



Kent County Rugby Football Union Limited

www.kent-rugby.org

President

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Hon. Secretary

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Hon. Treasurer

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Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting will be held at **Aylesford Bulls RFC, Jack Williams Ground, Hall Road, Aylesford, Kent ME20 7DS** on **Monday 30th September 2024, 7:00 pm registration for a 7:30 pm start**. The County Executive Committee hopes that you will be able to attend.

Agenda

1. Apologies for Absence
2. In Memoriam:
 - a. **Brian Barker (Gillingham Anchorians RFC)** and former member of KSRFUR.
 - b. **Frank Croxford (Sidcup RFC)**
 - c. **Robert Horner (Sevenoaks RFC)**: Past President of KCRFU, Past President and former Council member, RFU and President, Kent County Playing Fields Association.
 - d. **Ian Milstead (Maidstone FC)**: Past President of KCRFU & Chairman of selectors.
 - e. **Terry Williams (Gillingham Anchorians RFC)**: Former Rugby Master at The Skinner's School and England Schoolboy International.
3. Approval of Minutes of the last AGM, held on 19th July 2023 (attached, below – **Annex A**)
4. Financial report and presentation of 2022-23 and 2023-24 accounts
5. Address of the President, who will propose the adoption of the Report and announce the recipient of the President's Award.
6. Questions to the Executive Committee
7. Honours
 - a. Election to Life Vice-President
8. Proposed amendment to Section 11 (Composition of Executive Committee) of the County Rules
9. Proposed amendment to Section 12.4 (County President) of the County Rules
10. Election of Officers for 2024-25
 - a. President
 - b. Hon. Secretary
 - c. Hon. Treasurer
11. Election of Committee for season 2024-25
12. Appointment of Auditors
13. Any other Business

Should any individual member and or member club wish to propose any items for discussion at the AGM, they are invited to inform the Hon. Secretary (honsec@kent-rugby.org) **by no later than Friday 20th September 2024**.

Nigel Fray
Hon. Secretary & Director of Governance

Kent County RFU Ltd. Annual Report 2023-24

Summary

The highlight of the season is undoubtedly the Senior Representative Men's retention of the Bill Beaumont County Championship Cup. In a pulsating, nail-biting match, Kent beat Yorkshire by a single point. Congratulations to Taff Gwilliam, Tom Stradwick, the players, coaching and support team.

Encouragingly, participation and match completion rates have now recovered to their pre-Covid levels.

Women's and Girls' Rugby within Kent continues to grow and prosper. Both the Game Development and Women's & Girls' Committees will be seeking to leverage the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup to further increase participation.

The number of registered Age Grade Rugby players continues to increase year-on-year. We can now start to plan for future years knowing the numbers coming through the age groups. Mini Rugby, too, is a great success within Kent.

The lowering of the tackle height seems successfully to have been introduced having been well managed by match officials, coaches and players.

A common yet concerning thread throughout the past season is, regrettably, poor discipline and behaviour, especially as displayed by coaches and spectators. The CB, led by the Discipline Committee is seeking urgently to address this, including by holding a webinar for Kent clubs reminding them of their obligations and how they can work within their clubs to maintain the highest levels of respect for match officials, and remind them that they have the responsibility that all those in the playing arena of their clubs must adhere to the Rules and Regulations of the RFU, whether directly connected with the club or not.

Off the field, the Executive Committee is seeking to broaden its membership, to deliver diversity of thought, new ideas, and experience, both to refresh and invigorate the Committee's discussions and decision making, as well as keeping an eye to the future with regards to succession planning.

The Club Development Committee has made good progress in ensuring clubs meet their safeguarding obligations and to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing. Challenges, however, do remain in the Rugby Safe space and in the training and development of clubs' volunteer administrators.

Executive Committee (Roger Clarke)

The KCRFU Executive Committee met 8 times during the 2023-24, including the annual Strategy Awayday held on 3rd July 2024.

From a financial standpoint, the 2023-24 budget was agreed close to break even, supported by income from the RFU, our sponsors, Festivals and Age-Grade competitions, and investment income. This funded a wide range of on- and off-field Rugby activities, led by a wide group of volunteers and sub-committees, overseen by our ever present and very effective Office and Finance Manager, Tracy Pettingale. Our thanks go particularly to Shepherd Neame Ltd., which has been our loyal principal Sponsors for some 20 years, and to Henderson Rowe, which has supported Girls' Rugby in the County for the past 3 years.

After two seasons without a Chair, the Game Development Committee came under welcome and experienced leadership of Jarrod Lawrence from Dartfordians, who has made a valued addition to our team.

A key part of the Executive Committee's agenda for each meeting over the past 3 years has been in-depth dives into a range of activities organised in the County's name. This gives the Executive the chance to spend time on the topic with the lead County volunteer, giving them the opportunity to outline key achievements, plans, and whether and what support they require from the CB. The topics focused on in 2023-24 were: Safeguarding, Discipline, Club Health and retention of Players, the Women's and Girls' Game, Age Grade Rugby and Competitions.

During the year, the CB underwent two RFU audits (Safeguarding, and Discipline), each of which were successfully concluded, with thanks to Dawn Stanford and Huw Gronow and their teams for co-ordinating these, and to Nigel Fray, our hard-working Honorary Secretary.

Kent is in the vanguard, compared with other CBs, in supporting our clubs and volunteers, having organised this season some outstanding Conferences and Training days. Consultant orthopaedic surgeon, Guy Slater, who is the KCRFU's and Blackheath RFC's doctor, organised a Health Care Professionals CPD day at KIMS Hospital, Maidstone. Taff Gwilliam, our Representative Rugby (DoR), provided an outstanding training day for clubs' senior coaches and DoRs working with coaches from the Welsh U20s squad, London Irish, and the Cornish Pirates. These events were attended by 20 and 30 clubs respectively and were widely praised. We aim to attract far more of our clubs to these events in the future.

Kent continues to be one of the most proactive and leading counties in England in supporting its Representative sides. Our Senior Development Squad tours are a key aspect of this, being integral to building for our participation in the County Championship. In July 2023, the Squad undertook a 2-week, undefeated tour of South Africa, playing matches in Cape Town, Pretoria, and Rustenberg.

Following our triumph in the Division 1 County Championship last year (our first in 97 years), beating Lancashire in the Final at Twickenham, we achieved back-to-back Championships, first by defeating Cornwall at Charlton Park in our final group game, and then Yorkshire by the narrowest of margins in the Final. If we manage to win three County Championships in succession, the RFU will have to give us the Cup!

The Executive thanks Tracy Pettingale for yet another outstanding year of support in organising the County Awards Dinner, where we were joined by RFU President, Rob Briers and his wife, Anne-Marie, and some 160 club representatives.

Nigel Fray has continued to be a pillar of support, handling a raft of Governance issues, the Diversity and Inclusion brief and helping to review the structure of the Executive Committee and our Succession programme (see below).

Ben Ashby, our Hon. Treasurer, has maintained prudent oversight of the CB's investment policy and introduced a new and innovative club financial reporting system linked to changes in RFU Regulation 5.

Jarrod Lawrence has in his first year grasped with both hands the challenges of Game Development, club health, and Competition structure to support player retention.

Special thanks go to Kevin Cope, who has retired from the CB after 5 years as Club Development Chair, and previously, 5 years as Minis Chair. His contribution to Kent Rugby was recognised by both the RFU and KCRFU at the Aylesford Volunteer Awards evening. Kevin has made a very big contribution to Kent Rugby, especially in developing Volunteering, working to ensure the survival and sustainability of small clubs, mental health in the game and recruitment of a diverse range of new young Rugby players. We will miss him greatly and wish him well with his travels and his vegetable growing.

Tony Power has stepped down from this role of managing the County's international ticket allocations. Tony has been a faithful volunteer for the County for many years and we are indebted to him for his long service. Steve Homewood our membership officer has since stepped into this role and is already dealing with the Autumn Internationals and Six Nations.

Thanks, also, to Doug Hursey who carried out lots of 'meet and greets' across our clubs, while as member of the Executive, providing sound commercial knowledge and robust support for our Representative sides as a larger-than-life character.

