

LANCASHIRE COUNTY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-24

THE SECRETARY'S OPENING REMARKS

My first job is to thank our President, Carol Baker, who has brought a great vibrancy and energy to the role. A dedicated and long serving Safeguarding lead she is now also responsible for this with Sale Sharks and consults to the RFU on many subjects under that umbrella. Carol has once again organised the County Safeguarding Conference with some very informative and inspirational speakers. This season she has been well supported by her partner, Ian, and we owe them a great gratitude for promoting the County so well.

To Rugby, both our Senior Mens and Womens XVs sadly came unstuck by Yorkshire in the double header. The Womens XV had 2 high scoring wins against Gloucestershire and Warwickshire in the opening game with the men winning their only other game in the North group against Somerset ! Here lies the problem with the latest system whereby Counties selecting at which level they play at and not being placed using a promotion / relegation system as in the past. It means "Pot Hunting Counties" are not challenged and the Counties who play at the highest level are not challenged with enough fixtures.

Central funding 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.

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

Concerns we had about the playing level regulations for the U20s competition last season have been partially addressed and saw us progress well in the competition, finally being knocked out by the narrowest of margins by our neighbours of Cheshire.

Our Royals had their usually run out at Leigh 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.

Once again financing a County is not easy and with the current model of targeted funding for specific areas of the game it makes it harder to wield a large brush for a diversity of the games needs. 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.

Rob Briers has had a fantastic season as RFU President that has included the World Cup in France and an upcoming tour with England to Japan and New Zealand helping to boost his air miles. The ever steady presence of Anne-Marie has no doubt provided invaluable support during a very busy season. Rob is the 8th Lancastrian President of the RFU, all of whom have been worthy of the accolade due to great service to the game. There will be more to come.

We also have Dave Clarke, and new to the Council, Paul Deakin, looking after the Counties interests at Twickenham. The many sub committees and groups they are involved with takes up a lot of their time. In 2016, I asked Deaks, an old friend and Management Accountant, to come to a finance meeting at Hoppers just to give us some advice. As he got out of the car he said "I'm not coming out of here as Treasurer !". The rest as they say is history.

The County Schools Union under the Chairmanship of John O'Ryan with Secretarial duties being done by Robbie Jones. A recent report by John Cole highlighted that Schools rugby was in decline and part of the problem was the lack of local staff to drive this. We, it seems, in Lancashire are happily bucking the trend with a rise in playing numbers, but we are still lacking local staff. We should all recall the cull a few seasons back of the Community Rugby Coach role. I feel we are seeing the effects of what I thought was a shortsighted decision. The County has invested in schools clubs links this season with coaching and mentoring and hope to continue the project.

Thanks to Kate Bennetta for her work with the Womens and Girls players and teams in the County. New to the Board and the W & G Lead role this season, she has worked hard to bed in a new coaching team which has provided squads who have benefitted from the chance to be part of representative rugby.

It is still a fact that Club rugby at many levels of league, age and gender is suffering. Focus needs to be given to retaining youth players to move into adult rugby. Many clubs have seen the loss of one or more teams. These teams are the bedrock of our game and in the majority of cases the ones who keep the club open. If the drop off continues we could be looking at the loss of facilities and pitches. Once gone they will be difficult to replace.

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, with a worrying rise in under 18s issues both on and off the field. If parents and coaches could please take notice of the fact that every game is NOT a World Cup Final, and they are not Steve Borthwick or Andy Farrell the game would referees easier to find. Thanks to John Greenwood and his team for dispensing justice, especially Brian Stott whose Fridays are fully taken up with judgements. The hangover from the Thursday Disciplinary party the night before.

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 implementing the Board Structure Review. 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 and Gill Burns for so ably looking after our Volunteers. 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

On the Men's Representative side of things, it was a good season but could have been slightly better given the rub of the green.

The **Royals** our Community County XV kicked off the County Rep season with an excellent win over a very strong Anti-Assassins side at Leigh RUFC in a game that suffered from some horrendous weather. New Team Manager Stephen "Baz" Bailey was delighted that his new charges put on a decent show for the large crowd on the day.

