

February Newsletter 2025/26

Email: countyoffice@middlesexrugby.com

President's Corner

A busy time for us all I suspect, beset at the same time as we are by this constant depressing and wet weather. Nevertheless, there has been a lot of rugby to watch and support

First a quick update on where we are with the revamped **Middlesex Clubs Awards Supper confirmed for Friday 5th June**. The venue is still to be confirmed and invitations are currently out for tender. This has previously been the Middlesex Clubs Dinner but we are determined to make the evening much more affordable to try to ensure that we get more clubs and players to what is their Awards Night. We are looking at around half the ticket price that attendees paid for previous evenings. Great nights previous firstly at London Welsh for two years and then two more at Ealing Trailfinders but we are determined to make it more inclusive for our clubs and players and cost is one area that we are focused on. Thanks to the team lead by Peter Baveystock who are doing all the work in preparation for what should be another great night celebrating the success of our clubs and their teams both men's and women. Despite the fact that I am going to have to say a few words I am really looking forward to this.

So, onto to what I have been up to since the last newsletter. Again, it continues to be a busy period for us all, beset at the same time as we are by this constant depressing and wet weather. Nevertheless, there has been a lot of rugby to watch and support and all this plus those innumerable meetings that are so much a part of the administration of our game at all levels

Unfortunately, on Wednesday 21st January, I was very much looking forward to hosting at Harrow our Middlesex Vets against the RAF Vets but the constant rain made the pitch unplayable and the

fixture had to be postponed until the 25th March at the same venue

The next day I was at Grasshoppers for the Middlesex Club Surgery Workshops. An excellent initiative and a most informative afternoon/evening. Unfortunately, only eleven Middlesex Clubs were able to attend. Thanks to Adam Cottingham from the RFU and Andrew Walker for all their work to set up the initiative, to Grasshoppers for their excellent hospitality and to the clubs who attended.

Then on Saturday 24th January I went to Marlow v Grasshoppers in a re-arranged fixture in my league, after the original fixture went down on the 10th January because of a frozen pitch. Excellent defensive performance by Grasshoppers playing into the wind in the second half, conceding no points, giving them a hugely important victory in their fight to remain a level 6 club

On Monday 26th an RFU Council Informal Zoom meeting

On Wednesday 28th I was on a Middlesex Clubs Dinner meeting

On Friday 30th January Bob and I went to Wasps Vets v Finsbury Vets to catch up with Steve who ended up playing in the second half

On Saturday 31st January I got to watch the first half of LS Lions hosting Farham at Regional1 before going next door to watch an outstanding game between 2nd place HAC hosting top of the table Eton Manor at Chiswick in R2 Anglia. A game to stir the blood won at the death by HAC who are now within two points of their rivals who they have now beaten home and away

Then quite a busy week of meetings. First on the Monday a Community Cup oversight meeting followed on the Tuesday where I chaired an RFU OC Competitions meeting. On the Wednesday I chaired an RFU Competitions meeting on Registration levels followed by the NW Middx Group meeting. The

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following day on a CB Off-Field Development meeting chaired by Andrew Walker

On Saturday off to the Allianz Stadium with my guest Hannah Everritt the Deputy-President of the London Society of Referees

On Sunday to support the u20s v Berkshire u20s at Grasshoppers in their only warm up game before the U20s Championship starts in a couple of weeks

On Tuesday 10th on a lively Middlesex Management meeting

On Wednesday an Adult Competitions meeting at the Allianz Stadium, where I was joined by Tim Miller who runs the County Championship and our own past President Paul Astbury representing the L&SE Regional Organising Committee. A very strong Middlesex representation on this very important RFU Sub-Committee. Then four and a half hours to travel thirty-five miles to get home after they had closed the M25 at junction 16. My colleague on the meeting who was travelling back home to Wigan actually got home quicker than I did.

Then back to Grasshoppers on Thursday evening for the RFU Sponsorship Workshop. Again, a very interesting and useful evening organised by Martin Woodward from the RFU and our own Andrew Walker. About 18 in attendance for a most useful and interesting presentation. Thanks again to both organisers, to Grasshoppers for their excellent hospitality and to those from our clubs who attended the workshop.

