

October Newsletter 2022

Email: countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com

President's Message

It's great to see Club's catching up with their fixtures but am aware that some still have fixtures outstanding. As you'll see in this Newsletter, there has been some knock on affects to the Merit Tables which Andy Smart is addressing to ensure that we get games played.

This season I've committed, in my third year as President, to visit those Clubs I didn't see in the first two years. This has seen me watching London Exiles, under lights at Wasps on a Friday night and last week, I went to Barnes to see London French. Unfortunately, both sides lost but the enthusiasm both on and off the field was amazing, especially the trumpeter at London French. This week, I'm saying in the Surrey Leagues with a visit to Old Paulines to see them play Harlequin Amateurs and hope to share a beer with Old P's stalwart, Tim Cunis.

A farewell to a Pinner Stalwart Nick Young - May 1962 - September 2022- It was with great sadness that I heard of the passing Nick Young of Pinner from David Hiles. Nick joined Pinner's Colts team in 1979 when a pupil at City of London and it was evident that he would develop into an outstanding scrum half. See below link to David's full obituary for Nick.

<https://www.pinnerrfc.co.uk/nickyong>

Richard Gray (County President 1994-1997) - We hadn't heard from Richard for some time but I'm pleased to say that, prompted by a note from me, he called Paul Astbury and left a message giving us his new phone number which I'm happy to share with anyone who'd like to give him a call. I followed this

with a call to him on Saturday and he sounded well and sends his best regards to his Middlesex mates. He continues though to see live rugby at Hartpury College and continues to enjoy our monthly Newsletter.

Brian East (Past President) - Brian would like to pass on his thanks for all the recent birthday wishes. Brian maintains his positivity especially around his beloved Belsize Park.

Kind regards

Peter

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Message from Eddie Keal, Chair, Middlesex

I have been out and about the County in recent weeks, including a 3-club Sunday morning drop-in where I learned a lot about a) Clubs with links to GAA teams b) Damage caused by dry weather and c) The challenge of getting players to turn up every week. I've also seen a couple of excellent Women's games and some 15-a-side Men's rugby played on grass pitches on Saturday afternoon at 3pm. Bring on the non-contact and walking rugby and I'll have seen the full set before Christmas.

The County's work probably peaked about a month ago, and we are now in the middle of executing the plan and trying to carve out some time for longer-term considerations. I know that sounds odd, but the nature of the job is that we often find ourselves a half-cycle ahead of the game. Once the season is up and running, many of us can find time to think about 6 months down the line.

Hot topics include plans for the end of season Middlesex Sevens, Club sustainability, County volunteer development and succession planning. Having said that, this season is different from those that have gone before as many of our clubs face an existential crisis. I'm glad that so much of this Newsletter is devoted to that topic. There is

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precious little good news coming from the Premiership or the grass-roots of the game right now, and it is going to take a lot of work to see this season through. Expect a steady stream of support and assistance from the County. Our clubs are our top priority. Nothing else matters to us like they do.

Regards

Eddie

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Update from Lou Latter – Chair of Rugby Development

I hope you have all enjoyed the first 6 weeks of the season and players are returning. We have a feast of rugby on at the moment with the Red Roses going well in their first two pool games of RWC2021 and the men's Autumn Internationals kick off in the next couple of weeks.

Please remember that the following must be completed by clubs:

- Club Safeguarding Audit 22 – deadline is end of 31st December 2022. Available on GMS. Please also ensure all DBS certification is up to date.
- 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](#).

Thank you to all clubs for completing the Facilities Audit. We have managed to get a 100% of responses which is great. This audit allows us to look at the provision within Middlesex and to help find ways of supporting you in the future.

We are pleased that the Middlesex Financial Support Fund has been well received again this year and we have already processed over 40 applications to support age grade players and their families facing financial hardship. The fund provides support with paying club membership and the purchase of club kit (shorts, socks and shirt), gumshields, rugby boots and sports bras. You can access the application via the [online application form](#).

We have an exciting opportunity to receive some funding to support Girls U12 rugby within the County so I am looking for a female volunteer(s) aged between 18-24 to support with this initiative. Please let any of your players, volunteers aware of this and ask them to get in touch with me on the email below to discuss the project.