Lancashire Royals 22 Anti-Assassins 21 at Leigh RUFC

The **U20s** season was a marked improvement on last season despite the continuing player eligibility rules. Our very young-looking squad (Over 65% where U19) finished with a record of 4 games played 3 Won and 1 loss. Sadly, the loss came in the North Group decider against Cheshire. For the record we used 31 players from 12 Clubs and 3 Universities. Top try scorers were Tom Hesketh (Rochdale) in the Backs with 4 Tries and Ben Dickinson (Tyldesley) in the Pack with 3.

Lancashire U20 22 Yorkshire U20 21 at Sedgley Park RUFC

Durham U20 41 Lancashire U20 53 at Hartlepool Rovers RFC

Lancashire U20 32 Northumberland U20 12 at Wigan RUFC

Cheshire U20 37 Lancashire U20 24 at Chester RUFC

To give you an idea of the continued chaos involving the eligibility criteria we had held our trial and selected a squad only for the County Championship Committee to make a tweak to the rules that made several of the selected players unavailable. We could now pick players from Level 3 and 4 Clubs so long as they hadn't played 1st XV rugby. Again, this tweak came back to haunt us as a member of the squad helped out his own Clubs 1st XV out by playing in the 2nd to last game of the season and thus then becoming ineligible.

The **Senior Men's XV** had the strange circumstance of only having to play 2 games for a shot at another Twickenham Final. The lack of interest from other counties in competing in the Bill Beaumont County Championship meant we ended up in a North Group of 3 with our old friends from the Dark Side of the Pennines and that other "Northern" county, Somerset. Fair play to the lads from the Cider County, they came to Fylde and gave a good showing before the Red Rose boys cruised to a victory.

So that setup a winner takes all encounter over at Hull Ionians RUFC against Yorkshire. In a game where things just didn't quite go our way the home side edged us out and ensure they had a visit to Twickenham for the first time in 16 years.

Lancashire Men 54 Somerset Men 33 at Fylde RFC

Yorkshire Men 26 Lancashire Men 13 at Hull Ionians RUFC

Couple of things of note, Scott Rawlings captained the side with diligence it what was his swansong performance as the big Centre retires. A true legend of the county game for Lancashire over the years he will be missed but he goes out with a hatful of County finals appearances and quite a few Winners Medals. Enjoy the retirement Scottie!

For the 2nd successive season one of our Men's Squad made 30 Appearances for the county with Fylde's Pete Altham adding to his Cap tally, awesome show Pete.

Again, it feels that some in the RFU are hell bent on reducing/removing County Representative Rugby but you can rest assured that this county will continue to support one of the oldest competitions in World Rugby and all the other Championships we are involved in.

Howard Hughes

Director of Rugby Development

WOMENS & GIRLS RUGBY

Introduction

This season has been an incredibly interesting journey as the Lead for women's and girls' rugby. Despite the challenges and the ups and downs we faced; I am delighted with how this season has concluded. This was our first year, and many positives can be taken into the next season. We introduced a completely new coaching and management team across all three age groups, and I am deeply grateful to each member for their time and expertise. Special thanks go to James Wright, who led both the U16's and U18's programs, and to Vicky Irwin and India Perris-Redding, who led the women's county campaign.

U16's Girls

- **Nominations and Assessments:**
 - Received 99 nominations from 14 different rugby clubs.
 - 94 players were assessed at Trafford MV.
 - Two squads were selected, consisting of 45 players.
- **Training and Matches:**
 - Held five training sessions over four months.
 - One internal game was played.
 - Unfortunately, the game against Cheshire was cancelled due to bad weather.
 - Organized an away fixture against Northumberland, providing a great experience for all team members.

U18's Girls

- **Nominations and Assessments:**
 - Received 55 nominations from 10 different clubs.
 - 45 players were assessed in November at MMU.
 - A squad of 24 was selected.
- **Matches Played:**

- Played against Yorkshire at TMV at the end of December and emerged victorious.
- Participated in a tri-fixture against Cumbria and Durham at Preston Grasshoppers, showcasing highly competitive county rugby.