Finally, thanks to Adam Cottingham, our RFU CB Liaison Manager, who as part of our Executive team, has provided help and guidance during the year; and to Mark Finnis, our RFU Club Developer, who has helped us to keep one or two clubs out of 'intensive care'.

For 2024-25, the Executive Committee has been considering how best to adapt its structure to reflect changes to the game, to refresh itself to broaden and diversify debate and to aid decision-making. It is important, too, that the Committee is able to further progress the Women's & Girls' game, including by leveraging the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup. To this end, the Committee proposes to add the newly created position (as agreed at the 2023 AGM) of Senior Vice-President, and to co-opt the Chair of Women's & Girls' Rugby and Will Disbrey, a member of the RFU's National Youth Council.

Executive Committee 2023-2024

Kent RFU Executive Committee



President
Doug Hursey
president@kent-rugby.org
07969 205166

Chairman of Executive Committee, RFU Council Member and RFU Liaison
Roger Clarke
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chairman@kent-rugby.org
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Hon. Treasurer
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Game Development Chair
Jarrod Lawrence
game-development-chair@kent-rugby.org

Chairman, Club Development Committee
TBC/Vacant
club-development-chair@kent-rugby.org

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Executive Committee

President, Senior Vice President, Youth Council and Women & Girl's Chair are all co/opted for 2024-25 season.



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Diversity & Inclusion: (Nigel Fray)

The CB, working with its member clubs and others, seeks continually to attract both playing and non-playing participants to the game from across the Kent community. We have engaged with members of the National Youth Council, to determine how best to attract young people to the game, both in a playing and administration capacity, and will be conducting a survey of young people early in 2024-25 to obtain feedback on how best to achieve this objective. The Executive Committee also plans to appoint as a member a young individual in an *ex officio* capacity, who will be able better to represent the views of young people engaged in the game.

We have also, through the Club Development Committee, continued to deliver the **Rugby United** project, but this continues to be a struggle, due primarily to the lack of volunteer time within the Kent team and due to club ambitions not aligning with the principal objectives dictating the funding available. We are working with the RFU project manager to pursue a way forward.

RFU Liaison / RFU Councillor's Report (Roger Clarke)

Council Membership. Many thanks to our 55 voting clubs for returning me for a final 3-year term as your representative on the RFU Council. There are a range of changes taking place to make it easier for individuals to do the Council role; we will look carefully at how we conduct the vote for my successor who would take up the role in 2027-28.

This past season as a Council Member and part of the RFU team, I have fulfilled the following roles:

- Chair of the RFU Game Development Sub-Committee
- Member of the Community Game Board
- Trustee of the Rugby Football Foundation
- Member of the RFU Oversight Group for Adult Registration
- Member of the Oversight Group on a new blueprint for match officials

- Member of the Advisory Group for the U 20 County Championship.

Key RFU work programme during the year. The RFU has completed a broad scope of work to support the Community Game:

- Monitoring and assessing the new tackle height law amendments -Production and agreement of a 4-year business plan for the community game to reflect the 8-year Community Game Future plans.
- Finalising the Community Game Future project, to include formats of the game (non- and semi-contact and contact), facilitating and encouraging rugby in Schools, by seeking to establish links with clubs across Men, Women, Boys and Girls, Mini-Midi and Rugby Tots.
- Evaluating and developing the potential for creating 5 or 6 Regional Boards to raise funds for the growth of the game.
- Ensuring that the Community Game receives close to £30m each year for the next 4 years from the RFU to fund growth and sustainability of the game.
- Creating a blueprint for Match Officials to ensure that every type of competitive game in whatever format and location has an available individual of the right standard to officiate at it.
- Developing the first ideas on minimum standards for community clubs as regards facilities and governance; although initially, perhaps, only for clubs from Levels 8 to 3 (i.e. Counties 1 to National 1).
- Consideration, when the RFU has the requisite IT resource, to look at full registration for coaches and match officials.
- Continued auditing either by samples or fully of each CB's Discipline procedures Safeguarding practices, and potentially financial performance within clubs to ensure that Rugby Union is at the forefront of good practice amongst sports.

Internal Council issues. The RFU, through the Council, has also looked at a range of internal issues, including:

- The future structure and operation of the Council, which is currently comprised, with co-opted members, of 66 voting members, and of which 35 only represent the geographical Counties.
- A Working Group, under the Chairmanship of Malcolm Wharton, is working on proposals to restructure aspects of Council, which are due to be finalised by the end of the 2024-25 season. Council members have expressed some dissatisfaction at the way RFU sub-committees work with the Council on decision making and guiding the game. As a result, incoming President, Rob Udwin has been leading the development of proposals, now approved, to change the current Council meeting format, duration and content. This will include physical one-day meetings, virtual formal and informal discussions, more group discussions and a 2-day Council Conference. These will be introduced from the start of 2024-25.

Visits to Clubs 2023-24. In my roles as County Chair and RFU Council Member I visited, at their invitation or informally, the following clubs: Tonbridge Juddians, Cranbrook, Blackheath, Westcombe Park, Canterbury, Tunbridge Wells, Medway. Aylesford Bulls, Charlton Park, Maidstone, Esher and Havant, as well as Twickenham for the County Championship final.

As ever, I am very happy to discuss any of these topics in more detail either by phone or attending Kent clubs by invitation. Doug Hursey (President) and Nigel Fray (Hon. Secretary) have also indicated they are available.

Discipline (Huw Gronow, Andy Gent)

The Adult and Age Grade Discipline Committees report to the Executive Committee but act wholly independently of it in respect of the judgements made. Discipline Committee members are trained and accredited by the RFU and act under delegated authority from the RFU Discipline Department, in accordance with RFU Regulation 19, with the right of appeal through RFU Discipline and not the CB. Their remit is for the community game at levels 5 and below.

The Adult Discipline Committee is chaired by Huw Gronow. Other members of the Committee are Mark Huntley, Paul Woodhouse, and Tim Cross. The Adult CB Discipline Secretary is James Connerton.

Work is under way to add to the Committee to reflect the increasing diversity in the game, and to be more inclusive.

The Chair, and two members at a time of this Committee, form the tribunal-style Panels that hear cases, and the Executive Committee is grateful for the care, impartiality, and diligence with which they exercise their responsibilities. We are particularly grateful to the previous co-Chair, Simon Corcoran (Beccehamians RFC) who stepped down from the Committee this year after 13 years of diligent and dedicated service.

The 2023-24 season began with the KCRFU putting clubs on notice that the sharp increase in Match Official Abuse (MOA) seen since Covid restrictions were lifted, would not be tolerated and if they continued, would result in the most severe sanctions applicable under the RFU Rules and Regulations. This was heeded by most of our 55 member clubs, but a rash of further cases ensued this season, together with a **significant overall increase in both Adult and Age grade cases heard by the Kent RFU Panels, both 'on the papers' and in person.**

The Discipline Committee continued to publish the outcomes of all disciplinary decisions arrived at by the Panels, both as a deterrent to future offending but also to assist clubs and referees by providing them with further transparency.

The RFU enables the CB to also publish names of offenders, as it does for levels 1-4, but again for this season we have decided not to do so, to ensure proportionate mitigation against further action taken against people in their life outside rugby. This has a particular impact in the South-East of England, where there are highly regulated industries, such as financial services, but also in teaching and care professions. However, as noted above, if trends continue and are not reversed, the RFU enables us to reveal identities, which would increase the deterrent.

Many cases which are not of a very serious nature and that can be accompanied by an acceptance of the red card are dealt with 'on the papers' without the need for an in-person hearing but still follow the RFU process. Other cases, involving a likely "mid-range" entry level sanction, repeat offenders and MOA, will normally be heard in-person and as quickly as is practicable.

The Panel sat in-person on 13 occasions during 2023-24, each hearing up to 7-8 cases, reflecting the care and diligence undertaken, but also the increase in case load. The RFU protocol is to hold all hearings by video conference and the Committee will adopt this method of operating more in future.

