

September Newsletter 2022

Email: countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com

President's Message

Queen Elizabeth II 2026 – 2022 – It was with great sadness, that we heard of the death of Queen Elizabeth II on 8th September. I would like to thank all Middlesex Clubs for the way they handled their own way of marking her 70 years plus of devoted service, including 64 years as Patron of the RFU. Since then, I have attended a number of games and witnessed an immense sense of loss in the pre-match silences.

David F Aldridge, Chiswick RFC – It was also with great sadness that I heard of the death of Chiswick stalwart, David Aldridge, a brave and dynamic number 8 who started playing for Chiswick in 1963 and became Club Captain in 1965, Coach in 1972. Off the pitch he became Secretary, Chairman and then President between 1987 and 1991.

A true Chiswick great and “one of the good guys”!

I know it's been a really difficult start to the season for some Clubs, due to the extended hot weather. I would like to thank those Clubs who have offered their grounds as alternatives for training and playing and hope that those Clubs who still have home ground issues can get back to training/playing on them soon.

Our two newest Clubs – Finally, I'd like to welcome our two newest Clubs, London Imperials and London Hong Kong, I wish them well and look forward to seeing them play at some stage.

Peter

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Message from Eddie Keal, Chair, Middlesex

It's become an exceptionally busy month very quickly. This Newsletter is packed with activity and updates. I hope you enjoy the read.

We've almost completed the first round of Group meetings where I've delivered the same script each time. It helps the minute takers!

Several of the Management Board members were invited to the national Game Congress in Coventry last Friday/Saturday and we also had representatives from three Middlesex clubs – because they had been delegates on either Leadership Academy or Leadership in Union. Topics for discussion were mainly centred around the future of our Game. Be assured that everyone from Middlesex made a big contribution, we seem not to be a shy bunch.

I can only echo and amplify the comments from other contributors about the splendid reaction of Middlesex clubs to the death of the Queen. We are an astonishing community, top to bottom.

Hopefully, I will see more of you on my travels this season. Zoom is good for meetings, but no substitute for real company

Regards

Eddie

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Update from Lou Latter – Chair of Rugby Development

September is flying by but it was so pleasing to see all the club tributes to HM Queen Elizabeth II, who was the RFU Patron for so many years of her reign.

The start of the season has seen many requests come out to clubs. For ease of reference, the

following needs to be completed by clubs so please ensure the relevant club personnel are aware and are actioning.

- [Middlesex RFU Club Facility Audit](#) – deadline is Friday 30th September 2022
- Club Safeguarding Audit 22 – deadline is end of 31st December 2022. Available on GMS. Please also ensure all DBS certification is up to date.
- [Cost of Living Information Request](#) – deadline is Friday 30th September 2022.
- Age Grade Affiliation - You can find information and 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](#).
- Applications are now open for the [RFU Rugby Leadership Network](#). This will be the London and South East Network.
- Middlesex Financial Support Fund – providing financial assistance to those families that need a little helping hand with membership and club kit costs for age grade players. Access the [online application form](#).

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

Stay safe

Lou

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Message from Andrew Smart, Chair of Competitions

So finally, having just completed the third week of fixtures almost every club across both the county

and the division have finally started their league campaigns with Counties 3 Herts and Middlesex to begin this weekend. I commented that there was still a lot of angst out there following the refusal of the RFU Competitions Sub-Committee to delay the start of the season across London or indeed allow the season to be extended. On balance with just over 50% of the games going down on the 3rd September they probably just about got away with it but as clubs start to face the cost of what that actually means we will have to see whether that position changes. We already have one Middlesex club making their feelings very clear indeed and no doubt there will be many more as the reality hits home

As we went into last weekend, we had 25 clubs across the division (five Middlesex) facing fourteen games in a row without a break, three, (one Middlesex) facing eleven, and ninety-four (ten Middlesex), facing ten matches in a row. In total across the Division 136 clubs (16 Middlesex clubs) were facing between ten and fourteen consecutive matches without a break. That was 42% of those London's club whose season has already started. Obviously one week later that position has changed with almost everyone of those clubs having now played their first fixture. However, that is not the case for all. Some clubs who had commitments amongst their players to central London are now in a worse position having not been able also to get out on the 17th. Unfortunately, this includes a Middlesex club who in a twenty-two-match season now face 20 consecutive games without a break (if you take out Christmas and New Year.) and twenty in twenty-three consecutive weekends. It is simply unsustainable and impossible to reconcile the RFU's avowed commitment to player safety and guaranteed breaks with their refusal to allow the extension of the season all to protect a National Cup Competition that at the moment appears to have little interest for clubs. If we were to get bad weather or another serious Covid outbreak we would end up in a position where games would not get played to protect a competition at levels 7 and below which is not even open to many of our clubs. This will be a regional, not even national, knock out

