

February Newsletter 2022

Email: countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com

President's Message

There's a lot's going on in the County on the field and I'm really pleased that we're seeing less games going down due to lack of players. Off the field I'd implore you to make sure you cast your votes in the election for our two excellent candidates for the vacant CB RFU Council Rep.

County Dinner – Friday 29th April – Proves to be a celebration of 140 years of Middlesex as a CB so please see details below of how to attend. It will give us a great chance to get together again and talk over old times.

On 22nd January I visited Staines when they played Old Millhillians in Herts & Middlesex 2. It was a great day with and in form Old Millhillians running out winners, but it gave me a chance to talk to many old friends. It was particularly great to speak with Past Presidents Graham Lee and Tim Partner (son of Middlesex Past President, Aubrey Partner 1976-1979)

On 29th January I attended the Pinner President's Day when although they lost to Berkhamstead, a great rugby day was had by all. It was also great to see that the Referee, Kevin Morris of Hayes RFC was a product of our initiative "Take Up the Whistle" event earlier in the season at Grasshoppers.

It was great to visit Kilburn Cosmos on 2nd February the "Rugby Landscape" element of the "Leadership Academy" headed by Chair of Rugby Development, Lou Latter. A great session and am sure the candidates are getting a lot from it.

On 5th February it was a great honour to visit Hendon and present their Herts & Middlesex 1 2019/20 Shield. They rounded it off with a good win against Finsbury Park and it's going to be a close battle between them and Finchley at the top of London NW3.

On 12th February I went along to Old Priorians who seem to be in a great place especially as their win against Grasshoppers has put them at the top of London NW2.

Peter

peter.baveystock@middlesexrugby.com

Message from Eddie Keal, Chair, Middlesex

Things are looking up. I've visited several clubs this year, and we've completed a round of Group Meetings. The general mood is much better than it's been for a long time. That said, there are plenty of challenges that haven't gone away, particularly with respect to available player numbers.

The All-Clubs meeting/Zoom about Future Competition Structure was a great success. We heard a lot of voices. It is truly valuable to engage so deeply on a topic. We will follow up now with plans and actions to map out the future, based on a solid understanding of what our constituent clubs want. Chris Cuthbertson and I will also take some very clear messages back to the RFU Council.

We are busy planning end-of-season events, with the exception of the Middlesex 7s once again which is a great shame. Uncertainty about so many arrangements drove that decision. We fully expect to hold the event next season, possibly in a slightly different format, with greater focus on our own clubs in the County.

For now, our focus as a Management Board is on visiting clubs to ensure we stay well-connected and to help with topics identified at Group Meetings. County representative teams have a close-to-normal programme of fixtures so we'll turn out for those too. All support is welcome, please check social media or the website.

I think we need a County Calendar on the website, somewhere prominent. The "What's On" section of this Newsletter only goes so far. From coach and referee courses to festivals and County matches, we are very active right through to May.

Hopefully I'll see many of you face to face on my travels soon. I can tell you a little about what I'm doing on the GMS review and the Club of the Future Commission.

Stay safe and well.

Eddie

eddie.keal@middlesexrugby.com

Update from Lou Latter – Chair of Rugby Development

As we head into February and the men's 6Nations, there is a national campaign to support clubs with the recruitment and retention of adult male players. Please see link to the [Back in the Game Webinar](#) that was held last week to support clubs.

For clubs that have been using the Club Support Section of the England Rugby website, please note that this has now moved to <https://help.rfu.com>. This is a new portal which will hopefully make it easier for clubs to find information and help.

Please do ensure that your club members are aware and do please nominate a deserving volunteer. For those that are nominated we will invite them to the annual Middlesex Volunteer of the Year Awards evening. Further information about the awards, categories and how to nominated can be accessed [here](#). Deadline for nominations is 28th February.

