**Edition No 19 2020**

**President’s Message**

As you will all appreciate in these difficult times, the County Management Board has undertaken a detailed review of all its cost base to identify areas where expenditure could be reduced, including the County Office. After discussion with our two part-time staff (Nicky and Rachel), Rachel has accepted the County’s offer of redundancy. Rachel has worked for the County for almost exactly seven years and in that time she has worked hard to support our clubs and members of the Management Board on whose behalf I offer our sincere thanks and appreciation for her tireless contribution. However, her involvement in the County goes back to 2010 when she served on my Community Rugby Committee as a Volunteer Coordinator. I am sure you would join me in thanking Rachel and wishing her well in the future. I am incredibly pleased to say that Nicky is to continue in her role, principally supporting the financial activities of the County.

We are still using the County Office email and telephone which is being monitored by Nicky Fielder, Tim Miller and Simon Hardcastle, so please do not use their individual emails for general enquiries.  This way we can keep all inquiries in one place and know who has dealt with what.

**The County Office contact details are**:

Telephone: 020 8896 9050

Email: countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com

During North West Group last Wednesday, Ben Nash from Old Millhillians, updated us on Past President, Andy Mortimer in that although he is still at Chase Farm, the family and the medics are moving him to a care home where he will continue to receive 24/7 treatment. He is in good spirits so anyone wishing to send their best wishes can send them via Ben at: bnash2001@yahoo.com or son Max at: mstumortimer@gmail.com

Ben also passed on some more sad news when he told us of the sad passing of Old Millhillian, Jim Roberts who had played for Middlesex and England see link below to RFU tribute:

<https://www.englandrugby.com/news/article/rfu-pays-tribute-to-jim-roberts>

I know how frustrating it must be for you all to have worked so hard to get your Clubs to some form of normality only to see it dashed by last Saturdays announcement by the Prime Minister. However, I also know how resilient you all are and so am confident that we will get back to normal when we can all participate in enjoying the game, we all love.

***Peter***

**Message from Eddie Keal, Chairman Middlesex County RFU**

I posted a communication on the County website on Monday 2nd November. If you missed it, you can read it here <https://middlesexrugby.com/news/middlesex-county-rfu-response-to-recent-announcements/>

Clearly, we are all disappointed with the lockdown and the move back to stage A, but we have to do our bit to contain the virus. I have been impressed with the attitude and the response from the County’s clubs.

You will see several responses and initiatives from the County in this Newsletter, and we’ll add to those as time goes by. We are right in the middle of a round of Group Meetings, so I look forward to seeing and talking to you all over the next few days.

Stay safe

***Eddie***

**Rugby Development**

Well, here we go again. Lockdown and back at Stage A of the [return to rugby roadmap](https://www.englandrugby.com/dxdam/44/44e24835-2a5e-4c3d-abad-5ad34957f348/RUGBY%20ROAD%20MAP%20VF.pdf) and at Level 2: That means rugby is suspended until at least 2nd December. What is not clear is whether we will have to move through the roadmap stages again or if we will come out of lockdown back at Stage D. Once we have clarification from the RFU we will let you know in order to support you getting rugby back up and running.

Lockdown does mean that face-to-face training courses are now delayed and will resume in January (fingers crossed!!). However, there are a number of e-learning courses available so do look through the GMS Course Booker or the [coaches resources](https://www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/coach-resources) page on the RFU website.

It’s not just COVID that keeps the Rugby Development Committee busy. Unfortunately, you will be aware that we had to postpone the Volunteer Awards Evening back in June, where we would have recognised our 160 Mitsubishi Motors Volunteer Nominees. Whilst we are hoping to still host an awards evening for the 2019-2020 season, we are pleased to announce the two Middlesex winners, who will go through to the National Finals early next year. CONGRATULATIONS go to Deborah Crossan of Hampstead and Katie Lashbrook of Ruislip Ladies. We are also working closely with the RFU to issue all the volunteers with their certificates. Again, this will be in the New Year.

Andy and I are also planning a Tax Webinar later this month to help clubs understand any tax advantages they can benefit from. Further details will be communicated to clubs shortly.

Lockdown will inevitably bring financial concerns to clubs. Please do reach out to myself and Andy if you have any concerns, whether immediate or longer term. The [Middlesex Immediate Support Fund](https://middlesexrugby.com/mcrfu-immediate-support-fund-application-form/) is still available and we will support you in making any applications (which must be related to the COVID situation). I would also urge clubs to look at the Sport England [Return to Play Fund](https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/coronavirus/funding-innovation-and-flexibility).

While we have some time on our hands, please remember that clubs can ensure that GMS and your Golden Roles is up-to-date and your Club Safeguarding Audit has been completed.

Thank you to all clubs that supported the Middlesex Hardship Grant. To date, we have issued a total of 27 applications and nearly £3,000 to support membership and kit/boots for disadvantaged youngsters in their rugby activities. We will reopen the grant window in January, but if you do have someone that could benefit from the grant then do let me know.

