

**MCRFU AGM – Grasshoppers RFC
Monday 22nd September 7pm start**

**Guest speaker Ali Donnelly
RFU Exec Dir Corporate Affairs
All welcome!**

September Newsletter 2025/26

Email: countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com

President's Corner

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

I sign off as County President at the AGM next Monday (22nd September) and hope to see as many of you at Grasshoppers as possible. Having completed my two years and two months in office covering seasons 2023-2025. Our rules confusingly say I remain president until the AGM, this year that is on 22 September, making it two years and two months. In practical terms, it has been long known my deputy, Andrew Smart succeeds me after his election at the AGM I wish him every success in his two years.

I have enjoyed meeting so many of you and watching some entertaining matches on my presidential travels and am sure that you will receive Andy with the same warmth and enthusiasm you've shown me.

In terms of horizons this year, I see three areas to progress: We need help as a County supporting our clubs and we seek to identify potential sponsors to help us with our programme. Anyone with an interest or a viable contact please let our chair, Edde Keal know.

We also must address the challenge of engaging with our 26 universities and with their 400,000+ students within the county to produce a feed of graduates into our clubs.

There is also a lot of energy around the non-contact game, T1 rugby and this gives clubs an opportunity to expand membership and recruit more volunteers by having a T1 offer both at age grade and adult level. Do contact Fred Cracknell if you need the County's help launching T1.

I am enjoying the women's Rugby World Cup, and the County recognises and congratulates the 9 Middlesex players in the England Red Roses squad. These are: **Kelsey Clifford** (Finchley RFC and Saracens); **Rosie Gallagher** (Harlequins and now Saracens), **Marlie Packer** (Wasps and now Saracens), **Abi Burton** (Trailfinders Women), **Lucy Packer** (Harlequins), **Zoe Harrison** (Saracens), **Megan Jones** (Wasps now Trailfinders), **Abby Dow** (Trailfinders) and **Ellie Kildunne** (Wasps and now Harlequins)

It is good to track upcoming stars too, like ex-Mill Hill School and Saracens wing, **Noah Caluori**. He has already started to make a name for himself with impressive performances for England U18 and U19s, including a brilliant set of tries against Japan. He recently started in England U20's games against Wales and Georgia and was later selected in Mark Mapletoft's squad for the 2025 World Rugby U20 Championship, playing against Australia. Fellow Saracen, **Jack Bracken** was in that selection too.

Poppy Love made the England Women U20 training camp in June, previously capped at U18 and U19, she is showing great promise. Her journey started at Grasshoppers RFC and she is now with Trailfinders.

We were delighted that our Middlesex Volunteer of the Year, **Mary Impey** of Hackney RFC went on to be crowned the National Honda Volunteer of the Year, 2025.

Our Ambassador in the West

The Cornwall RFU are delighted to announce our new Patron.. FLOYD STEADMAN OBE DL Hon D Ed Floyd has led an incredible life that has been well documented in the media and in his book, "A Week One Summer". His parents came to the UK in 1956 as part of the Windrush Generation, answering the

call to help rebuild the motherland after the destruction of the Second World War. His family along with many others suffered racism and discrimination, while Floyd also had an abusive father, whom his mother left. His father rejected him and he spent 7 years in care from the age of 10. Floyd developed a love for rugby at school and eventually attended Borough Road College to train as a PE Teacher. His rugby career is most closely associated with Saracens Rugby Club who he began playing for in the late 1970s. He quickly established himself as a gifted scrum-half becoming the first black captain of a Premiership rugby club when he led Saracens at the age of 23. Floyd played a total of 469 Saracens games and is a member of Saracens Hall of Fame. Floyd's wife was a Madron girl, Denise Friggens, who sadly died in 2016. With Denise's sister Sally married to Phil Westren, Floyd played several games for the Pirates, once playing for Saracens against Northampton before turning out for the Pirates against St Ives the next day having travelled straight down after the game. Floyd also played for the Barbarians and Middlesex, captaining them in the 1989/90 County Championship semi-final against Cornwall at Redruth. The game was drawn but Middlesex went through on most tries scored. When Floyd's Rose Award was conferred on him by the RFU Council in 2023 he became the sole recipient of this annual recognition of a "remarkable contribution to the game". Parallel to his rugby career Floyd has enjoyed a very successful career in education holding positions as a Deputy Headteacher and Headteacher at several schools. Floyd was awarded the OBE in the first of King Charles's New Year's Honours Lists in January 2023 for services to rugby, education and charity. On retiring to Cornwall Floyd lives in Ludgvan close to his Cornish family. He was recently appointed a Deputy Lieutenant, supporting the Lord Lieutenant in Cornwall, and sometimes deputising for him. The Lord Lieutenants are representatives of the King for each county in the UK and, with Floyd's expertise in education and sport, he is an immense asset to the life of Cornwall. Floyd continues to travel and give talks stressing the need to continually challenge perceptions, break down barriers, and address unconscious bias within ourselves and our community. "I love what I do and I hope I can

continue to make a difference. I suffered racial abuse when I was playing, and throughout many periods of my life, and I'm dedicated to trying to change people's perceptions and attitudes

Do all enjoy the 2025-26 season.

