

## **November Newsletter 2024**

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

### **Middlesex County Clubs' Dinner, Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2025**

Middlesex County Rugby warmly invites you to the 2025 Middlesex Clubs' Dinner, held at Trailfinders Sports Club, London, W13 0DD (home of Ealing Trailfinders and Ealing 1871 RFCs).

Our County Clubs' Dinner is an opportunity to thank all our volunteers for their hard work and to celebrate the season.

The dinner is on Friday 16 May 2025, three courses with a Guest Speaker, (Deborah Griffin OBE). Then a presentation of trophies to the County's competition winners. Deborah is a former England player and has represented women's rugby on the RFU Council where she is now the Senior VP. She is one of the RFU's Representatives on World Rugby. She has been a Chair and Trustee of the School of Hard Knocks charity.

The cost is £70.00 pp, which includes a complimentary drink on arrival and table wine. In recognition of their support that allows rugby to continue to grow, plus-ones are welcome.

If you, or members of your club would like to attend, please fill out this form by Thu 17 April 2025 to secure your place:

<https://forms.gle/gY4JnVw3wVZMRx278>

We need to confirm catering numbers by Thu 1 May, so we - regrettably - are not able to accept late entries after this date. Likewise, refunds after this date will only be given in exceptional circumstances.

Further details with final arrangements and payment details will be sent out in April 2025.

Questions or queries please reply to this email, or contact [countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com](mailto:countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com)



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## President's Corner

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

**19 Oct: Whitton Lions 1 v Ruislip 2.** A Middx MT Div 2 match. The referee was Hugh Tippet (LSRFUR), assessor Clive Roberts (Finchley RFC). The result was 17 – 14 pts. My thanks to Whitton's (WL) co-chairs and joint coaches, James Bowman and Andi Williams for hosting my visit.



WL were formed 12 years ago and are settled in at Whitton Park, which was once the 18<sup>th</sup> century estate of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Argyll. He had an exotic tree collection that after his passing were moved to what is now Kew Gardens. The park was later sold for housing and the playing field was the base for Old Latymerians' sports.



It was a very tight game that entertained the supporters. Whitton's forwards had the edge in the scrum and had some good line attacks. Both teams had strong defences, and both moved the ball wide at pace.



The Ruislip captain was DJ Willis (4), John Scullion was coaching. DJ, Nick Karayiannis and Killain Griffith had good performances. WL's captain was Angus Collie (7), players of note included Lawrence Riekstins (14), Duke Ashworth (11 'man of the match'), Richard Gregory (13) and Angus. The front row of Cameron Shilstone (3) who scored the winning try, Lewis Maiella (1) and Henry Loarridge (2) were solid together and dominating.





**26 Oct: Belsize Park 1s v Marlow 1s** in LSE Regional 2 League Thames 1. Referee: Piers Skinner (LSRFUR). Belsize won 28 -7 pts.



My thanks To BPK's Director of Rugby, James Lindsay and Conor for making me feel welcome. Perhaps the bigger buzz was on an adjacent pitch where Park's 3s were playing London New Zealand who had All Black brothers, Beauden Jordie and Scott Barrett, cheering on from the touchline. That was a Mx MT Premier Division fixture, won by Park 10 - 0 pts.



*Belsize in black and heliotrope hooped jerseys*

This was a hard fought match, with strong defensive play and excellent tackling. Belsize's pack had the edge, I felt, and both sets of backs ran good moves. For me, Park's Ben Stanton (10 + captain), Tom Lewis (5), James Tilley (4) and Jimmy Strainge (2) all played very well. The coaches were Conor Carey (ex-Ireland U20, Connacht, Worcester and N'hampton Saints prop) and Dan Leavy (ex-Leinster and Ireland flanker).



Formed in 1871, Belsize Park RFC run five men's sides in the leagues and merit tables, a vets XV plus two women's XVs. Regent's Park Royals act as the junior and minis' affiliate club. Matches are played by The Hub in Regent's Park and training in Russell Square, giving them the claim to be "London's most central rugby club." This club has more players and teams than most and we wish them well for the rest of their season.



