

LANCASHIRE COUNTY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

Minutes of the Board Meeting
Monday 20th February 2023

Present: Mr D Clarke in the Chair, & Messrs, J.T. Hughes, H. Hughes, K. Andrews, P. Deakin, G.A. Burns, M.J. Worsley, C.A. Baker, R.T.J. Briers, & M. Downs.

In Attendance: Mr B.H. Stott

Apologies: Mr J.R.S. Greenwood.

CB Relationship Managers Report.

See A Soutar written report, Appendix 1.

In addition to the report it should be noted under role changes that John Foster, one of our RFU Club Developers will become move to growing the game for Womens and Girls in the North West pre Womens RWC 2025.

Minutes of the last meeting.

The minutes of the Board meeting held on Monday 9th January 2023, (previously circulated) were accepted and signed as a correct record.

Matters arising.

MJW asked about sponsorship talks with LANX, MD to contact.

Action MD

HH – MJP Environmental will act as shirt sponsors for the U20s for 2 seasons.

CAB – date for website meeting is still outstanding.

RFU Report.

Written report by KA circulated – Appendix 2

KA addressed MJW directly as a fellow Board member, and was unhappy about his personal comments to both himself and Dave Clarke at the recent Clubs Tackle Height meeting.

KA described the difficult clubs meeting at Liverpool St Helens around discussions on the Tackle Height. The ill feeling shown by several attendees will be fed back to the RFU. It was admitted that the initial correspondence from the RFU had been particularly bad in general but on describing the tackle height as to be below the waist.

MD – The RFU had set up a series of Forums both online and face to face. Each CB has been given a quota calculated against the number of voting club. Lancashire have a max of 55 attendees and it was decided to ask clubs to nominate 1 representative who could be any member of their club. At date of this meeting MD reported 11 from 80 clubs had responded.

RTJB – confirmed he had been asked to lead a group to look at communications around the subject and the decision making process. RFU Council feel the whole process has been run badly. Investigations and report are to be with Council by 1st April. Its widely known that the RFU must do better in future.

MJW – was unhappy that Council Members cannot be mandated. KA explained the regulations that their duty was to the game and that they were there to make the best decision given any information on any subject on behalf of their CB. It would not be possible to consult our clubs on every decision to be made by Council. BHS also commented that you would not get a consensus on decisions from 60 voting clubs.

PD – felt that non of the anecdotal evidence negated the medical evidence. DC explained that the medical evidence was what Council Members were given 7 days prior to the Zoom Meeting vote.

BHS – concerned that the game have still not been given any change or definitive area or point from RFU.

RTJB – closed the discussion by noting that we cannot re-write what has been done and we have to learn from mistakes.

HH – reported that all the County Championship fixture on the RFU website are wrong. DC has brought this to the attention of Tim Miller.

County Championship Budgets.

PD – confirmed we are on track for this point in the season. The U20s sponsorship had helped.

Correspondence.

None appertaining to this meeting.

New Members.

No applications.

50:50 Draw

Feb 23	Value
PE Hughes	£53.40
PE Hughes	£8.90
EN Norcross-Taylor	£8.90
WN Hopkinson	£8.90
D Poppitt	£8.90

Date of next meeting.

Next Meeting: 6:30 pm on Monday 6th March 2023 at Liverpool St Helens.

Any other business.

KA – Lancashire Competitions Committee will meet by Zoom on 1st March. Due to KA retirement this committee will need a new Chairman, KA feels this should be a member of the Board.

PD – Blackpool have been broken in to and the club damaged. PD to call and find out if we can help in anyway, including financially.

GAB – Volunteers Award nominations deadline is 25th February.

MD – reminded the Board of the details of David Hodgson’s funeral.

DC – reported that there had been several cry offs in ADM Counties League 3. HH thought this was probably down to a clash with the 6 Nations matches.

