Lancashire 24 – Yorkshire 12

Buckinghamshire 15 – Lancashire 25

### **Mike Dale**

*Womens & Girls Representative Rugby Lead*

### **Helen Duggan**

*Women & Girls Club & Competitions Development Lead*

### **RFU LEAGUES**

The 2022/23 Season saw the introduction of the new Competitions structure and a new National Cup Competition. The League Competition ran fairly well, albeit being shortened by having the Cup Competition at the end of the Season, and cramped further still by having three weeks of zero temperatures at either side of Christmas leading to clubs having to play ten weeks of consecutive rugby which is not appropriate.

In the ADM Leagues games were largely competitive with the winners listed below:

ADM 1 Liverpool St Helens FC

ADM 2 Eccles RFC

ADM 3 Hoylake RUFC

ADM 4 Clitheroe RUFC

Congratulations to all the above on their achievements.

At Level 5 Blackburn RUFC pushed the winners Lymm RUFC all the way and only losing out at the end on points difference.

In the National Leagues Sedgeley Pk were victorious in Level 4 with Fylde RUFC pushing them all the way.

### **Papa John's Cup:**

This was a new competition this season with some clubs having a good experience and one or our winners having a bad experience. Congratulations to Widnes RUFC, Thornton Cleveleys RUFC and Bury RUFC in winning their respective competitions. However as whole the Competition was blighted by 'cry offs' and will be seen as unacceptable by many, it does however remain in place for two more seasons with the start of next year's competition being pushed back by three weeks.

### **Dave Clarke**

*North ROC Secretary*

### **CLUB & COMMUNITY RUGBY**

First of all I would like to congratulate the clubs that have gained promotion, very well done.

The season as a whole has had a lot of ups and downs. Some clubs have struggled with a lack of players for the lower teams, this has caused a lot of cancelled games throughout the leagues, which is not good for rugby or club finances. The RFU staff ran a number of cluster meetings around the County to find out what clubs needed in the way of support. Very little came out of the meetings in the way of help, it seem to justify their existence

The fact that the RFU have made a pigs ear of the new tackling height for next season is an understatement. We will have one set of laws for community Rugby and a set for the professional game this will split the game in two. The big problem will be the mini junior games on Sundays, when these are refereed mainly by coaches.

We are always open to ideas and valid points of view.

### **Malcolm Worsley**

*Club & Community Rugby Chairman*

### **COUNTY SAFEGUARDING**

My thanks are extended to Christine Spivey Lancashire Deputy CBSM for her continued support and work through this past season. Christine has undertaken the 'in-depth' Safeguarding Audits at 9 clubs. Which takes Lancashire County well above the required 10% for RFU in compliance in RFU Regulation 21

My thanks are also again extended to all Club Safeguarding Officers past, present and in future post, throughout Lancashire rugby clubs. The wealth of experience, commitment and expertise of our officers is testament, to why Lancashire CB is continually recognised nationally for its effective professionalism and commitment to safeguarding young people and adults. I am honoured to support you all.

I am delighted to report that the Lancashire Executive board recently approved the appointment of Lisa Johnson (CSO at Littleborough RUFC) as a second deputy CBSM for the county; with the specific lead and remit to support clubs who have members with neurodiverse and mental health issues. Work has also commenced with two other CSO officers (Rachel Taylor -Eccles & Daniella Beggoria – Fylde) on a Lancashire rugby project to train and deliver further mental health support and

'first aid' (MFHA Youth) to compliment the 'Cauliflower Ear' counselling program which continues to be on offer to all members of Lancashire rugby and families.

As we approach the commencement of the 2022-23 season, I confirm that I will be remaining in post as CBSM and Director of Governance, as well as taking up the role as Lancashire's Rugby President for the 2023-2024 season. An honour I am truly humble and delighted to undertake in the coming season.

I have been informed that a few CSO's will be stepping down over the off-season and I thank them most sincerely on behalf of Lancashire CB, for their work and for protecting young persons and adults at risk from their home clubs.

Over the summer off season, I will be contacting all clubs to ensure that the role of CSO is fulfilled, and all details, training and qualifications are up to date.

The new process' for DBS clearances and Age Grade dispensation applications, appear to be embedded within all clubs and are working well.

A point of note the RFU; DO NOT send reminders when DBS clearances are expiring so it is up to individuals, CSO's and coaching coordinators to ensure that appropriately trained and DBS cleared coaches and managers only interact and work with persons under the age of 18 years.

