

LANCASHIRE COUNTY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-25

THE SECRETARY'S OPENING REMARKS

As ever my first job is to thank our President, Brian Hurst for a great season in the role. As well as filling this role he is also involved in the Cup committee and works tirelessly for his own club Littleborough as Chairman. A trip to Twickenham beckons before he hands over the reins to represent the County at the U20s Jason Leonard Cup final. Brian has been supported all the way by his wife Jane who we should also thank.

To Rugby, both our Senior Mens and Womens XVs sadly came unstuck by Yorkshire in the double header. Sadly, this last line was left in from last seasons report. The Womens XV lost to Staffordshire very closely in the opening game and beat Northumberland on the road. in the opening game with the men winning their only other game in the North group against Somerset !

The U20s face Devon in their final at Twickenham, anyone having watched this team knows they re something special and I'm sure many will feature in the Senior XV in seasons to come.

The County Championship season continues to be pushed back later and later to the point it will soon clash with the start of the following season. This has to stop and be brought back in to May. To ask player to potentially play a final a week before the start of pre-season for their clubs is unfair.

The structure needs to change as the top division of the Bill Beaumont Cup has very few sides in and competition is sparse but I feel we must still compete at that level. A return to the promotion, relegation system should be reinstated.

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

Our Royals had their usual run out at Leigh over the Christmas period in their annual fixture against the Anti Assassins, as well as an invitation game playing Vale of Lune in their celebration of their 125th season. My thanks to all players and coaches for putting this together and to the AAs & The Vale for providing stout opposition.

The Finances are in good health, but as with everyone, some more funding would never go amiss. This funding is well allocated by 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.

Ian and Christine Spivey, along with their Mini & Junior team are thanked and hopefully the forthcoming season will grow the seeds sown by them. Organisation of leagues and finals days have been thorough and enjoyed by all who took part.

I pass on my thanks to Malcolm Worsley and his Club & Community Rugby Committee team for the worthy job they have done this season. Malcolm now steps down from the Board at the AGM and I'm sure we would all wish him well. Personally Malcolm, thanks for your guidance over many seasons whilst I have been involved.

Dave Clarke and Paul Deakin are looking after the Counties interests at the maelstrom of Twickenham. The many sub committees and groups they are involved with takes up a lot of their time. On top of this it's not been an easy season with much laundry being aired through certain areas of the press.

The latest Governance Review Report I feel has not treated the Council well, and whilst I agree some changes should be made, its dissolution is not the way forward, this will remove any checks and balances against the board and professional staff at TW2. They are our representatives, voted for by us in the County democratically and should remain so.

The County Schools Union under the Chairmanship of John O'Ryan with Secretarial duties being done by Robbie Jones. John is retiring from the Schools Committee and we wish him well for the future, I am sure we will still see him around at finals day. Thank you both as well as your committee for the work you do on our behalf in the County schools.

Thanks to Kate Bennetta for her work with the Womens and Girls players and teams in the County. With Club rugby, Pathway rugby and Representative rugby to oversee it's a big task.

In Club rugby focus still needs to be given to transitioning youth players to 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. It is not just an issue within Lancashire but across the Country and I feel greater emphasis needs to be put in to resolving this issue.

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 with a large increase with issues from the junior game. I would ask all our clubs to please instil good behaviour in both children and parents alike. Thanks to John Greenwood and his team for dispensing justice, especially Brian Stott whose Fridays are fully taken up with judgements.

My personal gratitude goes firstly to Brian Stott the assistant secretary for covering for me when I have been unable to attend meetings and being a driver in our Governance changes. 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 will see big changes in the off season 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

Our Age Grade Male Teams had good seasons the U18s started with a Win over Cheshire at Manchester and followed it up with a win over Cumbria at a very very cold Penrith. As the weather got colder the final game at Yorkshire was called off after 5 inches of snow fell overnight.

Lancashire U18 36 Cheshire U18 20 at Manchester RC

Cumbria U18 5 Lancashire U18 24 at Penrith RUFC

Again, thanks to Team Manager **Gavin Butterworth** and Lead Coach **Rob Jones** and their staff for a great U18s season and the 15 Lancashire boys invited to the North U18 Trial.

The U17s started with a good win over Yorkshire but came unstuck against a very good Cheshire side before losing a bit of an arm wrestle with Cumbria. Thanks go to new U17s Team Manager **Eugene Grimes** in his first season and coaches **Chris Marsh** and **James Smith**

On the Men's Representative side of things, it was a very good season.