Nigel R Orton, President

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Message from Chair. Eddie Keal

I'll start by thanking Nigel for splendid service as President – Nigel, you have been brilliant. Your contribution to this Newsletter has been immense, and I hope everyone has read what you've written above with delight. Especially the notes on the Red Roses! England will be playing their semi-final shortly after this lands in everyone's email.

Another season has begun, and the County is in great shape. Welcome to Paul Bakash as the new chair of South Group and many thanks to Jerry Rogers for his years of service – that was a big shift!

We do have opportunities for more volunteers at the County, particularly in roles supporting off-field activity. Let me know if you'd like an exploratory chat. Salaries are £0 as always, but the jobs are rewarding.

My season started with an invitation to Enfield Ignatians to see their new changing rooms. I've copied their report below this article. Nice work, Martin Baker and team.

Please come to the AGM on Monday, I know Ali Donnelly will be a terrific guest speaker.

<https://www.englandrugby.com/follow/news-media/rfu-appoints-executive-director-corporate-affairs>

Bring your heads of communications, social media, women and girls, RWC 2025. Everyone is welcome.

I look forward to seeing you at Grasshoppers for a 7pm start on Monday 22nd September.

All the best

Eddie

Middlesex Chair

Eddie.keal@middlesexrugby.com

Enfield Ignatians

Press release: Enfield Ignatians September 5

In a landmark moment for ENFIELD IGNATIANS RFC, the club proudly unveiled its new look changing rooms in a special ceremony at its Donkey Lane clubhouse last Friday (September 5), writes Jonathan Landi.

To mark a momentous occasion, the Rugby Football Union (RFU) President Deborah Griffin (OBE) officially opened the new facility, with the Deputy Mayor of Enfield Cllr Nelly Gyosheva, and a Middlesex County contingent comprising Deputy President Andrew Smart, Bob Lawless and Eddie Keal, also in attendance.

The clubhouse has been extended and refurbished to create four new look changing rooms, each complete with their own separate shower/toilet areas. Both "child safe and female friendly" by design, they present the added advantage of enabling men and women's games to take place simultaneously.

Of course, the success of the project wouldn't have been possible without the input of the club's key partners, including the Rugby Football Union [in tandem with Sport England and UK Sport] via the Impact 25 Fund, with the county instrumental in supporting the initial successful grant application.

Deborah Griffin said: "The RFU is delighted to have supported Enfield Ignatians RFC with the development of their new changing facilities. Having modern, welcoming spaces will make a real difference in attracting new players and volunteers, as well as supporting the teams already thriving here. We look forward to seeing the positive impact these facilities will have on the club and the wider community for many years to come."

The new facilities quickly came into play at the weekend (September 6) as the club staged four fixtures for both sexes – two in the morning and two

in the afternoon – including the first ever EIRFC's first senior women fixture against Finchley.

With an eye to the future, Enfield Ignatians should now be in a better position to broaden their appeal to the wider community by promoting female rugby. In fact, the girls'/women's rugby has been a big growth area at EIRFC as it accounts for 30 per cent of the club's 300 youth section playing pool.

In addition, EIRFC has also secured a separate short-term loan from the RFU, which has eased the cash flow of the £350,000 project.

EIRFC is also working closely with Enfield Council so as to encourage more people to become more active by taking up sport. This entails promoting the Enfield Playing Fields as a rugby hub and centre of sporting excellence.

Having secured the relevant planning permission and a new lease from the council, works got underway at the club at the backend of 2024 in the wake of the club having successfully raised the required remaining capital via Crowdfunding, social events and other fundraising initiatives.

EIRFC has also been in the enviable position of being able to enlist the help of local businesses/key volunteers – many of whom either provided their services/materials for free or at discounted rates.

EIRFC Club President Stephen Renny said: "This isn't just about bricks and mortar but represents a commitment to greater inclusivity and playing experience at our club. To the RFU, and companies which provided materials and labour, and all those who rolled up their sleeves or made donations, I would just like to say one thing: thank you."