Finally, I would like to say thank you and goodbye to Rachel Barry, for her help and support during her time in the County Office and wish her good luck for her new venture.

As ever, please do get in contact if you want to discuss anything.

Stay safe and well

***Lou***

**Competitions**

Obviously, the big news in competitions was the announcement that came out on Friday, from the RFU, that the league season was formally abandoned for the 2020/21 season. However, what the circulation failed to mention was the considerable amount of work that had been going on in the background to provide an alternative competition offering for all our league clubs. The reaction to the circulation was immediate and less than supportive and the RFU recognising that they hadn’t communicated the whole message was forced into sending out a further circulation on Sunday about their proposed plans for competition to cover this failing.

Basically, the intention is to provide localised competition across both the men’s and women’s competitions. For the men, the intention is for clubs to be placed in clusters of 6 playing each other home and away.  This will see ten matches with 2 break weekends over a 12-week period.  At this point, with the continuing uncertainty, it is not anticipated there will be any subsequent KO competition although that hasn’t been entirely ruled out.

As you know work had already been done on clustering in our leagues when the original fixtures were sent out at the beginning of the season and at levels 7 and below with twelve and ten team leagues it is likely that these existing clusters can be maintained, albeit the ten team county leagues will be in clusters of five, not six. However, levels 5 and 6 are more of a problem, being as they are fourteen team leagues and already clustered into mini leagues of seven. Clearly there is some work still to be done to accommodate six team clusters at these levels, especially where minimising travel will be the primary objective.

Nevertheless, the hope is that we may be able to return to play at some point in the New Year, albeit probably with some form of adapted rules. I suspect like many of you, that is going to be most unlikely looking at the current situation. Still the ambition is there. It is hoped these stand-alone competitions will provide a framework for clubs to return to meaningful rugby without the pressure of league positions and results.  Participation will not be compulsory and a club’s position in the league structure will not be jeopardised if they choose not to enter.

The four Divisional Organising Committees have been asked to review and agree the format of the competition and the makeup of the clusters, reporting back to the RFU Competitions Sub Committee before their meeting on Tuesday 10th November. The London Competitions DOC for instance has arranged an emergency meeting via Zoom on Sunday morning at 11.30am. If any of you have any views that you would like me to put before the DOC then please come back to me before the meeting. I have my own views, but I sit on the DOC as the representative of our county and I will of course represent your views as best I can. Once agreed and signed off the intention will be to get out the details of the competition and the invitations to clubs to participate out by the end of next week.

What I can confirm is that when the format is agreed I will be running the Merit Tables in exactly the same way. Once again having already clustered the clubs in their MTs when I sent out the fixtures it will be easy to mirror whatever the RFU determines. This will not affect MMT5 who will be able, as last season to play who and when they want

The next significant news, unsurprisingly following the Government’s decision to put us back into a national lockdown, came out in Thursday’s Community Game Update as follows

“England is now in national lockdown until Wednesday 2 December **and all team sports have been suspended, including club age grade and adult rugby activities below Championship and Premier 15s.

With effect from today, we return to Stage A on the Return to Community Rugby Roadmap. This means that no competitive or formal rugby activities can be undertaken until at least Wednesday 2 December.** While group training sessions are banned, a maximum of two players (or one player and one coach) can participate in socially distanced (two metres plus), individual training sessions in a public outside space, but not a garden, without sharing equipment. “

So, a full stop for all amateur rugby including training and Ready4Rugby. It was my intention to do full reports on the various Ready4Rugby competitions across the county with contributions from the organisers but I have run out of time and space. Apologies then to David Gershlick and Martin Baker. I will make use of your reports in the next edition of the newsletter. Suffice to say that their competitions and the men’s and women’s competitions that I am managing with Steve Partridge are all up and running successfully. They will all restart once the lockdown has finished with the organisers busy sorting out new fixture dates for the games missed.

Keep safe.

***Andrew***

**Group Officers Report**

Some technical issues with Zoom on Monday for the South Group meeting where it appears that the passcode was changed without notice by the host company at the last moment. Anyway, although many people were still able to get on once they know the new passcode, others could not at all, including the Group Secretary Lyndon Walters, whilst others were only able to get on via their phones. It was all a bit of a debacle, and at the end the South chair Jerry Rogers took the sensible decision, (especially as he didn’t have anyone to take the minutes) to postpone the meeting until Thursday 12th November again at 7pm. The new login details for this and the other remaining group meetings are listed at the end of this newsletter.