The **Royals** our Community County XV faced our regular "challenge" opponents the Anti-Assassins RUFC at a relatively dry and not too cold **Broughton Park** over Christmas. Lead Coach **Martin Scott** knew that his Royals squad was talented and their proved that with a dominant display over an AA's side containing players from Levels 3, 4 and 5. Team Manager **Stephen "Baz" Bailey** did his usual sterling job in getting the side together and managed to do the same later in the season when the Royals played Vale of Lune to mark the Clubs 100th Year. Vale coming out on top in a high scoring game,

Lancashire Royals 54 Anti-Assassins 21 at Broughton Park FC

Vale of Lune 48 Lancashire Royals 21 at Vale of Lune RUFC

The **U20s** well what can I say other than this bit of the annual report was written about 3 days ago after we finished the County Season as **U20 County Champions** at the Allianz Twickenham. When we held the Trial (71 nominations) back in January we knew we had something special with the final 33 selected. How good was the squad? Well 32 players got on the pitch at some point as we rode our luck on the injury and unavailability fronts but had the luxury of being able to select squads to do a job against each of our opponents thanks to some precise work from the coaching staff.

Lead Coach **Chris Johnson** assisted by **Jack Weare** and **Mark Dickinson** became a "Holy Trinity" of a coaching team further assisted by two current players as part of their Coaching Development in the shape of **Alex Gaughan** and **Theo Hulbert**. Physio **Hayley Sumner** was fantastic in sticking people back together and always with a smile.

Team Manager **Richard "Dicky" Buckley** has given eight years of solid management for the U20s and ended his tenure with the ultimate prize. I could use all kinds of superlatives for Richard, but I think one proper Wigan word will do, he was "Beltin"

As for the Squad, well it was never easy picking a Match Day 23 when all 33 deserved a spot. However, we managed to select those who we thought had the best chance to deliver our game plan game by game. The nett result for that was just over 300 points scored in the Six games played and the Jason Leonard U20 Trophy sitting in front of you at the County AGM. With so much talent available it was inevitable that we would provide a substantial number of players to the North Division U20s Trial. Depends on how you think "substantial" is in terms of the numbers, but we provided 17 or the 35 players trialling. In the end the final 23 players selected for the North U20 Squad has 12 Lancastrians

in it! That means both myself and those lads selected our season won't finish until the first weekend in July! Nothing can take away from our performances this season we have been outstanding, and the squad buy in was a joy to see. Going back to the "Holy Trinity" the amount of detailed planning and assessment done by Johnno and the guys was some of the best I've seen since my time with England U18s. The lads practically knew what the opposition had had for breakfast thanks to the details relayed in a never-ending stream of analysis provided to them. Not that the coaches did all the work the players were challenged to do some homework, and they did that with aplomb.

I feel quite sure that whilst winning the Trophy was a great achievement for us as a County, the bigger one for me is that all of these players want to wear the Red and White shirt again at Senior Level because they played for each other and the Shirt and they loved every minute of it.

Group Games

Lancashire 77 Durham 7 at Leigh RUFC

Lancashire 60 Cheshire 10 at Tyldesley RUFC

Yorkshire 5 Lancashire 60 at Sandal RUFC

Northumberland 26 Lancashire 33 at Whitley Bay Rockcliffe RUFC

Semi-Final

Lancashire 35 East Midlands 24 at Tyldesley RUFC

Final

Lancashire 36 Devon 22 at Allianz Twickenham

The **Senior Men XV** once again had the same dance partners as last season; this time we travelled down to Weston-Super-Mare to face Somerset with a side containing NINE debutants. On a hot hard pitch the Lancashire lads did the business securing a 17-24 win.

That meant a winner takes it all game at Fylde RFC against Yorkshire. A massive crowd cheered us on but the Yorkies just had a but too much in their tanks and ran out winners 22-36. We will continue to rebuild but thanks must go to **Mark Nelson** and his coaching of **Alex Loney, Paul Arnold & Stephen Briers** plus the rest of the support team for a job well done.

Somerset 17 Lancashire 24 at Weston-Super-Mare RFC

Lancashire 22 Yorkshire 36 at Fylde RFC

All in all, a very good season and as we continue to build on our strengths there is no reason why we can't **#TargetTwickenham** once again.

Howard Hughes

Director of Rugby Development

WOMENS & GIRLS RUGBY

Building on the successes of last year, this season has seen continued and impressive growth across the women's and girls' game. Participation has increased in every age group, clearly highlighting the exciting momentum within our programmes. With the upcoming Women's World Cup on the horizon, this growth is both timely and encouraging. We are especially hopeful that, as a county, we can rally behind and promote the four fixtures scheduled at Salford Stadium (AJ Bell Stadium) on the 23rd and 31st of August.