*Off Pitch:* **Ian Swindale** turned 90 years old in July, and this was celebrated at Upper Clapton RFC where he is a long serving member. For many years, Ian has represented UCRFC at the County's North Group meetings. He introduced colts, minis and physios to the club. In recognition of his long and dedicated service and loyalty to Middlesex. I am pleased to announce he has been made a County Vice President. Thank you, Ian for all your service to rugby!

Nigel R Orton, President

[nigel.orton@middlesexrugby.com](mailto:nigel.orton@middlesexrugby.com)

### Message from Chair, Eddie Keal

I'm back up and running again now. Thank you to all the County and Club folk who sent me messages and cards, and to those who attended my wife's funeral. There were, and will be, some difficult times so I truly appreciate your support.

I can see that I've missed a lot, but the County held a regular Management Board on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> November and everything appears to be in good health with the usual array of background grumbles and issues to resolve. I will be out on the road visiting clubs at weekends as usual so I look forward to seeing many of you on my travels.

Enjoy the Newsletter, it is to the usual high standard. There are a couple of calls to action, and plenty of Management Board members looking for contact.

Regards

Eddie

Middlesex Chair

### Update from Fred Cracknell – Chair of Rugby Development (on the field)

October saw me back on the pitch myself, playing 2 games for CS and once in a charity game for the Brave Mind Lions with fellow board member Mark Coles.

Despite a false start to refereeing at Harrow, I did manage to watch the U16s play Hampstead, have a good tour of the club – including the fantastic gym facilities – and have a really interesting conversation about the work Harrow are doing with local schools. Harrow work with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party to deliver an activity session for local schools hosted at the club. They use this as a springboard into the club but also to create what was described as a “Freddie Flintoff Field of Dreams” style team, with the schools competing against each other at the end of the programme. It's really interesting learning how different clubs approach the challenge of engaging their local schools. I will document the various approaches to help other clubs in the County that want to engage the schools around them. I ultimately think if we're going to grow rugby in the County there has to be a best practice model to bring children into our clubs having had positive rugby experiences at their schools.

I managed to get up to Hendon to discuss recruitment. We looked at a few quick wins and I owe the guys some follow up actions! It'd be great to see Hendon competing in the leagues again in the not too distant.

Former CS director of Rugby Chris Swann joined me on my visit to Hendon and off the back of it, he has agreed to support the County in a new role focusing on Rugby Sustainability. We are still fleshing out what this will look like and where Chris' experience and expertise will be best placed, but the general premise is to create a structure which ensures the longevity of our clubs. Great to have you onboard Chris!

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I also had a good catch up with Peter and Steve from Hackney Rugby Club and we talked at length about the growth of the game, especially for minis and junior girls. (Another 2 people I owe follow up actions to!) This again comes back to ensuring there is a route for children from schools into the clubs, particularly as we all want to capitalize on the funding and delivery effort from the RFU in the T1 rollout to schools.

So good news for Peter and Steve and everyone else involved in girls' rugby across the County, Caz Henzell has agreed to support us as the Girls' Rugby Lead. Caz plays herself at Hammersmith and Fulham and has lots of experience running competitions including her current efforts to get a City Women's 7s Competition off the ground. Caz will work with Kesha at the RFU to develop the current junior offering and ultimately return its running to the County. The first phase of this will be a virtual town hall in December to get a temperature check on how the season is going – I will share details of this in the coming weeks. We are also looking to broaden our mini's offering for girls to try and grow the engagement before U12s with the aim of more clubs being able to have standalone teams and girls being able to play rugby at their clubs rather than having to travel from U12s. Welcome to the team Caz!

Unfortunately, personal commitments mean I'm away most weekends in November, but I look forward to getting back around the clubs in December and playing as much as I can for CS.