Women

- **Nominations and Assessments:**
 - Received 60 nominations from 20 different clubs.
 - 55 players were assessed at Leigh Rugby Club.
 - A squad of 32 players was selected.
- **Competitions and Results:**
 - Competed in the Gill Burns Championship.
 - Played three games:
 - Beat Gloucestershire 39-6.
 - Beat Warwickshire 43-0.
 - Lost to a very strong Yorkshire team 30-19, ending their season's campaign.

Conclusion

Overall, I am very proud to have been involved this year and hope to continue the momentum going into year two. The dedication and hard work of our coaching and management team have been instrumental in our success. We look forward to building on this year's achievements and continuing to develop and promote rugby for women and girls in the coming seasons.

Kate Bennetta

Womens & Girls Representative Rugby Lead

RFU LEAGUES

N1W Level 5

After an early three way battle between Rossendale , Blackburn and Macclesfield, in the latter part of the Season it became a two way battle with Macclesfield running out the winners from Rossendale. Manchester also finished a creditable 5th in this highly competitive League

N2W Level 6

This League was basically dominated from start to finish by Birkenhead Pk with Firwood Waterloo finishing second 17 points behind the winners.

Counties 1 ADM Level 7

Two teams namely Widnes and Eccles dominated this division from start to finish. Eccles led for a lengthy spell after Christmas but were overtaken by Widnes who eventually won the League by a margin of two points.

Counties 2 ADM Lancashire and Cheshire Level 8

This was another League dominated by Trafford Metrovick with the runners up being decided in the final fixture of the season which saw New Brighton beat Southport to claim the second promotion place.

Counties 3 ADM Lancashire and Cheshire Level 9

Thornton Cleveleys and Wigan led this League for most of the season with Thornton Cleveleys winning out at the end of the day.

Counties 4 ADM Lancashire and Cheshire Level 10

Colne and Nelson and Ashton U Lyne led this League for most of the season with Colne and Nelson having a 15points winning margin in the end.

Promotion:

Widnes and Eccles promoted to Level 6

Trafford MV promoted to Level 7

Thornton Cleveleys and Wigan promoted to Level 8

Colne and Nelson and Ashton U Lyne promoted to Level 9

Papa John's Cup

This year saw two Lancashire clubs appear at Twickenham. Widnes reached in the Final of the Counties 1 Championship losing out 25 -19 in a closely fought contest with Long Levens from Gloucestershire. Wigan reached the Final of Counties 3 and below Championship also losing 45 -22 to a very talented Old Elthamians.

At Darlington Mowden Pk Aldwinians lost out to Bradford Salem 54 – 41 in the Counties 1 North Plate Final and our only winners in this year's competition , Ashton U Lyne defeated York Railway Institute 35 -28 in the Counties 3 and below North Shield Final.

Congratulation to all our promoted teams and the teams who reached the Papa John's Finals.

Dave Clarke

North ROC Secretary

SENIOR CUP COMPETITIONS

The number of senior clubs entering the cup competitions for the season 2023/24 was down on recent season with only 24 clubs indicating their interest in taking part. The Lancashire Cup was not played for because the senior clubs in the county felt that their congested League season was enough rugby for their players. Therefore, only the Brian Leigh Lancashire Trophy, Lancashire Plate and the Alan Stone Bowl were contested.

A good start was made in August with most of the ties being played but as in previous seasons, bad weather hampered the playing of some of the games. However, by Easter games had been played and finalists were in place. The competitions were then held up as five of the six finalists were playing in the Papa John's up run by the RFU. Some clubs got to the PJ Cup semi-finals and this stopped the county finals day going ahead as planned. Finally, when all other competitions were finished, the finals day went ahead hosted by Leigh RFC on Saturday 18th May 2024.

The cup committees give thanks to the Leigh Club and its members and for all the hard work that made it such a good day. Perhaps one of the best cup finals event in recent years.

On behalf of the Cup Committee, I wish to thank all clubs for taking part and again Leigh RFC for hosting a well-run finals day.