A special tribute was also paid to the project leader, Martin Baker, who worked tirelessly through thick and thin to ensure that everything came to fruition, as the club contemplates an even bolder and brighter future.

Message from Andrew Smart, Chair of Competitions

I won't pretend that it hasn't been a difficult and long summer for competitions both locally and nationally but two weeks into the season at least the issues around hard pitches and registration seem a distant memory and hopefully you have all been able to get out to see some of our Middlesex Clubs in

action. Apart from a few of our clubs who play in the lower Surrey leagues who are yet to start, pretty much every Middlesex Club has started either their league or merit table campaigns. To be honest after the summer we have had it couldn't come quick enough. Everything always seems better when we are actually playing although many problems still remain across the community game. Still, I am also delighted to report that finally we saw Middlesex clubs playing in Middlesex Counties leagues and long may it continue. So far every game played which is great to see just over three weeks ago there were question marks around the fitness of our pitches and slow/low registration numbers but that pretty much all disappeared with the deluge of rain and as importantly, registration figures for the men's game went from 40,000 to 70,000- over the last weekend in August just seven days before the league season was due to start. In the end despite some issues every Middlesex Club was able to get a team of properly registered players on the field. Of course, even when it looks everything is working well in the first weekend there were issues around some of our league secretaries getting access to their league registered players lists, then last weekend access to their match cards which still hasn't been fixed. Still the RFU website for the first time in four years was able to cope with all the demands of the first weekend of the season and didn't crash.

Obviously after only two rounds it is far too early to ready anything into any results but let's see how our clubs are faring.

London Welsh the first Middlesex Club in the National Leagues for nearly fifteen years despite two close losses have still managed to pick up three bonus points. Currently 10th of fourteen in National League 2 East.

In Regional 1 South Central CS Stags 1863 continuing their excellent form from last season and currently sit top with three other clubs with maximum points. London Scottish Lions in their first season at level 5 currently seventh whilst Hammersmith & Fulham currently winless but with two bonus points are eleventh

At level 6 in Regional 2 South Central Twickenham are currently fourth. In Regional 2 Anglia H.A.C. are currently fifth whilst in Regional 2 Thames Brunel University, Teddington and Belsize Park are on maximum points. Old Priorians are fifth, Grasshoppers seventh. That is seven Middlesex Clubs across three Regional 2 leagues, which helps to illustrate the impact of the FCS on how the Regional leagues are now made up

In Counties 1 Essex Epping Upper Clapton are currently seventh. In Counties 1 Middlesex Ealing 1871, Old Streetonians, Old Haberdashers and Finchley have maximum points. Ruislip are fifth, Hampstead sixth, Chiswick seventh, Wasps FC eighth, UCS ninth and Saracens Amateurs tenth. Interestingly the new Herts Counties 1 doesn't start until the 4th October. Counties 1 Surrey/Sussex after Uckfield withdrew before the start of the season is now an eleven-team league. London Cornish who are a game behind are currently eighth.

In Counties 2 Middlesex after one round Hackney, Enfield Ignatians, Actonians and Finsbury Park are top with maximum points followed by Harrow, Barnet Elizabethans and then Old Millhilans and Kilburn Cosmos

In Counties 2 Surrey old Hamptonians on promotion are currently fifth

In Counties 3 Surrey Thamesians are top withhold Georgians on maximum points. London Exiles are currently seventh

In Counties 3 Hertfordshire Grammarians after their return to the leagues have had a strong start with two wins and are currently third

Counties 4 Surrey which includes London French and Staines hasn't started yet

Counties 5 Surrey also hasn't started yet except for a couple of fixtures which saw Old Paulines go top with a try bonus point win whilst Feltham picked up nothing from their first game.

In case you missed the recent Community Game Update from last week and in particular the engagement sessions with Clubs over October via webinars and workshops on Competitions. If not

can I ask you to look at this [Let's discuss competitions at our next engagement opportunity - Community Game Update 09/09/25 | Rise 360](#)

The link will take you through to the booking process if you want to be involved

For ease these are respective dates and times

- Mon 20th October - 7:00pm - 8:15pm
- Tues 21st Oct - 8:00am - 9:15am
- Tues 21st Oct - 7:00pm - 8:15pm
- Wed 22nd Oct - 8:00am - 9:15am
- Wed 22nd Oct - 7:00pm - 8:15pm
- Thur 23rd Oct - 8:00am - 9:15am
- Thur 23rd Oct - 2:00pm - 3:15pm

There will also have 4 face-to-face workshops and I will confirm the dates and venues once we have them booked in.