On Saturday 14th February, hosted a pre-match lunch at Harrow with some great friends from Enfield Ignatians. Really competitive game won 20-14 by the home team on a pitch despite all the previous rain that proved to be in excellent condition. A nice afternoon, a full clubhouse to watch England crash and burn at Murrayfield.

Then on Monday a RFU Council Informal on the proposed Governance Review that if supported at the Council meeting on Friday 27th February will,

amongst the recommendations, see CBs like ours who currently have two Council Members go down to one. Came of that to join the South Group meeting on Zoom. Another very interesting meeting with a presentation from Kieran Spencer from the RFU Facilities Team, well chaired as ever by Jon Boyle

Back to the Allianz Stadium on Saturday for the Ireland game and then on Sunday I plan to go to Grasshoppers to support our Middlesex u18 girls against Essex u18s girls

Plenty going on both off and on the pitch. Hopefully catch up with more of you on our touchlines for the remainder of the season.

Enjoying it and hopefully see you on a touchline or clubhouse soon.

Andy Smart

[Message from Chair, Eddie Keal](#)

Spring is approaching and we feel the need for some more refresh and renewal! I've recorded a short video here [Video from the Chair](#) which announces that we have serious intentions for improvement. It's only one minute long so please watch and share if you can.

We will be building a programme of events and meetings around these themes to give ourselves something of a boost.

You should also be seeing similar content from the RFU, so we will synchronise with them and put a distinctive Middlesex Club flavour on our own offerings.

The Management Board is operating well and we're all fired up for the "business end" of the season. Please keep an eye out for Middlesex visitors in your clubhouses and on your touchlines.

Our representative team programme is well underway - I know I'm not the only one looking forward to our women's Vets and Men's SuperVets getting a run out.

The new Middlesex badge, based on the true Middlesex flag with the right colours, is being phased in to all our playing kit and will start to appear on our other collateral soon.

Thank you to those who have nominated volunteers for end of season awards. Please keep an eye out for the County Clubs dinner invitations too.

All the best

Eddie

Middlesex Chair

Eddie.keal@middlesexrugby.com

Message from Steve Partridge, Chair of Competitions

We are now over the halfway point of the season and entering into what seems to be an endless wet period; groundsmen are doing an excellent job in keeping games going, and clubs are working together to find solutions.

The application for this season's Middx 7's on the 9th May 2026 @ Wasps FC is now open and can be found here: [Middx 7's 2026](#) . As in previous years, you will receive the entry fee back on the day to be redeemed for food and drink, and with some fantastic prizes to win, we hope to see all of you there.

I have also included the link to the RFU's Community Game update, which contains more details around the national engagement sessions and the Mid-season RFU briefing. Please take a look if you haven't already [RFU Community update 10th Feb 2026](#)

Here is how Middlesex clubs are faring in their respective leagues, as of the end of Jan.

London Welsh are currently in 8th place in National League 2 East, with 46 points from 17 games (7 wins, 10 losses). 26 points behind league leaders Old Albanians, who currently sit top with 14 wins and 3 losses on 72 points.

In Regional 1 South Central London, Scottish are on 56 points, joint second with Tunbridge Wells,

having won 11 and lost 4 games. They are currently 17 points behind league Leaders Jersey, who are unbeaten with 15 out of 15 wins and are on 73 points. **CS Stags** are in 4th place on 53 points, having won 10 and lost 5 games. **Hammersmith and Fulham** remain at the bottom of the table on 15 points with 1 win and 14 losses

In Counties 1, Essex, **Epping Upper Clapton** are currently second in the table on 48 points, having played 12 games and won 9, drawn 1 and lost 2. They are currently 2 points behind league leaders Thurrock, who are 11 of 11 wins with a game in hand.

H.A.C. are in 2nd place in Regional 2 Anglia on 65 points, having won 13 and lost 2 games, and are 5 points behind league leaders Eton Manor on 70 points, who have won 14 of their 15 games and lost 1.

Twickenham are currently 9th in Regional 2 South Central with 27 points, having won 4 and lost 11 games. Bournemouth is sitting at the top of the table on 68 points with 14 wins and 1 draw from their 15 games played.

