

President's Report for AGM (17th July 2023)

Season 2022/2023

I will start my report by extending my gratitude to all the club Presidents and the club officials who have hosted me over the season. The common discussion point during all my visits was the new tackle height laws for 2023/24 closely followed by "in my day....." It was also evident during my visits that clubs, despite their differences, have similar problems:

- Commitment of senior players across the season – evident in the high number of players used to regularly turn out the 1st XV.
- 2nd XV fixture cancellations
- Age grade gaps
- Recruitment and retention

It was to address these issues that the Executive organised our first residential conference at the end of March, to share problems and discuss solutions. From your comments, I know this was a great success and that you now have a network you can call upon for ideas and support. You certainly made some commitments which I trust you will follow through on.

During the 2022/23 season, I managed to visit all Buckinghamshire clubs, although my schedule was disturbed by bone-hard pitches in early September and frozen pitches in January. With a shortened season this had a knock-on effect with respect to the Papa John Cup, with some clubs reluctant to commit or unable to fulfil fixtures due to postponed league matches. This is a pity, as those clubs who were active in the Cup felt it was an enjoyable end to the season and a special mention must go to Beaconsfield, who beat Dartfordians at the StoneX Stadium in the Regional 2 South Shield Final.

Others will comment on the success of our senior county sides in more detail, but it was disappointing, despite strenuous efforts, not to be able to field an U20s men's side. Over May I attended 4 county championship matches culminating in the ladies' county final at Twickenham which is a testament to how far ladies' rugby has come in Buckinghamshire. The doubleheader against Surrey was a particularly memorable day; not only did we win both matches, with the men winning their first county game in some time, but I got to award 6 county caps and congratulate and hand out awards to your nominated club volunteers. This was a poignant reminder that our volunteers are the lifeblood of our clubs and I encourage you to continue to recognise and reward them appropriately.

I continue to be impressed by the work carried out by the County Executive on your behalf, managing a constant and, at times, uncoordinated flow of information from the RFU. My thanks go out to each of them. There is much going on in Buckinghamshire rugby that other counties admire but seem unable to replicate; perhaps that is one benefit of our scale.

In my second year, I am planning a number of Sunday club visits to support the ladies' game and to listen to their views and concerns. I am also planning to pick one such match to award my own daughter her 150 club matches cap.

We all know that 2023/24 will be a difficult season. Players, coaches, referees and spectators will have to show a degree of restraint as we come to terms with the new tackle heights. Whatever our opinion about how the RFU has managed and communicated this change, we all know that this change is necessary for the safety of our players and the good of the game in the long run.

Finally, I look forward to my second year when I will be joined by a Senior Vice president. Somehow, I don't think I will need to make many introductions.

Thank you for all your support and generosity last season and I look forward to meeting next season. Just remember I have now heard all your awful jokes.



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