We come into the season where there is a lot of focus on our age grade players. The Middlesex Mini's festivals are back after a two-year break and will be held on:

Sunday 6th March – U7s at Teddington

Sunday 13th March – U8s at Rosslyn Park, U9s at Ealing and U10s at Ruislip

Sunday 20th March – U11s at Wasps FC

The girls are also back in action where all age groups will be at Haringey on Sunday 27th February.

Reminder: please ensure that players in the age grade game are playing in their correct age groups. If you are unsure then please do get in touch. [Regulation 15](#) details out all information for playing up or down and the process and approvals that are required. Age Grade players MUST also be affiliated via GMS as per Regulation 15.1.4 and 15.1.5. I would encourage clubs to start encouraging parents to affiliate players so it doesn't become an onerous task next season.

We meet next week to discuss and plan the 2022-2023 Age Grade calendar so will get that out to clubs in March.

The Middlesex St George's Day Girls Festival will be held on Saturday 23rd and Sunday 24th April at Wasps FC. This will see U11, U13, U15 and U18 girls teams player from Middlesex and surrounding areas. Middlesex clubs are encouraged to complete their expression of interest forms ahead of the 4th

March deadline. If you have not received the email then please do let me know.

As Easter approaches, clubs are now turning their focus back to clubs. Please do ensure you get the correct approvals from the [Middlesex County Office](#). More details on incoming and outgoing tours can be found on the [England Rugby](#) and [Middlesex](#) websites.

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

Lou

louise.latter@middlesexrugby.com

Message from Andrew Smart, Chair of Competitions

For those looking for the results of the Lower XV Opt-Out Vote and the way forward I cover it in detail in my Group Officer's Report in another part of this newsletter

In my previous report I mentioned that I sensed a new determination amongst many of our clubs now that Christmas has passed to get on with things and play. It was no more than guarded optimism but supported across the four group meetings by the majority of clubs in attendance. I also cautioned that it might be stalled by the arrival of the Six Nations which always puts further stresses on club's ability to get out players. Unfortunately this weekend we seemed to hit the wall with three of our top Middlesex Clubs unable to get out teams to honour fixtures in the leagues whilst the walkovers in our merit tables a matter of real concern including two of the four in the Premier Division. Hopefully a blip but really disappointing I can't pretend

So, with six further rounds played since New Year by the majority of our clubs here is a round-up of how our clubs are doing. In the Championship, Ealing Trailfinders remain in second behind league leaders Doncaster Knights although they still have two games in hand. London Scottish continue to struggle. They remain bottom, now thirteen points adrift of Nottingham who have played one game less although they picked a useful high scoring away draw at Hartbury University.

At level 5 in the London and SE Premier League CS Stags 1863 remain winless after nineteen rounds and after the they failed to get out on Saturday for the fourth time this season, they are now forty-two points adrift from the team above. I know that beset by injuries especially in their front row, they have been advertising for players to help them to get to the end of the season where without relegation at this level they will have the chance to take breath and begin planning for next season. Really tough times for one of our top clubs. We wish them all the best as they seek to navigate through these uncharted waters

At level 6 in L1N Belsize Park remain ninth with Old Haberdashers tenth. In L1S London Welsh remain top but their lead over Camberley is now only one point, whilst H&F remain fourth but now twelve points outside the final promotion place. London Cornish remain bottom ten points adrift of the team above.

At level 7 after seventeen rounds in L2NW, HAC and Old Priorians continue to battle it out at the top of table with HAC who lost their first game of the season 8-7 away at third placed Letchworth on Saturday dropping to second two points behind their Middlesex rivals but with a game in hand. Old Streetonians remain fifth, Grasshoppers exchange places with Ruislip, sixth and seventh respectively, Enfield Ignatians move up one to eighth. Hampstead

remain tenth with Hackney bottom In L2SW Chiswick who failed to get out on Saturday drop to fifth with Twickenham who also failed to get out remain tenth and bottom. A reminder that is now a ten-team league after the withdrawals of two of the clubs earlier in the season

At level 8 in L3 Essex Epping Upper Clapton remain tenth whilst in L3NW, Finchley remain top, on points difference from Hendon who have a game in hand. Finsbury Park seventh and Harrow eighth. Again, a reminder that this is also a ten-team league following the withdrawals of two clubs earlier in the season

In Surrey One, Teddington drop to sixth whilst in Surrey Four Old Paulines are second, Harlequin Amateurs third and Old Hamptonians fourth.

