

June Newsletter 2024/25 Roundup

Email: countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com

President's Corner

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

Middlesex v Hertfordshire (Men) in Counties Championship pool B of the Bill Baumont Cup. The referee was James Walker (LSRFUR), Hertfordshire won 5-59. Our thanks to the players led by Luke Risman (CS Stags) and coaches: Steve Partridge (manager) Jerry Hedigan (Lead Coach), Paul Davis and Ross Parsons.



Middlesex putting in a big tackle

This was a tough day as Hertfordshire were clearly the bigger, stronger side reducing us to having few play opportunities and an afternoon of brave tackling. Jake Ryan (12, Belsize Park) ensured we got on the scoreboard with a great try. Having beaten Essex this was a disappointing result. The core of the Hertfordshire team is drawn from their four level 5 clubs who fully support the county squad. Our team was drawn from 14 clubs and one of our U20s.



Our next outing was to host Buckinghamshire in the final pool match, again at Grasshoppers. The referee was Chris Howe (LSRFUR). This was a thrilling, close encounter. The score **Middlesex 34 - 35 Buckinghamshire**. In a high energy match we were unlucky not to win, and certainly we had our chances and another conversion, or a better pass would have sealed it.

May is a busy time for our County teams, and I am sorry I couldn't get to see our U17s or Women but read more in the Team Middlesex report.

Volunteers Awards



Ruislip RFC's volunteers. Courtesy of Leo Wilkinson Photography

I was pleased to present Honda Volunteer Awards in a lively evening at the Allianz Stadium to the many

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nominees from our Middlesex clubs on 4 June. Collectively, their contribution to their clubs is impressive and forms the backbone of our clubs' operations, helping with essential tasks, recruitment, outreach, coaching and more. It was good to meet nearly 200 recipients, their diversity and the spread of generations represented was good to see with young volunteers and referees included.



Mary receiving her award. Courtesy of Leo Wilkinson Photography

In the last act of my two year presidency, I presented the awards. Mary Impey of Hackney RFC received the County's '2025 Overall Volunteer of the Year' for her amazing community outreach and work in the club. Mary received a deserved standing ovation. She will go forward to the Honda national volunteer event.



Courtesy of Leo Wilkinson Photography

Jim Russell

News has reached us of the passing of Jim Russell. Jim was involved with Middlesex Rugby from 1990 - 2003 as team manager of the U19 and U20 county teams. Jim led county u19 tours to Wales and Scotland in alternate years.

Jim was Chair of Sudbury Court RFC, and was a regular attendee at county general meetings and our AGMs. Our thoughts are with his family at this time.

In conclusion

My final task is to announce that **The Middlesex President's Medal for 2025** is being awarded to **Kevin Moran**. A long serving Master-in-Charge of Rugby and coach at London Oratory School, Fulham. He runs 7s festivals, helps coach in other schools, is a long serving member of Middlesex County Schools Union and for many years was team manager of Middlesex U18s and a Divisional U18 selector. Kevin is the Middlesex Schools' representative on England Rugby Schools' Committee. Kevin is still coaching at LOS - a career of service to rugby!

Well two seasons have passed, in a flash. I have enjoyed visiting so many clubs and thank you for your hospitality and welcome. I now hand the President's baton over to Andrew Smart who needs no introduction. I move on to be your Immediate Past President and I will no doubt be on some of your touchlines and in your clubhouses next season.

Nigel R Orton, President

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Message from Chair, Eddie Keal

It's been a thrilling season with success for the County on many fronts. But it's finally over. County Championship duties at over the coming weekend will be my last matches for a few weeks.

Please take time to get a proper break - it's important we relax and get things in perspective. Then we will be in great shape to go again.

My thanks to the Management Board, and especially to Nigel for his two years as President. He has covered some ground!

Also to Peter Baveystock for getting this newsletter out every month – it's never an easy task.

I enjoyed the Volunteer Evening immensely. Congratulations again to all the winners.

We will be announcing the date for the September AGM shortly.

All the best.

Eddie

Middlesex Chair

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

What a year it's been for rugby development across Middlesex. We've seen multiple festivals, forums, new formats, and fantastic people stepping up to grow the game. From the first whistle to the last, it's been brilliant to see so many clubs, schools, and volunteers getting stuck in.

There are so many reasons to be optimistic, not least the continued rise of girls' rugby in the county, culminating in a fantastic Emeralds Cup at London Irish. Building on Lou's great work, we've started assembling a volunteer team to coordinate junior girls' competitions and provide much-needed structure. Caz and I are working to bring something to the clubs over the summer which will allow as many girls as possible to enjoy rugby in 2025/26. As always, if you want to be part of this, we want to hear from you!

