

May Newsletter 2023

Email: countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com

Middlesex All Club 7s 2023

Middlesex Sevens returned this weekend post covid in a new home and back to its roots as Middlesex All-Clubs competition. Thanks to Grasshoppers for being fantastic hosts for the day with special thanks to Matt Gillmore and his team for ensuring everything went well on the day, we had Peter "the voice" Baveystock on the announcements and could be heard for miles around attracting in additional spectators. We'd also like to thank Photographer, Brian O'Connor for his hard work with the camera and we'll soon have the photos out with you soon.

In all we had 11 Clubs represented with 29 games played, 1249 points scored and over 180 tries scored. It was a fantastic day of Rugby with some good numbers of spectator support. Actonians were the Social bowl winners with Old Isleworthians as runners up, Enfield Ignatians won the Open Bowl 26-11 with Wasps as runners up, Thamesians won the Social Plate 38-10 with Uxbridge as runners up. Grasshoppers won the Open plate 34-7 with Chiswick as runners up. Moving on to the main 2 finals we were treated to some great rugby at the end of a day's competition with Harrow beating Hammersmith & Fulham II 36-12 to be crowned the Social Cup Winners and Hammersmith & Fulham I topping off a fantastic season and taking the Derek Mann Open cup trophy as winners of the Middlesex All-Club Sevens 19-12 with London Scottish Lions 1 as runners up.

None of this would have been possible without Rob Park and the excellent team of referees that we had on the day. So my thanks to them and finally to my friend Mark Coles who has done an amazing job on organising an enjoyable tournament, I certainly couldn't have done it without you and great to see you not only organising it with me but playing for Uxbridge on the day as well!!!

We will be sending an all-club survey out and welcome feedback and hope to see more of you at

next year's All-Club Sevens and especially by holding a Women's competition next year.

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Social Bowl Winners | Actonians |
| Social Bowl Runners Up | Old Isleworthians |
| Open Bowl Winners | Enfield Ignatians |
| Open Bowl Runners up | Wasps |
| Social Plate Winners | Thamesians |
| Social Plate Runners up | Uxbridge |
| Open Plate Winners | Grasshoppers |
| Open Plate Runners up | Chiswick |
| Social Cup Winners | Harrow |
| Social Cup Runners up | Hammersmith & Fulham 2 |
| Open Cup Winners | Hammersmith & Fulham 1 |
| Open Cup Runners UP | London Scottish Lions 1 |

President's Message

It was great to be able to attend all of the end of season Festivals from under 7's through to the Middlesex Club 7's last weekend which was an excellent day well organised by Mark & Steve and brilliantly hosted by Grasshoppers. However, despite watching some outstanding rugby I was disappointed at some of the touchline behaviour at some of the events. We all want to support our teams but what used to be friendly touchline banter, often turned into aggressive exchanges with officials and event organisers, all of which are volunteers, being accused of bias, favoritism and even bordering on accusations of cheating. Middlesex, we can do better than this so let's get back to respecting our officials, organisers and fellow Clubs.

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Well done to Teddington, Twickenham and Harlequin Amateurs for reaching their respective finals with Teddington and Harlequin Amateurs becoming Papa John's Champions! I was at Stonex on the Saturday to see Twickenham put up a brave fight and the following day it was an early start to get to Sidmouth to see our Women lose to a strong Devon side.

Annual General Meeting 2023 - You will soon be receiving the first calling notice for the Annual General Meeting at Grasshoppers on Monday 3rd July so please come along and have your say about how Rugby is run in Middlesex.

Kind regards

Peter

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Message from Eddie Keal, Chair

What a great end of season it has become. So many of our clubs involved in competitions, finals and play offs. Clearly we still need to get the structured season adjusted so regular league and merit table activity isn't as squeezed as it has been. There is work to do.

I had the privilege of hosting Hackney Gladies and Teddington men's teams at Twickenham for their Papa John's Community Cup Finals. Unforgettable days out for both clubs.

I'm looking forward to seeing many of you on Friday at London Welsh.

Regards

Eddie

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Update from Lou Latter – Chair of Rugby Development

Well, another season is drawing to a close and what a season.