In the Herts and Middx County leagues at level 9, after ten rounds London Scottish Lions remain top although their lead has been cut to five points, Ealing Trailfinders 1871 third, Saracens Amateurs up to fourth, Wasps FC dropping to fifth, Bank of England move up to sixth, Kilburn up to seventh Actonians drop to eighth with Thamesians tenth and bottom. In H/M2 the competition moves into the second phase with the league splitting in two. The top five clubs carrying over the points they accrued in the first part of the competition only against the other four. Where a club played one of the four at home in the first part of the competition they are now away and vice versa. After taking over those points and after the first round of matches in the second part of the competition, Old Millhillians are now top four points ahead of Brunel University. Uxbridge are third although with a game in hand. The same applies to the bottom six clubs from the first part of the competition. UCS are top, a point ahead of Staines and three ahead of Mill Hill. West London v Cuffley went down because of Covid with London French bottom

In the Allianz Premier XV's after thirteen rounds Saracens Women are now top by seven points with a game in hand, Harlequins Women rise to third and Wasps FC Ladies are now up to fifth.

So, plenty going on both on and off the field, plenty to play and report on but problems as you all know have not gone away.

Going to Richmond on Saturday to watch London Scottish Lions host Saracens Amateurs which I am really looking forward

Keep safe

Andrew Smart

andrew-smart@ntlworld.com

Report from Chair of Groups, Andrew Smart

First of all, I thought that the All-Clubs meeting on the 31st January on the Lower XV Opt-Out Vote with 71 attendees from 37 of our clubs was a real success. Firstly, on providing the context needed for clubs to make an informed decision on the available facts even though there were significant concerns about the number of issues including registration that are simply and unacceptably unresolved. I also wanted to mention the level of the discussion and the calm and respectful way our clubs, notwithstanding which side of the debate they were on, put forward their points and were listened to. It was a long meeting but it was important that everyone who had something to say had the opportunity to do so and I think that we managed to achieve that. A very worthwhile exercise for a very important process, I believe not only in helping to educate our clubs about the issue and the voting process but without I hope seeking to shape their views.

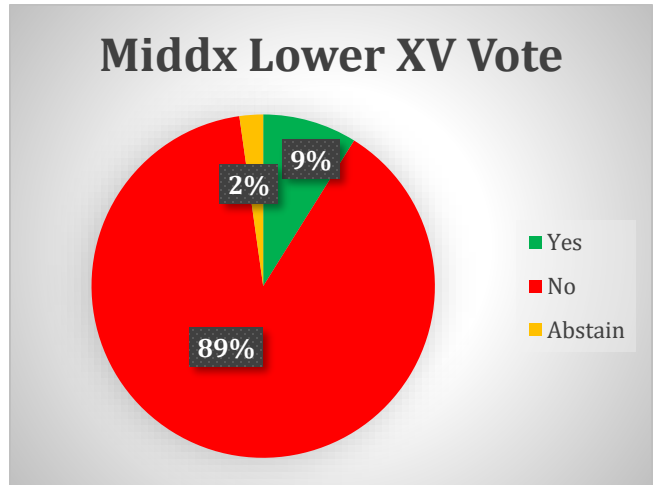
The following week I was on a Zoom meeting held by Surrey for their clubs on the same subject. Whilst many of the views and concerns were replicated

what I found especially interesting was how many people on the call commented at the end what a really useful format the All-Clubs meeting had been and they thought that their county should perhaps do more of them. I admit to feel a little glow of pride at that point about how our County had fully embraced this format (think we have now run seven) almost from the outset of the pandemic and amazement that this was their first offering. It has worked really well for our clubs and we will continue to use the format when it suits us best. Glad now that other CBs are following our lead