So, to (and a reminder here) that appointments to voluntary positions especially coaches and managers of Age Grade rugby; are required to use and undertake the RFU Safeguarding RFC Volunteer Application & Self Declaration Form <https://www.englishrugby.com/dxdam/33/33fce371-43c5-4e2c-b055-30dbceec7e0a/safeguardingVolunteerForm.pdf>

Child Abuse and the reporting of incidents continue to make headlines. Legal and personal responsibility are at the forefront of tackling offences against children and adults at risk.

We must remain vigilant and continue to promote good practice, reporting and maintain observant practices within our cubs.

There have been increasing numbers of spectator misbehaviour on the side lines at Age Grade rugby matches. Abuse of match officials. Incidents of racial abuse also are increasing. Clubs and their officers CSO's M&J Chairs and the like, must work to eradicate these poor practices. The discipline committee continue to support and request support of the CBSM and CSO's.

The RFU Safeguarding and Governance department at Twickenham still oversee the management and recording of safeguarding of incidents and child protection for the whole Union and liaise with Lancashire Safeguarding (and discipline) when required.

Play it Safe and In Touch – RFU specific safeguarding courses, have been delivered within the county. Though there has been a lack of tutors within the Lancashire and Cheshire area, so number of courses have been somewhat reduced. As a reminder the Play it Safe course is required every three years by all those in contact and responsible for children.

The In -Touch course proved very successful in its virtual delivery by National Safeguarding team from Twickenham, so will remain as is, in its delivery 'online' and by the RFU directly. This again requires completion every three years.

The insistence of persons attending 'renewal' training bears witness to the importance and recognition of not only keeping young people free from harm but also strengthening the protection and training of our volunteers.

A safeguarding officers conference was held this season 10<sup>th</sup> September 2022, initially this was in jeopardy of cancellation due to insufficient confirmed numbers of CSO's who had registered their interest. However, a late rallying call increased participant numbers and a very successful conference went ahead. The focus was on mental health of people with powerful guest speakers from several different projects. It was a moving and very thought provoking.

I again wish to thank the CSO's and officers at our Lancashire clubs who work tirelessly maintaining and continuing to provide robust and effective safeguarding for Young Persons involved within the game.

To those newly appointed CSO's welcome, it's great to have you on board. Welcome you to the role, it is an exciting, challenging, so worthwhile but a necessary role.

Finally Thank you to Lancashire CB who continue to be supportive of and acknowledge the importance of Safeguarding Children, Young People in Lancashire Rugby Union.

### **Carol Baker**

Lancashire CB Safeguarding Manager

## **LIVERPOOL & DISTRICT REFEREES SOCIETY**

### Summary

Approx. 1200 games appointed to with issues over number of players/teams and short format games presenting issues that needed to be controlled and managed. Efforts of Gary Spengler in his role as A&G Chair noted. Discipline both on and off the pitch remains an issue CBs and Refs societies need to remain focused on. Thanks to CB discipline chairs for all support and input in the season.

Mid monthly meetings well attended with a lively and challenging set of interventions, speakers and CPD led activities. Thanks to Fred Howard for all efforts and deserved award of David Yorke Cup for services to society. We continue to engage with referees via social media but also an increase of blended face to face time via informal meetings through the month at Southport/Widnes and Wirral which are well attended and will continue in 2023-24 under the area secretaries.

### Additional Info

New role of Hon. Chair of Grading's brought in for 2023-24 season as well as a more "balanced scorecard" of criteria for assessing and grading referees including fitness testing for 6/7/8 grades. Focus on developing match officials from all groups but with a focus on women and juniors (schools and uni focus) who may not move into senior rugby.

Society in is good financial shape, but with additional requirements to support various initiatives needs to have strong financial controls and decision making. Directors are happy the society is living up to its requirements under its articles of incorporation and complying with its requirements as a Limited business.

Safeguarding remains high priority and DBS process plus the new look RFU online training will be delivered to ensure compliance. Chris Maltby leads on this and his efforts are much appreciated.

LADS has strong and open links with RFRU and RFU and will engage in early season with RFU on our disciplinary process to develop further and better literature and online training. November will see the roll out of By Stander training as part of LADS commitment to RFU values and inclusivity for all.

Society members voted in the season for the clubs and schools who they felt provided best hospitality and lived up to LADS and RFU values.