If you are ready for a new challenge and would like 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

louise.latter@middlesexrugby.com

Message from Andrew Smart, Chair of Competitions

I can only start this report but referring to my report to Management last week when I made the following observations. "Yes, the season has now started for all our leagues and all our clubs are now playing, and yes in the leagues the RFU Competitions Sub-Committee has finally had to concede that playing fourteen league games without a break is completely unsustainable and has allowed the 19th November to revert back to a

reserve weekend. This means that clubs who didn't start until the third weekend of the season will now not have to play on that day unless both teams in the fixture agree to. So, some good news there but the significant issues around this structured season persist and will become even worse if we lose any matches because of bad weather or for any other reason. On top of that, for those of us who look at the league results every weekend both across our own leagues and also across the division it is clear that our concerns about the pressures of this season are now proving correct. We are seeing far too many one-sided games with some huge scores plus a worrying number of walkovers. This is very much duplicated in our three leagues where so far, we have already seen four fixtures not honoured with at least one at each level. (Three of the walkovers were conceded by Middlesex clubs and the other one a Hertfordshire club)."

I also have to report that West London have decided after three rounds that their future, hopefully in the short term, no longer remains in the leagues and have formally withdrawn from Counties 3 H/M and have asked to continue the rest of this season in our merit tables. A request of course that we will honour. That is now two Middlesex clubs so far this season who have withdrawn from the leagues with Mill Hill going before the season actually started but unfortunately, I cannot say with any certainty that they will be the last. The situation is much, much worse across the merit tables which I will cover on later later in the report together with the alternative competition offerings that we will providing for the rest of the season for MMTs 4 and 5, and the impact that it will have on MMT3.

Anyway, those clubs that did actually get to start on the 3rd September will now have played six rounds of competition and it is about time that I cover how each of our clubs are actually doing

I suppose I should start with the Gallagher Premiership and the demise of Wasps. I appreciate that they are no longer a Middlesex Club, but they have been one of the truly great clubs of English and European rugby, a huge part of the history of our county and I like many of us will be truly sad about

the position they now find themselves. The Wasps FC, who play at Twyford Avenue continue to thrive although there must be some concerns for the future of the Wasps Women who were due to join the men in Coventry in the next couple of years. We wish our friends at both clubs all the best as the professional club seeks to find some sort of future

The Allianz Premier 15s don't start until November. In the Championship Ealing Trailfinders have had a perfect start with five try bonus point wins, one point above Jersey Reds. A long way to go but those two games will I suspect very much decide where the title will go. London Scottish despite their much-heralded partnership with Harlequins which seemed to promise so much continue to struggle and are currently bottom already five points adrift with a couple of bonus points. Unfortunately, the visit of Ealing next Saturday to the Athletic is unlikely to change that position in the short term

At level 5, in Regional 1 Central, London Welsh after some years of unparalleled, success. Have found this new level a struggle with one win and a draw in their first six games and are currently second from bottom. In their sister league Regional 1 South-East CS Stags 1863 have so far now won four out of six and would be second but for the minus five-point sanction that they carried over from last season. Brilliant effort by the club to come back so strongly after all their travails of last season and long may it continue

At level 6 and these are important leagues for our Counties H/M league below because relegations at this level will from this season, with level transfer now gone at level 7, will go into their own CB leagues. So, if for instance four Middlesex or Herts clubs are relegated from the two level 6 leagues, they play in they will all go into Counties 1 Herts/Middx and therefore force four clubs to be relegated. The same will apply to Counties 2. On the other hand, if no Middlesex or Herts Clubs are relegated from level 6 there will be no clubs relegated in our leagues at 7 and below. Anyway, as it stands the news is pretty good. In Regional 2 Anglia HAC sit proudly top in points difference with five wins and a draw over Letchworth from

Hertfordshire in second. In Regional 2 Thames Hammersmith and Fulham are top with six bonus point wins averaging 63 points a game with Old Priorians four points behind in second place. London Cornish are fifth with Old Haberdashers eleventh and currently in one of the two relegation places. Fullerians, for what it is worth are seventh

At level 7 in Counties 1 Essex, Epping Upper Clapton are tenth. In Counties 1 Herts/Middx Old Streetonians are top by three, with Grasshoppers third, Chiswick fifth, Hampstead eight, Finchley, ninth, Enfield Ignatians tenth, Ruislip with two games in hand eleventh and Hackney with a game in hand bottom. In Counties 1 Surrey/Sussex Twickenham are fifth but with two games in hand

At level 8, in Counties 2 Surrey, Teddington sit proudly top on wins with the same number of points as Chipstead who have one win less but a draw and two more bonus points. Next Saturday's game between both clubs at Teddington unless it is a draw will start to see some daylight between the two clubs. London Exiles on their return to the leagues, are currently bottom but competitive and playing, which is a huge step up from last season and great news for the club. In Counties 2 Herts/Middx Ealing Trailfinders 1871 are top with maximum points from seven games with London Scottish Lions 8 points behind with a game in hand. Saracens Amateurs are fourth, Hendon sixth, Wasps FC eighth, Harrow eleventh with Finsbury Park bottom