Results:

Brian Leigh Lancashire Trophy

Aldwinians RFC 32 v Didsbury Toch H RFC 13

Lancashire Plate

De la Salle RFC 31 v Southport RFC 26

Alan Stone Bowl

Garstang RFC 50 v Burnley RFC 14

Brian Hurst

Chairman, Senior Cup Committee

CLUB & COMMUNITY RUGBY

I would like to congratulate all the clubs that have gained promotion this season and also the clubs that have won the respective cup competitions very well done. Too many games have been cancelled once again making it impossible for clubs to plan.

The RFU asked us to run Active Bystander Training sessions. We did organize the date and venue only to be let down by the RFU not inviting clubs to attend.

I thank all the committee members for attending the meetings and bringing some sound ideas to the table

Malcolm Worsley

Club & Community Rugby Chairman

COUNTY SAFEGUARDING

This season has personally been a busy and most enjoyable one. Continuing as Constituent Body Safeguarding Manager and the very prestigious President for the County has made for a very busy year.

Upon taking up my role as County President I was asked “who will be your replacement as CBSM?” to which I replied “I am not stepping down” so much is the passion and enthusiasm I have for the role.

Safeguarding is; if one can say, is a passion of mine and this my 32 year involved with Safeguarding in Rugby Union. Both as a club CSO and then county CBSM.

I have immense pride in ensuring Lancashire Rugby and its safeguarding of Young People and Adults at Risk is still regarded as one of the best CB's in the Union.

I hope, will strive and continue to maintain the very high standards within our county for many a year to come.

I wish to sincerely thank my two deputies, Christine Spivey and Lisa Johnson for their commitment and hard work, both having a professionalism and understanding of their deputy roles and both supporting me throughout this busy year, taking on more of the work associated with the CBSM role.

The Age Grade playing out of age group applications have been well received are embedded throughout our Lancashire clubs and clubs (most) now fully embrace and understand the procedure. Thanks to Christine for keeping track and administering this process.

The social media and communications between CSO's grows in strength with many queries answered almost immediately and many links to interesting and relevant articles and training being posted by Lisa, especially for children with neurodiverse issues, Lisa's speciality. Thank You Lisa

Emotional Support for our Lancashire Rugby members continues with the free Cauliflower Ear (Counselling) programme, being accessed and used.

I still am amazed however when speaking with some clubs around the county that they are not aware of the free and valuable service on offer to us all. Please ensure your clubs know and publicise the service

<https://lancashirerugby.co.uk/news/1516-cauliflower-ear#:~:text=The%20aim%20of%20the%20programme,the%20stigma%20around%20mental%20health.>

The safeguarding audits completed by all clubs at start of season (early September) were this year completed on time and I didn't have to chase Club Safeguarding Officers or officers at the clubs Thank You to you all , please don't let the county down this year !!! 01/09/2024

The national 10% requirement from RFU; Regulation 21, of the in depth safeguarding audit, is in place and we will have completed 10 of our 65+ clubs so well above again the nation requirement. Another 10 of our clubs will be visited this year to ensure compliance.

My very grateful thanks are again extended to all Club Safeguarding Officers past, present and those coming into post for this next season

The wealth of experience, commitment and expertise of our officers is outstanding. We are a very lucky Constituent Body to have such a wealth of knowledge enthusiasm and expertise looking after clubs.

To those CSO's who will be stepping down over the off-season, I thank you most sincerely on behalf of myself and Lancashire Rugby, for your work. For protecting young persons and adults at risk and the safeguarding you have achieved within your own club. You will be missed but I am confident you will hand over to your replacements a safe , happy and well run safeguarding practice.

May I take this opportunity and use as a reminder here that appointments to voluntary positions especially coaches and managers of Age Grade rugby; are required to now complete and submit the RFU Safeguarding Volunteer Application & Self Declaration Form
<https://www.englandrugby.com/dxdam/33/33fce371-43c5-4e2c-b055-30dbceec7e0a/safeguardingVolunteerForm.pdf>

Child Abuse Safeguarding 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.

The new law relating to POSITION of TRUST is now enforceable through law and is an arrestable offence.