We've seen the introduction of the new girls age bandings and teams finding their feet. We are still navigating through the new tackle height but resources are now available on the [Tackle Height Resource Hub](#). In the last couple of weekends we've had Middlesex clubs winning their leagues and Papa John Cup competitions. Congratulations to all clubs. And on 29th April we saw 58,498 spectators at Twickenham watching the Red Roses first standalone fixture at Twickenham as they one the Grand Slam 6Nations match against France. And now we start to look forward to a men's World Cup later in the year.

All volunteers who were nominated for the Honda Volunteer of the Year Awards should now have received their invitations to the Awards evening at Twickenham Stadium on 7th July.

As a reminder, age grade clubs are asked to ensure any activity they undertake over the summer is in line with [Regulation 15 Age Grade Out of Season Activities Guide](#).

The St George's Day Girls festival, in conjunction with Surrey CB and London Irish Amateurs was held on Sunday 20th April and we had 68 teams with over 800 girls across the four age groups enjoying their rugby. Well done to the Middlesex Clubs who participated.

The RFU are running nine U18 Girls Touch Rugby Festivals between 26th May – 2nd July across England. Each festival will be a showcase event, providing a fun, non-competitive environment to target girls who have dropped out of the sport and

engage with new players. Each festival will accommodate approximately 80 girls per festival. Please do push this out to your networks, either lapsed players or new players as well as volunteers as there are plenty of opportunities on and off the pitch. You can register for the festivals [here](#).

As ever, if you need any help and support on or off the field, then please do reach out and let me know.

Lou

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Message from Andrew Smart, Chair of Competitions

Middlesex Report to the London ROC AGM 12th and 13th May 2023 in Newmarket

The 2022/23 season started with 37 clubs across Counties 1,2 and 3 Herts and Middlesex. That number had dropped by one before the season even started with Mill Hill withdrawing from the level 9 league. They were soon joined by West London who found the competition in the rejigged leagues following the FCS re-organisation far too strong from them. Then we lost Finsbury Park from Counties 2, a combination of injuries some very heavy defeats and four walkovers in the end meant that they couldn't continue. All three withdrawals were instigated by the clubs themselves and they all went on to find places for themselves in the merit tables where they have been to find a much more appropriate competition level for their players and has provided a structure that will allow them to flourish and hopefully grow. At the same time two Middlesex clubs, Staines and London French who had only just level transferred to the Surrey leagues found the competition too hot and both had to be dropped one level each and play the rest of the season playing friendlies albeit in a league

structure. Both will continue to play league rugby next season in the Surrey Counties leagues at a level more consistent with their ability.

At the end of the season Hemel Hampstead were promoted as champions of Counties 1 with Grasshoppers taking the second promotion place as one the best six runners up across the country. Cheshunt undefeated across the league season were champions of Counties 2 with London Scottish Lions also promoted as runners-up. In Counties 3 Old Millhillians were champions and promoted together with Brunel University in second place.

Congratulations to all those clubs for successful seasons but unfortunately if you look across our game in this part of London you will see a game and many of our clubs now out on their knees. We continue to see a narrowing of the player base across our game locally where clubs having to support 1stxv league competitions have been forced to draw up players from their lower xvs to honour fixtures and this has seen a savage impact on both the Middlesex and Herts&Middx Merit tables which despite re-organisation across the season has seen little impact on the chronic walkover rates. Players play for fun, a word I suggest is in short supply in our game at the moment. Yes of course playing habits have not returned to pre-covid standards (although to be fair I believe you could already see the changes pre-covid but clearly accentuated by the pandemic) but this savage unforgiving structured season has accelerated those underlying problems in our game and we are now seeing their effects not only with the players who are crying out for rest weekends but also now on both coaches and volunteers across our game, They are asking themselves why they commit week on week when the players who are they working to support can't be bothered to make themselves available consistently. I already know of coaches, DoRs and Administrators who are walking

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away from the game or certainly talking about whether they are prepared to commit to their club's next season. The game is in crisis and whilst of course there are successful clubs and team, there are too many that are failing. A county with twenty 1stxvs in our merit tables all one team clubs, plus an increasing number of our league clubs now down to one team the decline cannot continue without seeing in the next five to ten years many of those clubs disappearing forever.