At level nine in Surrey 3, Staines are bottom on points difference with two other clubs. In Counties 3 Herts/Middx after three rounds Brunel University are top on maximum points, Thamesians fourth, Uxbridge fifth, Old Millhillians sixth, Bank Lane eighth, Kilburn Cosmos ninth, Actonians tenth and with West London withdrawing UCS bottom in eleventh

At level ten in Surrey 4, Old Paulines are third and Harlequin Amateurs fourth. London French pointless are tenth and bottom

At level 11 in Surrey 5, Old Hamptonians are top with maximum points and a game in hand.

Now onto the Merit Tables

As it stands although this weekend's returns are looking slightly better, up to the 8th October our current completion rate is really worrying and I see nothing that persuades me that is going to change in any significant way

For our six merit tables it currently runs as follows

Premier. 53% completion rate (Arranged fixtures against games played) against 62% (Played games to walkovers)

MMT1 75% and 82%

MMT2 58% and 70%

MMT3 40% and 50%

MMT4 36% and 36%

MMT5 No games played and none as yet organised.

Total for these MTs 49% and 56% and across all our MT competitions that includes the MT Cups and Vets, that figure is pretty much the same at 49% and 57%

The figures for completed games in Merit Tables across England are even worse at 44%. Whilst that tells us all we need to know about the state of the community game and the pressures that clubs and teams are facing to get out players and whilst we might be currently above the national average our returns are pitiful and a source of real concern. It is absolutely incumbent on me to look to improve the playing opportunities for our merit table teams and players and where something is clearly not working, even this early in the season I have to find a way to either improve it or change it.

I have taken the view that we have no other option than to change the competition offering for the bottom two merit tables which will also impact on the make up and competition offering for MMT3 also.

Steve and I are putting the finishing touches to the new formats before being circulated to the clubs. At

the moment I don't think it is appropriate to expand on these plans until they have been finalised and the clubs concerned have been informed first. I intend to circulate our merit table teams with the changes midweek, looking to bring them in on the 29th October. That discussion will also include finding West London a place in our MTs at an appropriate level

Finally, I understand that the RFU Competitions Sub-Committee are going to accept that at levels 7 and below it is frankly farcical that in this "National Cup" competition, half the sides will be eliminated after one round. Instead, they are now discussing introducing a "waterfall" competition for eliminated clubs to then go into a plate instead. That will clearly impact on my plans for CB Cups at those levels and there is little I can do to develop my plans until the RFU issue theirs. Invitations for the "National Cup" are due out next month.

Keep safe

Andrew Smart

andrew-smart@ntlworld.com

Report from Chair of Groups, Andrew Smart

Now that we have finished the first round of Group Meetings, I am in a position to confirm the remaining dates. Venues to follow closer to each meeting.

North-West - Wednesdays

16th Nov

8th Feb

12th April

South - Mondays

14th November Teddington

23rd January

3rd April

West - Wednesdays

9th November

25th January

5th April

North - Mondays

7th November although we might consider moving that now as the September meeting was put back two weeks

6th February

17th April (Would normally have been the 10th but that is Easter Monday so this meeting has been put forward one week)

All the April meetings will of course be preceded by the Group AGMs

I am delighted to report that the North Group "Pick Up the Whistle Course" at Old Grammarians RFC on Monday 3rd and 10th of November is now full with all twenty places filled. There will be further courses in the North West Group to be hosted by Harrow RFC in January and the South Group to be hosted by Twickenham RFC in April. Joining details will be circulated closer to the course dates

The recent West Group "Pick up the Whistle Course" at Grasshoppers on the 3rd and 10th October was also very well attended with nineteen of the twenty available places filled. An excellent response so far from the clubs from two of our groups and I am very hopeful that the same will apply for the other two also

Finally, we have been completing the annual Club Audit of Middlesex Clubs on behalf of the RFU and unfortunately it has identified that seven of our voting clubs are in danger of losing that status and with it access to international tickets. Just to clarify for a club to maintain its "voting" status it must play at least twelve adult games in one season against at least four other voting clubs. They have two seasons to reach that threshold and if they fail their voting status is removed after consultation with the CB. This is a really significant issue for these clubs not only to lose their voting status with the RFU but perhaps far more importantly their guaranteed access to International Tickets which we know can be hugely important to the financial survival of many of us. I am currently writing to the seven clubs at risk to let them know where they stand, what the criteria required to maintain their status and some

ideas about what we can do to support them to maintain their status.