A special thank you goes to Justine Thatcher for her outstanding organisational skills and vastly improved communications. Her contributions have been invaluable to the season's success, particularly within the U16s and U18s programmes. The U16s residential at Barnard Castle stands out as a season highlight, and I look forward to working with Justine again next year.

Thank you also to our Head Coaches James Wright and Sean Philips, along with their dedicated coaching teams. Their passion, commitment, and support have made this a memorable and enjoyable experience for all the girls involved.

U16 Girls:

Nominations and Assessments:

76 nominations received from 15 different rugby clubs.

All 76 players were assessed at Trafford MV.

Two squads of 48 players were selected.

Training and Matches:

6 training sessions held over 4 months – none cancelled.

3 match fixtures played:

Home fixture vs North Midlands at Leigh Rugby Club: 4 games played with 2 full squads per county.

All 4 games won by Lancashire.

Away fixture vs Staffordshire included a coach trip experience. 2 games played with 2 full squads per county. Both games lost.

Residential:

Joint residential weekend held with Cumbria, Northumberland, and Durham at Barnard Castle.

42 players and 3 coaches attended.

Opened by Gill Burns.

Day 1: Training and evening social event.

Day 2: 3 x 30-minute games for two teams.

U18 Girls:

Nominations and Assessments:

42 nominations from 15 clubs.

All players assessed in November at Manchester Rugby Club.

29 players selected for the squad.

Training and Matches:

3 training sessions over 4 months (1 cancelled due to bad weather).

3 match fixtures played:

Away fixture at Northumberland (coach trip experience):

vs Cumbria – *Won*

vs Northumberland – *Lost*

Home fixture at Manchester Rugby Club:

vs Warwickshire – *Won*

vs Staffordshire – *Lost*

Rearranged fixture vs Cheshire – *Won*

Originally scheduled as a tri-fixture with Yorkshire, who withdrew.

Women's Update:

We were thrilled to welcome back Vicky Irwin as Head Coach this season, supported by a talented and enthusiastic team: Ben, Rachael (TomTom), Ed, Aimee, and Yaz. Their collective experience and dedication have been instrumental in the squad's development.

Nominations and Assessments:

85 nominations from 18 clubs – a clear sign of the sport's growing reach.

78 players attended two trial sessions at West Park St. Helens.

The high standard made selection for the final squad of 36 particularly competitive.

Gill Burns Championship Cup – Fixtures & Results:

Lost vs Staffordshire (Away): 39–6

Won vs Northumberland (Away): 12–20

Upcoming: Home fixture vs Yorkshire on 1st June (*result pending*)

Overall, I am extremely pleased with how the season has concluded. The commitment and effort from our coaching and management teams have been central to this year's progress. As we continue to build on these successes, I look forward to even greater achievements and the ongoing development of women's and girls' rugby in the seasons to come.

Kate Bennetta

Womens & Girls Representative Rugby Lead

RFU LEAGUES

Last Season was a very successful season for Lancashire clubs in the RFU National Leagues as indicated below:

Regional League 1 North West

Rossendale led this division from start to finish and despite losing to the eventual runners up in the penultimate match of the season wrapped the League up on the final day with a convincing win over Stoke on Trent.

Regional League 2 North East

Rochdale transferred into Yorkshire to balance up the numbers won this League convincingly having led for much of the season. They clinched the League Title with a comfortable win over the early League leaders Bradford Salem in the penultimate match of the season.

Counties 1 ADM Lancashire and Cheshire

This League again was led by most of the season by West Pk St Helens and despite being pushed hard late on by Didsbury Toc H and Tarleton, they won the League title with an away win at Didsbury Toc H on the last day of the season.

Counties 2 ADM Lancashire and Cheshire

This League was hotly contested by four or five clubs in the early rounds, however after topping the table in late September Wigan went 15 games unbeaten to clinch the title with a convincing win at home to Bolton on the penultimate Saturday of the season.

Counties 3 ADM Lancashire and Cheshire

Garstang and De La Salle were first and second in this League throughout the season with Garstang proving to be the stronger side to win this division.

League	Winners	Runners up	Winners Promoted to
Regional 1 NW	Rossendale		National 2 North
Regional 2 NE	Rochdale		Regional 1 NW
ADM 1	West Pk St Helens		Regional 2 NW
In the Leagues below 2 clubs promoted			
ADM2	Wigan	Warrington	ADM 1
ADM3	Garstang	De La Salle	ADM 2

We would like to congratulate all these clubs and wish them all the best for next Season.

Papa John's Community Cup

This season's competition proved to be problematic with cry offs. There were some notable performances , Rochdale reaching the Semi Final of the Regional 2 Championship before losing away at Lutterworth. Also Littleborough reached the quarter Final of the Counties 2 Championship before losing away at Dinnington.