In terms of data, during 2023-24, the Adult Committee dealt with **157 cases**, comprising **59 red cards and 98 citings** either by the KCRFU or by clubs. This represents a **67 per cent increase on last season** which in itself saw an 80 per cent increase in cases on the previous season. 64 of these have been referred to us from the CBAGS (see below). The offences fell into the following categories:

RFU Rule/Law/Regulation	Description	Total
Law 9.12	Punch or Strike	32
Law 9.13	Dangerous Tackle	17
Law 9.18	Lift opponent/drop and drive	2
Law 9.20	Dangerous Play Ruck/Maul	4
Law 9.25	Charge/obstructing an opponent	1
Law 9.27	Acts against spirit of good sportsmanship	5
Law 9.28	Match Official Abuse	13
Laws 9.27 and 9.12	Acts against spirit of good sportsmanship, and punch/strike	1
Rule 5.12	Conduct prejudicial to interests of the game	38
Rule 5.12/Law 9.12	Physical Abuse	3
Rule 5.12/Law 9.28	Match Official Abuse	25
Reg 19 Appendix 1	Two yellow cards	2
Regulation 19.9.1	Failure to Report Red Card	1
Regulation 19.3	Bad Discipline Record	1
Reg 6/RFU Rule 5.12	Match Abandonment/Failure to control players	1
Regulation 15	Playing out of Age Grade	9
Regulation 6	Match Abandonment	2
Grand Total		157

This is particularly relevant when considering the dwindling numbers participating in the community game and while it is clearly desirable to keep discipline under control as one of the RFU's core values, we must also be mindful of getting players back to playing as soon as possible, without compromise on sanction.

One positive outcome this season was that the anticipated large spike in the number of dangerous tackles leading to red cards, under the new Tackle Height Laws, did not materialise. A presumed combination of good coaching, good player discipline and empathetic refereeing all contributed to this pleasing outcome.

Of more immediate and serious concern, however, is the increasing level of MOA perpetrated by players, coaches and spectators, especially at Age Grade. In total, we considered 38 individual cases of MOA, with attendant cases for clubs for failing to control players and/or spectators and/or coaches. The Discipline Committee will aim to deal with MOA cases, if proven, as severely as possible. The RFU has noted this daunting upward trend in this unacceptable behaviour and introduced mandatory upward aggravation of sanctions from 1st January 2024. This, we sense, is at last beginning to have the desired effect, with 2, 3 or 4 weeks being added to final sanctions depending on severity of offence. The most severe sanction this season we imposed on a player for MOA was a 12-match ban, and for a spectator, a 13-match touchline ban.

Furthermore, discipline infractions are widespread. Of the 55 member clubs, plus 2 universities in Kent, 44 of these had at least one case brought against them this season.

The Discipline Committee seeks to uphold to the highest standards discipline within the game but the current trend of ill-discipline and poor behaviour in Kent Rugby cannot be sustained and will inevitably attract the attention of the RFU.

Therefore, in September, the Chair of the Adult Discipline Committee and CBAGS will hold a webinar for Kent clubs reminding them of their obligations and how they can work within their clubs primarily to (a) maintain the highest levels of respect for match officials and (b) remind them that they have the responsibility that all those in the playing arena of their clubs must adhere to the Rules and Regulations of the RFU, whether directly connected with the club or not.

Age Grade Discipline: The CB Age Grade Discipline Secretary (CBAGS), Andrew Gent, is appointed by the Executive Committee, and is a member of the Discipline Committee, in accordance with

Regulation 19 Appendix 6. His remit is for the U13 to U18 games at club, school, college and Regional Academy level.

The CBAGS chairs Discipline Panels, to hear cases which will include, as necessary, relevant representatives from the clubs and other members of the Discipline Committee. We are pleased to welcome Jayne Ashdown-Denney to the Committee, who brings her experience of dealing with Club Age Grade Disciplinary processes and has provided support to the CBAGS, enhancing resilience and developing experience to facilitate succession planning.

For the last three years, the CBAGS has played an integral role in the development of a national RFU trial to vary the Regulation 19 Appendix 6 sanctioning arrangements to reflect a more modern approach, by seeking to educate, prevent, and invoke restorative sanctions alongside or in combination with match bans. As a result, with effect from the 2024-25 season, this approach will be adopted by all CBs in the country, and the regulations will be amended in the summer to recognise and facilitate this approach.

The 2023-24 season has seen a sustained high level of cases similar to the previous season. We have dealt with 82 cases since the end of last season, including two cases carried over from 2022-23, and of which 48 were investigated by the CBAGS and referred to an Adult Discipline Panel. Of these:

- 10 arose from breaches of Regulation 15,
- 18 were MOA by coaches and spectators; and
- the rest mainly arose from conduct involving coaches and spectators and clubs failing to control coaches, spectators or players.

This was a significant increase (65 per cent from the 29 such cases referred in 2022-23 and coincides with an increase in incidents (3 MOA) arising from coaches of cluster teams in the girls' game, which resulted in 8 clubs facing disciplinary hearings. This is an issue both the CB and RFU are aware of and are tackling.

Of the 32 Age Grade cases (spread across U13s to Colts, of which 10 fell under the latter), only 4 were from schools and all cases were dealt with during the season. These cases resulted in a total ban of 90 matches, 26 of which were suspended for a season or more. The most serious sanction was 11 games (2 of which suspended) for a punch to the head causing serious injury. Most cases involved an additional sanction reflecting either technique training, written apologies or Club Community Service. In one instance an allegation of racial behaviour was subject of mandatory RFU training by the whole team of the offending player.

The headline offences were:

- 5 MOA (2 x 5.12 and 1 x 9.28 plus 2 raised by CBAGS at hearing), this is dramatically reduced from last season.
- 11 Physical abuse by punch or strike
- 8 Conduct prejudicial (5.12 other)
- 7 dangerous tackle offences (4 High Tackle – head clash all by schools)

In summary the number of Age Grade hearings has significantly reduced from last season (37 per cent). However, the significant increase in adult misbehaviour on Sunday mornings, particularly from coaches, is disappointing and worrying and will require the attention of the Disciplinary Committee in the off season and into next season

In line with the publication of adult disciplinary outcomes on the Kent RFU website, Kent remains the only CB to publish this data, albeit anonymised, Age Grade discipline outcomes in an effort to raise awareness of the issues and impact on player and spectator behaviour (<https://www.kent-rugby.org/youth/youth-discipline/>).

The CBAGS, in conjunction with the Discipline Committee and Executive, intends to run a number of events early next season to raise awareness of the Age Grade disciplinary trial, the emerging disciplinary issues at all levels and reinforcing that tackling this rising problem requires a whole club approach.

County Representative Teams (Taff Gwilliam)

Senior Men: Kent, once again, excelled at Senior Men's level, with the squad retaining the Bill Beaumont National County Championship title, defeating Yorkshire 30-31 in a pulsating Final at Twickenham. Having beaten Lancashire in the 2023 Final, Kent, once again, had to overcome perennial favourites, Cornwall to reach this year's Final, doing so by the narrowest of margins at Charlton Park RFC by 34-33. At one stage, Kent had only 12 players on the field.

The opening game of the campaign in Hampshire was also a tight affair with a 30-32 victory.

The character of the squad shone out in all these encounters with a total points difference of just 4 in defending the title. Back-to-Back Championships. A magnificent achievement for Kent Rugby.

The Management team of Head Coach, Tom Stradwick supported by David Marshall, Taff Gwilliam, Peter Johnstone, Charlie Bannigan and Guy Slater all committed to ensuring Kent had the best possible chance of successfully defending the Bill Beaumont Cup. A great effort by both players and staff.

The playing squad included players from all the senior Kent Clubs; Blackheath FC, Tonbridge Juddians RFC, Canterbury RFC, Westcombe Park RFC and Sevenoaks RFC. Our Thanks also go to Charlton Park RFC for their hosting of the Senior Squad.

A significant factor in the make-up of the squad was that the vast majority of players had come through the Kent U20s and had also been on Kent senior overseas development tours to New Zealand, Argentina, and most recently, last season's tour of South Africa. The tours have proved to be key factors in the development of Kent Rugby.

Back-to-back National Championships would not have been possible without the investment from the County in aiding the development of Kent players. We now have an established player (and coaching) pathway in the Kent Senior County Rugby which is the envy of other counties in the RFU.