Decent numbers again for the NW Group meeting where the main topics unsurprisingly were the country going back into lockdown and with it the cessation of amateur sports (including training) until 2nd December and the impact that this would have on our clubs and players. The second big talking point was the disappointing news from the RFU communicated on Friday 30th October that there would be no league rugby for the 2020/21 season and subsequently on Wednesday 4th November that across lockdown we were back to Stage A on the Return to Rugby Road Map. The news about the cancellation of the league season was not helped by the fact that the RFU failed to inform the game that they were working hard on providing an alternative competition offering for their clubs. This shocking omission from earlier drafts of the communication caused considerable angst and anger across the game and realizing their mistake the RFU sent out an emergency communication on Sunday 1st November to try to rectify their mistake. Anyway, more of that offering is covered in my Competitions report in this newsletter.

Overall North West Clubs appeared to be in good spirits and confident of their ability to survive these unprecedented times certainly for the remainder of the season. It will be interesting to see what the clubs in the other groups say to see if this is a consistent position across the county.

Just to let you know Louise and I are currently organizing an All Clubs Meeting with a Tax Webinar. When I say we, I actually mean Louise whilst I will intend to take much of the credit. Anyway, we are looking at the following dates Wednesday 25th November, Tuesday 1st or Wednesday 2nd December. This will be a really useful meeting for clubs and especially your treasurers at a time of such financial pressure to try to ensure that we are only paying what we have to and are fully aware of what we are entitled to. Anyway, please look out for further details once we have confirmed the date and the format and agenda for the meeting. An hour or so of your time could save your club thousands.

**A bit of work still be done to confirm the detail but it looks like clubs paying business rates might well be entitled to more financial assistance from the Government. The money like the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant will be paid out via your local authority which the added bonus that clubs not eligible for the original grant because their rateable value was over £51,000- would be entitled to some money this time around.**

**Businesses required to close in England due to local or national restrictions will be eligible for the following:**

* **For properties with a rateable value of £15k or under, grants to be £1,334 per month, or £667 per two weeks;**
* **For properties with a rateable value of between £15k-£51k grants to be £2,000 per month, or £1,000 per two weeks;**
* **For properties with a rateable value of £51k or over grants to be £3,000 per month, or £1,500 per two weeks.**

Just to remind you of the remaining November Group meetings dates. Hope to see you on at least of these meetings

North. Monday 9th November. West. Wednesday 11th November. South Thursday 12th November

Finally, on behalf of the Group Officers and our clubs I just wanted to say thanks to Rachel Barry in the county office who after over seven years of dedicated service has taken decided to take voluntary redundancy. Her efforts on all our behalf are very much appreciated and it is going to be strange going forward without her being around to rely on. Difficult times for her and Ronnie, who unfortunately was made redundant recently from the RFU after seventeen years and we wish them both and their family all the best in whatever they do in the future

Keep safe

***Andrew***

**Update from Bob Lawless - Representative Middlesex Playing, Coaching & Referee Development/ Deputy President**

**Middlesex Coaching Association Age Grade Webinar.**

All Middlesex coaches, parents & players are invited to join a Middlesex Webinar looking at the Journey into & through the London Irish DPP and onwards towards the Middlesex U17s & U18s Representative Playing Programme (see Zoom details below)

**Middlesex Rugby On-line Fitness Programme**

**Fitness Coach Ian Burbedge of Hammersmith and Fulham R.F.C invites all players to engage with this online fitness programme.**

As we’re in a lockdown the initial sessions will be set without any equipment required, they will include elements such as Warm Up and Cool down stretching as well as Stomach/Core and general fitness to prepare you for returning to your club training.

Sessions will start from **Monday November 16th**and will run through to the end of December 2020.

Access to the programme is free on **www.middlesexrugby.com**

Look forward to seeing you then.

Ian Burbedge,

*BAWLA Coach, FFI Personal Trainer, Sports Nutritionist, Massage Therapist.*

**Upcoming Events**

**West Group - Wednesday 11th November**

Topic: Middlesex West Group Meeting

Time: Nov 11, 2020 07:00 PM London

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4822543155?pwd=NkVNdkpMYzRteG0wK2xqeHdJYnErQT09>

Meeting ID: 482 254 3155

Passcode: 6178

**South Group - Thursday 12th November (Moved from Monday 2nd November)**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4822543155?pwd=NkVNdkpMYzRteG0wK2xqeHdJYnErQT09>

Meeting ID: 482 254 3155

Passcode: 6178

**Middlesex Coaching Association Age Grade Webinar.**

All Middlesex coaches, parents & players are invited to join a Middlesex Webinar looking at the Journey into & through the London Irish DPP and onwards towards the Middlesex U17s & U18s Representative Playing Programme.

**When** - Friday 13th November 2020

**Time**- 19.00hrs

**Lead Presenters** -

**DPP** - Lachlan Jok Dunbar

**U17s & U18s Manager** - Richard Wilmott

**U17s Lead Coach** - Jerry Hedigan

**U18s Lead Coach** - Martin Crossan

**Target Audience** - All those involved in Age Grade Rugby

**Zoom Log in details -**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84334237284?pwd=MjlRTmh6OGVUM2hMbDRjZmJkUEdJUT09>

Meeting ID: 843 3423 7284

Passcode: 221637