We did have some success at Counties 2 Level with Southport beating Colville in the North Plate Final 47 -26. Thornton Cleveleys won the Counties 2 North Shield Final beating Birmingham and Solihull 25 – 18

Further to criticism received at the roadshows regarding the Papa John's Cup the RFU Competitions Committee undertook a review of the Competition. The result of this is noted below:

Proposed Regional 1 and 2

National Cup Competition to be scrapped and replaced by a play off system. The intention of this is to provide greater interest until the end of the season and give extra promotion places. This is to be ratified through a series of webinars wit the clubs on the 9th , 10th and 11th June 2025.

Counties 1 and Below

There will continue to be a National Cup , however , clubs have been consulted and the majority voted in favour of the first three rounds being played in the regular season and the QF , SF and Final being played in the first three weeks of May. This will allow for more League fixtures in late March and April which historically brings greater revenue for our clubs in the better weather.

Dave Clarke

North ROC Secretary

SENIOR CUP COMPETITIONS

The number of senior clubs entering the cup competitions for the season 2024/25 was up on recent seasons. Last season the Lancashire Cup had not played for because some of the senior clubs in the county felt that their congested League season was enough rugby for their players. This season, however, the cup competitions were re-structured to include clubs from levels 6 & 7 to compete in the John Burgess Cup and clubs were entered into the Trophy, Plate and Bowl competitions according to their positions in lower league levels.

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. As last year, the finals were held up as a number of finalists were still involved in the RFU's Papa John's Cups. Eventually, the county finals day went ahead as planned at Wigan RUFC on Sunday 11th May 2025. The results are below.

On behalf of the Senior Cup Committee, I wish to thank Wigan RUFC and its members and for all the hard work that made it such an excellent finals day. Thanks also to all clubs who took part in this year's cup competitions and helping to continue the great tradition of cup rugby in Lancashire.

Results

The John Burgess Lancashire Cup	Firwood Waterloo RFC 33	v	West Park RFC 14
The Brian Leigh Lancashire Trophy	Warrington RUFC 43	v	Aspull RFC 26
The Lancashire Plate Final	Tyldesley RUFC 34	v	Littleborough RUFC 29
The Alan Stone Lancashire Bowl	Garstang RUFC 43	v	De La Salle RUFC 36

Ken Andrewsw
Secretary, Senior Cup Committee

COUNTY SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding is, as I say year on year is a passion of mine and this my 33rd year involved with Safeguarding in Rugby Union. A role I take great pride in. Experience as a club CSO and County CBSM and working for RFU, as well as professionally for Sale Sharks.

The community game and Lancashire County Rugby is where my passion is firmly embedded . I have immense pride in ensuring Lancashire Rugby and its safeguarding of Young People and Adults at Risk within our county is still regarded as one of the best CB's in the English Rugby Union. I will strive and continue to maintain the very high standards within our county for many a year to come. Though I am aware that if a successor wishes to be considered for the role

“no(wo)man is an island”

I initially 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 supporting me again throughout this season.

Christine dealing with, keeping and administering the records relating to Regulation 15 – Age Grade Rugby. As well as all the work she does with Age Grade Lancashire competitions leagues and matches.

Lisa answering almost immediately (via a well supported CSO WhatsApp group) and social media pages, answers, links, information and articles relating to all matters Safeguarding and support of children. Her extensive knowledge of issues relating to Children with Neurodiversity and issues still amazes me.

We have this year in the safeguarding team had the added expertise of Catherine Jones who has taken up the mantle and role of Mental Health Champion for the county. Through her employed role with 'TryIt Rugby' Catherine speaks regularly to many clubs, schools and community organisations, continually providing information and advice many times on behalf of Lancashire Rugby – not just relating to mental health.

Catherine has undertaken the role mental health support for the county is a wealth of knowledge and signposting and has recently released the new Lancashire Mental health video highlighting.

“Its Okay not to be Okay”

Which can be viewed <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/19ocmPPU2G/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

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

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 online safeguarding audits issued by RFU via GMS completed by all clubs at start of season (early September) were this year completed on time and we were I believe the first county to post 100% completion first

Thank You to you all , please let's do it again this coming season. 01/09/2025

There is now a new process for recording incidents and all concerns relating to Safeguarding and discipline.

Incidents are required to be reported firstly to Twickenham for recording purposes. Twickenham will then triage and issue actions to the relevant officers, clubs or investigators. Please ensure this new process is adhered to, it will protect us all. No issues will slip through net, be dealt with in house, nor will any perpetrator go unpunished. This way we will keep all children and adults at risk SAFE. So too our county rugby.