I am pleased to say that the Senior Management team have all committed for the 2024/2025 campaign.

Under 20s: The County U20 squad remained unbeaten for the second year running, with victories over Beckenham U23 (22-7), Hampshire (17-3), Surrey (71-19), and South-East North Pool winners Essex (52-18).

These victories were, however, undermined by an administrative declaration error which removed Kent from the Jason Leonard National U20 County Championship competition.

The Management Team of Head Coach Taff Gwilliam, Graham Longstaff, Alan Lane, Charlie Spence, Mike Melford, Adrian Moss and Caroline Surtees were delighted with the effort and commitment put in by the whole squad who were led by Captain, Noah Dann of Thanet Wanderers RFC.

Our thanks go to Tunbridge Wells RFC for the hosting our matches and to Charlton Park RFC for providing our training venue.

The squad comprised of players from 12 different clubs: Thanet Wanderers RFC, Maidstone RFC, Sidcup RFC, Tunbridge Wells RFC, Medway RFC, Charlton Park RFC, Old Colfeians RFC, Gravesend RFC, Beckenham RFC, Bromley RFC, Tunbridge Juddians RFC, and Canterbury RFC.

It is pleasing to note that 10 of this season's squad will remain eligible for the 2024-25 campaign.

15 Kent players were selected for the initial London & SE Divisional Under 20 trials. Of those, 11 went forward to the final stage, with 7 players were successful in that final selection.

In recent seasons, several former Kent U20 players, who were not part of professional Academies, have gone on to forge professional Rugby careers. Their success is testament to the strength of the community game within Kent.

Women's Senior Rugby: This season saw the Senior women of Kent return to the top tier of the Gill Burns National County Championship competition.

The Management Team of Head Coach Peter McCallister, Andy Miller, Bee Goodwin, Katie Gent and Bethany Grayson were delighted to be back up into Division One and were keen to ensure they remained at the level.

The opening game saw them drawn away against Buckinghamshire at Aylesbury. A tough game saw Kent lose (45-15). They then had back-to-back home matches at Medway RFC versus Berkshire (won 50-3) and Surrey (lost 5-24).

The Kent Women's squad was drawn from nine different clubs: Thanet Wanderers RFC, Medway RFC, Canterbury RFC, Blackheath FC, Tunbridge Juddians RFC, Aylesford Bulls RFC, Gravesend RFC, Lordswood RFC, and Dartford Valley RFC.

Our thanks go to Medway RFC for hosting both of the Women's home County Championship matches. A thank you also extends to Katie Gent who stands down as Team Manager to focus on both her career outside of rugby and her refereeing development within the game.

Game Development Committee (Jarrod Lawrence, Chair)

Frequency of Meetings and Committee Structure: The committee met on 4 occasions during 2023-24; two meetings were held physically and two were virtual. Where the meetings were virtual Tracy Pettingale provided minutes and where they were physical, these were drafted by the Chair and individual reports attached to the key items discussed and the actions agreed. Many of the committee members felt that the physical meetings added more value.

During the year, the Committee comprised of the following:

- Chair - Jarrod Lawrence (Dartfordians RFC)
- Youth Chair - Alan Erskine (Leigh RFC)
- Mini/Midi Chair - Dawn Waters
- Womens & Girls Chair – Graham Withers (Tunbridge Wells RFC)
- CB Representative Rugby – Taff Gwilliam (Canterbury RFC)
- Coaching – Miles McKinnon & Taff Gwilliam (Canterbury RFC)
- Club Kent and DPP Representative – Neil Wiltshire (Aylesford RFC)
- Special Schools Wooden Spoon Coaching Manager – Darren Reeves (Tonbridge Juddians RFC)
- Referee Representative – David Oliver (Kent Society of RFU Referees)
- Kent Schools Report – David Bowers
- Competitions Chair – John Day
- RFU Representative – Matt Watts (London & SE Training Manager)

I am very grateful to all Committee members for the number of hours they have dedicated during the season to the work of KCRFU on behalf of our clubs and for the support they have provided me in my first season as GDC Chair.

Key issues addressed by the GDC and thinking ahead to 2024-25: The Committee considered a broad range of issues, as follows:

- Continued review of combining teams across Mini/Midi and Youth and clustering in the Girls age groups, as both had led to some challenges from clubs and the management of disciplinary issues.
- Continued work within the Women's & Girls' game to build on previous foundations, as we move towards the Womens 2025 World Cup and the best ways to grow the game.
- Continued monitoring of the Kent leagues across the Met and Rural areas, with WhatsApp groups built out to encourage direct contact between clubs and push for fixture completion.
- Success seen in introducing the change in tackle height regulations which has been well managed by match officials, coaches and players.

- Match Official Abuse has, sadly, increased in 2023-24 with the committee working with the Kent Disciplinary team and the Kent Exec to send out very clear message that this direction of travel is unacceptable.
- Work undertaken to grow the number of volunteers supporting the Youth competitions which has been successful and means the continuation of such fixture structure.
- Continued support of the County's Representative sides, which saw the Men's side defend their County Championship title by beating Yorkshire 31-30 at Twickenham.

Club Development Committee (Kevin Cope)

The Club Development Committee (CDC) met regularly during 2023-24.

The Committee's membership comprises:

- Steve Homewood (Membership).
- Trevor Martingell (Leadership Academy).
- Peter Thompson (Rugby Safe).
- Pamela Kilmister (Volunteer Officer).
- Ali Boyd (Wellbeing Officer).
- Trish Sellers (Rugby United).
- Sophie Warren (Social Media Officer).
- Dawn Stanford (Safeguarding Officer).

We continue to have vacancies in both the Facilities and Marketing & Sponsorship roles. Throughout the season, we have been well supported by Tim Holmes, RFU Club & Volunteer Manager. Mark Finnis, our RFU Club Development Officer, regularly engaged with struggling clubs, helping several improve their playing delivery. Sadly, this was not enough in respect to Erith RFC and despite visiting the club, it was unable to remain viable. A sad loss to grassroots rugby. On behalf of the CB, I thank Mark for his excellent work throughout the past season. He is a valued member of our rugby family.

I am grateful to all CDC members for their work on behalf of clubs in Kent and during my chairmanship. They are all volunteers, something that is occasionally forgotten by our clubs, who give up their time to support Kent Rugby and deserve our appreciation and respect. I reserve a special mention for Tracy Pettingale, who provides exceptional support and informed advice. Sadly, this is my last season as Club Development Chair, a role I feel honoured to have held and one which I have enjoyed doing. I've met a lot of our rugby community during my tenure and witnessed the excellent work our many volunteers do for their respective clubs. The presentation of both the RFU/Honda and KCRFU Volunteer awards recently gave clubs and the CB a chance to thank them, and it was a privilege to be part of those celebrations.

Key issues addressed by the CDC: The Committee considered a broad range of issues, as follows:

- **Membership:** We recruited 14 new members this season, increasing total membership to 298. We introduced a draw for 3 members to attend the CB's Annual Awards Dinner, which will continue next year. Steve Homewood succeeded Tony Power as the CB's International Tickets Coordinator. Tony's years of service in the role leave a hard act to follow.
- **Facilities:** The CB awarded 6 small grants totalling £14,690 (out of a £20,000 budget) to help clubs improve their facilities. With the support of Mark Finnis and Rick Bruin, the CDC reviewed the club audit returns for this season (28 clubs submitted updates), allowing us to identify and prioritise those clubs that may benefit from 'Impact 25 Funding' and support.
- **Marketing & Sponsorship:** Shepherd Neame Ltd kindly renewed its sponsorship of the CB, although at a lower level than in previous seasons. Henderson Rowe, once again, supported our Kent Women's representative teams.
- **Leadership Academy:** We were unable to reinstate a leadership training programme, even in partnership with other CBs. A hurdle to reinstating the Academy is the RFU's decision to end its financial support for such training, so any future courses will have to be met from the CB's own resources.
- **Rugby Safe:** A challenging season; communication from clubs remains sporadic. Two clubs were audited by the RFU as to their compliance with Regulation 9 risk assessments. The CB

awaits the outcome. First Aid training is a concern; no club utilised the voucher scheme for First Aid training. The CB is in negotiation with Mitie to deliver to clubs First Aid training through its staff's volunteer local community scheme. The CB is also establishing a WhatsApp group for Rugby Safe leads, so that clubs can potentially share first aid cover when shortfalls arise. This will also make it easier to inform leads of Headcase training / e-learning opportunities.