With the two promotions from Counties 1, no Middlesex or Hertfordshire sides relegated from Regional 2 plus successful applications from Stevenage and Finsbury Park to re-enter the leagues for the 2023/24 plus a new club entering the leagues for the first time in Berkhamsted we will have thirty-five clubs playing in our three Counties leagues for next season.

In view of all the problems that so many of our clubs have faced this season the Herts and Middlesex Competitions Sub-Committee believed that it was important that our clubs and their players has a say in the competition offering for our County leagues for next season. With this in mind we decided on four options for the clubs to consider

(For voting analysis please see supplementary report)

To say that this has not been met by universal approval across the two CBs is an understatement. The majority of clubs at level 7 and 8 voted for 10 team leagues but the final vote was skewed by the clubs at level 9 voting less for the status quo but more against conferencing which they clearly hate.

We continue to try to find a way through this mess and any suggestions would be much appreciated. As it stands, we are not in a position yet to sign off on our leagues for the new season. Both David and Bob will be able to do a verbal update of where we are at

the moment but as it stands, we have real concerns about the ability of some our clubs to be able to get through another season of more of the same and we fear about the impact on our merit tables.

There are two issues that Middlesex wish to be addressed at the AGM and whilst I accept that it is unlikely that this will see a change in the regulations, we would ask that they be addressed in the Admin Instructions for next season. We offer our won solutions but of course these are very much for the AGM to decide.

1 Clarity around the Man-Off Regulations. It is clear that the referees, coaches, and clubs have little understanding of the regulation and how to apply it properly. I have had six different queries in Regional 2 Thames alone this season and I know of any number of similar issues across our leagues. It is creating uncertainty and mistrust in our clubs and to be honest what is available to league secretaries and clubs is at best inadequate and the head injury dispensation that allows a club to go uncontested and remain at fifteen is open to abuse and to be fank is being abused. We need clear guidance in the regulations next season on how this is to be applied. Without it the integrity of some of games will continue to be called into question

2 Clarity around Clubs offering friendlies at level 7 and below to avoid receiving a sanction. Again, this is open to abuse. It can no longer be sufficient for a club to refuse to play the friendly without testing the willingness of their opponents being willing to actually honour the offer. Too many clubs ae making the offer expecting their opponents simply to take the points and refuse to play. We need regulation around how many times clubs can do this before sanctions for failing to offer a fixture can be applied and a decision about what points should be awarded to the other club if they should effuse the offer

I suggest the following:

Friendly offered, accepted, and played 5 points to the non-offending team. No sanction to the team that can't honour the league fixtures on the first two times only.

Friendly offered but refused. Four points to the non-offending team. No sanction to the team that can't honour the league fixtures on the first two times only.

Friendly offered and accepted, opposition fails to honour the friendly. As of now. 5 points to the non-offending and five-point sanction

Finally, I attach a copy of our feedback on the Papa John's Community Cup and some solutions for next season.

"It is very difficult to make any useful or constructive comments re this competition when it remains tied into a five-week window at the end of the league season and even more so when there is no catch-up weekend at between the last league weekend and the start of the competition.

I know that we have spoken about this in some length but let me deal with the failings first.

1 Communication has been risible and has left the competition, the organisers and the RFU itself open to ridicule at best, contempt at worst. It has been an utter shambles and the fact that there was no circulation to the community game about the ko times and teams at the lesser finals at Stonex and I imagine the other two venues highlights this issue even further. I only found out about them because via a Council Circulation from Terry Burwell and from what you sent me

2 No balance to the knockout fixtures. Ealing for instance got three games away whilst Chipstead got three at home. I am sure that those anomalies can be seen across all the competitions.