A major theme this season has been the growth of T1. From RFU-led school delivery to clubs facilitating players giving rugby a try, we're seeing real momentum. With the RFU backing T1 as the format to be delivered in schools, we have a great opportunity to capitalise on the resurgence of rugby in our local areas. Seven of our clubs have

already engaged with the programme, and I'm looking forward to formally launching Middlesex's initiative in July.

We saw some fantastic events across the year. The U12 Love Rugby Pitch Up & Play in February saw 50+ girls from multiple clubs get stuck in, building on school outreach and strengthening the all important school to club link. The London Youth Games brought together 240 girls for competitive T1, and Hackney RFC ran multiple camps aimed at girls from non-rugby-playing schools.

It's been great getting around the clubs this season. From chatting to various players, coaches, and committee members about the great work going on, to trotting around for UCS 2s and refereeing Harrow U16s. Not forgetting everyone I played with and against for CS this season. Across adult and junior rugby, it's great to see there is so much passion and energy.

That said, recruitment and retention will continue to be a big focus next season, particularly in the adult game. We have a team of experienced rugby people across the county who can absolutely support you with this if needed. Further to this, I'm looking forward to working closely with the rest of the Middlesex management board and senior players like Will Gilgrass at Old Streetonians and Tom Brogden from Old Habs to ensure that the adult male offering is giving clubs what they need to grow.

A huge thank you to everyone who's supported rugby in Middlesex this year. Whether you've hosted a camp, played in a PUAP event, run a skills day, turned up to a forum, shared a post, or simply shown up for your club, it is all so valuable to the future of our great game. We've made real progress in creating systems that will give more players than ever the opportunity to pick up a rugby ball and with a Home World Cup on the horizon, we've got a huge opportunity ahead. For 2025/26, let's make sure we're ready to welcome new players, volunteers, coaches, and supporters into our clubs.

As always, I'm here for questions, ideas, support or even just as a sounding board. Let's keep growing rugby in Middlesex, together!

Fred

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Message from Andrew Smart, Chair of Competitions

In the end what a great season for Middlesex and its Clubs. Of course, there continue to many, many issues facing our clubs around, retention, player availability and their ability to honour fixtures and we as importantly we must accept that we have lost one club with a proud history completely from our ranks. Still, those issues whilst they are real are for another day and in the meantime, I think we should acknowledge again what a tremendous season it has been for many of our clubs. Nine league titles, altogether nineteen different champion clubs picking up twenty-six pieces of silverware. It's not all about winning of course but the spread of champion clubs across our county is much to be proud of I believe

So, although we are now out of season the work for the competitions sub-committee continues which included a Zoom meeting for our clubs in the Middlesex Counties 1 on Monday 9th June at 7pm.

As it stands the new Middlesex 1 for next season will be a 10-team league playing home and away.

Old Haberdashers

Finchley

Ealing 1871

Old Streetonians

Ruislip

Chiswick

Hampstead

Wasps FC

Saracens Amateurs

UCS

Accepting that 18 matches are not enough for clubs at this level to be sustainable, we committed as much as possible to ensuring that clubs will have as much as possible up to 22 meaningful fixtures across the season, as if it had been in a 12-team league. The Zoom meeting was very much to give the clubs the opportunity to have a say in how this was to be achieved exploring the options to help clubs come to their decision

The easiest way to increase the fixtures was is to include play-offs at the end of the season but I was mindful with only one promotion place guaranteed for the Champions for each Counties 1 league with another five available across the country for the best runner's up against their Best Playing Record (BPR), to ask the teams at the top end of the league to play each other again could impact disastrously on any BPR for anyone looking to pick up a best

In the end I am delighted to say that all ten Middlesex Clubs did attend the meeting and all participated in a lively discussion. Following the meeting clubs were circulated with two options with the clubs to respond with their preference by Wednesday

Option One

Start on the 6th September playing 18 league games home and away. Finishing on the 28th March and creating an extra break weekend of the 20th December. After the end of the league campaign which will determine promotion and relegation, we will revert to a Middlesex Counties 1, Cup, Bowl and Vase offering.

The Cup will be made up of the clubs that finish 1st to 4th playing each other once in a round robin competition once over three weekends, 11th, 18th and 25th April. The winners will be the club that finishes at the top of the table after the three rounds.

The Middlesex Counties 1 Bowl will consist of the teams that finish 5th to 8th playing each other once in a round robin over the same three weekends. The winners will be the club that finishes at the top of the table after the three rounds.

The Middlesex Counties Vase will consist of the teams that finish 9th and 10th playing each other home and away over the weekend of the 11th and 18th April. The winners will be the club that finishes top after the two fixtures

All the fixtures and results will be on the GMS and will count towards your international tickets. Clubs that finish 1st to 8th will have 21 competitive and meaningful fixtures across the season with the clubs in 9th and 10th will play 20.