DC – Papa Johns Cups will have some amount of travel funding over a certain distance.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7:45pm

D. Clarke

Chairman

Date

6-3-23

Appendix 1

Area Manager Report to Board – 13th February 2023

Affiliation

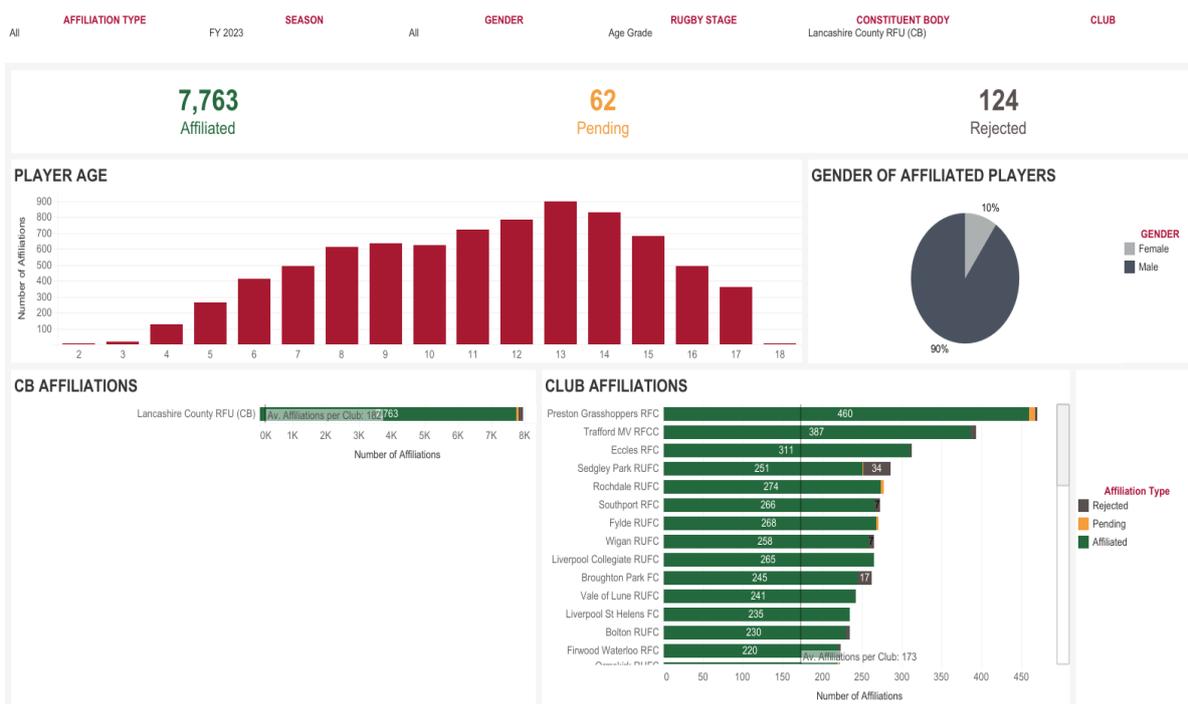
Club	Engagement	Comments/Notes (if required)
Rochdale	Phone call	Overall numbers look correct - Senior/Junior colts merged numbers down in Under 16's and Under 15's
Ormskirk	Email - generic	20 player down - EMAIL SENT 11/1/23
Southport	Phone call	53 players down- 10/01/23- GMS figures accurate. Lost U16s team. In total, 99 AG players have not returned to rugby this season according to John Kenny
Ashton under Lyne	Email - individual	Mixed colts 21/22 - some turned 18 not re-affiliated some moved to other clubs some stopped playing. Lost under 11's team majority came from RL decided to stay with RL - Numbers correct
Heaton Moor	Phone call	24 players down- Lost entire U13s team.... numbers are correct
Liverpool St Helens	Phone call	24 players down- Jackie investigating 10/01/23
Eccles	Phone call	20 player down- Figures are accurate 11/01/23
Manchester	Email - individual	17 players down- Lost U15 team according to Natalie 16/01/23. Figures look correct. Message sent to TMs to ensure all active players are affiliated.
Aldwinians	Email - generic	Club Developer has sent individual email 7/12/22 - 57 down on last year
North Manchester	Cluster Meeting - virtual/f2f	Club have many age grade players CD and CBSM are working with club to make sure these players are accredited
Vale of Lune	Email - individual	Club Developer has sent individual email 7/12/22 - 57 down on last year