3 Clubs in the knockout competition want more notice of their next fixture than being told on the Monday. Either the next round must be drawn and

notified to clubs before the Saturday fixture proceeding or they need the draw through to the final at the beginning of the competition with some leeway to reverse fixtures where appropriate

4. The pools simply don't work. If a club loses its first-round match it has no chance of getting through to the next stage and this is when clubs withdraw, and fixtures aren't honoured. Also, it is simply unfair with some of the travelling costs for some clubs to have two home games and only one away and vice versa. They have to go or you have to increase them to pools of five so everyone gets two at home and two away. This of course means increasing the competition by one week. Semi-finals with between the three pool winners and the best runners up. Encourages everyone to keep playing even for the best runner's up place. Still don't think it will work and think you need to a Knockout Cup at each level

5 I think there are too many competitions. If that is the plan to continue, then a maximum of 16 teams at each level North and South with a break week would work best or you could have a National Finals between the winners of the North and South. You can leave the Champions competitions at 32

6 It was clear at Stonex that the RFU had spent a significant amount of money on the hiring. There was loads of staff, easy to get food and a drink with pretty much almost no queues. Very good programme and a great experience for the clubs who actually got through but no-body who wasn't with one of those clubs would have attended and in one of the games two Surrey sides less than five miles away from each other had to travel to the Stonex to play their game. I would much rather that Community Clubs got the benefit of hosting these lesser finals. Esher or Grasshoppers for instance have clearly got the facilities to host four finals and there must be many other clubs across the country also able to do so. It's a Community Cup for Community Clubs. Why should Premier and Championship clubs be the ones to benefit.

7. Regulations were clearly a cut and paste from the original National Cup instructions. Those on

registered players and next round made no sense for a competition that starts after the Transfer Deadline Date and over a five-week block.

8 My suggestion appreciating that the competition will start in a five-week block at the end of the season.

A. Cut down the number of entrants at each level to 16. Spread over five weeks this introduces a break weekend and also give value to each competition.

B Draw needs to be fairer to encourage teams to take part so that clubs know that if they were away in the previous round, they have a great chance of being at home in the next

C Competitions should be within ROC Boundaries until the finals in the lesser competitions and semi-finals in the Champion Competitions

D More local finals to support community clubs

E Feedback needs to be directed at those clubs who didn't enter or failed to honour fixtures to establish why the competition failed to attract their entry.

G Overall I would just about give the competition a fail despite the successful final's days. a 33% walkover rate is dreadful, woeful communications, the format, the impact on the league season".

Andrew Smart

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Report from Chair of Groups, Andrew Smart

Following the last round of Group meetings (all held in person which I believe is the first time since the pandemic) I am delighted to confirm that once again, all eight group officers were voted back into office by their clubs

South - Chair Jerry Rogers (London Cornish), Secretary Lyndon Walters (H&F)

West - Chair Andy Brooks (O Isleworthians), Secretary Nick Dance, (Grasshoppers)

North-West - Chair Andrew Smart (Harrow), Secretary Mark Foster (OMTs)

North - Chair Jon Boyle (Hampstead), Secretary Debbie Stockman-Rose (o Grammarians)

Simon Hardcastle the Group Secretary will be conducting the election for the Group Chair for the 2023/24 season in the next couple of weeks and certainly in good time before the AGM.

I can also report that Tim, Eddie and myself have now had a provisional meeting to review the groups and how we can improve the offering to our clubs. There is no doubt at all that they remain absolutely central to how the county does and will continue to function and that will not change. What we do need to do with the advent of the monthly newsletter plus our ability to get out and communicate with our clubs at short notice via All-Clubs meetings (which generally have proved very successful) is make sure that they remain fit for purpose, receive all the support they require to function and develop and ensure that they remain relevant to our clubs

Although most clubs are in the process of closing down for the break there are still a couple of dates that our clubs must not miss. Apologies for repeating them but they are both very important

Friday 26th May is the deadline date for all voting clubs to ensure that all their matches from U14s upwards across the season are all on the GMS and resulted for them to receive their full benefit for international ticket allocation. For anyone who might be struggling with the process, please contact me andrew-smart@ntlworld.com and I will be happy to assist

Friday 30th June is the deadline date for clubs to submit their "Payment of Player" Declaration against the following criteria and is mandatory for Middlesex clubs at level 7 and above

For clubs whose men's first XV team play at **Counties Level 2** (formerly 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 Counties Level 2 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.

If a club at Counties Level 2 or below does not submit any declaration and is later found to have paid Material Benefit to a player or a player coach, disciplinary sanctions will be considered.

As a reminder, the declaration covers the period of 1 June 2022 – 31 May 2023.

Regulation 7 (Payment of Players) can be found in full [here](#) providing further information on thresholds and definition of RFU benefits.