Brunel University remains in 1st place in Regional 2 Thames with 14 wins and 1 loss (courtesy of Belsize Park), on 72 points. **Belsize Park** are sitting in 3rd place on 57 points with 11 wins and 4 losses. **Old Priorians** are sitting in 4th place on 53 points with 9 wins and 6 losses, followed closely by **Teddington** on 46 points in 5th place with 8 wins and 7 losses, with 4 Middlesex clubs in the top 5 places.

In Counties 1, Middlesex **Ealing Trailfinders 1871** are currently sitting at the top of the table on 60 points, with 12 wins and 1 loss out of 13 games. Followed closely by **Finchley** on 57 points with 11 wins and 2 losses out of 13 games. Old Haberdashers are in 3rd on 48 points with 9 wins and 4 losses, followed by **Hampstead** and **Chiswick** on 41 points. **Old Stretonians** are in 6th place on 39 points, dropping down to **Ruislip** in 7th place on 23 points, who have had some issues of late and

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didn't go out for the last 2 fixtures, resulting in 1x - 5 sanction. **Wasps FC** is in 8th place on 17 points, **U.C.S** is in 9th place on 9 points and in last place, having used all their 3 friendly walkover games, are **Saracens Amateurs** on 6 points with 1 win and 12 losses.

In Counties 2 Middlesex and Hackney are top on 57 points, having won 11 games, drawn 1 and lost 1. **Barnet Elizabethans** are in second place on 44 points, having won 9, drawn 1, and lost 1. **Harrow** in 3rd place on 35 points with 7 wins and 6 losses. **Kilburn Cosmos** are in 4th place on 34 points with 6 wins and 6 losses. **Actonians** in 5th place on 30 points with 5 wins and 8 losses. **Enfield Ignatians** are in 6th place with 27 points, with 5 wins, 1 draw and 6 losses. **Finsbury Park** in 7th place with 24 points from 3 wins and 10 losses, and Old Millhillians in 9th place on 6 points, having had 2 walkovers in the last 2 games, for having less than 10 players available and unable to fulfil the league fixtures, resulting in -10 deductions.

In Counties 4, Surrey **Staines** are currently sitting 5th on 31 points, having played 11 games and won 6 and lost 5 and are 13 points behind league leaders Old Freemans who have 44 points with 10 wins and 1 loss out of 11 games.

Old Grammarians are 2nd in Counties 3 Herts on 49 points, having played 13, won 10 and lost 3, with Hitchin II top of the league on 56 points with 12 wins and 1 loss.

In Counties 5, Surrey. **Old Paulines** sitting in 2nd place with 10 wins and a loss on 50 points, just 1 point behind Economical on 51 points with 10 wins and a loss also. **Feltham** in 8th place having won 2 and lost 9 but with -15 points adjustment and in last place in the league are **Harlequin Amateurs** with 9 games played with 2 wins on the same ratio and both teams encountered a -5 points adjustment.

Middx Merit Tables

The Middlesex Merit Tables have been challenging this season, as evidenced by the completion rates. Several 2nd and 3rd teams are struggling with player availability. We recently lost Ruislip 2's and Harrow 2's, who have had to pull out of the merit leagues, and we hope to see them back next season.

The finalists for the Merit Cup, Bowl, and Vase have been confirmed, and the games will be played on 11th April. Congratulations and good luck to all the finalists

Cup Final RP 4ths v Twickenham 2nds

Bowl Final Belsize Park 4's v Hendon

Vase Final Actonians 2's v Ealing 1871 3's

Last week's fixtures

Prem - 3 games scheduled, 1 played, 1 W/O and 1 Postponed, 33% completion.

Div 1 - 5 games scheduled, 3 played & 2 postponed. 60% completion.

Div 2 - 5 games scheduled, 1 played, 2 W/O & 2 Postponed, 20% completion

Div 3 - 5 games scheduled, 4 played, and 1 Postponed 80 % completion

Total 18 games - 9 Played, & 3 Walkovers, 6 postponed - Total 50%

Overall season to date.