We had identified eleven clubs across the CB that we thought were a bit low in terms of numbers, John/Aaron have been engaging with these clubs to find out the reasons why. See below for information we have had back from the clubs.

Green = We are now happy with the numbers.

If you feel there are still clubs low on numbers please let us know and we are happy to get in contact.

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN



Governance and Business Transformation

Sport England Governance and Business Transformation support for rugby clubs The RFU is working with Sport England to develop a programme of governance and business transformation which will be supported by the Government Winter Survival Programme.

- Blackburn - Registration email sent but not completed
- Broughton Park - Registration email sent but not completed
- Burnage - Registration email sent but not completed
- Firwood Waterloo - Registration email sent but not completed
- Fylde - Registration email sent but not completed
- Preston – Support email sent out
- Manchester - Registration email sent but not completed
- Rochdale - Registration email sent but not completed
- Rossendale – Registered
- Sedgley – Registered
- Vale of Lune - Registration email sent but not completed

Role Changes

Matt Bryan will be leaving the North Competitions Development Officer (CDO) role, moving into the newly created role of Player Registration Manager, project managing the implementation of the new adult registration process.

Aaron Howorth has been successful in applying for the North CDO role. Aaron currently works as a RFU Club Developer in the North West and will begin transitioning into the CDO role over the coming weeks. Aaron will be reaching out to competition organisers across the north, in due course.

Honda Volunteer of the Year

The Honda Volunteer of the year awards 2023 is now open and accepting applications. The awards will recognise and celebrate rugby volunteers for their achievements and efforts over the past 12 months from around the game - <https://www.englandrugby.com/participation/volunteers/honda-volunteer-recognition-programme/how-to-nominate>

No matter what their role, on or off the pitch, behind the scenes or on the committee, we want to hear about your volunteers who do a great job, day in, day out.

There are so many outstanding volunteers who have really made a difference and the Honda Volunteer of the Year awards provides a great opportunity to recognise this and most importantly, say thank you!

This year's awards include three categories:

1. **Game for All** recognises those who have developed an inspiring offer to open the game up to new & under-represented audiences & make the game more inclusive and accessible for all.
2. **Unsung Hero** recognises those who have provided positive experiences, enhanced member enjoyment and ensured their club is fit for the future.
3. **Challenging Spirit** recognises those who have implemented innovative ideas to help re-build after the pandemic; engaging and retaining players and increasing the number of games played.

Get involved and say thank you to a volunteer, or a group of volunteers, who have gone above and beyond in the last year.

Nominations close on Friday 24 February (17.00)

You can nominate now using the following link -

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/c577b56b66a14f12946d5538d1f55af2>

If you have any queries regarding the volunteer recognition programme please email VolunteerRecognition@RFU.com

12 Nominations so far from

Wigan RUFC

Eccles RFC

Littleborough RUFC

Tarleton RFC

Firwood Waterloo RFC

Broughton RUFC

Garstang RFC

Old Bedians RFC

Course Numbers

Course Name	Start Date	Attendees Booked	Spaces Available
Play it Safe - Preston Grasshoppers	27/02/2023	14	6
Play it Safe - Fylde RUFC	13/03/2023	0	20
Emergency First Aid in Rugby Union - Liverpool Collegiate	18/03/2023 & 19/03/2023	0	12
Play it Safe - Fylde RUFC	20/03/2023	0	20

LANCASHIRE COUNTY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION LTD
Board Meeting 20th February 2023
RFU Representatives Report

Notes from RFU Council meeting held at Twickenham, on 13th February 2023

CEO Report-Bill Sweeney

Report containing an update from the CEO on strategic matters for the RFU and our game.