As always, any comments or questions are welcome. Any willing volunteers are very welcome. And if you'd like to talk to me about what's going on at your club, you're short of a referee on a Sunday, or you need or want anything from the County, please do get in touch.

Please reach out if you have any ideas, wants, challenges, or to simply introduce yourself –

**Fred**

[Fred.Cracknell@middlesexrugby.com](mailto:Fred.Cracknell@middlesexrugby.com)

### **Facility Needs Capture Survey: Middlesex RFU**

To ensure your rugby club's current facility needs are recognised please ensure that you take 10mins (maximum!) to **complete the**

### **Middlesex RFU Facility Needs Capture 2024/25**

**by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024 latest.**

This data is incredibly helpful when prioritising RFU/CB support and gives a useful reference point to feed in club needs through our regular touch points with local authorities. Please do take the time to complete even if you submitted a return last year – we are aware that officers and opportunity can occasionally change the strategy of a club, but it is equally important to register if your position remains unchanged.

We look forward to receiving your submission and please do come back with any questions.

Many thanks,

Graham K Lee  
Funding & Facilities Coordinator  
Middlesex County RFU

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

I start with the vote on Lower XV.

The RFU have now confirmed the results of the Lower XVs vote that took place between Wednesday 8th October to Friday 25th to the following question **Do you support Lower XV teams from your CB joining the RFU Leagues?**

In relation to the Middlesex Vote

**Yes - Five Clubs. No - Thirty-Seven Clubs**

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Of the forty-two Middlesex Clubs that recorded a vote, **88.1% voted no and 11.9% voted yes**, far outreaching the 66% required to continue to opt out

A further two clubs voted outside the windows and as such their voted whilst noted were not added to final return

#### Across the Country

2 CBs (Essex & Lancashire) elected not to have a vote, nor were they triggered to do so by 10% of their clubs asking for a vote to be held.

The other 6 CBs (apart from us) all offered a vote to their voting clubs.

For the national policy of allowing Lower XVs to be included in the RFU leagues then any vote must have over 66.6% "No" votes.

Surrey: 51 votes – **Yes 11.8% No 88.2%**

Durham: 20 votes – **Yes 30% No 70%**

East Midlands: 19 votes - **Yes 57.9% No 42.1%**

Northumberland: 16 votes  
– **Yes 12.5% No 87.5%**

Yorkshire: 58 votes – **Yes 27.6% No 72.4%**

Sussex: 20 Votes – **Yes 9 45% No 11 55%**

We are now in the application window across the country for those clubs that wish to put their lower xvs into the league system for next season. This includes our clubs although they will not be able to play in our leagues if accepted but have to find a place in a CB run league that allows Lower XVS.

From recent discussions with Hertfordshire, it is clear that the decision of Middlesex clubs will lead to a split across our three counties leagues for the 2025/26 season onwards

At this stage with promotion into and relegation from the regional leagues, to take into

consideration together with the possibility that some Hertfordshire Clubs might look to play to continue to play their rugby with us and whether some of those clubs now playing in Surrey leagues partly because of the travel into Herts will want to return it is simply impossible at the moment for us to consider how our leagues will look for next season.

I should also add that the eleven Middlesex Clubs who are currently playing outside our CB's boundaries, will all continue to play their rugby free of Lower XVs, with no change in the positions of both Essex and Surrey.

There is no doubt that the break of our longstanding relationship with Hertfordshire will have a significant impact on our own leagues going forward. However, the decision has been made and now we have to manage around it

Anyway, for most of us it is the rugby being played that we are most interested in thank goodness. So here we are

In the Championship after five rounds Ealing remain second but now only two points behind Coventry. London Scottish after some difficult years remain seventh.