I will leave the update on the merit table for the next newsletter

My last competitions report to the Newsletter. I wish my replacement who should hopefully be Steve, subject to ratification at next week's AGM, all the best. I continue with my competition's roles within the RFU and I will always be around to provide Steve with whatever support he and also our clubs might require

Keep safe and all the best.

Andrew Smart

Update from Chair of Team Middlesex – Mark Coles

I hope this finds you well and you have had a great summer. Last season only seems like five minutes ago and yet the new season is already upon us! The first County session (U16G) gets underway tonight with further Age Grade activity in September, so I thought it a good time to write out for this season to all our coaches and team leaders. For those involved

in Open Age, we will receive further details later in the season on fixtures and competitions I will follow up with.

The big change to update those who don't know in my life has been coming a father for the first time in late July, with the birth of our daughter, Charlotte. Though I'm fortunate enough to have a good spell of paternity leave, the onset of fatherhood means I will likely have to operate differently to last season where I came to as many things as was able to which helped me get up to speed, towards striking more of a balance such that I am able to play a proactive role at home.

This may mean you initially see less of me, but rest assured I will still be working away across our programmes and coming to as many session/games etc as I can. We now have strong, experienced leadership teams in place across our teams, so I have full confidence in our ability to keep showing up for our clubs and players and I'll continue to be in regular contact with our Head Coaches and Team Managers, so will never be far away. Charlotte may even become Team Middlesex's youngest supporter if I bring her down with me!

Looking ahead, I'm keen to build on the positives of prior seasons, challenge where we can be better, and make sure we are focused on giving players and each other the best experience when wearing County colours. I have no doubt I will continue to learn and make mistakes as I go so would encourage you all to embrace success and learnings in the same manner.

As you may have seen last year, I'm in favour of giving autonomy to coaches/teams within the bounds of good practise, but would make the following points:

- We are Team Middlesex. We expect any club allegiances to be left at the front door when you come in and focus on creating a great experience for the players we do have. This includes being fair and transparent to all involved, and not using this as an

opportunity to 'tap up' players for any club purposes you have. This is not acceptable and may lead to people being asked to step back from our teams.

- One aspect I want to push this season is thinking through and having discussions with your Head Coaches about how you can develop in your time with the County. I'm keen to continue fostering the culture of coach development within teams and using our representative teams to give experience in areas you may not have at your schools or clubs. I'd like everyone to have a clear area within your team you are looking out to (forwards, backs, skills, physio and support, team management etc) and can take pride in contributing on. Will be picking up with team leaders on.
- Uphold the values of the game be it to opponents, referees, officials, volunteers or supporters. Abuse will not be tolerated. We have a good track record in this and would like to continue.
- If we do have disagreements and differences of opinion (which I expect we will from time to time as passionate and enthusiastic people), we try and solve them promptly and in a mature way.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, and I'll conclude with:

- I hope you're looking forward to this season's journey. I am always open to considering new ideas or ways of doing things. I'm keen to work on developing our pathways so will reach out to some of you on how we can further develop Game Models etc across our male and female pathways.
- Work will be ongoing over coming weeks on Open Age teams to think about how we run

those programmes this year based on data, coach and player feedback. I am also looking at bringing back a (male) Vets team and introducing a female vets team for the first time this season if there is ample interest from clubs to nominate players.

- If you are not or are unable to be part of Team Middlesex this season, please do let me know and will remove you from communications.
- Given a fair amount of activity happens at Wasps FC, they have asked me to remind all coaches/players to wear to the appropriate footwear when going on the 4G down there, or otherwise stay behind the perimeter fences. They will be stricter in enforcing policy of boots (not trainers/shoes) on this season, so please do uphold this if/when going down or not be surprised if challenged on.
- Jok will be continuing in his role with Age Grade. If you are involved in a group which requires a valid DBS check, please make sure this is valid and confirm to him in the first instance that this will remain valid for the season. If this is not the case, please do let us know so steps can be taken to remedy.