Topics covered:

Adult Male Recovery Plan – Project Phoenix

The adult male recovery plan (Project Phoenix) continues to be tracked and scrutinised. This work has been targeted on an identified 160 focus clubs and, more recently, c.25 selected adult men's merit tables that are operating between 60-75% match completion rate, and where a little extra support may ensure they finish the season strongly.

A 'Hit Squad' including local Competition Organisers and RFU staff is working with the targeted merit tables to develop and implement short-term action plans

Tackle Height

Council held a lengthy debate on the decision to lower the tackle height. There was some anger regarding the poor communication that led to much misunderstanding the game and their understandable reaction. Council members took the decision in good faith but were let down by those who should have got the message right. Council agreed that the decision was correct and over the course of the next few weeks, the RFU will be launching a series of initiatives to listen to and learn from people across the community game.

At the Council meeting, Ken Andrews gave verbal feedback from the Lancashire clubs meeting on 8th February. **(see Appendix 1)**

Central to this will be a series of consultation forums that will aim to talk to 1,000 people during the month of March. These forums will give an opportunity to discuss what the law changes mean to those in the game, as well as why they are happening and what is needed to be factored in to make them a success.

These forums will only work if they can source input from all different parts of the community game.

Alongside the forums, there will be an open survey, giving everyone the chance to have their say, as well as a series of online focus groups. This open survey will be formally announced by the RFU on Wednesday 1st March.

Next steps and a more comprehensive explanation of the Consultation process. **(see Appendix 2)**

Changing the tackle height is a vital step in reducing the risk of player head injuries and concussion in the community game. It's backed by a large body of scientific evidence, and is aligned with recent steps taken by France, other Home Unions and New Zealand. The RFU is determined to make this a success, while ensuring that changes are implemented in a way that means rugby remains the sport we all love.

New Professional Game Agreement.

The joint RFU / PRL Steering Group met in December, and again in January, to kick off discussions and agree the process that we will be running.

It is anticipated that a three-stage process linked to Council agreements, and are currently in; Stage one, in which we are sharing headline objectives and agree areas of contention / agreement. Stage two will run until the April Council meeting, when we aim to have the principles of the new agreement confirmed.

Stage three ends with the final agreement, targeted for June Council.

DCMS Select Committee Report

The DCMS Select Committee issued its report in which they recommended the setting up of a benevolent fund to help support players in hard times, ensuring player voices are heard on player welfare issues and how the RFU would support professional clubs going forward.

An acknowledgement the RFU and PRL were instigating governance changes to support better management of professional clubs. These changes include updating the fit and proper persons test, improving financial oversight and also having greater independence in financial monitoring and sporting decision making.

Regarding the RFU's finances, it reiterated that despite significant losses caused by COVID, recovery efforts will ensure the RFU continues to invest around £300m in the game over a four-year cycle, including almost £30m per year in the community game. In response to the Committee wanting to know how the RFU would financially underpin clubs, the statement said that it would be wrong to divert community game funding to sustain losses of professional independent clubs who receive funding via the PGA.

Wasps

The RFU has received the signed insolvency agreement and proof of funds.

Wasps and the RFU have been working closely in recent weeks, particularly around the payment of rugby creditors, to establish a clear process for validation and payment of those rugby creditors. RFU will continue to work with and support the club over the payment of rugby creditors. The RFU and Wasps have agreed within the insolvency agreement that the payment of staff and players must be prioritised.

Worcester Warriors

On Thursday 9 February, Atlas released a statement saying that they had withdrawn its application for Worcester Warriors men's team to play in the Championship. The RFU and DCMS met with Atlas on Monday 13 February to see if there could be a different resolution to the situation. The Atlas position did not change, and therefore Worcester Warriors will not participate in the Championship in the 2023-24 season.