At level 5 in Regional 1 South Central after eight rounds and after a fantastic try bonus point victory away at Jersey are now ahead of the Channel Island Club by five points with CS Stags 1863 dropping to fifth with Hammersmith and Fulham dropping to eleventh although they picked up only their second win of the season on Saturday at home to mid table Maidenhead

At level six in Regional 2 Thames, again after eighth rounds London Scottish Lions are now top H.A.C are currently third two points. Belsize Park up to fourth only four off top, Grasshoppers drop to sixth, Old Priorians remain seventh, Teddington, after a slow start, are up to eighth whilst Old Haberdashers winless remain bottom and ten points away from safety.

At level seven in Counties 1 Sussex/Surrey again after eight rounds Twickenham drop to third only four points behind the leaders whilst London Cornish remain sixth. In Counties 1 Essex again after eight rounds Epping Upper Clapton jump up to seventh. In Counties 1 Herts/Middx, Finchley in their Centenary Season remain top after eight rounds with maximum points, with Brunel University in second place five points behind, with Ealing Trailfinders 1871, fourth two points behind them, Old Streetonians remain fifth, Ruislip seventh, Chiswick from tenth to eight with Hackney dropping a place to eleventh.

At level eight in Counties 2 Herts/Middx at level eight also after eight rounds, Wasps FC are now top one point ahead of both Hampstead and Saracens Amateurs, Harrow are fifth, Wasps U.C.S. sixth, Old Millhillians eighth, Enfield after their first win of the season up to tenth.

At level nine in Counties 3 Herts/Middx after six rounds Thamesians are top by one point but having played a game more than second placed Royston, Actonians up to fourth, Finsbury Park drop to fifth, Kilburn Cosmos up to seventh and Mill Hill on their return to the leagues ninth and so far, winless. In Counties 3 Surrey after seven rounds Old Hamptonians are top by only one point whilst London Exiles drop to ninth

At level ten in Counties 4 Surrey, after six rounds, Harlequin Amateurs go up one place to fifth, Old Paulines ninth and London French bottom and tenth with only one point between the two clubs

At level eleven in Counties 5 Surrey after six rounds, Staines undefeated and on maximum points are top by three points with Feltham on their return to the leagues remain in fifth

In the Middlesex Merit Tables Premier Division after five rounds NZ Kiwis drop to second with London Sussex dropping to eight although with two games in hand.

In MMT1 after six rounds London Japanese drop to second whilst Quintin drop to in fifth.

In MMT2 West London, with a game in hand, remain in second place after six rounds, Haringey Rhinos drop to fourth, Whitton Lions up to fifth, Old Isleworthians drop to eighth, Hanwell ninth.

In MMT3 after four rounds, Ickenham go up to eighth and Northolt ninth. Uxbridge who have not been able to get out at all so far this season have now been removed from the Merit table

In the Herts and Middlesex MTs Championship South after six rounds Old Grammarians after two successive defeats drop to second. In Merit Table South 1 after five rounds Pinner & Grammarians are first, by five points. Southgate up to 2<sup>nd</sup> equal whilst Hendon drop to sixth.

In the Premiership Women's Rugby after five rounds Saracens Women's drop to third Harlequins Women up to fifth whilst Ealing Trailfinders Women drop to sixth

Andrew Smart  
Chairman Competitions  
[andrew-smart@ntlworld.com](mailto:andrew-smart@ntlworld.com)

### Group Officers Report

We are now in the middles of the November round of Group meetings. We started with the South Group meeting on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> November in-person at Twickenham. The North meeting will be on Zoom on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> followed by the North West Meeting on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November. The West group date still to be confirmed will also likely to be on Zoom. Details to follow.