I wish to sincerely thank the 60+ club safeguarding officers who are integral and present in all our County Clubs ; (which have under 18 year olds playing rugby and some clubs who don't but still have CSO's).

Without these wonderful and valuable members of clubs and committees, your clubs would and could not function.

It is a regulation from RFU that a CSO is in post , fully trained and qualified at all clubs. The knowledge and experience of these wonderful officers is vast; we are extremely lucky to have them working for us. Sometimes unseen and underappreciated. Here is the opportunity to say publicly say THANK YOU to you all

Sincere thanks are extended to Bob Wilkinson and Graham Winstanley, CSO's from Clitheroe and Orrell respectively, who are stranding down this year after many years in their role's as CSO at their respective clubs. Thank you, gentlemen.

To those CSO's who will be stepping down (that I am not aware of yet), 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.

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 clubs.

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

offence and is embedded in regulations.

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 146 active referees, slightly improving on the number for last season, recruiting 39 whilst 15 have retired or moved elsewhere. I am pleased to be able to say that our number of Female Match Officials (FMO's) has increased this season, including 3 female YMO's.

Our Starting to Whistle Course has again proved successful and developed to become more effective; it has a more practical element and the timings for the course have been adjusted, which has allowed us 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, the Developing the Referee Programme which had its first run in February/March of this season. Feedback was very positive and we indeed to run it next year.

Red cards went up this to 132, from 83 in 23/24 and 116 in season 22/23. but abuse continues to grow sadly, with some 29 adults MOA red cards and 9 age grade MOA red cards. We are seeing an increase in MOA from coaches, spectators or parents. The positive aspect is that the number of Age Grade players sent off for MOA is decreasing.

In terms of appointments, please see the following information.

• **End of Season summary –**

Month	Adult		Colts		Schools		University		Grand Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Aug	55		6		2				63
Sep	195	19	51		59				324
Oct	179	21	45	2	39		15	5	306
Nov	192	16	36		53		13	11	321
Dec	92	10	37		16		7	4	166
Jan	110	13	29		29		9	3	193
Feb	178	23	47	1	22		9	8	288
Mar	199	33	45		13		5	5	300
Apr	115	14	28		9				166
May	10		15						25
Total	1325	149	339	3	242	0	58	36	2152

Note does not 3 J semi-finals and 2 Cheshire games in May.

No referee available – 18

Association referee used – 24

% games appointed to – 98 %

We received requests to make a total of 2,152 appointments through the season (2517 in 2023/24).

Two games this season were abandoned at the referee's request, in one case for the purpose of safety as the referee could not guarantee the safety of players due to violent conduct from both sides.

We are aware of two cases which are currently legal matters involving the police and/or the law courts.

Success with the Young Match Officials (YMO) has seen 5 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 December 2024 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.

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. Twelve of the referees have been appointed to referee at level 5 (they are not all at level 5), the remainder are being developed to move up. We have two referees who have moved up to the national panel and one who has begun officiating in the Premiership this year.

At level 6 and below every active referee we attempt to watch every referee at least once during the season – we conducted over 300 observations this season.

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. We intend to appoint a Coaching coordinator for next season as we move to a more "coaching" approach rather than performance review approach.

Our relationship with clubs continues on a positive note and we are grateful for their support. I am pleased to say we have had only a small number of complaints this season and all three were resolved amicably.

The Society moves ever closer to its 125th anniversary.

Mike Hull

Hon. Secretary, Manchester & District Referees Society

LIVERPOOL & DISTRICT REFEREES SOCIETY

The Liverpool and District Rugby Referees held their Annual General Meeting on 13 May 2025, confirming the below under its obligations as a limited business. The society continues to grow and deliver a strong refereeing service across the CBs we support.

Key Highlights:

Referee Activity: 70 referees active this season; 13 new recruits, with 7 now regularly engaged. Recruitment and onboarding is being led by Chris Higgins.

Appointments: Over 1,100 games covered, despite ongoing player shortages. Named awards issued for referees contributing most across Saturdays, Sundays, and midweek fixtures.

Development: Neil Fallon has been appointed as Training Co-ordinator, with Josh Smith. A refreshed training model will focus on inclusive, practical sessions running monthly August–April. Ben Moore has stood down.

Safeguarding: One member removed under RFU procedures following investigation. Safeguarding remains a priority, and the THINK model is embedded across operations.

Welfare: Referee Welfare Protocol adopted by membership and backed by the Executive Committee, rolling out currently and into season 2025-26.

Grading: A continued focus on physical standards (including Bronco testing) will underpin grading decisions, alongside referee value and commitment.

Naming and Identity: Following a member poll, the organisation will adopt 'Liverpool and District Rugby Referees' as its public-facing name. Legal identity as LADS Ltd is retained, "society" is still an acceptable word but not our core referencing.