competition for the top 64 clubs. What about the rest I hear you ask? Yes, at level 7 there are 6 leagues of 12 across London. That is 72 clubs for a competition open to 64. So, after the first round on the 25th March, 32 of those will be knocked and their season effectively finished. A season in potential chaos, much goodwill lost, for a competition that won't be open for some clubs and where half of the others that can enter are out after one game.

It goes without saying that the pressure on clubs to get 1stxv's out over such an intensive period will put a massive strain on their playing resources and of course will have serious ramifications for their lower xv's and on our merit tables. At the time when the male adult game is under such stress this is doing nothing to help clubs retain players and all to support a cup competition that at the moment there seems very little appetite for.

Anyway, in order to ensure that we will provide rugby across Middlesex for clubs that do want it I will be providing a cup competition at each level from 7 downwards due to start on the first Saturday in April. This will allow those clubs who want to enter the new "national" cup to do so and still be able to get rugby across April should they be knocked out in the first round. It will of course be open to those clubs who might not want to enter the "national" cup who might prefer a more localised competition and of course those clubs who fall outside the top 64 clubs still to get guaranteed rugby. As yet I have not made a decision about what offering we will make to our clubs at 5 and 6 who are at least being offered a national competition with more guaranteed games. At the moment, with almost no information about the "national" cup offering it is almost impossible for clubs to make an informed decision about entry or not. I understand that invitations will be coming out in November with clubs having to commit or not by December. It will be interesting to see what the enthusiasm is for this competition then and indeed for those clubs who do enter, what it will be for their players by the end of March after such an intensive season.

At the moment in an effort to get more games played I have written the following to the other competition chairs across the division

"Trust you are all well. I am looking to do a bit of work around the different Fixture Exchanges across the Division

My idea is to produce a single point of contact for all our fixture exchanges so that when clubs are looking for fixtures, they can look outside their own CB to see what else is available. Hopefully especially useful for those on the border of other CBs. It might be that the information is already out there and if so apologies. It is very much a work in progress so please if you have any comments about its usefulness or anything you think might improve the offering than please feel free to say

Otherwise, if your CB is running a Fixture Exchange or making use of another, I would be grateful for the

To start the process, I can confirm the following

Middlesex Fixture Exchange

The Fixture Exchange now runs on an Excel spreadsheet which contains the details of clubs looking for fixtures. It is simple to use if you want to add a new fixture, or are looking for a fixture. Click here to access the [Middlesex Fixture Exchange](#).

Herts and Middlesex Merit Tables Fixture Exchange

[Vacant dates \(hmtt.co.uk\)](#)

Once, I have all the information from the other seven CBs that with us make up the London & SE Division, I will ensure that it has a dedicated area on the Middlesex Rugby website for clubs to access. If it proves a successful tool, I will probably look to expand into those CBs outside London who are on our borders

In the meantime, please make yourselves familiar with our own Fixture Exchange. It is there for your benefit. We also have a dedicated WhatsApp Group for arranging fixtures. For details of how to get your club on that please come back to me

It is all about getting games played but unfortunately this season already looks fraught with problems across the adult male game

For our women's clubs their season begins this Sunday. All the best to them!

Keep safe

Andrew Smart

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Report from Chair of Groups, Andrew Smart

So, another very well attended All-Clubs meeting on the 22nd August with 80 attendees from at least 40 clubs, although not all clubs booked in so it could have been more. We were also joined by some of our friends from Hertfordshire. Thanks as always to Louise for facilitating. Not easy with so many people on the call and even more so trying to keep me on topic and thanks to Simon for getting a recording of the meeting onto the website for those who couldn't attend. It was initially intended mainly to update clubs on the new Adult Competition Regulations which I normally do in presentations across the September Group meetings. However, the earlier start in the first Saturday in September for the majority of our clubs under the re-organisation of the leagues would have seen the league season already underway before I would have had a chance to update them. Of course, the severe drought conditions facing many of our clubs and the implications for the beginning of the season meant that the main focus of the meeting changed

- New Adult Competition Regulations for women and men - Regulation 6
- Promotion and Relegation
- Start of the season - Pitch Conditions and RFU Protocols