- **Safeguarding:** The CB received positive engagement from clubs this season, with 10 having been visited and more scheduled to take place. Safeguarding incidents were few and when they did occur prompted clubs to review and, as necessary, update their codes of conduct. Poor spectator conduct has been the overriding issue the entire season and the CB is pleased that so many clubs share its and the RFU's stance on this, calling out bad behaviour when it arises.
- **Social Media:** The CB's Social Media presence has improved this season. Relevant club news submissions for all our media communications provides a powerful tool to reach out to our Rugby audience and beyond.
- **Volunteering:** The Honda and Kent County Volunteer Awards demonstrate just how valued volunteers are by clubs, with a record number of nominations having been submitted. Those receiving awards were celebrated at one of our two 'Volunteer Award Evenings'. The KCRFU congratulates those who were nominated and thanks every volunteer for their hard work and commitment.
- **Wellbeing:** The project, run in conjunction with Mindset Sports since October 2022 has enabled 5 clubs each to now have trained Mental Health First Aiders, with 13 more clubs working to this end. We are also seeking to develop this programme, possibly in collaboration with LooseHeadz and Bravemind and are planning a half-day conference in October 2024 on Wellbeing run by our partner organisations. We also intend to convene all the participating clubs, volunteers, and partners at Beckenham RFC in October to share ideas and best practice.

Coach and Referee Development (Taff Gwilliam)

Coach Development sessions took place at Aylesford Bulls RFC, with over 35 coaches attending a tutorial on scrummaging delivered by former professional front row specialists. A few local up and coming referees Kent Referee Society referees also attended, to help with their development.

Following on from last season's very successful inaugural Kent Coaching conference, we ran another in July at the Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical Grammar School in Rochester. There are workshops planned next season to continue to develop coaching in Kent.

Another coaching resource was our TV coaching platform, which is available to all coaches of Kent Member clubs. This will once again be available this season.

Women's & Girls' Rugby (Graham Withers & Katie Gent)

Kent Women & Girls Executive Committee: 2023-24 was another hugely positive season for the female game within the County, overseen with professionalism, hard work and zeal, by the Women's & Girls' Executive, consisting of:

Committee Chair, Treasurer & Competitions Manager:	Graham Withers
Senior Women's Clubs:	Katie Gent
Developing & "Inner Warrior" Clubs:	Simon Parsons:
Recruitment & Retention:	Charlotte Simpson
Under 12s Officer:	Eirlys Withers
Under 14s Officer:	Richard Warran
Under 16s Officer:	Jak Lipka
Under 18s Officer:	Amanda Johnston
Kent Representative Girls Rugby:	Mark Cornford, Cerys Harper & Gary Evans
London South-East Centre of Excellence:	Mark Finnis

Special thanks to all those named, and especially those who stepped down at the end of 2023-24. With some officers moving up with their respective age group, we will have three new committee members in 2024-25: Malcolm Oates (Under 14s), Laura Thompson (Kent Girls) and Natasha O'Leary (Women's

Rugby). A new role of Vice-Chair has been created to aid succession planning given Graham Withers's intention to step down at the end of the 2024-25 campaign.

The Committee attended in May its second annual *Girls' Rugby Forum*, hosted by Dartford Valley, which saw the representatives of 23 clubs engage in a vibrant discussion around our 2024-25 plans.

Women's Rugby: The game continues to see robust growth across Kent, with many clubs now boasting a growing women's section and increasing their player numbers. There have been many moments to celebrate across the season across the various leagues in which the Women's teams compete (see details at **Appendix II**).

Consequently, next season we will have 21 clubs within the RFU League Pyramid, not including those clubs who are starting new teams or intending to participate in the Inner Warrior Series. With the Women's World Cup being host by England in August and September 2025, the future of Women's rugby is set to be an exciting one.

Girls' Rugby: The Girls' game continues to see encouraging growth, with 1,542 registered girls playing in Kent in the 2023-24 season. There was a net inflow of 291 players (19 per cent) overall compared with 2022-23; 843 of these were at U12s and above, leaving 699 players spanning U6s to 11s (noting that many of the latter are "signed off" by the county to play up at U12, in line with current RFU guidance).

Regarding Competitions, both the U12s & 14s County events were run via the RFU's Waterfall format, with Deal & Betteshanger, Dartford Valley, Sidcup and Beckenham all acting as hosts (see details at **Appendix II**).

Of significant concern within the Girls' game this season is poor behaviour, which resulted in formal disciplinary investigations and action. Sadly, we seem to be mirroring wider trends within our game, experiencing both Match Official Abuse and unacceptable touchline behaviour (from both club officials and spectators).

This has highlighted a previously unforeseen consequence of the 'clustering' arrangements which have been (and no doubt will continue to be) such an essential tool in the growth of the Girls' game. The ability to bring together ('cluster') smaller squads of girls into one bigger team to provide them with competitive playing opportunities has been a hugely positive aspect of the junior female game. However, with the catalyst of the disciplinary investigations, it is now apparent that without formal cluster protocols in place, there is a lack of transparency as to which clubs are participating and who has responsibility for what. Next season, we will introduce a new regime to not only manage 'Clusters' but to also help the implementation of club-wide development plans to try and produce further growth such that it will enable more stand-alone teams to participate in our county competitions.

This year, the England Rugby Developing Player Program (ERDPP) U16s took its largest cohort to date from Kent: 88 players across three centres, and 53 players in the U18s.

At U16s, this consisted of twelve training sessions and three playing opportunities: the final fixture taking place between Kent and Essex. All the games were tightly fought contests with a score separating them at the final whistle. Next season, the ERDPP will change in name to the FOUNDATION program; its aims will still be the development of core skill and athleticism that aid the players growth and transition into further pathway programs.

The Kent U18 Girls' program is shorter than the ERDPP, with five training sessions and three playing opportunities; the squad acquitted itself extremely well against Essex, Sussex, and Hampshire, showing great endeavour and resolve against very strong opposition.

The program closed with the inaugural Maids of Kent (East vs West Kent) match for the Tracy Pettingale Cup. This will be an annual event, giving the older cohort another opportunity to showcase and celebrate Girls' rugby within the county. There was a great crowd for the game, and we were grateful to have Rosie Galligan and Marlie Packer as Team coaches and, of course, Tracy to present the trophy for the winning team.

The KCRFU also led the new London South-East Centre of Excellence program focusing on the region's most talented 16-, 17- and 18-year-olds, which finished strongly with a training fixture arranged with Worthing College/Harlequins development squad. It was pleasing to see how far the players had come across the program providing a performance that the players deserved after their hard work. This will prove to be a single year project though as the Centre of Excellence is changing for next season wherein 9 regional centres will be part of the new Player Development Group (PDG) program for U18s. The program, run by the RFU, aims to provide a consistent approach across all centres nationwide.

Age Grade Rugby (Alan Erskine)

The 2023-24 season was one of the most weather-affected in living memory. Thankfully, youth competition fixtures were rearranged and for the most part were keenly fought affairs, with some of the final games being table deciders and great rugby on display.

Registered players increased year-on-year, showing good growth in the youth game and we can now start to plan for future years knowing the numbers coming through the age groups.

Having successfully trialled the electronic match card system at the older age groups in 2022-23, we implemented it across all competitions this season. Albeit that it was not a complete success, the main problems experienced were due to the IT system itself. Hopefully, the bugs can be fully ironed out over the summer, as the administration involved in running the competition is vastly reduced by using it.

We have recruited a full committee of competition managers across all the age groups for the coming season (2024-25) which will release me to be able to concentrate on support and governance issues which are ever-growing.

As ever we will have a new approval to process this coming season for clustered teams which will again be digitised on the Kent RFU website.