Finance: Reserves requirement met; accounts approved. Fees and charges remain unchanged into 25-26 season.

Club and School Recognition:

Club of the Year: Ormskirk RFC (Special mention: Sefton RFC)

School of the Year: Merchant Taylors (Special mention: St Anselm's College)
The society thanks all clubs and CBs for their ongoing support.

Conal Scholes

Hon. Secretary, Manchester & District Referees Society

DISCIPLINARY REPORT

Introduction

This season the breakdown of cases is

	Adult		Youth		Total	
	23/24	24/25	23/24	24/25	23/24	24/25
Outstanding	5	4	0	2	5	6
Proved	112	182	47	48	159	230
Dismissed	14	10	0	1	14	11
Sine Die	2	0	0	0	2	0
Total	133	196	47	51	180	247

The number of cases dealt with this season has increased 27 an increase of 33% on last season. This is genuinely concerning as the number of matches being played is decreasing.

I would like to thank John Greenwood (Chair) and all panel members who have sat in hearings this 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.

We will be sending out a new strategy before the start of next season. This will hold clubs more responsible for the actions of their players, officials, and supporters.

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

2025 represented a quieter year than 2024 in terms of development activities and opportunities for the Lancashire Schools union. We still had a busy year presenting opportunities for our existing schools, both for boys and girls, but many of our programmes with relation to Sale Sharks mentioned in last years report did not materialise, mainly due to changes in personnel there, macro developments across the region, especially the development of a women’s world cup legacy plan and more general changes to the ability of our group to commit to the meetings and negotiations needed to make things happen.

Hopefully there will be a good outcome from the WWC, and I look forward to seeing the benefit we gain from all the work being done by the RFU, Lancs RFU, our partners in development at various clubs and institutions and wish them all the best,

Highlight of my year was the presentation to Tauheedul Islam Boy’s High School, Blackburn of their emerging school of the year trophy. We got to meet their inspirational headteacher, Masjid Ditta, and we were all really impressed by the great work been done the team in place there. I would doubt if there was ever a better case study of how Rugby’s core values merge seamlessly with a school’s charter.

Robbie Jones, the CSU’s formidable secretary will add a full list of competition and festival attendees and progress for 24-25 to his report, can I just take a moment to thank him once again for his energy

and commitment to everything school's rugby, nationally and locally, and for his amazing support over my extended Chairperson's tenure.

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, I have taken the rash step this year of joining the MADREFS so my rugby journey continues, and my new role at Stonyhurst means the school's team have not seen the last of me!

It has been a real privilege to have been in this role over the last 6 years, and I want to pay homage to all the members of the committee who allowed me to take on the job. I am sure that we will be able to find a successful replacement from the team, and that there will be another great year of Schools rugby next season.

I hope that I leave Lancashire County Schools Union in a slightly better place than I found it, despite pandemics, politics and PE teachers - I certainly tried.

John O'Ryan

Chair

Lancashire County Schools Union

LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS COMPETITIONS RESULTS

A total of 51 schools participated in the Lancashire Rugby Schools 2024-25 competitions and Festivals with 10 different schools winning age group competitions.

U12 & U13 Boys Festivals

31 schools participated in 3 separate festivals in each age group, which were based on ability/playing experience. Unfortunately, the top U12 tier was postponed and a suitable date was unable to be found. The U13 Cup Festival was won by **Audenshaw School**.

U14 Boys – 28 teams entered

Cup Final:	Merchant Taylors vs Kirkham GS	(not played)
Plate Final:	Audenshaw beat Scarisbrick Hall 42-17	@ Eccles RFC
Vase Final:	Outward Academy Haydock beat St Edwards Coll 54-7	@ Ruskin Park

U15 Boys - 27 teams entered

Cup Final:	Kirkham GS beat Lancaster RGS 35-28	@ Preston Grasshoppers RFC
Plate Final:	Scarisbrick Hall beat Birkdale HS 21-19	@ Southport RFC
Vase Final:	St Edwards College beat Maricourt 51-12	@ Ruskin Park RFC

U16 Boys - 23 teams entered

Cup Final:	Stonyhurst beat St Mary's Crosby 41-17	@ Preston Grasshoppers RFC
Plate Final:	Birkdale HS drew with Lytham HS 32-32	@ Preston Grasshoppers RFC

Vase Final: **AKS Lytham beat Chesterfield HS 29-5** **@ Preston Grasshoppers RFC**

U18 Boys – 15 teams entered

Cup Final: **AKS Lytham beat Stonyhurst 20-15** **@ Fylde RFC**

Plate Final: **St Marys Crosby beat Liverpool College 48-5** **@ Ruskin Park RFC**

Vase Final: **Manchester GS beat Bolton School 47-10** **@ Burnage RFC**

U12 & U14 Girls Festivals

7 U12 and 15 U14 schools participated in touch rugby festivals in each group.

Congratulations also to Scarisbrick Hall, who progressed to the T1 festivals held at Sixways, Worcester at both Year 12/13 and U14 mixed festivals run by the RFU.

