

## June Newsletter 2022

Email: [countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com](mailto:countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com)

### President's Message, Peter Baveystock

**County Dinner** – The 2023 Organising Group of Bob Lawless, Nigel Orton, Kate Hallett, Mark Coles and myself will be meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> July. We'll be looking at the feedback from the survey we carried out after this year's dinner and addressing some of the issues for next year.

**County Annual General Meeting** – I look forward to seeing you all at our Annual General Meeting being held this year at Grasshoppers RFC at 7pm on the 4<sup>th</sup> July.

**Barry Wright** – I was honoured to visit Barry Wright who played for the County in 1958 into the early 1960's who had asked for a replacement County Shirt as he had given his to fellow Wasps player Terry Gilder who subsequently passed away. It was an honour to present him with the shirt and he ask me to pass on his best wishes to those involved in the County now. Barry was a quick winger, and he tells me that he scored plenty of tries at the Middlesex 7's.

**President's Commendation** – It was also an honour to present the President's Commendation on 20<sup>th</sup> May to the four Ealing players who revived a fellow teammate in October last year. The four players were: Brenden O'Flaherty, Dr Justin Green, Paul Jackson & Eddie Beck. Thanks to Steve Weeks and Ealing Trailfinders 1871 for organising the presentation.

*Peter*

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### Message from Eddie Keal, Chair, Middlesex

I'm very pleased we agreed to send out this June Newsletter. There was a short debate at the Management Board about whether we had enough material and having just collated it I can see that we truly do have plenty. So much so that I've added page numbers for the first time.

This issue is packed with news and announcements. From the fabulous news that Paul Astbury is one of the first winners of the RFU's prestigious "Rose Award" to detailed information on the new Men's league structures and change age-bands for Girls.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the AGM on 4<sup>th</sup> July. It has been a season full of achievements in spite of the toughest challenges we have ever faced. We'll be recognising some of our local heroes at the Volunteer Evening on the 8<sup>th</sup> July. And so it goes on!

Regards

*Eddie*

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### Update from Lou Latter – Chair of Rugby Development

So it's a wrap for the 2021/2022 season and we are busy now planning for the 2022/2023 season.

Our Volunteers evening is just three weeks away and I look forward to welcoming those of you who have been nominated or will be representing their clubs on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> July.

A reminder to all Age Grade teams to refer to the [summer activity guidance](#) should you wish to offer activities over the summer.

The season's final Developing Women and Girls Rugby in London and South East will be held on 27<sup>th</sup>

June at 7.30pm over zoom. [Register](#) in advance for the meeting.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July, age grade affiliated players will automatically be deaffiliated in GMS so clubs and parents can start their re-affiliation process. As a reminder, the 1<sup>st</sup> August is when the age grade game regulations and age bands change over for 2022-2023. If you were unable to attend the webinar in May, you can access the [recording](#) or the Affiliation FAQs on the [Help Portal](#). Parents/Guardians will need to renew their child's affiliation by logging onto their GMS profile and re-affiliating to their club. For those new to affiliation they will need to create a login to affiliate their player(s) to the club. A full guide can be found [here](#).

The 2022/2023 season sees the new [Girls Age bandings](#) come into effect, moving to U12, U14, U16 and U18. The new age bandings will automatically be updated in GMS to assist with the affiliation process. Please do double-check dates of birth are correct. As a reminder, there is NO playing up in girls age bandings and this will be the same with the new age bandings. Playing players out of age bandings is a breach of regulations and does have discipline repercussions.

There will be a national GMS webinar training session held on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> June from 7pm – 9pm. Please ensure you [register](#) for the session.

The RFU are looking for players to join the second [England Rugby Players Panel](#). The RFU want to put players' voices at the centre of the decision-making and this Panel will help listen from players across the game. The panel will run from the 22<sup>nd</sup> June to the 28<sup>th</sup> June and will involve short daily activities lasting 10-15mins. Players may also be asked to join focus groups and give their view on key topics that drive enjoyment of the game. There are prizes & rewards for selected Panelists including a signed

England Rugby Shirt, and England Rugby Store vouchers & discounts.

Look out for details of educational workshops as we head into September. These will support volunteers and coaches with getting prepared for the new season.

If you want to have more involvement in Middlesex and Rugby Development, please do get in touch. We have some exciting projects - schools, adult playing, age grade and volunteers for you to get involved in.