The entire process will be completed within GMS and requires the three nominated club officers to be able to log into GMS and approve the declaration. It is therefore important that each authorising club official has the most up to date email address listed against their account in GMS before starting the process.

A list of FAQs has been produced around Payment of Players declarations (Material Benefit and Regulatory) and can be found [here](#).

Andrew Smart
Chairman Group Officers

andrew-smart@ntlworld.com

Update on Coaching and Referee Development

- There will be 3 sessions on Safety in Scrummaging & Building a scrummage held on the following dates, Monday 5th June, Venue South Middlesex, Tuesday 6th June, Central Middlesex, Wednesday 7th June, North East Middlesex.
- There will be 2 sessions on Safety in the Lineout and structuring a Lineout, held on Tuesday 13th June & Wednesday 14th June. Venues TBC. Both the Scrummage & Lineout

sessions will involve youth players from our Middlesex Member clubs

- A planned coaching session for Safety in the Scrummage & Safety in the Lineout will be held for coaches involved in the female game and will involve youth female players. Dates & Venue TBC
- Sunday 9th July 2023, London Irish will be running a Coaching conference suitable for all levels of Middlesex coaches. The Coaching themes and tutors will be published in late May

If your club would like to organise a Scrummage or Lineout Coaching session and you have the outdoor facilities and players who would like to participate, please do get in touch. When venues have been confirmed, there will be invites sent out to all coaches via the Middlesex Social Media Platforms.

Bob Lawless Chair of Middlesex Coach Development (M) 07803 196 409 (E) bob.lawless@middlesexrugby.com

A Report from Chair of Playing - Jok Dunbar

Boys U17

Sunday 14th May saw our U17's first game against Sussex at East Grinstead. The teams were evenly matched as was the score throughout, but the Middlesex lads missed a couple of open goals and lacked self-belief in the first half, Sussex went into the lead and maintained it whilst the Middlesex boys had to chase the score. A great game and a great deal to be gained in confidence, heads did not go down and a final score of 22-17 to Sussex shows how close it was. Thanks to our match officials and especially to East Grinstead RFC for hosting.

The next game is at grasshoppers RFC and we will be hosting Hampshire for a 2.00pm kick off. Our last

game of the season is on the 28th May, please note



the venue has now changed to Ivybridge RFC.

Under 17's Fixtures;

Sunday 21st May vs Hampshire (Grasshoppers RFC 2.00pm KO)

Sunday 28th May vs Devon (Ivybridge RFC 2.30pm KO)

Womens Rugby

An early start for the bus journey to Devon and Sidmouth RFC did not help us get off to a good start in the game. Devon were particularly quick in the backs and were excellent in creating overlaps at the 2nd and 3rd phase of play. A punishing scoreline of 46-0 at half time would have got the better of some teams but the Middlesex women came out fighting second half and in spite of now going uphill proved their fitness and grit. With some exceptional retention of the ball they moved well up the pitch and put Devon under constant pressure eventually rewarded with a try by Ellie Rogers. Final score 56-5 to Devon. Thank you to Sidmouth RFC for their wonderful hospitality and food and to the Devon team for making a loss feel like a competitive game, you were gracious in your win and deserved the result.



Our final game is this coming Sunday at Wasps FC, W3 9QA at 2.00pm against Dorset & Wiltshire

U20's Men

Although the representative season is now over the Divisional season is just starting and we were pleased that six of our U20's were asked to the London and South East assessments at Cheshunt RFC last Sunday. I was able to go along and watch some of the day as the lads were put through their paces by the L&SE coaches, it was well organised in a great environment with a good balance of intensity, purpose and enjoyment. Good luck to Abel Drigui, Morgan Poiner, Charlie Keane, Angelo Valentine and Joe Ounsley on getting through to the next round.



Jok Dunbar

What's On

Under 17's Fixtures:

Sunday 21st May vs Hampshire (Grasshoppers RFC 2.00pm KO)

Sunday 28th May vs Devon (Ivybridge RFC 2.30pm KO)

Women's Fixture

Sunday 21st May at Wasps FC, W3 9QA at 2.00pm against Dorset & Wiltshire

Middlesex County RFU AGM

Monday 3rd July 2023, Grasshoppers RFC

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