Club was awarded to Ormskirk RFC (2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row); as recipients of the David Yorke Club of the Year, but BHP/Sefton and Oxtan Parkonians deserve a mention.

Ian Robinson School of the Year was awarded to Birkenhead School with St Anslens College also getting a lot of mentions.

President Paul Warrington (2020-23) handed over to Gary Spengler who will be LADS President 2023-24 with the 2 yearly LADS Presidents Dinner to be organised for April/May 2024.

### **Conal Scholes**

*Hon. Secretary, Liverpool & District Referees Society*

### **MANCHESTER & DISTRICT REFEREES SOCIETY**

We are pleased to report that the Society has continued to flourish with 133 active referees. Of which we have 14 Young Match Officials (YMO's) who are under 18 and 7 women.

This number was achieved through the recruitment of 32 new referees this season through our poster campaign and running "Starting to Whistle" courses during the season allowing new referees to start refereeing upon completion of the course. A particular success was to link up with Manchester University and hold our first course there with the object of recruiting students into the Society but to give those who wished to referee their intra mural games the skills and confidence to do so.

We were able to support our clubs, providing referees for 2468 games of which 431 were cancelled or postponed. Unfortunately, as the season progressed, the number of games available at the lower level reduced substantially.

The diversity of our membership together with the training and support we offer was recognised by the RFU at a meeting earlier this season.

We are grateful to Lancashire RFU who gave us a grant to support our YMO's. This has enabled our YMO Officer to develop the squad on Saturday mornings at Manchester Grammar School, Cheadle Hulme School and Stockport Grammar School allowing the YMOs to learn their craft and be accepting of their errors. We are most grateful for the support and encouragement from these schools which allows the programme to exist. Additionally, the YMO's supported Sale Sharks U15 and U16 DPP events at Preston Grasshoppers and Carrington Training Centre, enabling them to experience good quality and fast-paced games. In April 2023 the YMOs have both officiated as a referee and AR for the U14-16 county finals and were well received.

It is pleasing to report that two of our YMO's refereed at senior levels, one at 9 and another who had just turned 17 at level 8.

Our female members have flourished and take an active part in the meetings of the Society and other activities, particularly the [Facebook Group for Female Match Officials](#) organised by the RFU together

with their Everest Event where female rugby match officials from across England and wider come together for a weekend and discover what their ultimate goal is in officiating and how the RFU can support them in achieving it!

Our support network of observers, coaches, assessors and trainers has been recognised as second to none allowing our referees to develop as far and as fast as possible. The amount of time, effort and resources which we put into developing our referees has resulted in the improvement of the quality of refereeing. The development of our Preferred Options being the backbone of the way we want Manchester referees to act being a particular success and taken on board by other Societies.

Through the North West Federation, the Society has taken a leading role in the Regional 1 North Match Official Team with responsibility for appointing, assessing, training and the development of referees at level 5 for an area which includes the Liverpool, Manchester, Cumbria, Northumberland and Durham Societies. There is a pool of 23 referees of which 8 are at level 5, the remainder being developed to move up. Two of the Manchester referees have been selected as NLMOT Associates.

We acknowledge that a number of clubs have struggled this season but do hope that they will be able to recover and we look forward to renewing our ties with them.

**Paul Houston**

*Hon. Secretary, Manchester & District Referees Society*

**DISCIPLINARY REPORT**

**Introduction**

As the season ends, we have dealt with 172 cases. This is a small decrease from 181 from season 2021/2022. However, there is a concern that there has been a decrease in matches played. There are two areas of concern which clubs must address next season.

**Racial and Homophobic Abuse**

There has been a large increase in the number of abuse cases during this season. It is difficult to decide if this an actual increase or an increase in reporting. Whichever it is clubs must educate all their players, coaches, and parents that this type of behaviour must stop.

If you have any questions or need advice, please contact me and I will arrange the County's Diversity and Inclusion Lead to get in touch

**Match Official Abuse**

This continues to be a problem and is having an effect on referee recruitment and retention. I can report that there has been an improvement in the adult game. However, the same cannot be said in under eighteen rugby. There has been an increase of abuse from players and more worryingly from coaches. Coaches have a duty to set a good example to players and parents which a lot are failing to do.

**Conclusion**

In closing I want to thank John Greenwood and all panel member and all club officials for their prompt responses to requests for information.