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

Stay safe

Lou  
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### **Message from Andrew Smart, Chair of Competitions**

#### **RFU Rose Award Paul Astbury**

First of all, I thought it appropriate to pass on my personal congratulations and those of us involved in competition management in Middlesex to Paul for being the first recipient of this new and most prestigious RFU award for services to our game made at the RFU Council meeting on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> June. It is a magnificent recognition of his outstanding service to our game I enclose the citation below but for me it does not truly tell the whole story. A mentor to so many competition organisers, he remains the first port of call for any of us with a problem. Calm, reasoned and knowledgeable he always seems to find the correct solution and his knowledge of competition regulations is encyclopaedic. He remains a huge influence for me, always available, always working for the best interests of the clubs, I have always

thoroughly enjoyed working with him even through some difficult days. A top bloke and champion of the community game he is thoroughly deserving of this honour which rightly rewards his outstanding service over many, many years at the highest level.

*“Paul has been a consistent and valued member of the RFU Competitions Management Committee and Competitions Development Committee for many years representing the London & SE Organising Committee (DOC) where his knowledge and expertise of all matter competitions and regulations has not only benefitted the Division but also nationally. He has served Middlesex RFU as the DOC representative for over 15 years and has been league secretary for the London Premier League for most of that time. However, it is over the past 3 years that Paul has had the greatest and most positive influence on our game. Paul was co-opted onto the Future Competitions Structure (FCS) Review Group for which helped to lead the changes to be introduced to the game in 22/23. He has done this with extraordinary attention to detail and considerable diplomacy with colleagues in other Divisions. His support to the Executive staff and volunteers has meant that a seamless transition can deliver to the new structure that will bring great benefit to our clubs, and their players and members. In addition, during the pandemic, Paul served on the RFU Adult Competitions Advisory Group (ACAG) helping to ensure a fair and equitable conclusion to the 19/20 season. He provided advice and guidance through the 20/21 season and empathy and support through this most recent season, enabling us to successfully move to the new structure next season. He assists Legal and Governance Department on all things RFU Competitions Regulations and is the ‘go to’ sounding board for many staff and volunteers seeking clarification in those areas. Paul has served as President, of Middlesex RFU, as well as being the ‘go to’ man for all matters of competitions and regulation. The game nationally has benefitted greatly from his wise counsel and advice for many years and he is a worthy candidate from the rugby family to be recommended as one of the first recipients of the RFU Rose Award.”*

Many. many congratulations my friend but as you know the work goes on.

Anyway, with the 2021/22 season now finished the work moved onto preparing for next season. First of all, with the announcement of the makeup of the new league structure and with it the league names and then the fixtures. Unfortunately, we have already seen our first casualty with Mill Hill dropping out of the leagues, and down into the Herts and Middx Merit Tables.

I appreciate that the new leagues and particularly the league names are not straightforward so to help at level 5 London Welsh will be playing in Regional 1 South Central whilst CS Stags 1863 will be in Regional 1 South East

At level 6 in Regional 2 Thames, we have Belsize Park, H&F, London Cornish, Old Haberdashers, Old Priorians, whilst HAC are in Regional 2 Anglia

For the majority of our clubs who play in the Herts and Middlesex side of the pyramid the leagues are as follow

Level 7 the old L2NW is now Counties 1 Herts/Middlesex – Chiswick, Enfield Ignatians, Finchley, Grasshoppers, Hackney, Hampstead, Old Streetonians and Ruislip.

Level 8 the old L3NW is now Counties 2 Herts/Middlesex – Ealing 1871, Finsbury Park, Harrow, Hendon, London Scottish Lions, Saracens Amateurs and Wasps FC

Level 9 the old H/M1 is now counties 3 Herts/Middlesex – Actonians, Bank Lane (Previously BoE), Brunel University, Kilburn Cosmos, Old Millhillians, Thamesians, UCS, Uxbridge, West London. Despite the withdrawal of Mill Hill which now makes this a twelve team league this competition will still conference after the first round of matches with the top six and bottom six splitting.

The rest of our clubs who are subject to a permanent level transfer their leagues are as follows

Level 7 Epping Upper Clapton are in Counties 1 Essex whilst Twickenham are in Counties 1 Surrey/Sussex

Level 8 London Exiles (who return to the leagues) and Teddington are both in Counties 2 Surrey

Level 10 London French, Old Paulines and Staines are in Counties 4 Surrey

And finally in the only level 11 league in the country both Harlequin Amateurs and Old Hamptonians will be playing in Counties 5 Surrey

I hope that I haven't missed anyone. If so apologies.