Option Two

Eighteen league games home and away. to be played between the 6th September and the 25th April. This will create four extra break weekends across the season including the 20th December. Some discretion about when this league can start and finish because of the extra breaks.

In the end the clubs voted by 5-4 with one club undecided to go for option.

The new Middlesex 2 will be made up of Eight clubs

Harrow

Hackney

Enfield Ignatians

Old Millhillians

Actonians

Barnet Elizabethans

Kilburn Cosmos

Finsbury Park

This league will play home and away for fourteen fixtures and will then split top four and bottom four. These clubs will then play each other twice again

home and away, giving each club twenty fixtures with half of those at home. The top four will play for the titles and promotion, the bottom four for the Middlesex Counties 2 Bowl

We have lost Thamesians who have moved over to the Surrey leagues on level transfer, Old Grammarians who have re-joined the leagues for next season but will be playing in the new Hertfordshire Counties 3 (concerned about the travel and the relative strength of Middlesex 2) we wish both clubs all the best and of course the door is always open should they wish to play in the future back with their CB boundaries. At the same time, it looks like Pinner, Hendon and probably Mill Hill will be leaving the Herts/Middx Merit Tables to play in the Middlesex Merit Tables and of course we are delighted to welcome them back.

The league secretaries for the two new Middlesex Leagues will be as follows

Middlesex 1 Dave Williams (West London) previously league secretary of Counties 2 Herts/Middx

Middlesex 2 Vic Devers (Hillingdon Abbots) Previously league secretary of Counties 3 Herts/Middx

You might well have seen this circulation from the RFU on Friday which has seen the publication of fixtures be delayed beyond the date set by regulations of then 14th June back to the 20th. I can confirm that all the London Fixtures have been completed but the decision was made that they would be held until all fixtures could go out at the same time

We are sorry to announce a short delay in the publication of the fixtures for 2025-26 season. There have been a number of factors that have impacted on our ability to confirm and generate all the fixtures ready for circulation. These have now been resolved, and the men's Regional and Counties fixtures will be available no later than Friday 20th June.

The make-up of the women's leagues has been out for consultation with the clubs and once they have been agreed an update on release of the women's fixtures will follow.

The fixtures for the National leagues have been circulated to the Clubs

Onto the MTs which have seen another challenging but ultimately successful season. Once again huge credit must go to Steve Partridge for his leadership and commitment to this vastly important part of our rugby offering to our clubs. It's funny that once you get involved in running our merit tables how consuming it becomes and how passionate you become to make it a success for our clubs. Steve is very much of that vein and our Merit Tables are much the better for it, hence the return of some of our 1stxv clubs currently playing in other merit tables. Anyway, to the final completion rates which are very encouraging and well above the national average

Overall - Final Playing stats

Premier Total 67 Games - 52 Played (4 Game On), 1 Void & 14 w/o - 77.6%

Div 1 Total 75 Games - 59 Played (1 Game On) & 16 w/o - 78.6%

Div 2 Total 88 Games - 76 Played, 1 Void & 11 w/o - 86.3%

Div 3 Total 93 Games - 73 Played (7 Game On) & 20 w/o - 78.4%,

Totals 323 Games 260 Played (12 Game On), 2 voided ,61 W/O's - 80.4%

A consultation document is currently with the Merit Table Clubs and teams and we look to improve our offering for the new season

Keep safe and all the best.

Andrew Smart

Update from Chair of Team Middlesex – Mark Coles

Greetings All! May flashed past us (well certainly me) like a whirlwind we were besieged by Representative Rugby across our various teams, and now we have wrapped up our activity we can reflect on a great season.

Since my last post, we have seen action across our Senior Men, Women and U17 programmes.

Our Senior Men took to the field again against Hertfordshire after a win against Essex I covered in last month's edition. Against a strong Hertfordshire side, the boys went down 59-5 in the blistering heat and followed this up with an agonising one-point loss to Buckinghamshire the following week in a 35-34 clash that was great on entertainment, with the lead changing hands several times.



Turning to our Senior Women, they after a good first result against Bucks Presidents XV, took to the field against Essex and Sussex. With a win against Essex (later overturned on appeal) and competitive game against Sussex, the team can be proud of their efforts and the progress shown year on year.

Our U17 programme also concluded with tight games against Surrey and Hertfordshire and the leadership team have been buoyed by the

performances the lads put in across the single/double headers we played going into the U18 campaign next year which is a natural follow on from this year. The programme concluded with some additional classroom sessions looking back at videos of matches, guidance on nutrition, strength and conditioning and creating Individual Development Plans to take away and work on over the summer which is something we are unique in doing in Middlesex compared to many other counties.