Thanks, as ever for reading and for your support
Mark

Mark.coles@middlesexrugby.com

A Report from Chair of Groups Andy Smart

We have just started the first round of Group meetings with the North West last week hosted by Harrow and the South tonight (Monday) on Zoom. It was an excellent meeting although numbers were down from where we would have normally expected. However, a combination of the tube strike and its impact on traffic accounted for some of those

who had said they were going to come. Nevertheless, a really good meeting with two new faces in Richard Simmons the new chair of the newly formed Ickenham and Uxbridge RFC and Wayne Meek from Northolt which was great to see. Also, thanks to Eddie Keel and Tim Miller the county chair and secretary respectively who made the effort to join and contributed fully to a lively meeting. Apart from a presentation from Tim on the new Laws, Eddie gave a robust explanation for the increase in Club Subscriptions and also the new entry fees for Middlesex Competitions which I am sure will be raised at the other three meeting

This is to confirm the Group Officers for the 2025/26 and the dates and venues for the September round of meetings.

The Group Officers are as follows

Chair – Andrew Smart (Harrow)

South – Chair Paul Bakash (Old Pauline FC), 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)

There has also been some movement in the dates for the first round of group meetings

North West at Harrow RFC Wednesday 10th September

South on Zoom Monday 15th September

West at Staines RFC Wednesday 17th September

North at Finchley RFC Monday 29th September

Agendas and Minutes will be circulated closer to the meeting dates

Finally, following Sam Clapham's sabbatical, we welcome Laura Westlake as his replacement, in the role of the Middlesex club developer.

The season as we know has only just started but once again it will be a busy year for the groups starting with the four Pick Up the Whistle Courses once the venues and dates have been agreed

A call to action from Discipline

The County is looking to recruit panellists to join the current Discipline team.

More panellists means we can share the load. Panel hearings are either in person or on-line. New panellists can bring their experiences in the game to help an established panel chair to decide on outcomes following discipline incidents (red cards & citings). We ask clubs to encourage their members (players, ex-players, officials etc.) to consider this opportunity to support the game in Middlesex. Initially volunteers are asked to observe a hearing to get a feel of the role. Panellists would then be eligible to join the rota so they can manage their commitment.

The county is also looking for an Assistant Discipline Secretary to assist the current Discipline Secretary manage hearings and support panels ahead of hearings. The role will need organisational and IT skills. Knowledge of the processes involved can be quickly picked up while working alongside the current Discipline Secretary.

Anyone interested in helping in either of these roles can email countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com for further help about what is involved.

Many thanks
Simon Hardcastle
Assistant Secretary

Middlesex Coaching & Referee Development



Middlesex referee & coach education, put on 2 sessions on the "New Laws of the Game" for this season. The first was run on Thursday 4th September at Ealing Trailfinders and another at Twickenham RFC on Monday 8th September 2025. A total of 42 referees & coaches were in attendance from 12 different Middlesex clubs. Thanks for both clubs for hosting and Bob Ockenden, leading on this.

Coaching Development

-  Middlesex Coaching presents a "Developing Back Play Workshop"
-  The workshop will be of great value to all youth & and senior coaches & players
-  Thursday 18th September 2025
-  Hampstead RFC, Parliment Hill, Athletics Track. NW3 2JP - Time 19.00hrs - 20.30hrs
-  Tutor - Rhys Davies, Saracens academy coach
-  To confirm your attendance - WhattsApp Bob Lawless on (m) 07803 196 409

-  Middlesex Coaching presents an Introduction to contact & the tackle for U9s & U10s players
-  The workshop will be of great value to all youth coaches.
-  Friday 10th October 2025
-  Grasshoppers RFC, - Time 19.30hrs - 21.30hrs
-  Tutor - Dan Cottrell
-  To confirm your attendance - WhattsApp Bob Lawless on (m) 07803 196 409

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

All the best
Bob

A Call for applications for the Financial Support Fund from Andrew Walker

MIDDLESEX RUGBY FINANCIAL SUPPORT FUND 2025/26

Middlesex Rugby are pleased to continue their commitment to supporting disadvantaged young people at our rugby clubs. Clubs, teachers, and parents or guardians can now apply for a grant to help with membership fees and/or club kit and rugby boots for economically disadvantaged children and young people up to the age of 18. To access the application form, please scan the QR code below. For successful applicants, Middlesex Rugby will contribute up to 50% of the annual costs of membership fees, with the expectation that clubs will cover the remaining costs. Middlesex Rugby may also contribute towards the cost of club playing kit, sports bras, boots and gum shields. Applications will be reviewed by a panel consisting of the Chair of Rugby Development, the Chair of Groups, the County Treasurer and the Club Representative. The panel's decision is final.



Applications will remain open until 30 November 2025

financialsupport@middlesexrugby.com

What's On

Middlesex County RFU Annual General Meeting,
Monday 22nd September, Grasshoppers RFC, Syon Lane, Osterley, TW7 5PN. 7pm start.