At the same time the audit has identified something that we have been aware of for some time, that we have far, far more clubs on records held by the RFU that are currently playing rugby in Middlesex. As far as the RFU is concerned we currently have over 120 clubs. That is clearly ridiculous and over the summer Nicky Fielder in the county office, Simon Hardcastle, Sagan Daniels and myself have been doing work to contact these clubs either directly or from information held on the GMS to confirm whether they still exist or indeed are playing. I just wanted to put on record my appreciation of the work put in here by Nicky Fielder who has been the main driver here and has put in a prodigious amount of work here over a number of years to try to get a handle on this. Perhaps unsurprising the majority of these clubs don't pay annuals subscriptions to Middlesex, don't engage with us in anyway and to be frank should no longer be shown on Club Audit. This work was completed some time ago and it is my fault that I have not actioned this to the Management Committee for them to decide or not to support our submission that many should be culled. That is now in hand and if anything, the Club Audit has shown that we have enough of our clubs who need our support, to waste time and effort on clubs who no longer exist or if they do aren't interested in what we do to want to pay their subs.

Well done to Nicky and thank you for all your efforts.

Andrew Smart
Chairman Group Officers

andrew-smart@ntlworld.com

Coaching & Refereeing Update, Bob Lawless

The November coaching theme is "What's Trending in the Academy & DPP"

These open Coach Education Evenings are suitable to all Middlesex Youth & Senior Coaches.

These are outdoor sessions, where those registered will be guided by the DPP manager Rhys Davies, who will assure a quality of experience through explanation and close observation of innovative & creative skills you can take away to develop your players.

Coaches need to wrap up warm and bring a pen & pad to take notes.

The sessions are spread out in the Academy sites to ensure travelling time is reduced.

- (1) Monday 7th November 2022 – Wasps Twyford – start 17.45hrs – 19.30hrs**
- (2) Tuesday 15th November 2022 – London Irish, Hazelwood – start 18.00hrs – 20.30hrs**
- (3) Wednesday 23rd November 2022 – Harrow School – start 18.15hrs- 20.30hrs**

To register your interest contact Bob Lawless (e) bob.lawless@middlesexrugby.com or text or WhatsApp (M) 07803 196 409

Principles of Scrummage

Find below a link to join the upcoming Scrum coach development evening at Wasps on 23/11/22 This is an excellent course which will give you technical knowledge and confidence in delivery, in areas of safety & technique of scrummaging.

<https://bit.ly/ScrumWasps231122>

RFU GMS Coaching Courses

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

England Rugby Referee Award: -

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

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

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.

Referee Development

The next take up The Whistle Course will take place on Thursday 3rd & 10th November at Old Grammarians. This Course has now been sold out.

Further Take up The Whistle Course will be held at -

Harrow RFC (dates TBC) & Teddington RFC On Mondays 17th & 24th April 2023

For Further Information or any queries on Coaching or Referee development contact Bob Lawless Middlesex Chair of Coaching & Referee Development on bob.lawless@middlesexrugby.com or on (M) 07803 196 409 by call, text or WhatsApp.

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Deputy President's Message

It is great to hear that the season is underway, let us hope you all have a full and enjoyable season.

As Deputy President I have yet to introduce myself in this newsletter. I learnt my rugby at Downer

Grammar School, Edgware under PE master Mr Jones of Saracens and Andy Williams of London Welsh; seemingly all Middx PE men hailed from Wales in the 70s.

With no old boys' team, I migrated to Old Kingsburians RFC, coached by the late Brian Jones from Kingsbury Grammar. Kings eventually merged into West London RFC, in my time they met in the Mitre on Watford Road and played in Northwick Park fields with the lower Wasps XV's.

I entered teaching, coaching and refereeing school XV's. A parent recruited me to the London Society, and I was also 'volunteered' on to the Middlesex Schools' Union.

I coached Middlesex U16, U18 and U20s and served for many years on the County Management Committee and chaired Governance. I am currently an England Schools' representative on the RFU Council and chair the RFU Game Development Sub-Committee.

It is great to currently support Bavey and I look forward to meeting many of you in the coming months.

Nigel Orton
Nigel.Orton@middlesexrugby.com

What's On

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**To register your interest contact Bob
Lawless (e)
bob.lawless@middlesexrugby.com or text
or WhatsApp (M) 07803 196 409**

Hold the Date - Middlesex Clubs Dinner

Friday 19th May at London Welsh RFC

Guest Speaker RFU Chairman, Tom Ilube

More details to follow!