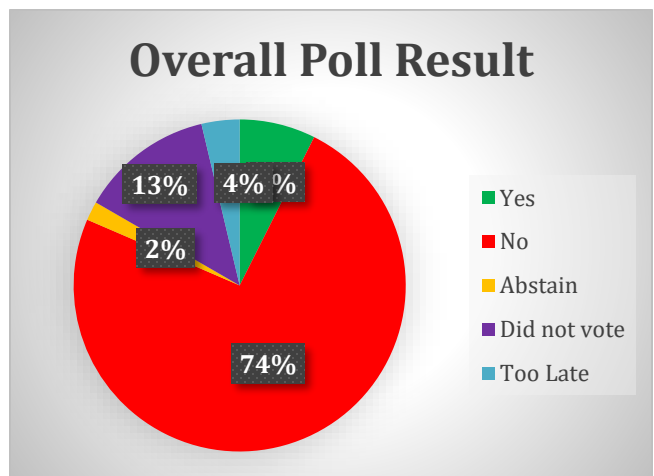
Anyway, the question that the clubs were asked to answer was as follows.

Do you support Lower XV teams from your CB playing in the English Club Championship (ECC)?
Yes/No

The voting which ran from Thursday 3rd to Sunday 13th February has now finished and once again Middlesex Clubs have voted in significant numbers to opt out. I know that it is likely that we will be asked to consider our position again in three years' time when the RFU come to review the success or otherwise of the FCS but there can be no doubt now about our clubs' position now that they have finally been allowed a real say in their future. So just to go over the numbers in case you haven't seen or heard them yet. There were fifty-four clubs eligible to vote. Forty clubs voted for the opt-out with four clubs voting yes. One club abstained, two clubs voted too late for the vote to count and the remaining seven failed to register a vote at all.



Of the clubs that did vote, if the solitary abstention is removed, 90.9% voted "No" whilst 9.1% voted "Yes" far outreaching the 66% requirement. 87% of the eligible clubs responded although the club that abstained and the two clubs that voted late cannot be included in the final voting figures.



Personally, I am delighted with the high level of engagement from our clubs. It doesn't finish with the vote. We now have to report back to the FCS Implementation Commission with the results of our vote by Midday on Friday 18th February explaining how the prevention will "Improve player welfare, reduce travel time/distance, improve the player experience/quality of the competition or support club sustainability"

How we go forward will also depend on how the same vote goes in Hertfordshire. Clearly it is in the interests of both CBs that we go the same way. The ramifications for both of us would be really serious if that was not be the case but we will have to deal with that if that happens.

Back to normal business. We have just finished the latest round of Group meetings. All have been quite well attended with the majority of clubs reporting a cautious optimism. There is universal acceptance that we all need to get to the end of the season, take stock of where we are and then start preparing with renewed optimism for the 2022/23 season. The main agenda points apart from the normal reports and club updates were on the Lower XV Opt-Out Vote and the election of the new RFU Council Representative which I understand begins at the end of this week

I also need update you with a couple of other things going on across the County. Firstly, the next Pick up the Whistle Course will be held at Grasshoppers RFC on Monday 21st and 28th February whilst the Emergency First Aid in Rugby Course that we were hoping to hold at Pinner unfortunately didn't work out for the trainer with the date offered. We have now been able to arrange the course at Wasps FC on Saturday 26th March. Places on the course have been offered first to those on the reserve list who weren't able to get on the four courses organised by the County in September and October 2021. If any places become available then they will be circulated by the county office as soon as we have heard back from everybody on the reserve list

Finally, the only group meeting in March is the North West which historically always holds five meetings whilst the other three groups hold four. This meeting will be on Wednesday 2nd March and at the moment the intention is that we have an in-person meeting hosted by OMTs. Now that is something to look forward to.