The fixtures were released last Monday and if you haven't seen them, they can still be found on the "News" page of the London and SE Website [www.rfulondon.com](http://www.rfulondon.com). Unsurprising there was plenty of disquiet once clubs realised that for the majority the leagues start on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September and finish on the 11<sup>th</sup> March. There is then a one week break before the national cup competition starts on the 25<sup>th</sup> March over five weeks, for those clubs who wish to enter. The invitations for those competitions will come out I believe around the New Year. For those clubs that don't enter the National Cup Competitions apart from county cups their season will effectively finish in the second week of March which is not good enough. Players apparently want to play in cup competitions say the FCS. We will see.

We have had an excellent response for the MMTs which is great news although of course whether clubs have been overly confident about their player numbers we won't know until the season is underway. Anyway, after the appeals Steve and I will be circulating the final merit tables on Monday. We will then be pushing out the fixtures

So, plenty going on and plenty still to do

Enjoy your break and keep safe

Andrew Smart

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### Report from Chair of Groups, Andrew Smart

Hopefully you are all enjoying your break. However, as you know the admin for clubs never stops. Just a couple of things for me to draw your attention to

First of all, the September round of Group Meetings are as follows

Monday 5<sup>th</sup> September - North  
Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> September - North West  
Monday 12<sup>th</sup> September - South  
Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> September - West  
Venues, agendas and minutes will come out closer to each of the meetings

Secondly can I remind all our clubs especially those playing at levels 5 to 7 that the 2022 Payment of Players declaration closes on the 30 June 2022 and is **mandatory** for clubs whose men's first XV team play at Level 5, 6 and Level 7 wishing to remain eligible for RFU Benefits. Those clubs that do not submit a completed declaration within this time period or declare that they paid above the set thresholds during the designated period will lose access to benefits for the 2022/23 season.

For clubs whose men's first XV team play at **Level 8 and below** the declaration is only required to be submitted if the club provides Material Benefits (as defined in Regulation 1) to players and/or engages a player coach. Clubs at Level 8 and below **do not need** to submit a completed declaration if they **DO NOT provide** Material Benefits to players and /or a player/coach. These clubs will not lose access to RFU Benefits.

Regulation 7 (Payment of Players) can be found via the following link [Regulation 7.pdf](#)

[englandrugby.com](http://englandrugby.com) which provides further information on thresholds and definition of RFU Benefits.

A list of FAQs has been produced around Payment of Players declarations (Material Benefit and Regulatory) and can be found via this link [Payment of Player FAQs.pdf \(englandrugby.com\)](#).

A guide on how to submit and authorise the declaration within GMS can be downloaded on this link [RFU Word Template \(englandrugby.com\)](#)

And finally for any queries around Payment of Players, please visit the RFU Help Portal [Support : HELP PORTAL \(rfu.com\)](#)

If anyone needs any advice by all means get in touch  
All the best  
Andrew Smart

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### **Representative Rugby, Jok Dunbar**

After a year and a half of no county rugby and limited resources on our return, it was hard to predict how the season would look this year. Budgets had been greatly reduced and playing numbers across grass roots and club rugby had diminished.

What was apparent from the outset was the appetite was still very much there for county rugby and the responses we have had across nearly all the section for nominations has been fantastic. This meant the calibre of players chosen has been some the highest we've seen in recent years.

The other positive outcome from covid has been the collaboration between all the counties I've encountered. Whether it was due to just being grateful we could return or a change of personnel in key positions or even other influences of need. All the games have all been played with great

determination and in a competitive nature but with open discussions regarding player availability, sharing costs, venues and ensuring convenient kick off times. The match officials have equally been accommodating in making adaptations from either introducing time off for conversions in the U18's boys games so the assessors could watch full games without losing time played, to allowing conversions in front of the posts for the U15's girls to ensure a greater success rate.

Across the board the games have been played with great spirit and determination on the pitch but with friendships and relationships reinforced off it.

Probably the most enjoyable season I've experienced and certainly looking forward to the next one.

