

August Newsletter 2024

Email: countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com

President's Corner

The County President, Nigel Orton shares his Middlesex travels and encounters:

I really enjoyed the County's Volunteer Awards Evening, in July at Twickenham Stadium with many clubs nominating their key members who helped you make your club good. There were inspiring stories of outreach, demonstrating that rugby is so much more than a game on a grass pitch for 80mins, but that your clubs can be great community hubs. Thanks to Andy Brooks and Lou Latter for arranging this.



Lou's final year as an organiser; we thank her!



No awards that evening, as they have their own CB, but it was good to have some of our referees present, enjoying the evening.

The volunteer event was another fantastic night and see below the link to the event photos:

<https://www.rugbyphotos.co.uk/p/93727rwp/middlesex-rugby-volunteer-recognition>

To Age Grade Coaches and teachers, I hope you can do your best to encourage our 16-18year olds to transition on to adult rugby. I hope that I can spotlight the best champion amongst you at successfully achieving that by this time next year!

With a Women's RWC to look forward to next year I intend to visit some women's sections in the coming weeks. I am also trusting that all clubs have made it easier for me to find your fixtures on your online sites!

It is time to look forward to another season and to fresh challenges on and off the pitch. Overwhelmingly, I met with cautious optimism from my many club visits last year that there was a sense of positive growth in your communities and a feeling that Covid-19 was well and truly behind us. Let us hope so!

To all of you - Enjoy your coming season...

Nigel R Orton

President

nigel.orton@middlesexrugby.com

Message from Eddie Keal, Chair

Here we go again! Another fabulous season of rugby to look forward to. We have some significant changes at the County and several pre-season and early season meetings arranged.

Welcome to Mark Coles, Fred Cracknell and Andrew Walker who join the Management Board. I can't be 100% sure, but I think that's the first time that Uxbridge, Civil Service or HAC have had

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representation at the top level of the County. If anyone knows better, I'm happy to be corrected. I'm delighted to announce that, following the short AGM formalities at Ealing on Monday 16th September, we have Conor O'Shea, the Executive Director of Performance Rugby at the RFU, to talk to us a variety of topics and to take questions. We're expecting a strong turnout to hear Conor so put the date in your diaries now! Mondays are not traditional training nights, so your Head Coach or DoR should be free to come along.



Conor O'Shea

As Executive Director of Performance Rugby for the RFU, Conor O'Shea is responsible for the leadership, management and strategic direction of professional rugby in England. With the aim to support long-term sustainable success at international level, he manages the England player, coaching and match officials pathways across men's and women's 15s and Sevens programmes.

Prior to joining the RFU in January 2020, Conor was head coach of the Italian men's national rugby team since 2016. He was previously Director of Rugby at Harlequins, where his side won the Challenge Cup in his first season (2010-11), were Premiership champions in 2012 and LV Cup winners in 2013.

As a player, Conor was capped 35 times for Ireland between 1993-2000, playing most of his rugby at full back. He played for Lansdowne RFC and Leinster before moving to England to play for London

Irish in 1995. He made 127 first-team appearances for the club, scoring 412 points and 62 tries.

I hope you enjoy the rest of this newsletter and continue to find it valuable. I will see many of you soon, whether at the AGM, the Group Meetings or on club visits. All feedback is a gift so please give me some. We think the County is in good shape at present, but it's your view that counts!

Regards

Eddie.

eddie.keal@middlesexrugby.com

Update from Fred Cracknell – Chair of Rugby Development



Above and below – Fred Ready for action



Before I dive into my introduction, I want to thank the board for putting their faith in me to deliver on the Rugby Development brief and to Lou for the work she did for rugby across the county during her

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tenure, she is a huge loss and has certainly left big shoes for me to fill!

For the last three seasons, I have served as the Club Captain at CS Stags 1863 and have sat on the committee for the last 2. I grew up playing in the Midlands at Oakham Rugby Club, Oadby Wyggs, and School. My adult rugby career includes stints at Oakham, Banbury, Syston, Stoneysgate, and University before ending up at the Stags in 2020. Outside of playing, I've coached both Union and 7s and am a qualified referee - something I hope to pick up again as my playing days come to an end. I also sit on The RFU Council's Rugby Growth Sub-Committee focussing on women and girls' growth, the transition from junior to adult rugby, and the use of non-contact variants to grow the game.

My firm belief is that while rugby may not be a game for everyone, it can and should be a game for anyone. This is part of what drew me towards this role and what is really exciting about Middlesex as a county is the size of the opportunity to reach people who have never experienced rugby.