**Brian Stott**

*Disciplinary Committee Secretary*

## COUNTY SCHOOLS UNION

After a very difficult period of adjustment in the school's game post pandemic, green shoots and progress are being made thanks to the great work from our colleagues and friends across the county.

There remains significant challenges to be addressed; as yet there is no national or local strategy to ensure rugby remains on school's PE curriculum, and the delivery of support to schools via clubs and/or their delivery partnerships when available is sometimes non-existent, often patchy and we are lacking an oversight or auditing facility to determine needs or celebrate good practice; School budgets continue to be squeezed - many PE departments are in skeleton staff mode, and many schools no longer enjoy the support of rugby loving colleagues from other departments due to their own workload demands;

External pressures, especially from Association football, which continues to enjoy both funding and media attention to the detriment of all other sports and to a lesser extent our friends at the Rugby League who continue to provide an outreach system to schools that reflects the RDO programme used to enjoy.

In terms of progress, those schools that are capable of engaging are now happy to do so, with the covid cloud no longer quite as dark and stormy. Many headteachers are now recognising the benefits of sport and especially travel to engage in sport and school representation as a positive behaviour reward that is loved by students. We therefore have had an uptick in fixtures and festival attendance this year, though we are bound to be well behind pre-pandemic contacts as these are now being provided and administered by willing and capable volunteers, as opposed to full time staff with the time and capacity to directly approach schools to encourage participation. We are also pleased that we have had some success in the last few years with the uptake of rugby amongst girls in schools across our county, culminating in our first girls Lancashire CSU festivals at Preston Grasshoppers, with a second festival in place next month to bookend the year, in association with the community team at Sale Sharks. We have also been directly supporting a new school to our competitions - Tauheedul Islam Boys High School, Blackburn, who have sent representative teams to all of our festivals - we look forward to their lads coming on board in the Cup competitions very soon. The school's headteacher is committed to Rugby as a force for good in his school and we would hope to encourage the other schools in the Star Academies group to come on board as well.

In conclusion, there are a few thank you messages to give to the people who have done such sterling work yet again for the county in their own quiet ways.

First and foremost must be our outgoing school's committee secretary, Mr Ken Andrews, who we were pleased to award honorary life membership to our Union, which he kindly accepted. We are blessed with a committed and active committee executive and membership, making our competitions and festivals happen and happen well. Huge thanks especially to Robbie Jones and Mark Devine, the brains and brawn behind the process, and to our colleagues at the schools that continue to support these events by bringing the players, refereeing the games and crucially keeping in great spirits despite weather, player demands, school politics, demands from other sports, travel .....

Our great friends at MADREFS and Liverpool rugby referees continue to support us brilliantly and we are greatly indebted to their hard work and dedication.

A special mention to Vicky Irwin at Sale Sharks for helping us develop a school's relationship and opportunities to engage going forward with both boys and girls, and to Helen Duggan, Lancashire Women's Rugby Chair for her great input and support.

Finally, as I come to the end of my journey as CSU chair, thanks to those who considered me suitable for the honour, and very finally thanks to the most important people of all, the hundreds of boys and girls who turn out and play our great game, whether it's a lunchtime touch rugby club or running out in the colours of their respective representative jerseys for Country, County, district, club or school, you are part of an amazing journey - happy travels.

**John O’Ryan**

*Chair*

*Lancashire County Schools Union*

## **LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS COMPETITIONS RESULTS**

### **U18 Boys**

U18 Cup Final : **Lancaster RGS won 27-7 v St Edward’s College** @ Fylde RFC

U18 Plate Final: **Merchant Taylors won 26-10 v Hutton GS** @ Preston Grasshoppers RFC

U18 Vase Final : **Manchester GS won 45-14 v Scarisbrick Hall** @ Preston Grasshoppers RFC

### **U16 Boys**

U16 Cup Final : **AKS Lytham won 17-15 v Wade Deacon HS** @ Fylde RFC

U16 Plate Final: **St Mary’s Crosby won 22-5 v Scarisbrick Hall** @ Southport RFC

U16 Vase Final : **St Margarets HS won 51-26 v West Hill** @ Liverpool St Helens RFC