'Position of trust' is a legal term that refers to certain roles and settings where an adult has regular and direct contact with children. Examples of positions of trust include:

- teachers
- care workers

- youth justice workers
- social workers
- doctors.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland changes to the law made in 2022 extend the definition to include:

- faith group leaders
- **sports coaches.**

It's against the law for someone in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with a child in their care, even if that child is over the age of consent (16 or over).

A Lancashire safeguarding officers conference was held this season 20th April 2024, it was as in previous years a very successful conference.

As usual the emphasis was on enjoyment and thanks for the CSO's who give so much of their time. (Rugby Safeguarding and issues relating to Protection being important) but not necessarily the direction the conferences take.

We were honoured this year to have as speakers

Andy Reid MBE (motivational speaker) ,

Star Scheme (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

Greater Manchester Police – Child Sexual Exploitation

SHE Empowering Females – female equivalent of Andy's Man Club

Dr. Ewan Dean speaking on concussion in rugby and ongoing research.

Catherine Jones from TryIt rugby talking about IMAS international Mixed Ability Sport – rugby and

Kate Bennetta Director Lancashire Rugby Board on the developing Women's and Girls teams, network and development of section.

I again wish to thank all 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 keeping them safe, allowing them to be heard and acting upon concerns.

To those newly appointed CSO's welcome, it's great to have you on board. Welcome 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

MANCHESTER & DISTRICT REFEREES SOCIETY

We are pleased to report that the Society has continued to flourish with 135 active referees, slightly improving on the number for last season, recruiting 33 whilst 25 have retired or moved elsewhere.

Our Starting to Whistle Course has again proved successful and developed to become more effective to include listening in to a level 6 referee on a live game with the result that a greater percentage of

participants are joining. Following on from Starting to Whistle a new course has been created, Developing the Referee which will commence in the coming season.

The fear at the start of the season was the DLV with the introduction of the lowering of the tackle height. However, this proved to be unfounded as players did respond and the number of red cards issued were not significantly higher than last season reducing as the season progressed. 83 red cards, down from 116 last season but abuse going in the opposite direction with 33 reported cases, comprising 18 (8) seniors (8); 6 (0) juniors, 4 (3) spectators and 5 (3) coaches

We received requests to make a total of 2,517 appointments through the season (2468 in 2022/23) and of that number 2,233 matches took place i.e. 89% of scheduled matches up from 82% and we were able to achieve a success rate of 97.9%

Success with the Young Match Officials (YMO) has seen 3 new recruits and two progressing to senior matches before reaching 18 and being supported by the development squad. This is a result not only of their dedication but to the support given by the YMO Officer and the schools; Manchester Grammar, Stockport Grammar, Cheadle Hulme and Lancaster Grammar and our thanks go to all of them.

We continue to support our local Universities and ran a S2W course at the Armitage Centre in October 2023 and another one is planned for this October. This is open to anyone, especially students where we recruit 3-4 each year, whilst others referee the university intramural games which at present are men's matches but it is hoped to start women's games next season.

The Regional 1 North Match Official Team comprising of Northumberland, Durham, Cumbria, Liverpool and Manchester Societies has expanded to include appointments to Level 5 with additional responsibility for assessing, training and the development of referees at this level.

There is a squad of thirty-seven referees, coaches, assessors and camera operators. Nine of the referees have been appointed to referee at level 5, the remainder are being developed to move up. One of the Cumbrian referees has been selected to move up to the NLMOT Associates group

At level 6 and below every active referee has been seen at least once during the season which is over four hundred matches, including exchanges. Our approach is to guide to get the best out of our referees and whilst all will not progress to higher levels, we are grateful for their enthusiasm and commitment at all levels. Our coaches and observers have attended training sessions to ensure that referees are being advised using a common criterion. We are a leading Referees' Society with our record of observing and coaching.

Our relationship with clubs continues on a positive note and we are grateful for their support.