The Ken Andrews' Cup for Emerging School of the Year was awarded to Lytham St Annes High School and **The Sanderson School Trophy for Lancashire School of the Year** was awarded to AKS Lytham.

Special thanks to Mark Devine for co-ordinating the competitions during the season and to John O'Ryan and John Morgan for assisting at the respective Festivals and Finals. Thanks also to Lancashire Rugby for supporting the schools competitions so readily and to the Clubs for hosting the finals; and to the Manchester & District and Liverpool Referees Society for providing the officials for all our finals, quite often at short notice! Their support is greatly appreciated.

Robbie Jones

Competitions Organiser

COLTS RUGBY

Entries to the Halbro NW Colts Leagues

68 sides joined the league for the 2024/25 season (56 in 2023/24) . The structure consisted of 4 senior leagues (35 sides) & 4 junior leagues (33 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 35
- Cheshire 26
- Cumbria 4, Staffs, 1, Shropshire 2

55 sides finished the leagues with 13 sides having dropped out either before the season started or during the course of the season.

Combined sides / Clusters - This season only Wirral & Hoylake (Gulls) ran combined sides at both Jnr & Snr age groups.

Clubs running sides at both U17s and U18s

Lancashire: Heaton Moor, Rochdale **(3)**, Sedgley Park, Waterloo & Tyldesley.

Cheshire: Chester, Stockport **(3)**, Wirral, Lymm, Caldy, New Brighton & Sandbach

Other Counties: Whitchurch

League winners for the 2023/24 season

Senior A Stockport

Senior B **Leigh**

Senior C Sandbach

Senior D **Tyldesley**

Junior A Chester

Junior B Newcastle (Staffs)

Junior C **Aldwinians**

Junior D Wirral Gulls

Lancashire Colts Cups Finals were Played at Eccles RUFC. - This was the 51st anniversary of the Frank Morgan Lancashire Cup (49th time contested)

25 Sides (14 Snr & 11 Jnr) entered the County Knock out competition. This was down by 3 clubs on the previous season & 6 down from the 2022/23 season.

The competition was played across 4 rounds. Those sides losing in their 1st round went through to the Trophy Competition allowing each side to enjoy a minimum of 2 knock out rounds.

The finals were (**Winners shown in Bold**):

- Snr Frank Morgan Cup **Leigh** 26-8 Wigan
- Snr Joe McDonnough Trophy **Fylde** 17 -15 Preston Grasshoppers
- Jnr Rob Briers Cup **Firwood Waterloo** 22 – 12 Liverpool Collegiate
- Jnr Alan James Trophy **Sedgely park** 28- 15 Aldwinians

In winning the Frank Morgan Cup Leigh Senior Colts won the Cup for the 1st time in the clubs' history.

The drop in numbers entering the competition can be explained in part by the block put on entries from out of county guest sides. This was a decision taken by the County Board at the end of last season ending the tradition of allowing entries from invited out of county sides

Thank you to Leeann Aspinall, Chris Gaffey and all at Eccles for facilitating a well-run and enjoyable finals day. Thanks to Mark Downs for pulling together the final's day programme.

League Cup Competition - 38 sides took part in the League Cup competition.

- **Lancashire Clubs won both the Senior Finals –Rochdale** Snr Bowl, **Fylde** Snr Plate. (Note Senior A sides were unable to enter the league cup due to a lack of free dates)
- Cheshire clubs won 3 –Chester Jnr Cup, Davenport Jnr Plate, Wirral Jnr Shield. Shropshire club Whitchurch won the Jnr Bowl

Thanks to all involved at Widnes & 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 In total 10 Northwest Colts League sides took up a spot in the competition - 3 Lancashire sides- **Leigh, Ormskirk & Vale of Lune**, were joined by 5 Cheshire, 1 Cumbria, 1 Shropshire. Northwest Colts League side Whitchurch won through the rounds to the semi-final losing out 18-22 to Olney who went on to win the competition. The National Cup entries impacted on the NW Colts League season meaning postponement & re-arrangement of numerous fixtures, these re-arrangements combined with weather postponements meant that the League season was not concluded until the 13th April.

Squad Numbers during the 2024/25 season - The information taken from the match cards indicate that most sides that managed to play through the season were able to maintain an in some clubs build their player numbers, however, the reasons why 13 sides dropping out either before the season got underway or during the season needs to be assessed.