Discipline remains an issue (see the main discipline report, above) I am sad to see so many issues arising at youth level and especially from the younger age groups. To quote Nigel Owens, "This is not Football" and we do not want the sort of behaviour we have seen this season to become commonplace.

I am grateful to the youth committee and to John Reilly in particular who, due to my personal work commitments undertook the monumental task of organising the Youth Sevens competitions single-handedly. This year was the largest ever in all competitions which shows the strength of Youth Rugby in Kent.

Minis Rugby (Dawn Waters)

The 2023-24 season has been one of the most successful in many years, especially in the support that we have been able to give clubs' Minis sections.

With careful budgeting, we have retained enough funds to give each club a 'Thanks You' pack (containing age-related sized rugby balls, etc.) and vouchers to fund RFU courses. The vouchers will be available in time for the new season and the 'Thank You' packs by early October.

The Kent County Mini Festival, held in March 2024, was hosted by nine clubs, with 3,494 players (about 5000 more than in 2023) from 318 teams and 34 clubs. Although it is great that our Festival grows every season, we still have clubs that do not attend. We are seeking to remedy this and, with help from Mark Finnis, will be reaching out to them early in the season to encourage them to participate

Our 2025 Kent Mini Festival will be on 23rd March. Host clubs will be selected by October. This should give them sufficient time to ensure that players have the best experience we can give. We will also be introducing our 'TREDS' Medal, where each coach or manager selects a player in another team (other than their own) who has shown the core values of rugby whilst taking part in the Festival. The player receiving the medal will be invited to send us a picture of themselves with it so that we can post them on our socials or website providing we ensure all safeguarding and data protection requirements are adhered to.

Thanks, as always go to Tracy Pettingale, Elliot Pettingale, our Game Development Committee and its Chairperson Jarrod Lawrence, the Executive Committee and all our 2024 hosts for all their continued support.

Competitions (John Day)

The season produced mixed fortunes for all our clubs in their respective competitions. There has been a continued movement of our smaller clubs and 2nd and 3rd XV's of the bigger clubs from the local Kent Metropolitan and Rural Leagues into the RFU league structure of Counties 1-5 (Kent). However, the secretaries for each league remain members of the KCRFU Adult Competitions Sub-Committee. It is sad to see in recent seasons that some of our clubs no longer exist, mainly due to no longer being able to maintain a regular adult playing base. This has been a trend post-Covid, even affecting our larger clubs, which have had to field fewer teams than in previous seasons. Thankfully, the position seems now to have stabilised with Kent appearing to be in a far healthier position compared with the National picture. Indeed, the position has improved: Kent has 59 clubs and, as a result, the ROC introducing next season a new league (Counties 5 (Kent)) into the RFU English Clubs Championship structure.

There is evidence of population movement since the Covid pandemic away from the Greater London area. This has resulted in players having moved to mid- and east-Kent, driven by the ability to work from home and provides a possible reason why Kent Metropolitan leagues reported fewer fulfilled fixtures (due to lack of players) compared with Kent Rural leagues, which reported a healthy 82 per cent of matches completed. We thank all committee members for their dedication and commitment this season and especially for their efforts in assisting clubs to play as many matches as possible. 'Game On', although not universally popular with our teams and referees, has been used several times throughout the season.

The County Finals Day on Sunday 28th April was a great and well-attended success, with Canterbury RFC being excellent hosts. Whilst County cup competitions are not very popular around the country, Kent very much bucks the trend, with many of our clubs participating in each of the competitions. Special mention and congratulations to Ash RFC on the club's first ever appearance at the Finals Day, competing for the Salver and although losing, played with great spirit.

The winners and runners-up of all league and cup competitions are at **Appendix II**

Kent Society of RFU Referees (David Oliver)

The introduction on 1st July 2023 of the Domestic Law Variation (DLV) on tackle height dominated our pre-season preparations, with an intense focus on training for referees (and players and coaches). Anecdotal evidence suggests the law change was introduced effectively with no significant issues. From a refereeing point of view, there has been a reduction in head high tackling and a faster game with more offloads and fewer upper body tackles.

The number of games we appointed to saw growth against the last two seasons with over 1,100 games covered, a rise of 200 games. Whilst some 300 games below pre-Covid levels it was a welcome progression. RFU League fixtures were consistently met whilst Rural and Metropolitan Leagues suffered from cancellations and late cry offs. There was an increase in Women's club sides although this was offset by a few sides who struggled to fulfil fixtures. There was a decrease in games with University's fixtures - fewer sides and more cancellations. The early rounds of the Papa Johns Cup saw a high number of cancellations.

Against this background, we used 81 referees (against 77 in 2022-23) representing promising growth and reversal of the picture for the last two seasons. Our core group of referees (15 or more games a season) again rose to 33 from 28 last season. In terms of games refereed the top performers were Katie Gent and Alan Whittingham (38 each) and Oscar Tanfield (35).

The Society's *Introduction to Refereeing Course* has continued to be very successful in terms of numbers attending and subsequent numbers joining the Society, attracting people across clubs, county wide and of varied ages and genders.

The Society was asked by the RFU to supply officials for the community rugby – the Twickenham Takeover Day. A team of 11 Kent referees and officials attended and successfully managed the 5 games. All teams and RFU were fulsome in praise for their efforts.

December saw the introduction of a new, revamped Society website (www.kentrefs.co.uk). The new more modern looking and versatile site offers better analytics and photo content. It also has improved links to other social media platforms.

As per last season, discipline and particularly Match Official Abuse has continued to be an issue throughout the season. All adult and age grade discipline cases are now reported on the County web site. The picture these cases represent emphasises the problem the game faces regarding behaviour on and off the pitch. The Society welcomes the support of the County and the discipline panels in dealing with this issue.

Season Awards

Cliff Booth Award (Best Newcomer) – Mark Shaw

John Carley Award (Most Improved) – Richie McIver-Hall

President's Award – The Appointments Team, Alan Crane, David Oliver and Kevin Willis

Long Service – Raj Khanna, Martin Pickering and Nick Wickham

Robert Horner Award – David Oliver

The Whistler Trophy for the most hospitable club in Kent, as judged by referees, was awarded to Whitstable RFC.

Developing Player Pathway (Neil Wiltshire)

The RFU announced the end of the DPP at the end of 2023-24. It will continue as a national Academy talent-based pathway funded by the Professional rather than by the Community game.

Recruitment and coaching for the pathway will be Saracens-led. Players at U14 level will no longer be included and those at U15s will be reduced in Kent to around 40 individuals from the current 200+ in DPP/PDG. The U16s will run as before but as a Saracens U16 group, with reduced numbers U17s/U18s will continue as Saracens squads. County Representative rugby will continue at U17 and U18 and will need to provide a worthwhile experience for the players to keep them involved in the game during the difficult 16 -18 period.

The Regional Player Pathway Group will cease to exist as there will be no Community game input into the Pathway going forward. There is a possibility, however, that communication hubs will be set up in the feeder counties to replace the Pathway groups.

Due to the closing of the three RFU-run Academies, player catchment boundaries have changed: Saracens have been given N Middlesex but have lost the Kent Met area to Harlequins. The players at clubs in the Kent Metropolitan area who are in Saracens squads and/or the current PDG will be offered the choice of staying with Saracens or transferring to 'Quins. In future, all players from the clubs and schools in Kent Met will attend Harlequins. Saracens are planning some stakeholder meetings in Kent, with dates and venues to be confirmed.

On the pitch, the U18 group had a reasonable season, losing one game out of their 3 LSE selection games. Four players, the first three of whom had progressed from the County U17s were selected to start for LSE Division: Keiran Finlay (O Alleyrians/Hayes); Isaacs Ridge (TJs /Skinners); William Stener (Gravesend /Gravesend GS); and Tom Cahill (Westcombe Park/Duke of Yorks). The U17s ran two squads, winning 5 of 6 games played.