The Atlas decision to withdraw their Championship application leaves the RFU with no regulatory means to enforce the payment of rugby creditors and this responsibility for managing the liabilities of the insolvent club now lies with the administrator of WRFC Trading Limited, and the liquidator of WRFC Players Limited.

The RFU awaits the detailed proposals from Atlas on how it proposes to maintain rugby at Sixways, and will continue to work with DCMS, local MPs, Atlas and the local rugby community to help find the best rugby outcome.

The RFU maintains its commitment to running the Midlands academy which it took over in November and the continuation of Worcester Warriors Women.

England Senior Men's Team

Significant changes have been made to the men's Senior Coaching group. The appointment of Steve Borthwick as England Head Coach alongside Kevin Sinfield and Nick Evans. We are excited to see the impact that Steve will have, with his team in the forthcoming Six Nations and leading into RWC 2023.

Championship Strategic Review

The Championship Strategic Review Group was set up to consider opportunities and options to support the Championship and its clubs to become more financially sustainable.

Council **approved** the recommendation on the proof-of-concept Cup Competition to involve all Premiership and Championship clubs in 23/24.

AGM Format and planning

A motion to de-couple the AGM from the June Council meeting and hold the AGM virtually on 21 June 2023 (mid-week) was defeated.

Council **rejected** this motion and the preferred choice is a hybrid meeting immediately after the Council Meeting on June 16th 2023

Council Nominations Committee

Council approved the recommendation of the nomination of Deborah Griffin for election at the AGM as the Junior Vice-President of the Rugby Football Union for the 2023/24 season.

Men's International Ticket Pricing - Season 2023/24

The pricing and plan for Six Nations 2024 (23/24 season) which relates to two fixtures, namely Wales and Ireland (both Cat A+), was approved by Board on 25 January 2023.

This pricing for these fixtures would generate £9,054,846 in net ticket revenue per fixture and £18,109,693 overall.

This represents an uplift of 5% versus the equivalent Cat A+ Scotland and France fixtures played in Feb/Mar 2023:

The increase is in response to the pressure of inflationary costs on the organisation which remain high. The increase is lower than current CPI rate and have scaled pricing increases depending on the category.

Every Rose Action Plan Update (Women and Girls)

The Every Rose action plan has 4 main pillars

1. Accessibility – Recruit and Retain
2. Success – Red Roses, Allianz Premier 15s, Pathway
3. Visibility – Broadcast and streaming, increase digital fan following, increase attendance at events.
3. Commercially Viable – Premier 15s self-financing, Red Roses self-financing

RWC 2025 Legacy Update

Overall project update

- a) Full business case signed off by DCMS for funding 22-23, 23-24 and 24-25. Due to Government spend cycles, justification for 25-26 will be required nearer the time.
- b) Publicly, the legacy programme is now being referred to as the RWC 2025 Impact programme. This aligns with sector practice in being clearer that the programme aims to have an impact ahead of the tournament, not just afterwards

Upcoming priorities include setting up the remaining groups in the governance structure, including oversight group to advise and ensure tournament connectivity, as well as engagement with host cities to work in partnership to deliver the programme.

Inclusion and Diversity update

The proposals from the I&D working group are:

- a. Provide each Council member with access to the LMS portal, training courses and resources.
- b. Run a number of training sessions to assist Council Members to get the best use from the system.
- c. All new Council Members to complete, as mandatory, the Diversity & Inclusion and Being an Active Bystander training at England Rugby, during their induction.
- d. Recommend all current Council Members complete the above two courses by the end of the 2022/23 season.
- e. Notify Council of new training and resources as it becomes available.

Ken Andrews, Dave Clarke RFU Council members **Rob Briers** Senior Vice President

Appendix 3

Verbal feedback to RFU Council- 13th February 2023

Dave Clarke and I had a somewhat difficult meeting with the Lancashire clubs on Wednesday 8th February regarding the lowering the tackle height issue.