I have bored many people over the years with my desire to create a pathway to participation. We talk a lot in rugby about the professional pathway, often in my mind to the detriment of participation. My view is that if we can open rugby up to as many people as possible, and keep them involved, the game at all levels will be significantly richer for it.

So how do we capitalise on the huge opportunity to do this in Middlesex? In my mind, it is all about creating opportunities for people to have a positive experience with a rugby ball in their hands before opening up the routes for them into the next step of their rugby journey, at whatever stage, whatever that step looks like.

Across the 6 focus areas under my brief (Age Grade, Middlesex Grils, Mini Rugby Development, Coach Development, Referee Development, and University & Schools Liaison - I think I'll add retention/restart to that as well) I plan to do just that, create opportunities for people to enjoy the game, making their journey through the sport as easy as possible,

and hopefully allowing them to experience many of the life-changing benefits I know everyone reading this will have had from rugby.

I look forward to getting to know the Middlesex rugby community and working with you all to develop the game we love. If my experience at CS Stags has taught me anything, the key to success is listening and creating an environment which can facilitate the needs and wants of the individuals, this is exactly what I plan to do in this role.

Please reach out if you have any ideas, wants, challenges, or to simply introduce yourself - Fred.Cracknell@middlesexrugby.com

Fred

Message from Andrew Smart, Chair of Competitions

With less than three weeks now before the beginning of the league season for the majority of our club there is a huge amount happening across competitions both locally and across the country. First of all, the fixtures for the Middlesex merit tables are now out and can be found on the England Rugby website. Invitations have also just gone out for our Vets merit tables. Well done and thank you to Steve Partridge for all his work on our merit tables. We are good to go. There are some problems with the fixtures for our Clubs that play in the Herts and Middlesex Merit Tables but I am assured that those issues have been addressed and our clubs will be getting their fixtures this week. If these problems persist, please come back to me. I have escalated this already direct to the Hertfordshire Chairman and he has made these assurances to me this morning Monday 19th August.

Everyone should now be aware that Adult Registration for both male and female players has changed for this season going forward. In a nutshell, Adult registration has completely changed to a player self-registration process with a club sign off. No players registered previous to the 16th July 2024

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remain registered for your club for the 2024/25 season. There is a huge amount of information out there to support clubs through the process included a RFU Contact for each club should they require assistance. This is something that I wrote last week that went out to each of the ROCs across the country and through them to their league secretaries specific to levels 5 to level 8.

“We (National Competition Organisers and Regional Organising Committees ROCs) will be getting a weekly update every Wednesday so let’s see whether we can improve these numbers for next week. Competition organisers have argued strongly over the last two weeks that the ROCs and through them the league secretaries now need to be part of the process to get clubs ready for the 7th September. There can be no excuses. The support is there but the onus is on the clubs to chase their players to self-register. Please note that there will be no leeway for clubs that are not ready and it is incumbent on us to make sure our clubs are ready to go “

I have argued that league secretaries with responsibility for and strong links with the twelve clubs he/she has responsibility for are better placed for to drive through on this working of course in partnership with the RFU, ROCs and CBs.

We will know on Wednesday whether the involvement of our ROCs and our league secretaries are, like I expect, helping to make a difference. At the moment we have too many clubs who simply don’t have enough players registered under the new registration process for them to be able to get sides on the 7th September. That has to change and your league secretaries should be providing your club with the information and support streams to help you, including the details for the dedicated RFU member of staff specific to your club and there to help. I enclose a copy of the FAQs for anyone who isn’t aware or doesn’t know what is happening

[FAQs for Adult Player Registration : RFU](#)

If I can help in anyway, please come back to me otherwise your club will be getting weekly updates on where your club is and I have a meeting on Thursday with the ROCs to see what more can be done to support those clubs that continue to struggle.

After that our attention will move to levels 9 and below so if you have a club at that level, you should also be registering your players ready for the new season. By all means if you need any advice or access to the support streams come to me direct otherwise expect to hear from me via your league secretaries in the very near future. But please don’t be complacent you need to start registering your players and the sooner the better

If that wasn’t enough Middlesex along with eight other CBs who voted in 2022 not to allow lower xvs into our leagues following a FCS (Future Competition Structure) review this season will be asked to vote again. There was nine of us on the review which included myself and Paul Astbury from Middlesex. At the last vote Middlesex clubs eligible to vote voted by 92% not to include lower xvs into our leagues. Surrey, where some of our clubs play voted last time by 89% not to include lower xvs whilst Essex where Epping Upper Clapton play their rugby voted by 73%. The timetable has suddenly changed. Originally we had to get the results of the new vote back to the RFU by the end of December. Now we are expected to get them back by the middle of October. I will do a short presentation on the new timetable and some of the issues at the County AGM at Grasshoppers on Monday 16th September and at each of the first round of Group meetings. I then plan to hold an All-Clubs Zoom meeting on Zoom towards the end of September to deal with any questions or issues that clubs might have before going to a vote in early October