### **Men**

The Middlesex men's team finished strong with their second fixture held at Wasps FC against Sussex on the 14th May. The gents rallied well and they came away with a 35-14 win. Sadly, it was not enough to get through to the next round as Berkshire beat Sussex the following week to go through as group winners. It was a great season for the men this year with greater engagement, a special thanks to the coaching team led by Mark Jackson, Cai Griffiths, Phil Smith and Corne du Rand, our physios Kirsten and Beth and all ably managed by Stephen Harris.

### **Women**

Cornwall made the journey to Grasshoppers and a wet Sunday for what proved a forwards game, it came down to errors in handling that gave Cornwall their points as Middlesex looked through out to be the better side. Final score 10-5 to Cornwall, a superb game in dreadful conditions but it did feel like it could have been so much more in our favour.

The ladies final game took place at Wootton Bassett RFC against Dorset & Wilts, the girls were fired up to prove they could get the points on the board. A cracking performance was delivered with a win assured with tenacity and grit shown throughout the game, Final score of 37-5 but sadly the points difference was not going to be enough to get through to the play offs as Cornwall won their last game against Somerset.

This was still the best performance Middlesex Women have had in more than six years and an absolute credit to Laurisa 'Gert' Robson and her team of coaches, Bryony Cleall, Helen Caux, Niall MacSweeney, Chris Mason, and all the others that could help when they could. It is a sad farewell to Gert as she moves to Canada, but she goes with our heartfelt thanks and appreciation for all that she has done for rugby in Middlesex over the last number of years, best of luck on her new adventures!

### **U15 Girls**

The coaches decided on a smaller development squad out of the 90 or so that came for trial this season. This proved challenging on the later fixtures as we lost a few to injury and other commitments, however we presented ourselves well in the fixtures that took place. It's important to remember that at this age it really is their first opportunity for the girls to play at a higher level and it can be quite daunting. We ensured that all the girls received equal game time and position specific coaching whilst keeping it fun. Of the seven games the U15 girls played across three fixtures they lost two and won five. More importantly they came together as a squad and had the experience of playing with other skilled players from other clubs in the county. They look a strong cohort and we look forward to next seasons U16's programme.

### **U17 Boys**

The U17 boys have proved to be one of the strongest groups we've seen in recent years. Whilst the competition for positions in the squad was fierce we finished with an impressive group of approximately 30 boys. Having recruited a great depth of coaches this season we were able to give some of the most intense and specific coaching in the sessions we had. It paid off in the results as the U17's won all three of their fixtures against Surrey, Hertfordshire and Devon. The last fixture was played in great spirits as Devon and Middlesex were missing a fixture on their calendars and agreed to fulfil the weekend as a 'friendly'. It was a great example of flowing rugby for both teams and an enjoyable experience for all, so much so, Devon have invited Middlesex down for a return fixture next season.

### **In summary**

A big thank you to the physios and match officials this season, without you the games just wouldn't happen safely and with the right discipline.

Thank you to all the players that took part and represented the senior Middlesex teams this season, it was tough coming back from the pandemic and with a great deal of games being played at club level it was a tough ask to get participants to stretch to the games in May. Lastly thank you to all those that came to support the games, it really makes a difference to the players having a crowd behind the teams.

From the scores I managed to record for the thirty games played this season, 15 were wins, 3 were a draw and 12 were losses. Points for totalled 498 and points against were 395. We saw approximately 460 players at assessments and of those over 240 played in a Middlesex shirt this season.

It has been a satisfying and worthwhile season for Middlesex Representative rugby, it has shown how important county rugby remains as a means of identifying potential players that may slip through the net of DPP, Academy or Centre of Excellence. What the landscape looks like for senior county I am not sure of at the time of writing but I sincerely hope we can continue still fulfil a county programme of games at all age groups. Sadly the U20's was a non starter for Middlesex this season but we are looking to build the bridges between the universities and county so that this too can prove an important opportunity for talent development.

My thanks to all the coaches, team admins, physios and match officials for their ongoing support this season, to Nicky Fielder for her steady administration and friendly reminders when something is due. Thank you also to Kate Hallet and her team at Wasps FC and Matt Gilmore and his team at Grasshoppers RFC for accommodating the fixtures and being so flexible when plans changed. Last but by no means least, thank you to the Middlesex Committee for their ongoing support and guidance.

**Jok Dunbar**

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**What's on:**

- **County Annual General Meeting - Monday 4<sup>th</sup> July at Grasshoppers RFC, Syon Lane. Calling Notices have been sent.**