Paul Houston

Hon. Secretary, Manchester & District Referees Society

DISCIPLINARY REPORT

Introduction

This season the breakdown of cases is

Type	Live	Proved	Dismissed	Sine Die	Total
Adult	5	112	14	2	133
Youth	0	47	0	0	47
Total	5	159	14	2	180

This shows hardly any increase on last season. However, it must be taken into account that as there fewer matches during this season the overall trend is up. The predicted Armageddon following the introduction of the ELV Tackle Law did not happen, dangerous tackling is slightly down on last season.

Areas of Concern

Match Official Abuse

This is proving to be an ongoing problem. Clubs and players are not getting the message that this is unacceptable behaviour. Disciplinary Panels can only “shut the stable door after the horse has bolted”. To this end we will be adding additional; sanction for any player sent off for Match Official Abuse.

Only clubs & coaches can stop players verbally abusing referees. They set the standards at training and match days.

Youth Rugby

We have seen this season a growing number of complaints about the behaviour of coaches and parents. This includes verbal abuse of referees, opposition coaches and opposition players. We have also received complaints of parents entering the field of play and making physical contact with opposition player.

This behaviour is unacceptable, and clubs must act as it does not set a good example to young players.

Should any club require assistance in dealing with any disciplinary issues please contact me and we will be able to give a presentation to support your efforts.

Brian Stott

Disciplinary Committee Secretary

COUNTY SCHOOLS UNION

Lancashire CSU AGM – Chairperson’s Report 2024

Last year’s Chair’s report examines 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 which I am extremely pleased to say continue to be very much the case.

Numbers of schools joining our competitions and festivals continues to increase year on

year, and our introduction of Girl's festivals in collaboration with Sale Sharks foundation and latterly with our Cheshire Schools friends is raising profile of the game substantially. We have forged great links with these good people and with the club development team under John Foster. They are promoting the girl's game in our region, especially as we are hosting the women's world cup next year. We are meeting and planning with them, our age grade club colleagues and other stakeholders to ensure we maximise the impact of our efforts to grow this side of the game.

Significant challenges remain to be addressed; there is still no national or local strategy to ensure rugby is introduced or holds onto a place in many school's PE curriculum. We have inconsistent delivery of support to schools via clubs. Where delivery partnerships exist, we as a CSU or CB are lacking an oversight or auditing facility to determine needs or celebrate good practice. Even where there is a strong club/school link there can be poor representation on CSU competitions or festivals. Equally, those schools attending our festivals need support via signposting potential players to clubs. What we have got is a patchwork of delivery, some excellent, many needing support. Sadly, we have too many of our counties clubs who have no school involvement either through complacency or intransigence. As long as this remains the case, we will struggle as a CSU to break away from a perceived elite sport mode and clubs will struggle to maintain teams at age grade.

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 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. I'm indebted to Robbie Jones and the CSU committee who must be the most hardworking in the country!

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.

Vicky Irwin and her team at Sale Sharks for helping us develop a school's relationship and opportunities to engage going forward with both boys and girls.

John O'Ryan

Chair

Lancashire County Schools Union

LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS COMPETITIONS RESULTS

Girls

U12 Girls Festivals 6 Teams @ Preston GH RFC

U14 Girls Festival 8 Teams @ Preston GH RFC

Combined Cheshire , Lancashire & Sale Sharks Girls Festivals

U12 Girls Festival 10 teams @ Sale FC

U13 Girls Festival 11 teams @ Sale FC

U12s Boys

U12 Festivals 3 tiers of 8 teams @ Preston GH RFC

U13s Boys

U13 Festivals Cancelled

U14s Boys

U14 Vase Final Scarisbrick Hall v Range HS 24-12 @ Firwood Waterloo
U14 Plate Final Manchester GS v Bolton School 14-7 @ Preston GH RFC
U14 Cup Final Kirkham GS v Lancaster RGS v 22-12 @ Preston GH RFC

U15s Boys

U15 Vase Final Ripley St Thomas v Chesterfield HS (to be played in Sept!)
U15 Plate Final Hutton v Bolton School 42-0 @ Preston GH RFC
U15 Cup Final St Mary's Crosby v Stonyhurst College 20-14 @ Preston GH RFC