### **U15 Boys**

U15 Cup Final : **Kirkham won 52-14 v Scarisbrick Hall** @ Fylde RFC

U15 Plate Final : **Bolton School won 33-20 v Stonyhurst College** @ Fylde RFC

U15 Vase Final : **Cowley HS won v St Margarets** @ Liverpool St Helens RFC

### **U14 Boys**

U14 Cup Final : **Stonyhurst College won 12-0 v Lancaster RGS** @ Fylde RFC

U14 Plate Final : **Audenshaw won 14-7 v St Edwards College** @ Ruskin Park RFC

U14 Vase Final : **Birkdale HS won 51-5 v Chesterfield HS** @ Southport RFC

### **U13 Boys Festivals**

3 tiers of waterfall leagues (26 schools) Winners: **Liverpool College**

@ Preston Grasshoppers RFC

### **U12 Boys Festivals**

3 tiers of waterfall leagues (26 schools) Winners: **Lancaster RGS**

@ Preston Grasshoppers RFC

### **U12 & U14 Girls Festivals**

Introduction to Touch Rugby festivals

@ Preston Grasshoppers RFC & Sale FC

## Cup Competitions Summary

Nearly 150 teams participated in the festivals/competitions, with 38 Schools engaging in CSU activities. Trophies were won by 13 different schools, highlighting the diverse geographical strength of the county. Many thanks to Lancashire CB for their financial support, to clubs for hosting finals and support from MADREFs and Liverpool Society for providing match officials.

Schools unable to accept/meet play by dates is still an issue, which affects the organisation of finals. That said, being able to schedule finals more geographically suitable to participating schools has proved beneficial. Medical cover has been done via schools and first-aiders, but greater provision required for 2023-4. This will necessitate set dates/venues for finals in order to plan ahead. Special thanks to Mark Devine for his assistance with the organisation of the competitions and to John O’Ryan and John Morgan for their invaluable support during the season and at the respective finals.

### **Robbie Jones**

*Competitions Organiser*

## **COLTS RUGBY**

### **Entries to the NW League**

59 sides applied to join the Northwest leagues for the 2022/23 season. This was down from 70 in the previous season (16% fewer). Over the summer 3 sides determined that they would not be able to field a colts side meaning that the leagues kicked off in September with 56 sides competing.

### **The Leagues & League Structure**

A new league format was put in place for the season with the 37 Senior (U18s ) sides split into 5 preliminary leagues , leading into conferenced leagues for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the season.

The 19 Junior sides were split into 2 leagues A league(9) and B League (10) with each side playing the other home and away over the season.

- Lancashire 20 Snr/11 Jnr total 31
- Cheshire 13 Snr/ 7 Jnr total 20
- Others 4 Snr / 1 Jnr total 5

The season finished with 48 sides. 34 Snr & 14 Jnr – sides dropping out were Macclesfield, **Rochdale**, **PGH**, **Wigan & Oldham** in the Juniors , Bowden, Hoylake & Lymm in the Snr leagues.

Many clubs ran a combined 17s/18s team in the Senior leagues. West Park & Sefton joined forces at Junior level to make a successful combined side.

Of the 7 leagues

- **Lancashire clubs won 6** – Rochdale Snr A, Littleborough Snr C, Liverpool Collegiate/Blackburn & Widnes Joint Snr D, Trafford MV Snr E, Vale Of Lune Jnr A, Heaton Moor Jnr B.
- Cheshire clubs won 1 – Winnington Park Snr B

## League Cup Competition

52 sides took part in the League Cup competition. 47 played in the Prelim or 1<sup>st</sup> round, i.e. 5 opted not to take part in the in competition.

- **Lancashire Clubs won 5 of the 8 Finals** – Waterloo Snr Bowl, Southport Snr Plate, Liverpool Collegiate Snr Shield. Heaton Moor Jnr Bowl, Bolton Jnr Shield.
- Cheshire clubs won 3 – Winnington Park Snr Cup , Sandbach Jnr Cup, Wilmslow Jnr Plate

All the finals were well matched closely contested games with no mismatches.

Thanks to all involved at Lymm & Eccles Rugby clubs for hosting the finals and for all the hard work that goes into making these days successful and memorable.

## Lancashire Colts Cups – Finals Played at Heaton Moor RUFC.

31 Sides (20 Snr & 11 Jnr) entered the county knock out competition, played across 5 rounds in the senior competition and 3 in the Junior Cup. Those sides losing in their 1<sup>st</sup> round went through to the plate allowing each side to enjoy a minimum of 2 knock out rounds.