Things that were asked of us to bring to this meeting.

- There was agreement that initial communications were unsatisfactory which led to misinterpretation and angst and that confidence in RFU decision making needs to be repaired.
- There was a lot of anger expressed with the early strength of feeling in the room being that the decision shouldn't have been made without with initial consultation.
- There were calls for the decision to be rescinded but it was explained that this would be almost impossible because it need support from 20 Council members.
- Clarity and that if the game is to have their say and, in considering the implementation date is in July, then decisions and engagement must be done very soon.
- The new law should have a minimum effect on the game at large.

However, the consensus of the meeting was in large part (not all) that lowering the tackle height was a reasonable measure to introduce for player safety reasons.

Appendix 4

Lowering the Tackle Height- next steps

Introduction

Apology: Accompanying the apology to the game around the process on the tackle height decision was a pledge to engage with the game. This is important to both consult on specifics relating to the tackle height and to begin the re-building of trust and co-operation with all aspects of our game.

Whilst some populations within the game have clearly moved on and now simply want to know what the new law(s) will be, there are many others who want and need to further understand why it is necessary and want to contribute to the process. The balance to be struck here is that of engaging in meaningful consultation whilst acknowledging that the key decision to lower the tackle height has been made.

Aim of consultation

What is not going to be consulted on is whether to lower the tackle height.

The exploration of what the optimal height of a legal tackle should be to achieve a meaningful reduction in head injury and concussion risk; how it is delivered in a way the community game understands and accepts; and consulting on specific aspects of the laws which will have to be developed before implementation.

In addition, there is a need to build understanding of why the law change is happening, and ultimately build support for it. We want to use the process to begin to address the criticism from the community game by delivering something that is authentically engaging with them.

Principles of the consultation

To achieve our aim of executing something that is authentic and which engages effectively across the game the process, and content, needs to both be (and feel):

- Representative – needs to involve a wide range of views from different audience groups and allow everyone to have their say.
- Educational - around the rationale and need for change, on what has/hasn't been agreed and what is proposed in the law change intent.
- Meaningful - allowing us to show where input has been taken on board and where direction has been adapted as a result of the consultation.

- Visible - encouraging take up and engagement and visibly showing the RFU to be listening to the game

Consultation

Reach

In being realistic about what can be achieved we are proposing to stage physical (both face to face and virtual) conversations with over 1000 people whilst concurrently enabling anyone else that wants to do so to contribute.

Consultation Mechanism

To achieve the reach we are proposing three primary inputs:

- **OPEN SURVEY** – allowing everyone to have their say. This will consist of a short video explaining the why and what followed by a series of short questions around rationale for change, reactions to the law intent and potential changes and implications, solutions and implementation observations arising from this.
- **ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS** – talking with active, engaged people in specific cohorts. This will take small groups representing specific groups from within the game – players, coaches, match officials, Club and CB leaders, teachers, parents, disciplinary officers, and other relevant volunteers.
- **ENGAGEMENT FORUMS** – using a roadshow format, both face to face and virtual, 24 forums will be staged across the country (12 face to face and 12 virtual with average of 40 attendees at each).

Attendees will be drawn from nominations made by CBs across a range of different defined personas (players, coaches, match officials, parents, club volunteers et al). These will be listened to by a panel including representation from CEO, Exec Team, Board, Council and technical experts from staff.

Timeframes

- The formal process will largely take place throughout the month of March.
- The remainder of February will be used to promote the process, recruit people for panels and forums
- An updated communication has gone to CBs and a formal launch will take in early March.
- The open survey will go live alongside the launch with focus groups and engagement forums.
- Input will be collated and a further feedback session arranged with Council in mid March.
- Work will continue on the education and training resources and programmes.
- The writing of the laws and law guidance by the Laws sub-committee and Governance.
- Council will formally need to approve, which is planned for the 21st April Council meeting.