U16s Boys

U16 Vase Final Hutton GS v Unity College 50-0 @ Preston GH RFC
U16 Plate Final Merchant Taylors, Crosby v Birkdale 28-10 @ Firwood Waterloo
U16 Cup Final Kirkham GS v Scarisbrick Hall 49-12 @ Preston GH RFC

U18s Boys

U18 Vase Final Hutton GS v Liverpool College 17-14 @ Preston GH RFC
U18 Plate Final St Marys Crosby v Bolton School 52-3 @ Preston GH RFC
U18 Cup Final Stonyhurst College v Merchant Taylors Crosby 40-10 @ Fylde RFC

Robbie Jones

Competitions Organiser

COLTS RUGBY

Entries to the Halbro NW Colts Leagues

63 sides gave expressions of interest in joining the leagues for the 2023/24 season, this translated into 58 full entries. Over the summer 2 sides determined that they would not be able to field sides meaning that the leagues kicked off in September with 56 sides competing. At 56 entries this was the lowest number of entries for many years and has almost certainly been caused by the drop off in playing over the Covid season (s). The structure consisted of 4 senior leagues (33 sides) & 3 junior leagues (23 sides)

The Leagues & League Structure

The leagues were played on a straight home & away basis with no conferencing.

Sides from 5 counties competed across the season.

- Lancashire 29 (31 had entered Waterloo Jnr & Rosendale Snr didn't take up their places)

- Cheshire 20
- Cumbria 4, Staffs, 1, Shropshire 2

53 sides finished the leagues with Burnley, Oldham & Bowdon having dropped during the season.

Combined sides / Clusters 4 sides were combined sides

- Manchester / Broughton Park
- Didsbury TOC H/ Old Bedians (Barbarians)
- West Park / Sefton
- Wirral/Hoylake (Gulls)

The sides were all successful in terms of their rugby & keeping lads at more clubs playing rugby.

Clubs running sides at both U17s and U18s

Heaton Moor, Widnes, West Park St Helens

Non-Lancs clubs – Whitchurch, Sale, Chester, Stockport, Wirral & Caldly.

League winners for the 2023/24 season

Senior A Caldly

Senior B Chester

Senior C Whitchurch

Senior D **Manchester / Broughton Park**

Junior A Stockport

Junior B **Heaton Moor**

Junior C Kendal

Lancashire Colts Cups Finals Played at Wigan RUFC.

The 50th anniversary of the Frank Morgan Lancashire Cup (48th time contested)

28 Sides (18 Snr & 10 Jnr) entered the county knock out competition. This was down by 3 clubs on the previous season.

The competition was played across 5 rounds in the senior competition and 3 in the Junior Cup. Those sides losing in their 1st 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 Frank Morgan Cup **Wigan** 23 - 15 West Park/Sefton
- Snr Joe McDonough Trophy **Heaton Moor** 31-28 Sedgely Park
- Jnr Rob Briers Cup **Heaton Moor** 20-15 Ormskirk
- Jnr Alan James Trophy **Widnes** 71-7 Aldwinians

The inclusion of out of county Guest sides into the Lancashire Cup has again been raised as an issue. Guest sides playing in the competition has been part and parcel of the competition since at least 2003

and the members of the Lancashire Colts Competition committee have supported their inclusion as it has helped to maintain the competition at a high level.

Thank you to Wigan RUFC for organising a great finals day – particular thanks to Ian Morgan for coordinating the day. Thanks to Mark Downs for pulling together a fine 50th anniversary programme.

League Cup Competition

52 sides took part in the League Cup competition.

- **Lancashire Clubs won 2 of the 8 Finals** – Bolton Snr Shield, Widnes Jnr Plate.
- Cheshire clubs won 6–Sandbach Snr Cup , Wirral Snr Bowl, Wilmslow Snr Plate, Knutsford Jnr Cup, Chester Junior Bowl, New Brighton Jnr Shield.

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

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

National U18s Cup

8 Northwest (2 Lancs , 4 Cheshire, 1 Cumbrian, 1 Shropshire) took up a spot in the competition. Both Lancashire sides were beaten in the 1st round. Northwest side Chester made it to the semi-final losing out in a close game V Newport Salop.