Also due out this week will be the RFU Men’s Leagues Pre-Season Briefing Document 2024-25 for clubs which include the following table of contents which will give far more background on both the

FCS Review and Adult Registration. Just waiting sign off before circulation

Introduction **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Enhancing the Adult Male Competition Structure: Changes to RFU Leagues for 2025-26..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Allocation of Clubs to National 2, Regional 1 and 2 Leagues for Season 2025-26.. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Relegation from Counties 1 and below Leagues (Potential Cascade Effect)..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Adult Player Registration..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Adult Player Registration – Sanctions related to non-registered players..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Papa Johns Men’s Community Cups Update... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Regulation Update Reminder **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

So, plenty going on, loads of headaches, lots achieved, loads to get done and rugby hasn’t even started yet. No long now.

Middlesex Club 7’s 2025

We are also looking to hold The Middlesex Sevens again in Spring 2025, date tbc, continuing to focus on our clubs (both male and female) and hopefully putting on a great day in the sun. Further details will follow. The organising team are looking for anyone who would like to join the team, helping out with organising and making this bigger and better each year. If you are interested or know someone who is, please do contact the County Office, Steve Partridge or Mark Coles

Andrew Smart

andrew-smart@ntlworld.com



Director of Team Middlesex Mark Coles

This is my first official appearance in a County newsletter having stepped into what is now Director of Team Middlesex (Director of Representative Rugby in old money) so firstly thank you for having me and taking the time to read my contributions to this and future months newsletters.

Firstly, it would be remiss for me not to start with a thank you to my predecessor Jok Dunbar for the work he has led in getting structures and coaches into place and a basis upon which I hope to build on in the coming seasons. A big thank you personally that I am picking up something in healthy shape to build on, and from everyone involved in rugby for the pride and commitment you have shown and taken in the role across the past few seasons.

Second to this, it would only be fair for those that do not know me so well, to do a form of quick introduction. My ‘normal’ day job is at VirginMediaO2 having had a misspent youth qualifying as a chartered accountant but I’ve been involved in County affairs for a few years serving across the old Finance Committee, leading on organising the Middlesex Sevens and Club Dinners and having one of the best jobs in any rugby setting, that of International Ticket Secretary, so

have got to know the Middlesex environment reasonably well. I'm also current chair (and player) of Uxbridge RFC, Co-Chair of Downe Manor Primary School in Northolt (until December) and chair of the Finance Committee at Uxbridge Sports Club so hope to bring some of the learning and experiences I have had in other roles, to the Management Board.

Looking ahead to the season whilst many think County rugby does not start to the spring, our U17 programmes are starting soon in the autumn and there's always work going on to ensure we have the right coaching teams and relationships in place, venues and locations booked, and looking for ways to improve on prior seasons. Having had an initial few meetings with key people (more to follow) as I get up to speed, I will no doubt learn more about the great work that goes on across our County and want to use this column to not only showcase the results on the pitch but the passion and enthusiasm our volunteers bring. I'm hoping to share some further high-level details of the season ahead at the AGM on 16th September that we are encouraging all clubs to attend.

So, thank you for your support, my line is always open for any ideas and I'm really looking forward to getting out and meeting people across the season.

Hope to see you soon,

Mark.

Group Officers Report

So as the season fast approaching, we reach the first round of Group meetings

It is a particularly busy September for our clubs not just on the field with the leagues starting on Saturday 7th September for the majority of our clubs

The first is on Monday 9th September for the South Group meeting venue/zoom to be confirmed

Wednesday 11th September will be the North-West Group meeting at Harrow

The following Monday 16th September we have the Middlesex AGM at Ealing Trailfinders RFC followed by an All-Clubs meeting with Conor O'Shea ex-Ireland International and the RFU's Executive of Performance as the main guest.

That is followed by the North Group meeting on Monday 23rd September venue/zoom to be confirmed

Then the final Group meeting with the West Group on Wednesday 25th September venue/Zoom to be confirmed

Both the agendas and minutes will be circulated closer to each meeting

One of the main agenda points at each of the group meeting will be on the new lower xv vote that we and eight other CBs are obligated to carry out and there will also be a short presentation to cover eligibility timeline and arrangements for the vote at the meeting following the AGM. This was also covered in my competitions report. Anyway, following the four Group meetings, there will be a further All-Clubs-Meeting on Zoom, on Monday 30th September to cover the any questions or concerns have around the FCS Review, its conclusions and the subsequent vote

Finally, once again we will be running four "pick Up the Whistle" Courses across the four Groups.