Premier Total 51 Games - 37 Played (1 Game On) 5 PP & 9 w/o - **72.5%**

Div 1 Total 61 Games - 43 Played (4 Game On) 4 PP & 14 w/o - **70.4%**

Div 2 Total 97 Games - 59 Played, 10 PP, 1 void & 27 w/o - **60.8%**

Div 3 Total 75 Games - 52 Played (4 Game On) 4PP & 19 w/o - **69.3%**

Total 284 games - 192 Played, & 69 Walkovers, 23 postponed - Total 67.6%

The single club team in the merit tables that are not in the structured leagues are performing as follows

Middlesex Premier Merit table

New Zealand Kiwis are currently sitting in 6th place on 34 points, having won 3 and lost 7 games. 18 points behind league leaders London Scottish Lions 2nds on 52 points, having won 7 and lost 1 game, with Quintin bottom on 20 points, having won 1 and lost 7 games.

Middlesex Division 1 Merit table

West London is sitting in 3rd place on 52 points, having won 6 and lost 5 games, and is 18 points behind league leaders Ealing Trailfinders 1871 2nds, who are on 70 points and have won all 10 games. **London Japanese** are in 6th place on 36 points, having won 3 and lost 7 games.

Middlesex Division 2 Merit table

Pinner are sitting in 5th place on 55 points, having won 6 and lost 6 games, and are 26 points behind Hampstead 2's, who have won 10 and lost 4. Hendon are in 8th place on 44 points, having won 5 and lost 6 games. **Haringey Rhinos** are at the bottom of the league on 29 points, having won 2, drawn 1 and lost 6 games.

Middlesex Division 3 Merit table

Ickenham & Uxbridge are top of the league on 85 points, having won 11 and lost 3 games. **Old Isleworthians** are in 6th place on 59 points, having won 7 and lost 8 games. **Hanwell** are in 8th place on 43 points having won 3 and lost 10 games and **Northolt** are in 11th place on 24 points with 1 win and 11 loses. **Whitton** are bottom of the league but recently transferred down from Division 2 and have won 3 out of their 4 games since moving leagues

Steve Partridge

Middlesex chair of competitions

A Report from Chair of Groups Andy Smart

As I write this we are in the middle of the February round of Groups meetings. The NW Group went ahead as normal on Wednesday 4th February. A first-rate meeting with over twenty in attendance on Zoom from eleven clubs with Eddie, Tim, Andrew Walker and Simon Hardcastle also in attendance to represent the Management Committee. Well, done to Micheal Searls, who has successfully resurrected the NW Middx Floodlit Cup after a number of years in the wilderness. The first fixture was to be played on Wednesday 11th February when Ruislip were due to host Ickenham/Uxbridge but unfortunately not for the first time this season it had to be postponed because of the weather. The other three Groups meetings have been moved for various reasons.

The North was now on Monday 16th February on Zoom, where we had an excellent presentation by Kieran Spencer from the RFU Facilities team with a direct responsibility for Middlesex in which amongst other issues he highlighted the importance of completing the RFU Club Needs Document which came out in the first part of the season to all Middlesex Clubs. This also helps the RFU Facilities team to work out the current facilities needs of Clubs in Middlesex. I include a copy of some of the report that Laura Westlake the RFU Club Developer prepared for us.

Club Development Feedback Report – Middlesex County

1. Overview

Laura Westlake (Middlesex Club Developer) collected feedback from affiliated clubs via a Microsoft Forms survey to better understand current club health, development priorities, and areas where additional support is required.

Responses were received from a broad cross-section of clubs and committee roles, including Chairs, Presidents, Treasurers and Secretaries.

Key priorities identified include.

- Volunteer Recruitment, retention and succession planning
- Revenue generation and financial resilience
- Marketing & Communication
- Adult Male Recruitment & Retention.

The feedback provides valuable insight into the challenges clubs are facing post-pandemic and highlights clear, recurring themes around volunteering, revenue generation, player retention, and club management capacity.