The National Cup entries again impacted on the league season meaning postponement of numerous fixtures.

Squad Numbers during the 2023/24season

Most sides have retained and, in many cases, built their squad numbers over the season. The number of sides failing to finish the season has reduced when compared to previous seasons. The over lapping of the union & league seasons continues to cause issues for clubs in rugby league areas with player availability.

Halbro Northwest Colts League Rugby for this coming season

Entries are in for the 2024/25 season – the leagues will be set with 68 sides.

- Lancashire have 35 of the 68 sides involved.
- Cheshire are at 25, Cumbria 4, Shropshire 2 & 1 side from Staffordshire.

There are no combined cluster clubs from Lancashire playing in the league this coming season.

Changes /Challenges.

Rugby League appears to be as much as challenge as 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.

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 100s of lads across as many clubs as possible in the Northwest of the country.

And finally 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

Lancashire Age Grade Committee

Firstly, my thanks go to Christine, Phil, Alan, Lisa and Jon for their time and effort they put into organising and running of the age grade competition. This takes more time than you realise.

At the onset of season 2023-2024 we had approx. 140 teams enter between the festivals and challenge areas of the competitions. Once again, this included clubs merging to make the numbers up for a competitive team, and to allow players to continue to play in a competitive structure. Some clubs still had difficulty in retaining playing numbers, so made use of the dispensation process, to keep players at their clubs.

Again, as with most areas of the game there has been the usual spectator/coach behaviour issues. This can only be rectified by clubs and volunteers being proactive in discouraging this bad practice. (Not an easy thing to do walking up to someone and asking them to stem their behaviour). TREDs should be more promoted more within clubs.

The subject of referee's is a constant one. We have asked teams to look for officials that are independent to the team or coaches referee half a game each. We need to look at attracting more referees to the game. There are some very good young referees coming through, they need to be approached especially at the older end of age grade rugby.

As the season draws to a conclusion, we have 4 end of season dates to fulfil. These are 2 under 12's festival days, the plate & bowl final and the cup & vase final.

This season Burnage RUFC asked to be considered as a host for the u12's festival day. The build up to the festival days were to say the least very wet, but Burnage did a great job on the day, it extremely well. All teams thoroughly enjoyed themselves and a great day was had.

Eccles RFC stepped in at the last minute to host an u12's festival day. As we know from previous finals Eccles know what expected on the day. So, this was another great day of rugby.

Fylde RUFC hosted the plate & bowl final. 12 Teams on the day, some exiting rugby was played, and all teams enjoyed themselves. Thanks to MADREF's for suppling all the referee's and touch judges for the day.

Leigh RUFC hosted the cup & vase finals. This turned out to be a glorious day of rugby for everyone who attended. There were some very close games that were compelling to watch. Again, thanks to MADREF's for suppling all the referees and to Leigh for the large number of volunteers on site all day.

So, I send my thanks to those clubs that hosed one of the 4 days to end the season. Without clubs and volunteers like you there would be no end of season days for players to celebrate.

As a final note, this season we have been working hard to put in place some form of competitive structure for girls' rugby next season. Dates are in the age grade playing calendar ready.

Let's carry on growing the game of union

Ian Spivey

Chairman, 7 – 16 Age Grade Committee

COUNTY OFFICERS & OTHER OFFICIALS 2023 - 2024

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

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
Kate Benetta
Tommy Hughes

World Rugby Chairman
Bill Beaumont CBE DL

RFU President
Rob Briers

RFU Council Member
Dave Clarke
Paul Deakin

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: Ken Andrews
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: Chris Barrett
Secretary: Jon Kitchen

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*

Note to Annual Members:
Individual Subscriptions (£20.00) are due on 1st July 2024
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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Registered in England & Wales – 06959820

Directors: M Downs (Company Secretary),
CA Baker, K Bennetta, G Burns MBE, D. Clarke, P Deakin,
H Hughes, JT Hughes, MJ Worsley.

The Lancashire Rugby Union Youth Trust
Referred to in the Annual Report,
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**Contact details and other information can be found on the
Lancashire County
website: www.lancashirerugby.com**