With that concludes, my first season heading up Team Middlesex and I'd like to highlight just a few achievements across the season we can all be proud of:

- Record numbers of girls signed up for our U16 programme and the first ever Great Middlesex Bake off event which all present enjoyed.
- Running double headers on our U17 programme to allow us to see a broader pool of talent
- Three wins from three in our U18 boys programme and high numbers of boys selected for the L&SE Divisional pathway experience
- Getting our U20M team back on the field, playing games, with an almost entirely new leadership team, and even getting a win over Surrey in the Jason Leonard Championship.
- A largely new leadership team on our Senior Women's team seeing nearly 100 girls in assessments (a record) and building on the work of previous seasons.
- Likewise with the Senior Men's team, a recent record high number of sign-ups and clubs represented in our final squad (17)

Thinking ahead, we will be taking stock over the summer where we would like to take these programmes. I am keen to establish what the objectives we would like to pursue on each are and then thinking about the systems, processes and experiences we then need to build and offer around so will be speaking to various people over the summer/early autumn in doing this and keep building on the success we've had.

Finally, and by no means least, I say it most months, but a big thanks for everyone's support and all the volunteers who pitch into Team Middlesex as a coach, team leader, assessor to make our programmes what they are. I hope you are proud of your achievements this season and look forward to building on them next season.

Thanks, as ever for reading and for your support
Mark

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Middlesex Coaching & Referee Development

Wednesday 28th May 25, Ruislip RFC, hosted a "Take up The Whistle" referees course. The course had a mixture of youth and seniors' volunteers in attendance. Thanks to Mark Hensman for organising the course and to Bob Ockenden & Tim Lynch for tutoring both evenings.



Thursday 12th June 25, Ealing Trailfinders hosted a "Take up The Whistle Course" which was organised by Chair of Youth Rugby Marta Le Bouedec and YMO coordinator Cyril Renaud. The course allowed a mixture of youth and senior volunteers to upskill their referee knowledge. Thanks to the Referee tutors, Bob Ockenden and Gary Dibden gave their time in developing these new referees.



On Friday 7th June 2025, at the Middlesex awards evening at RFU Twickenham, the following, 3 Middlesex Young Match Officials were awarded Middlesex Volunteers Awards for their following achievements.

Nomination 1 - Martha Blackman

Club - Ealing Trailfinders RFC

Nominated for -

Martha has fully joined the society this year and has gone from strength to strength refereeing U16 games at the following schools: Eton, St Pauls and Harrow. Martha has shown great dedication and has continued to help with the younger age groups in clubs (in particular going to Twickenham RFC and Grasshopper RFC), and refereeing Colts at the Rosslyn Park National school sevens. Martha has been a great example to other Middlesex young match officials.

Nominations 2 - Sean Hegarty

Club - Old Grammarians RFC

Nominated for -

Sean did a "Take up The Whistle" course at the end of last season and has refereed U11-U14s boys & girls this season, over many games. Sean is always willing & ready to officiate games through the age groups.

Nomination 3 - Angus Lusty

Club - Old Grammarians RFC

Nominated for -

Angus completed the TUTW course 3 years ago and has been refereeing Youth games up to U14 boys & girls at OGs for the last 2 seasons. He joined London Society in December and has progressed to refereeing colts.

Coaching Development

Thanks to Ealing Trailfinders for hosting a coach education session with the theme of, "Building a Safe & Effective Scrummage". This was an important area for our Middx Youth coaches to develop both their expertise in delivering a safe environment and their knowledge in developing the scrummage and for the players to work on the

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fundamentals & core skills to help with their scrummage technique. Thanks goes to Coach Educators Richard Pryor & Simeon Barnes for sharing their expertise in developing Middlesex Coaches.


Middlesex Coaching Summer Programme


The following coach education sessions are available to all Middlesex Coaches.


 Middlesex Coaching present the following Summer Coaching Workshops which will be of great value to all coaches.

 Mon 23rd June 2025, at Staines RFC, "Building & Evolving your game module," Tutor Amy Turner England Rugby Performance Coach.

 Thurs 26th June 2025 - "Building a Safe & Effective Scrummage" at Grasshoppers RFC - Tutors Richard Pryor & Simeon Barnes

 Mon 30th June 2025 - "Scrum Half Workshop" at Grasshoppers RFC - Tutor Patrick O'Grady

 Mon 7th July 2025 "How to develop defence coaching through games" at Grasshoppers RFC - Tutor Patrick O'Grady

 Coach Educators Amy Turner, Richard Pryor, Simeon Barnes and Patrick O'Grady are all Advanced Level Coaches with Pro Coaching Experience.

For more information on any of the above, contact:
Bob Lawless on (m) 07803 196 409

All the best
Bob

What's On

Formall launching T1 Middlesex's initiative in July.