Any questions about the Opt-Out vote and the way forward please come back to me

Andrew Smart

andrew-smart@ntlworld.com

Coaching & Refereeing Update, Bob Lawless

RFU Coach mentoring programme - The Middlesex mentoring programme is open to all coaches who would like to become coach mentors and to all coaches who would like support in their coaching pathway. The Course is overlooked by the RFU and Middlesex have 5 mentors on the RFU mentoring programme with 12 mentee coaches being assisted on their coaching journey.

Any coaches who would like to be become coach Mentors and would like to attend the RFU Mentoring Course, please forward an email of interest to the contact details below

Referee Development

To date there have been 4 "Take Up the Whistle" short courses run at locally at Grasshoppers and Enfield Ignatians RFC, Twickenham RFC and Rosslyn Park FC. These courses have upskilled 65 local referees. Another course is being planned for Haringey RFC and more information on this will follow. Another short course has been arranged for Monday 21st & 28th February at Grasshoppers (see below for joining instructions)

RFU South East Training Forum Monday 21/02/2022

This RFU training forum is for CBs to discuss the landscape of coach development in season 2022/23.

Middlesex will be putting forward the following request for coaching courses in Middlesex -

Play it safe - 2 Courses
Kids First Contact Rugby - 2 Courses
Principles of Scrummaging - 2 Courses
Principles of Lineout - 2 Courses
England Rugby Coaching Award - 2 Courses
England Rugby Refereeing Award - 2 Courses

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England Rugby Young Match Official Award 1 Course.

These courses will be run 1 Middx North & 1 Middx South. In addition, Middlesex run monthly coaching CPDs and a monthly online refereeing CPD.

RCD Coaching Weekly Newsletter

Middlesex have over 400 members subscribed to this free weekly newsletter. There is a weekly theme and access to over 2,00 coaching drills. This is also a good platform to advertise coaching positions for your club. If interested in receiving a weekly electronic copy, please contact the email address below.

For further information on any of the above course please contact -

Bob Lawless, Middlesex Chair of Coaching & Refereeing Development

(e) bob.lawless@middlesexrugby.com (m) 07803 196409.

Bob Lawless

bob.lawless@middlesexrugby.com

What's on:

**“Interested in becoming a Referee”
Enrol on the London Society of Rugby
Football Union Referees**

“Take Up the Whistle Referee Course”

£25 per person

Next Course:-

**Grasshoppers RFC on 21st & 28th
February 2022 – 7.00pm to 9.30pm**

Click on <https://buytickets.at/lrurfur/607276>
to enrol

**The Middlesex Mini's festivals are back after a
two-year break and will be held on:**

- Sunday 6th March – U7s at Teddington RFC
- Sunday 13th March – U8s at Rosslyn Park,
U9s at Ealing and U10s at Ruislip
- Sunday 20th March – U11s at Wasps FC

County Dinner 29th April 2022 – Contact

As shared in the January Newsletter, we were asking for payments by 28th January to pay the £60 (or £10 if you'd made the original payment of £50). We'll be re-visiting the list this month and starting to finalise details with London Welsh RFC (seating plans etc) so please do ensure payment has either been made, or can be done ASAP to the bank details below.

There are a few edge cases in which some attendees have paid for one person and subsequently added others in which case we will follow up on separately to avoid confusion.

Account: Middlesex County Rugby Football
Union Ltd
Sort Code: 30-92-82
Account No: 01066848
Reference: '[Surname]Dinner22'

As ever, happy to help with any questions (e.g. how many places you had reserved etc.) that may arise on what should be a great evening!

Yours in Rugby,

Mark Coles mark.coles@middlesexrugby.com

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