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Actonians RFC

CS Stags 1863

Ealing Trailfinders 1871 RFC

Enfield Ignations RFC

Finchley Rugby Club

Grasshoppers RFC

Hammersmith & Fulham RFC

Hampstead RFC (Women's Section)

Harrow

Hendon RFC

London Cornish RFC

Middlesex

Mill Hill

Old Grammarians RFC

Old Hamptonian's

Old Isleworthians RFC

Old Priorian RFC

Old Streetonians

Ruislip RFC

Saracens Amateur RFC

Staines RFC

Teddington RFC

Thamesians RFC

Twickenham

West London RFC

Twenty-six of our clubs took the time to complete the five-minute form and are now on the RFU radar for support and assistance around their needs. And whilst there are no promises you have to be in it to win it and those clubs who are not on this list should maybe ask themselves why they are not

The South Group meeting is now on Monday 23rd at London Cornish with the West going back to the 2nd March also on Zoom

Andrew Smart

Chairman Group Officers

[Middlesex Coaching & Referee Development](#)

Middlesex Coaching Corner

Coach Development - To date this season Middlesex Coach Education Programme have run 6 sessions which have been available to a

variety of Middlesex Coaches. There have been 3 sessions targeted at our youth coaches with themes of an Introduction to contact, a Back Play Workshop and a visit to the Saracens PDG skill clinics. 85 Middlesex Youth coaches have attended these sessions. For our more Senior Middlesex coaches there has been 3 coach education sessions with themes of "Ball Carry in the Middle of the Pitch", "Principles of Counter Attack" and "Understanding Kicking as part of your Strategy" These sessions have been delivered by Rich Whiffin, Nick Evans and Stephen Shingler all are involved in the professional game at International & Premiership levels. A total of 56 Middlesex senior coaches attended. Thanks to Hampstead RFC, Grasshoppers RFC, Harrow School and London Welsh RFC for hosting.

The below photograph was taken at the Stephen Shingler Coach Education session at London Welsh on Wednesday 21st January 2026



Upcoming Middlesex Coach Education Sessions

23rd February 2026 - Hampstead RFC will be hosting a Youth coaches CPD on getting ready for contact and tackling.

24th February 2026 - Chiswick RFC will be hosting a Youth coaches CPD on Practical Drills & Games to improve the ruck

2nd March 2026 - Harlequins academy will be welcoming Middlesex partners to a session with the PDG at Grasshoppers RFC

10th March 2026 - Ruislip RFC will be hosting a Youth Coaches session on developing the Ruck

12th March 2026 - Ruislip RFC will be hosting a Back play Workshop

22nd April 2026 - Saracens will be hosting our North Middlesex Partners to a PDG session at Harrow School

Referee Development - To date Middlesex have run a "Young Match Officials" courses at Ealing Trailfinders, Old Grammarians RFC, and a "Take up the Whistle" course at Grasshoppers RFC Other courses are planned for Twickenham RFC, Harrow RFC and Hackney RFC

The below photograph is of Grasshoppers RFC hosting a "Take up The whistle Course" Monday 16th February 2026



Focus on Middlesex Coach Abi Ashbey.



With a family who loves rugby it was surprising that it took until my teenage years to take up rugby myself.

In the mid 90s I started my journey playing for Harlequin Ladies Youth progressing to represent Middlesex and South East Region at U16 and U18. My coaching started when I joined the senior women's team at Harlequin Ladies and gained my RFU coaching qualification. I began coaching Harlequin Ladies Youth and then Middlesex Girls.

I continued working for local London clubs including Wasps, Harlequins and London Irish working with their community coaching teams.

I took a break from rugby after having my daughter and I started back at Staines RFC my family club just after Covid when a group of women restarted the Women's Team there and this in turn reignited my coaching career.

Since 2020 I have been the Head Coach of Staines Women coaching the team to league promotion in

2024/2025 season as well as assistant coaching the men's 1st XV from 2020-2023. This season I have taken on the role of Head of Women's and Girls Rugby at Staines RFC working to build a thriving female playing presence as well as a sustainable pathway for girls and women's rugby.

My philosophy when coaching is to encourage, inspire and motivate to be the best player that person can be. This is inspired by seeing the development in the women's game over the past 25 years, more recently being at the final of the Women's Rugby World Cup shows that the future of women's rugby in England and Middlesex is definitely at an exciting turning point that I'm proud to be a part of.

For further information on coach / referee education sessions. Contact Bob Lawless (M) 07803 196 409

For further information on the above coach / referee education sessions. Contact - Bob Lawless on (m) 07803 196 409

All the best
Bob

What's On

- **May 9th Middlesex 7's at Wasps FC.**
- **Friday 5th June - Middlesex Clubs Awards Supper (Venue to be agreed)**

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