You will have noticed that there are currently two surveys out with our clubs which appear to overlap in some areas. One is a Middlesex Survey circulated by Mike Lee, our Funding and Facilities Co-Ordinator, the second on behalf of the RFU from Sam

Clapham the RFU Club Developer for Middlesex. Both are very important surveys and whilst as I say they appear in some areas to overlap can I please ask you to make sure that you complete them on behalf of your clubs. The links and background to each survey follow

### **1 Middlesex Survey**

*To ensure your rugby club's current facility needs are recognised please ensure that you take 10mins (maximum!) to complete the [Middlesex RFU Facility Needs Capture 2024/25](#) by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024 latest. This data is incredibly helpful when prioritising RFU/CB support and gives a useful reference point to feed in club needs through our regular touch points with local authorities. Please do take the time to complete even if you submitted a return last year – we are aware that officers and opportunity can occasionally change the strategy of a club, but it is equally important to register if your position remains unchanged.*

### **2. RFU Survey for Middlesex Clubs**

*The RFU have created a new club needs survey for their member clubs to complete to help them understand the areas of development needed in the clubs for this season.*

*The survey should only take around 5 minutes to complete but will be really beneficial in understanding the focus areas and identifying any common challenges so they can tailor their support offerings accordingly.*

<https://forms.office.com/e/YkRsHvqNi3>

*If there are any questions or specific feedback, please contact Sam Clapham [SamClapham@RFU.com](mailto:SamClapham@RFU.com)*

We will look to share the feedback with you once all the responses have been disseminated.

Just an update on the Community Rugby Support Fund for 2024/25 which has now closed and clubs

who did apply should by now have had a letter from the RFU to confirm the awarding of their grant

Simply to be eligible you had to be

1 A Voting Club of the RFU

2 Have an annual turnover for last year of less than £125,000-

3 Complete the application (takes no more than one minute)

As I have previously noted only three Middlesex Clubs applied last year and all three got the full grant

I am delighted to say that with pushing from the County we have managed this year to get that up to twenty-six. Of course, I appreciate that some of our clubs would not have been eligible for the grant because their turnover for last year was above the £125k- threshold but I still believe that a significant number of our clubs still didn't make use of this opportunity.

Still twenty-six is better than three and we will look to improve on those number next year.

If any club that did apply this year and still have not received any confirmation from the RFU, can you please come back to me and I will chase on your behalf. As one of the clubs responded after they were informed that they had been awarded £500- "I'll be paying more attention to all your emails!"

So, a win all round.....

Keep safe and all the best.

Andrew Smart

### **Update from Chair of Team Middlesex – Mark Coles**

Hello, its November already (I know!) and I hope this finds you and your club well. The season is flying and we're already into the autumn internationals.



Regarding Representative rugby, our first games are kicking off in December and we've had a flurry of activity across our age group teams assessments and subsequent initial training sessions and discussions with potential coaches for the vacancies I spoke about last month am looking to fill.

In Age Grade, in all we had 409 young people nominated for our four programmes with 164 taken to the next stages of our programme. We were particularly pleased with the continued year on year growth in the number of girls on our U18's programme and exponential growth in the number of boys we were lucky enough to assess over the sessions. The growth in the latter has been in no small part due to the demise of the London Irish academy and shifting of boundaries of Harlequins/Saracens which shows the value these programmes bring in given young people a stage to showcase their talents.

For those that were unsuccessful this time I am also proud we've been able to give players individual feedback so they can keep developing and highlighted the fact they are welcome back to the respective age bracket assessments they find themselves in next year. Whilst this is no doubt disappointing, I have seen first-hand that parents and players alike appreciate the effort that has gone into providing so a doth of the hat to Jok Dunbar who has led on this means of engagement is certainly in order.

Turning towards the adult age groups, we've identified a Head Coach for the Senior Women's team who I think will be a real asset to the programme based on discussions with and anecdotal feedback we have received. We've also made strides on the U20 leadership team front and I'm hopeful of formally announcing both in the December newsletter update. We really do have some enthusiastic, passionate people in our midst and I am keen to bring them into our programmes to complement their rugby journeys if the enthusiasm and opportunities are there.

In recent days we have received the U20s fixtures (see below full grid of dates) and are awaiting the Senior Men's and Women's so we can push on with discussing those campaigns with the leadership teams.