- An update on the options if the Adult Male League programme does not start on the 3rd September and the implications for the season
- Post league National Cup versus County Cup Options
- AOB

I think we have run six or seven of these All-Club meetings since the beginning of Covid and it is proving a very successful tool for getting out information to our clubs as quickly as possible and getting feedback from you. It is not meant to take away from the vital role of our Group Meetings but there are times when we cannot wait for the next round of meetings, and this is the best way and quickest way for us to engage. We will continue to run similar meetings when we think is really needed or you ask for them and we are always looking to improve so if you have anything you think might help us in the future I for one would be delighted to hear from you. Thanks to all of you who supported that meeting. I hope that you found it informative and of use

One of the debates for the Group Officers was whether because of the well supported All-Clubs meeting we could put back the September meetings. In the end the decision was no. The Group Officers decided no, concerned that with everything going on it was important that we engage with our clubs as soon as possible. However, three of the meetings were changed to Zoom with only the South Group at London Cornish remaining in person. The North Group meeting originally due to be held Monday the 5th September put back to 19th because the Group Secretary was away on holiday, was moved again to the 26th September, once the 19th became the day of our late Queen's funeral. That meeting will be on Zoom at 8pm with the agenda and papers to be circulated closer to the date

Unsurprisingly perhaps all three group meetings so far have been dominated by the current state of the clubs and their preparedness for the new season. The other big discussion point was the rising cost of Utilities and the impact on all clubs with their own

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clubhouses whatever size. There is no answer to this until we know what support if any Government are going to provide for businesses/sports clubs

At the North-West meeting one of the decisions made was to trial going down from five to four meetings this season in line with the other groups with the January and March meetings being replaced by one meeting in February. As I say it is a trial and if it doesn't work for the clubs and the Group, we will change it back.

Going forward I think it is likely that we will continue to run an All-Clubs meeting before the start of the league season at the end of August to cover off on any new regulations and any new laws or interpretations. This will then take the pressure off to hold the first round of group meetings in early September and enable us to look at alternative dates. Very much an issue for each group and our clubs but maybe pushing the first round of Group meetings back towards the end of September when clubs are up and running and where we have had some rugby would be a better fit for the clubs and the season. We could then look to push the next round of group meetings back towards the end of November with the late January/early February and the April AGMs remaining as they are. I think it would give a better balance for the meetings

Anyway, a discussion point for us to consider and if you have a view then I would be more than happy to hear from you

All the best

Andrew Smart
Chairman Group Officers

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Coaching & Refereeing Update, Bob Lawless

Interested in gaining a Coaching Qualification?

Middlesex are inviting member clubs to nominate Senior players who would like support in achieving,

The England Rugby Coaching Award (this replaces the old L2 award, which is now more commonly known as the ERCA). The programme is free and is open to all who have an interest in coaching in the Senior game

Referee Take up the Whistle Course

The next Take up the Whistle Course will take place at Grasshoppers on 3rd & 10th October 22,

Young Referee Match Officials Award

Open to all Middlesex Youth Players. The Introduction to refereeing is run over 2 evenings. On completion of the Course each young match official will receive a Certificate, Whistle, Lanyard and a Middlesex Referees Jersey. The course will consist of 2 face to face meetings, 3 webinars and practical experience.

For Further Information or any queries on Coaching or Referee development contact Bob Lawless Chair of Coaching Development on bob.lawless@middlesexrugby.com or on (M) 07803196 409 by call, text or WhatsApp.

RFU GMS Courses

Kids First Tag

Ealing - 13th Oct

Kids First Contact

Ealing - 20th and 27th Oct (must attend both evenings)

England Rugby Referee Award:

Harrow School - Day 1: 23rd Oct, Day 2: 28th May 2023

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**Latymer School Enfield - Day 1: 20th Nov, Day 2:
25th June 2023**

Principles of Scrummaging

Barnet Elizabethans - 7th Nov

Wasps FC - 23rd Nov

To book a place on the RFU GMS courses - Go to EnglandRugby.com and check the course finder for many more national courses.

If you have any questions, please contact granthathaway@rfu.com 07731008175.

For Further Information on any queries on Coaching or Referee development contact Bob Lawless Chair of Coaching Development on bob.lawless@middlesexrugby.com or on (M) 07803196 409 by call, text or WhatsApp.

What's On

Hold the Date - Middlesex Clubs Dinner

Friday 19th May at London Welsh RFC

Guest Speaker RFU Chairman, Tom Ilube

More details to follow!