Electronic Match Cards (EMC's) – The Northwest colts league and the Lancashire Cup competitions both introduced EMCs this season. Once a few early issues were sorted they have generally been very successful and easier for team managers /administrators.

Halbro Northwest Colts League Rugby for this coming season - Entries are in for the 2025/26 season – the leagues will be set with 62 sides (6 fewer than last season, but 6 more than the season before that)

- Lancashire have 35 of the 62 sides.
- Cheshire are at 19, Cumbria 4, Shropshire 3 & 1 side from Staffordshire.

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

Proposed Lancashire Jnr Colts League – Howard Hughes (Lancashire CBs' Director of Rugby Development) had made a proposal for a Lancashire only Junior (U17s) League for the upcoming 2025 /26 season.

In a recent meeting between the CB, the RFU & the NW Colts League this proposal was discussed and with little interest from the sides coming through to Colts it will not be going ahead this season.

Changes /Challenges. The over lapping of the Rugby Union & Rugby League seasons continues to raise challenges issues for our Lancashire clubs in Rugby League areas adversely impacting player availability. The timing of the CB U18's Sundays does not help with this matter, in that no sooner has the Rugby League season finished then the CB Sundays begin. The block on playing Colts League fixtures on these CB Sundays hampers sides from gathering any momentum. This is currently being investigated by the CBs and the NW Colts League Organisers.

Thankyous & 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 & For England, congratulations.

To the Coach's/Managers and parents who support their sons each week, as they travel around the Northwest of England - 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 1000s of lads across as many clubs as possible in Lancashire and the wider 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

As always, my thanks go to the age grade committee for everything they do throughout the season.

This season feels as though it's been a long one.

This season we have been able to introduce the Lancashire girls under 12's-18's festival and challenge fixtures. This all started by having club meetings back in 2023-2024, to get the clubs input on the best way to go about putting Lancashire County games for girls on a similar footing to the boys.

So, for the first season we had teams cluster to make up numbers and invited Cheshire girls to join us. As expected, the first few dates were a bit of an unknown area, but all coaches stepped up and made sure the fixtures were played within spirit of our core values. We kept playing numbers very flexible to ensure all players were given the opportunity of game time. To end the first season of Lancashire County girls fixtures we held a girls rugby celebration day at Manchester RUFC. Thanks must go to Paul Windham for organizing the day. There were over 350 girls in attendance showcasing a full day of rugby. Considering it was over the Easter holiday we had a great turn out. Thank you to all the girls, coaches, and admins for their support and patience on this first season.

We are now looking to improve for the 2025-2026 season and move forward engaging more girls and more teams.

The 12's-16's boys' season has yet again been a successful one. We started the season with 140 teams entering and finished the season with 24 teams attending challenge finals days and 30 under 12's team split between two festival venues

The venues that did a brilliant job of hosting our end of season events were as follows....

U12's festivals were at Burnage RUFC and Trafford MV RUFC, the challenge finals were at Aldwinians RUFC and Leigh RUFC. A massive thank you must go out to these clubs and their dedicated volunteers to put on a great spectacle of age grade rugby. Without clubs stepping up to host there will be no end of season events.

It has been great to see some young referees officiating some of the challenge fixtures, we need to encourage more people to take up the whistle. Having said this, we still need to work on spectator behavior improvements.

Going forward we are working to promote better club school links within the game and introducing T1 rugby in and around our clubs and schools.

Ian Spivey

Chairman, 7 – 16 Age Grade Committee

COUNTY OFFICERS & OTHER OFFICIALS 2024 - 2025

County President Brian Hurst
Vice Presidents:
John Greenwood (Senior Vice President)
Mark Nelson
Robbie Jones
Ian Spivey
Stephen Goddard

Members of the Management Board

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

Dir. Rugby Development

Howard Hughes

Dir. Safeguarding & Player Welfare

Carol Baker

Dir. Volunteering

Gill Burns MBE

Dir. Without Portfolio

Kate Benetta
Tommy Hughes

RFU Council Member

Dave Clarke
Paul Deakin

Hon. Membership Secretary

Anne-Marie Briers

Safeguarding Manager

Carol Baker

Deputy: Christine Spivey

Lisa Johnson

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

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

Individual members Representatives

Ian Scott-Brown
Chris Smail

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.lancashirerugby.com

Note to Annual Members:
Individual Subscriptions (£20.00) are due on 1st July 2025
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
is a company limited by guarantee**

Registered Office:

Hanover Buildings, 11-13 Hanover Street, Liverpool, Merseyside L1 3DN
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,
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**