Election of Officers & Committee for Season 2024-25

Executive Committee Membership - Nominations

President
Hon. Secretary
Hon. Treasurer

Doug Hursey (subject to approval of proposed Rule change)
Nigel Fray
Ben Ashby

Committee Leads that were in place in 2023-24

R J H Clarke	Chair of KCRFU and RFU Council Member
N G Fray	Hon. Secretary & Director of Governance
B Ashby	Hon. Treasurer
J Lawrence	Chair, Game Development Committee
K Cope	Chair, Club Development Committee
H Gronow / S Corcoran	Chair, Discipline Committee
J Connerton	Secretary, Discipline Committee
A Gent	Chair, Youth Discipline Committee
T Martingell	Leadership Academy
J Day	Chair, Adult Competitions Sub-Committee
A J Gwilliam	Director of Representative Rugby
A J Gwilliam	Coaching & Refereeing Development
S K Homewood	Hon. Membership Secretary
D Stanford	Safeguarding Officer
G Withers	Chair, Women's & Girls' Rugby
A Erskine	Chair, Youth Rugby
D Waters	Chair, Mini Rugby
P Kilmister	Volunteering Development & Recruitment
A T H Power	International Ticket Secretary
A Boyd	Player & Volunteer Well-being Officer
N Wiltshire	Chair, Club Kent (Developing Player Programme)
-	Marketing & Sponsorship
-	Education
P Thompson	Rugby Safe
S Warren	Social Media Manager
B Ashby	Cluster lead: North Kent
T Martingell	Cluster lead: Metropolitan Kent
P Macaulay	Cluster lead: East Kent
-	Cluster lead: Mid-Kent
D Clare	Cluster lead: West Kent

RFU / Honda Volunteer Awards for 2023-24

Finalists who have been selected to go forward to the overall finalist selection, to be held at The Allianz Stadium, Twickenham.

Connecting The Community

Habib Annous – Blackheath RFC

Game for All Category

Stacey Sewell – Gravesend RFC

Students RFU

Ella Jenkins – Canterbury Christchurch University

Kent County RFU Volunteer Awards

Kent County RFU President's Award

Presented to a club volunteer whose efforts, more often than not, are unsung, and who makes an all-round significant contribution to the success of a club, either on the pitch and/or off of it.

Winner **Noel Fitzgerald, *Blackheath RFC***
Runner-Up **Mike and Janet Grasby, *Tonbridge Juddians RFC***

Kent County RFU Mini Rugby Volunteer Award

Presented to a volunteer who has been nominated by their club as making a significant contribution to the mini section of their club.

Winner **Mark Dixon, *Gravesendians RFC***
Runner-Up **James Bassett-Cross, *Bromley RFC***
Runner-Up **Stacey Sewell, *Gravesend RFC***

Kent County RFU Junior Rugby Volunteer Award

Presented to a volunteer who has been nominated by their club as making a significant contribution to the junior section of their club.

Winner **Des Amanono, *Cranbrook RFC***
Runner-Up **Julian Davies, *Edenbridge RFC***

Kent County RFU Senior Rugby Volunteer Award

Presented to a volunteer who has been nominated by their club as making a significant contribution to the male or female senior sections of the club.

Winner **Iain Dinning, *Blackheath RFC***
Runner-Up **Russell George, *Bromley RFC***

Kent County RFU Young Persons Volunteer Award (14–24-year-olds)

This award will go to a young person (aged 14-24). This person continues to drive the core values of Rugby within their community and among their peers, supporting their club or county on or off the pitch.

Winner **Jake Beesley, *Canterbury RFC***
Runner-Up **Lola Sanderson, *Canterbury RFC***

Runner-Up **Charlie Gannaway, *Gravesend RFC***

Kent County RFU Spirit of Rugby Award

This award recognises volunteer non-players who make significant contributions to their club or wider community; be it facilitating training opportunities, back-office administration or taking Rugby's core values into external organisations. This volunteer consistently upholds and actively promotes club/county rugby.

Winner **Gavin Bright, AlexCave, Richard Annable, *Old Gravesendians RFC***

Runner-Up **Graham Cox, *Blackheath RFC***

Kent County RFU Match Official Award

This award is specific to those who make the game a reality, whether it's running the line on a Sunday morning for a junior game or picking up a pair of boots and whistle for a Saturday senior game. This Match Official could be a club referee or county society member.

Winner **Jamie Bond, *Medway RFC***

Runner-Up **Elly Cole *KSRFUR***

Runner-Up **Richard Collins, *Canterbury RFC***

Kent County RFU Social Inclusion Award

An award that seeks specifically to recognise those who bring rugby into the heart of our local communities, improving mental and physical health, encouraging equality and diversity, reaching out to those in hard-to-reach or disadvantaged environments, and growing the inclusiveness of our game. This award targets individuals within Kent rugby who make a positive and visible difference at your club and within the local community. Examples may include establishing new partnerships with non-rugby schools, using club resources to support local organisations, engaging with local supportive projects, etc.

Winner **Habib Annous, *Blackheath RFC***

(Runner-Up **Alice Hayward, *Canterbury RFC***

Cup and League Competition Winners 2023-24

Shepherd Neame Kent Cup, Kent Shield, Kent Plate, Kent Vase, Kent Salver

Kent Cup – Not contested.

Kent Shield

Winner – Bromley 2nd XV (32)

Runner-up – Dover 2nd XV (29)

Kent Plate

Winner – Thanet Wanderers 2nd XV (27) **Runner-up** – Beccehamians 2nd XV (26)

Kent Vase

Winner – Whitstable (25)

Runner-up – Brockleians (14)

Kent Salver

Winner – Cliffe Crusaders (37)

Runner up – Ash (7)

Spitfire Gold Veterans' Competition

Kent Veterans' Cup

Winners – Lordswood (41)

Runner-up – Beckenham (21)

Kent Veterans' Bowl

Winners – Dover (15)

Runner-up – Sevenoaks (5)

Kent Veterans' Shield

Winners – Thanet Wanderers (33)

Runner-up – Tunbridge Wells (7)

Women's RFU Leagues

Championship One South: This is a highly competitive standard of rugby and in finishing 8th of 10, thereby securing their place at this level again for 2024-25, Beckenham remains the county's highest ranked club.

Championship South-East 2: It was a tough season for our two clubs here but well done to Blackheath who battled back from some early season turmoil to maintain their status in finishing 8th of 10. Sadly, one place below them were Medway who will continue the re-build started mid-season one step down next season.

NC 1 South-East (South): A terrific season for Canterbury saw them finish runner-up behind champions Guildford. Dartford Valley came 6th and Tonbridge Juddians 8th, but Aylesford Bulls were relegated having come bottom of 10. Not only will the three Kent clubs retaining their status here be joined by Medway, but Jersey was promoted to maintain the potential for mini-tours 12 despite Guernsey's relegation.

NC 2 South-East (East): Thurrock IIs dominated this league with a 100% record, but this should not mask the sterling efforts of Thanet Wanderers. They fully justified their request to skip Division 3 in their first season out of Inner Warrior rugby by coming second of seven. Lordswood, Gravesend and Ashford filled positions 5 to 7 but all three will remain part of what looks a potentially exciting all-Kent NC 2 SE (East) league next season (see below).

NC 2 South-East (South): Beccehamians were very creditable runners-up to the aforementioned Jersey in a competitive 8-team league. They will now move "sideways" to NC 2 South-East (East) along with bottom team Beckenham II and join demoted Aylesford and the 4 Kent sides already there.

NC 3 South-East (East): Bexley & Dartfordians finished 5th and 6th and will remain here next season.

NC 3 South-East (South): Having followed Thanet out of Inner Warrior rugby, both Tunbridge Wells and Sheppey can be pleased with their respective campaigns in finishing 2nd and 3rd to champions Uckfield. Next season, they will again be joined in this division by Maidstone, New Ash Green and Folkestone plus Edenbridge, Sevenoaks and Eastbourne, as the Inner Warrior Series again does its job in nurturing fledgling sides.