The eventual winners in the 4 competitions were:

- Snr Cup **Kendal** (Cumbria) 23-20 Rochdale
- Snr Plate **Widnes 37-21** Littleborough
- Jnr Cup **Sedgley Park** 33-14 Wigan
- Jnr Plate **West park/Sefton** 17- 7 Bolton

The inclusion of out of county Guest sides into the Lancashire Cup has been questioned. It should be noted that Guest sides playing in the competition has been part and parcel of the competition since its inception. Whilst the Frank Morgan Senior Cup has not been won by an out of county side, the 3 other trophies have all been won by Guest teams.

Thank you to Heaton Moor RUFC for organising a great finals day. Thanks to Alan James who put in enormous effort to make sure that all the background work of Cups, Medals, Programmes were all organised and that the day ran smoothly.

Frank Morgan sadly passed in February, he leaves a lasting legacy with next Season being the 50<sup>th</sup> season of the Cup that bears his name.

## National U18s Cup

9 Northwest ( 6 Lancs , 3 Cheshire ) applied to take up a place in the competition. Rochdale & PGH upon realising the complications it would cause in playing league, league cup & County cup fixtures withdrew from the competition. Blackburn, Liverpool St Helens, Leigh, Waterloo from Lancashire. No Lancashire sides made it past the 2<sup>nd</sup> round.

## Squad Numbers during the 2022/23 season

Several sides have struggled during the season to maintain enough players to keep a side going. There is a noticeable effect when the Rugby League season starts with some clubs struggling to raise sides on a Sunday due to dual code players choosing to play League in preference to Union. Over a number of seasons the League have adopted and promoted the RFUs game on Principals which have enabled

games to go ahead with as few as 10 a side. Whilst this may work on an occasional basis it is not sustainable across a season.

### **Colts League Rugby for this coming season**

Entries are in for the forthcoming 2023/24 season , with 59 sides confirmed. These are made up from 34 Senior and 25 Junior sides.

- Lancashire have 30 of the 59 sides involved.
- Cheshire are at 20, Cumbria 4, Shropshire 3 & Derbyshire 1 and 1 side from Staffordshire.

Many sides have adopted to play at single U18 age group and 10 clubs have merged their squads to form 5 colts sides

### **Lancashire based U16s sides coming through to colts for this season.**

Of the 25 clubs that entered the U16s 2022/23 junior, most have a colts side playing in the NW leagues for the 2023/24 season. There are a few notable absences with Fylde, Liverpool St Helens and Bury not having a colts side in the league.

### **Changes /Challenges.**

*Rugby League* appears to be more of a challenge than ever in Lancashire in particular. As reported last season it can be seen in player numbers that many sides struggle for numbers when RL is being played.

*Playing Down of Players* – this continues to be a much discussed issue. The unanimous view of the Lancashire Colts Competition Committee and the NW Leagues Committee is that this should only be allowed to happen in the most exceptional of circumstances. The NW Colts league AGM voted on this last August and the member sides voted overwhelmingly (96%) to keep in place its existing regulations. The regulations and protocols around this matter should be reviewed as allowing players to play down for no other reason than a club not having a side at a particular age group does not stack up.

**Thank yous & Congratulations :** As always our thanks to both Manchester & Liverpool Referee Societies; who rise to the task to provide Sunday Appointments for Colts games.

To the players who played for the County, The North & England Counties via the 17/18, congratulation's.

To the Coach's/Managers and parents who support their sons each week, as they travel around the North West of England, playing this great game which we are all privileged to be a part of. Without your commitment, Colts Rugby, on such a scale would be hard to achieve.

Thanks to my colleagues on the Halbro NW Colts League Committee who work so hard and with such enthusiasm and dedication to ensure that Colts Rugby is enjoyed & played by upwards of 2000 lads across as many clubs as possible in the Northwest of the country.

And last but not least to those that organise Rugby within the county & region for their valued support over the season.

**Chris Barrett**

*Chairman*

## **MINI JUNIOR (7 – 16 AGE GRADE) COMMITTEE**

The season started with some changes to the competitions committee structure. We said thanks to Allen Bower for his involvement with the competition and welcomed Phil Lord as his replacement. Phil has brought some new ideas for this season. We have also brought in two more age grade secretaries, for the u12's we welcomed Jon Maslan and for the u13's we welcomed Lisa Lord.

As in previous seasons team numbers fluctuated, some team merged and some teams just could not retain the players. Going forward into next season I think that this will still be the trend. The age grade dispensation has helped some clubs survive by being able to move players up or down depending on circumstances and situations within clubs.