We have the dates and joining details for the West and North Group courses. Once again, the country will support financially those who apply and take part in the course by covering the course fees.

The West Group course will be held at Grasshoppers RFC on Monday 7 and 14 October

Click on <https://buytickets.at/lrurf/1335766> to enrol

The North Group course will be held at Old Grammarians RFC on Monday 7 and 21 November

Again, <https://buytickets.at/lrfrur/1335772> to enrol

The North-West Course will be held at Harrow RFC on Monday 13 and 20 January 2025. Joining details will be circulated closer to the dates.

Finally, the South Group course, venue and dates are still to be agreed

So, plenty going on across the County across September. Looking forward to seeing you at some of the meetings and please make sure you have the County AGM on the 16th September at Ealing Trailfinders RFC and the All-Club meeting on Zoom on 30th September in your diaries

Any questions or issues please feel free to come back to me at any time.

Keep safe and all the best.

Andrew Smart

Chairman Group Officers

Coaching & Referee Development

Middlesex Summer Coach & Referee Development Education Programme

A total of 6 Coach & Referee Education Sessions were held over the Summer Months. In total 218 Middlesex volunteers attended the sessions. The Themes of the Courses was, safety in the scrummage & lineout, safety in contact areas, creative back play, DOR, coaches & managers Getting it Right off the Pitch & a "Take up The Whistle" short referees course.

(below) Safety in The Scrummage. 66 Middlesex coaches & players, were in attendance from 11 Middlesex Clubs. Thanks to Academy coaches Richard & Simeon & Grasshoppers for hosting.



(below) Creative Back Play, 82 Coaches & players were in attendance from 16 different Middlesex clubs. Thanks to Academy coaches Patrick & Rhys for leading on this session and to Grasshoppers RFC for hosting.



(below) Getting it Right off the Pitch. A very informative interactive session on retaining players and discussing cultural change in our member clubs. 22 volunteers were in attendance from 14 different clubs. Thanks to Bogey Knights for leading on this and Ealing Trailfinders RFC for hosting



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(below) Take up The Whistle" referee course run at Finchley RFC on 10th & 17th June. This was a mixture of Young Match Officials and Seniors. A great turnout from members of our North Middlesex clubs. Thanks to Luke for organising this and referee tutor Pierre and to Finchley RFC for hosting



Bob Lawless, Chair of Coach & Referee Development on (e) robjlaws@aol.com or on Whatsapp (m) 07803 196409

What's On

West Group - Monday 9th September for the South Group meeting venue/zoom to be confirmed.

North-West Group - Wednesday 11th September with the North-West Group meeting at Harrow.

The County AGM is on Monday 16th September at Ealing Trailfinders Rugby Club, Vallis Way, London W13 ODD starting at 19:00. This will be followed by an All-Clubs Group meeting where Conor O'Shea, Performance Director for the RFU will present and take a question-and-answer session. **All club officials and Coaches are welcome.**

Simon Hardcastle

Upcoming Take up The Whistle Courses

Grasshoppers RFC on 7th. & 14th. October 2024 – 7.00pm to 9.30pm

Click on <https://buytickets.at/lrfrf/1335766> to enroll

Next Course :-

Old Grammarians RFC on 7th. & 21st. November 2024 – 7.00pm to 9.30pm

Click on <https://buytickets.at/lrfrf/1335772> to enroll

Middlesex Schools Cup and Plate Festivals

	Date	Venue
<i>(please note these are in age order and NOT date order)</i>		
U12 Boys Festival November 2024	29.11.24	Grasshoppers
U12 Girls Festival November 2024	27.11.24	Grasshoppers
U13 Boys Festival November 2024	25.11.24	St James'
U14 Boys Festival October 2024	01.10.24	Grasshoppers
U14 Girls Festival November 2024	20.11.24	Grasshoppers
U15 Boys Festival October 2024	10.10.24	Grasshoppers
U16 Boys Festival October 2024	08.10.24	Grasshoppers
U16 Girls Festival October 2024	23.10.24	Grasshoppers
U18 Girls Cup Festival December 2024	04.12.24	Grasshoppers
U18 Boys Festival October 2024	16.10.24	Grasshoppers

These festivals generally start at 11am and run through to 2.30pm approx.