

Buckinghamshire Referees Society: Season 24 / 25

My first season as Chair is coming to an end, and it has certainly been a bit of rollercoaster ride!

Firstly many thanks to Phil Bowden for his leadership over the previous 11 years, and the support I have received from my fellow Directors and Committee members. I must also thank our Sponsors, Arnold Funeral Service, Aylesbury Honda and Rugby Radios.

We have two principle objectives, the recruitment and development of referees, and the appointment to all Senior Rugby matches Level 6 and below, as well as League and Cup games for Juniors / Schools U16s and above. I am delighted to report that the society has continued to recruit new members, and has fulfilled all our appointments this season.

The RFU / Allianz Innovation Fund have supported us with a £3000 grant to invest in our Club Academy initiative, we have run sessions at both Buckingham and Milton Keynes, with other clubs planned for next season. Each monthly meeting has included a development item, and thanks go to James and Phil for leading on these.

We have appointed to all fixtures requested, an ever increasing task, as we support the Friday Night Vets league, an increasing number of school matches, including some significant Continental Tyres ties, the Papa Johns Cup and County Championships, Additionally over the last couple of seasons we have seen Bletchley return to the society and more erectly we have added Dunstablians, increasing our club count. Holly Wood has been appointed to Womens World Cup this autumn.

Structurally we have been developing a team approach to the major tasks, historically these tasks had rested entirely with individuals, and we lacked the ability to share workloads, and have developed succession plans. The development team has worked hard to put in place a process, which was recently shared with all members, clearly determining the criteria for individuals to progress their grading, and this looks positive for next season. Unfortunately the creation of the appointments team has been more problematic and has resulted in some personnel changes recently, I hope the team will now be able to move forward constructively.

We appointed a new Safeguarding lead at the start of the season, and it is fair to say he has been busier than anticipated, we have had to deal with some unexpected safeguarding issues, and I believe these have now been closed. The society has updated its processes to improve our compliance in this area, and again we have made significant progress, unfortunately in addition to the day job of safeguarding Steven has managed two complaints that were made by members, ensuring a clear action plan was put in place to avoid reoccurrence and generally improve our processes and structures.

We have supplied new kit to all members, including a double sided playing shirt and off field team wear, as well continuing to invest in radio comms kits.

Our Treasurer has ensured we continue to operate on a solid financial footing, as well having to deal with significant challenge from the HMRC, which he has successfully resolved in our favour.

Of course in recent weeks we have seen significant disruption at the RFU, with our own CB the RFRU leading the challenge for a SGM, this has raised some questions by a number of societies regarding the leadership of the RFRU, and I expect more of this to unfold at the AGMs of both RFU and RFRU. The society ran an internal ballot to determine our members wishes on voting at the recent SGM resulting in us abstaining on CEO resolution and supporting the Governance Review.

In summary we have continued to grow as a society, supported all requests for appointments, whilst in the background significantly improved our internal structures and developed a number of enhanced processes, which I believe leave us at the end of the season in a much stronger place than the beginning. None of this would be possible without the tremendous efforts of the committee members and I thank them all, and lastly I must recognise the dedication and willingness of all our members to support Rugby in Buckinghamshire, you have all done an amazing job.

Richard Bobbett