We as a competitions committee have now a designated face book page just for coaches and club officials, which appear to be running well. There is also a designated website for the competition fixtures. This has all fixtures, pool tables and league tables. This has been created by Phil Lord and everyone seems to be very happy with the way its run and the information on there. Hopefully during the summer we can improve the website so there are no adverts to get in the way.

This season has progressed as we thought it might. We have had some complaints re spectator /coach behaviour. We would hope that clubs will ensure codes of conduct and TREDs are adhered too. The other issues that has been raised is the situation re referees. Whilst we know that there is a shortage of referees generally, asking for them for under 13's games is a not an option. May be we need to find away to encourage members to take up the whistle.

We finished the season with some very close games of rugby, at the two final venues. The cup and Vase was held at Eccles and the Cup and Bowl was held at West Park. Leigh and Old Bedians hosted the under 12's festival days. Without clubs stepping up to host there will be no finals. So a massive thank you to ALL volunteers at the 4 rugby clubs for giving the county great end of season finals days.

My thanks also go to Phil, Christine, Alan, Lisa and Jon for their time and efforts for this season.

Let's now look forward to next season and to keep growing the game of union.

**Ian Spivey**

*Chairman, 7 – 16 Age Grade Committee*

## COUNTY OFFICERS & OTHER OFFICIALS 2022 - 2023

**County President** Brian Stott  
**Vice Presidents:**  
Carol Baker (Senior Vice President)  
Mark Nelson  
John Greenwood  
Alan James  
Brian Hurst

### **Members of the Management Board**

*Chairman:* Dave Clarke  
*Hon. Secretary:* Mark Downs  
*Hon. Treasurer:* Paul Deakin

### **Dir. Rugby Development**

Howard Hughes

### **Dir. Volunteering**

Gill Burns MBE

### **Dir. Without Portfolio**

John Greenwood  
Tommy Hughes  
Gary Morgan

### **World Rugby Chairman**

Bill Beaumont CBE DL

### **RFU Senior Vice President**

Rob Briers

### **RFU Council Member**

Ken Andrews  
Dave Clarke

### **Hon. Membership Secretary**

Anne-Marie Briers

### **Safeguarding Manager**

Carol Baker

*Deputy:* Christine Spivey

### **County Committees:**

#### **Club & Community Rugby Committee**

*Director/Chairman:* Malcolm Worsley

#### **Finance & Funding Committee**

*Chairman:* Chris Smail  
*Asst. Treasurer:* Stephen Briers

### **Cup & Competitions Committee**

*Chairman:* Dave Clarke

*Secretary:* Brian Hurst

### **Disciplinary Committee**

*Chairman:* John Greenwood

*Secretary:* Brian Stott

### **Governance Committee**

*Director/Chairman:* Carol Baker

### **17-18 Committee**

*Chairman:* Tommy Hughes

### **7-16 (Junior Rugby) Committee**

*Chairman:* Ian Spivey

*Secretary:* Christine Spivey

### **County Schools Union**

*Chairman:* John O'Ryan

*Secretary:* Robbie Jones

### **Colts Competitions Committee**

*Chairman:* Jon Kitchen

*Secretary:* Chris Barrett

### **Assistant Hon. Secretary**

Brian Stott

### **Assistant Hon. Treasurer**

Stephen Briers

### **Hon. Legal Adviser**

John Bullough

### **Chairman of Selectors for**

Senior XV John Greenwood

### **Team Manager**

Senior XV Guy Lovgreen

*Contact details can be found on the  
Lancashire County website:*

**[www.lancshirerugby.com](http://www.lancshirerugby.com)**

Note to Annual Members:  
Individual Subscriptions (£20.00) are due on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022  
Royal Bank of Scotland: 16-29-34 10251318  
(not the former NatWest Account)

**The Lancashire County Rugby Football Union was established in 1881**

**Lancashire County Rugby Football Union  
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Directors: M Downs (Company Secretary),  
K Andrews, CA Baker, RTJ Briers, G Burns MBE, D. Clarke, P Deakin, JRS Greenwood,  
H Hughes, JT Hughes, GJ Morgan, MJ Worsley.

**The Lancashire Rugby Union Youth Trust**  
Referred to in the Annual Report,  
Is a Charity Registered with the Charity Commissioners – 1014271

**Contact details and other information can be found on the  
Lancashire County  
website: [www.lancashirerugby.com](http://www.lancashirerugby.com)**