Next month, I'm hoping to update on the progress we will have made on the above appointments, share updates on the games we have been playing and more details on the open age programmes, but for now thanks as ever for reading and for your support.

Thanks as ever for reading and for your support  
Mark

[Mark.coles@middlesexrugby.com](mailto:Mark.coles@middlesexrugby.com)

### Coaching & Referee Development

#### Coaching Corner


The following coaching & referee development courses are open to all Middlesex coaches


Middlesex Coaching presents a "Skill Development Workshop" looking at how coaches can develop skill while working with small groups of players.

 **The workshop will be of great value to all coaches.**

 **Monday 18th November 2024 @ Grasshoppers RFC, Syon Lane. TW7 5PN - Time 19.30hrs - 21.00hrs**

 **Tutor - Patrick O' Grady. Patrick is a Level 4 coach and has represented England at the youth level and has coached pro academy & senior players.**

 **Note - ensure you have the appropriate footwear for the AGP surface. Bring pen & paper to take notes.**


 **To confirm your attendance - WhatsApp Bob Lawless on (m) 07803 196 409**


Middlesex Coaching invites youth coaches to a Saracens PDG coaching session

 **The session will look at how the PDG operates & what's trending in skill development.**


 **Venue - Harrow School,**

 **Date - Wednesday 27th November 2024**

 **Time - 19.15 hrs - 20.30hrs**

 **Tutor - Ed Conway the Saracens PDG manager**


 **Note - The workshop will give ideas to coaches on the development of the core skills of player development**

 **To confirm your attendance - WhatsApp or email Bob Lawless on (m) 07803 196 409 (e) [robjlaws@aol.com](mailto:robjlaws@aol.com), more information will be sent on confirmation of attendance.**

\*Middlesex Coaching presents a "Back play Workshop" looking at the various attacking & defending options.\*

 **The workshop will be of great value to all coaches and players.**

 **Thursday 5th December 2024 @ St James, Catholic High School, Great Strand London, NW9 5PE - Time 19.00hrs - 20.30hrs**

 **Tutor - Rhys Davies, Saracens Academy Coach**

 **Note - Finchley RFC, will be supplying players for the practical session, all other players are welcome to attend and view.**

 **Confirmation & further details will be sent on registration.**

 **To confirm your attendance - WhatsApp Bob Lawless on (m) 07803 196 409**

Coaching & Refereeing Development Courses

"Take Up the Whistle Referee Course"

Middlesex CB Funding this Free to attend

Course

Next Course :-

Harrow RFC on Mondays 13<sup>th</sup>. & 20<sup>th</sup>. January 2025  
- 7.00pm to 9.30pm

Click <https://buytickets.at/lrurf/1459725> to enrol

RFU Emergency Aid Course

Any club that would like to run an RFU Emergency Aid Course, free of charge, please contact me for further details. Interested clubs would need to provide 12 interested candidates and a room / hall large enough to accommodate the course.

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

### What's On

#### **Middlesex Schools Cup and Plate**

| <b>Festivals</b> | <b>Date</b> | <b>Venue</b> |
|------------------|-------------|--------------|
|------------------|-------------|--------------|

(please note these are in age order and NOT date order)

|                          |          |              |
|--------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Under 12's Boys Festival | 29/11/24 | Grasshoppers |
| Under 13's Festival      | 25/11/24 | St James'    |
| Under 14's Boys Festival | 26/11/24 | Grasshoppers |
| Under 16's Boys Festival | 20/11/24 | Grasshoppers |
| Under 18's Boys Festival | 04/12/24 | Grasshoppers |

These festivals generally start at 11am and run through to 2.30pm approx. so please try to get down and support them.

### Save the Dates in 2025:

**County Clubs 7's Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May, Grasshoppers RFC**

Entry details to follow from Organisers, Steve Partridge & Mark Coles

**County Clubs Dinner - Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May at Ealing Trailfinders - Booking book your place/places below.**

<https://forms.gle/gY4JnVw3wVZMRx278>