Men's RFU Leagues

National 1:	Blackheath (8 th position)
National 2 East:	Tonbridge Juddians (5 th), Canterbury 7 th , Westcombe Park (9 th), and Sevenoaks 11 th

London & South-East Regional Leagues

Regional 1 South-East Central:	Tunbridge Wells (4 th)
Regional 2 South-East – Winner Regional 2 South-East	Old Alleynians Medway (3 rd), Sidcup (5 th), Beckenham (6 th), Old Colfeians (9 th), and Gravesend (10 th).
Counties 1 Kent – Winner: Counties 1 Kent – Runner-up:	Canterbury 'Pilgrims' (2 nd XV) Dartfordians
Counties 2 Kent – Winners: Counties 2 Kent – Runner-up:	Sevenoaks 2 nd XV Park House
Counties 3 Kent – Winner: Counties 3 Kent – Runner-up:	Old Elthamians Old Alleynians 2 nd XV
Counties 4 Kent – Winner: Counties 4 Kent – Runner-up:	Beckenham 2 nd XV Brockleians
Counties 5 Kent – Winner: Counties 5 Kent – Runners-up:	Canterbury 3 rd XV Bromley 2 nd XV

Shepherd Neame Kent Leagues

Kent Rural A – Winner: Kent Rural A – Runner-up:	Rye Dover 2 nd XV
Kent Rural B – Winner: Kent Rural B – Runner-up:	Tunbridge Wells 3 rd XV Edenbridge
Kent Rural C – Winner: Kent Rural C – Runner-up:	Gravesend 3 rd XV Sheppey 2 nd XV

Shepherd Neame Metropolitan Leagues

Kent Metropolitan A League – Winner: Kent Metropolitan A League – Runner-up:	Old Alleynians 3 rd XV Westcombe Park 3 rd XV
Kent Metropolitan B League – Winner: Kent Metropolitan B League – Runner-Up:	Blackheath 'Bandits' Old Alleynians 4 th XV

'Papa Johns' Men's Community Cup

Regrettably, for a variety of reasons, very few of our clubs shown any interest in these competitions. However, we congratulate the following:

Men's Counties 1 South Shield Final

Runner-up: Gravesend (8) lost to Newbury Blues (25)

Men's Regional 2 South-East Shield Final

Runner-up: Ashford (38) lost to Midsomer Norton (39)

Men's Counties 3 (and below) Final

Winners: Old Elthamians (45) beat Wigan (22)

Girls' Rugby

At Under 12s, Tonbridge Juddians secured the Cup, Dartfordians the Plate, Dartford Valley the Bowl competition and Tunbridge Wells won the Vase. TJs made it a double by winning the end of season Kent Sevens. The Under 14s Champions were the Tonbridge Juddians/Cranbrook "cluster", Dartfordians collected the Plate, Beccs Valley (a Beccehamians and Dartford Valley cluster squad) the Bowl & Tunbridge Wells the Vase. Sevenoaks triumphed in the Sevens.

The U16s and 18s saw Kent Leagues run from September to March. It was hugely positive to see ten teams/clusters competing at U16 and seven squads at Under 18s. Beccs Valley went undefeated in becoming the Under 16s League Champions, whilst the Aylesford/Sevenoaks cluster did the same at U18s.

Both teams also went on to win the Kent Cup at their age groups, during another highly successful Kent Finals Day, this time held at Medway. At Under 16s BASS (a Beckenham, Old Alleynians & Sidcup cluster) won the Plate with Medway claiming the Bowl, whilst at Under 18s Medway earned the Plate and Beccs Valley the Bowl. The County Sevens brought the curtain down on the season when they were held at Beccehamians on the May Day Bank Holiday and whilst Sevenoaks beat Beccs Valley in the U16s Final to thwart the latter's 'treble' bid; no one could stop Aylesford/Sevenoaks from completing this feat as they also became the County's U18s Sevens champions.

Annex A

Kent County Rugby Football Union Limited

Report of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting held at Gillingham Anchorians RFC on 19th July 2023

The Honorary Secretary of the Kent County RFU, Nigel Fray, opened the meeting and welcomed those 10 members present, including County Officers, Life Vice-Presidents, members of the KCRFU's committees, and representatives of clubs.

The following Clubs were represented at the meeting:

Askeans	Canterbury	
Aylesford/KCRFU	Gillingham Anchorians/KCRFU	
Bexley/KCRFU	Maidstone	
Charlton Park / KCRFU	Vigo / KSRFUR	
Blackheath		

Also present was Mark Finnis, (RFU Club Developer).

The Hon. Secretary noted that apologies for absence had been received from 17 members. He noted, too, that the number present was not quorate. The Rules (section 7.4) of the KCRFU state that, for General (including Annual General) Meetings the quorum shall be 20 members. Even with the further five members for which Steve Homewood (Askeans), the KCRFU's Membership Secretary, represented their proxy votes, the number present still fell short of a quorum.

With the agreement of those present, the meeting continued, not least because there was no guarantee that suspending the meeting and convening it at a later date would ensure a greater attendance.

In Memorium

He read a list of people associated with Kent County RFU and its member clubs who had passed away during the past year:

- a. Mike Newsom (Blackheath FC and Past President, KCRFU)
- b. Mark Humphrys (Gillingham Anchorians RFC and former teacher at The Howard School, Rainham and Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School, Rochester)
- c. Neil Armstrong (Thanet Wanderers, E Kent Representative to General Committee and Chair of Selectors, Kent Senior XV)
- d. Clive Putner (Beccehamian RFC and Local Metropolitan Competitions Secretary)

A minute's silence was held in their memory.

Minutes of the last AGM held on 20th Sept 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20th September 2022 were confirmed as a true record, with no matters arising. The minutes were adopted by consensus and without comment. (*Proposer – Steve Homewood (Askeans RFC) / Seconded – Kevin Cope (Bexley RFC)*)

Minutes of the last AFGM held on 1st February 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on the 1st February 2023 were confirmed as a true record, with no matters arising. The minutes were adopted by consensus and without comment. (*Proposer – Kevin Cope (Bexley RFC) / Seconded – Steve Homewood (Askeans RFC)*)

Kent County RFU Annual Report 2022-23

The Hon. Secretary highlighted some of the key points from the 2022-23 Annual Report, illustrating the extensive range of activities that the Executive and its Committees, all of whom (as with our clubs' officials) are volunteers, have carried out to support rugby in Kent:

- The fantastic performance of our Representative teams, led by Taff Gwilliam and his staff, especially the Senior Men's XV who are now County Champions – the first time Kent has won this since 1927.
- The work of our Club, Game Development, Competition, Youth, Minis, and W&Gs Committees, the latter of which under Graham Withers, now has a robust and committed Committee structure in place.
- Our work to sustain clubs in difficulty (sadly, not always successful), including through the incentive scheme with Shepherd Neame to ensure that matches are completed. Also, Rugby United.
- Working to identify clubs' key priorities, especially recruitment & retention and coaching development, where we will be continuing in 2023-24 to target funding and resource to deliver this.
- Evolution of the League structure, to try to ensure that clubs at every level have meaningful fixtures that motivate players.
- Finally, and on a more serious note, the Executive Committee's continuing concerns regarding discipline. This must improve (especially MOA). He expressed his thanks, on behalf of the executive to Huw Gronow, Simon Corcoran and Andy Gent for the enormous amount of work they and the Panel members do to ensure that the CB fulfils its obligations that are delegated to it by the RFU. It is an incredibly difficult and time-consuming role. He also paid attribute too Tracy Pettingale, who, as well as fulfilling her role managing the CB and Referees' Society, this past season had also carried out the role of Discipline Secretary. He noted that the CB has now appointed a Discipline Secretary, James Connerton, who is already in post and is engaged in a handover with Tracy.

Address of Kent County RFU President, Doug Hursey

Doug Hursey said that, during his second year as Kent President, he had visited 18 clubs. Together with Roger Clarke and Nigel Fray, the Executive Committee had sought to visit as many clubs as possible to listen to each club's perspective on what has been a season of great flux. The tackle height edict from the RFU proved divisive at all levels, but with a measured response in listening to all the feedback from clubs and then making our voice heard at the RFU Council, he believed that the Game has reached a sensible resolution for the change.

The County representative teams' performances, for both men and women, was of the highest order. The Ladies' team produced performances that reflected the organisation and structure put in place by Taff Gwilliam last year. After finishing second to Hampshire this year, he looked forward to them gaining promotion back to the top level of next season.

The Men's Senior and U20 teams performed at the highest level and but for what the county saw as an unwarranted points deduction, the U20s would have made the County Final; along with the Men's team, neither side lost a game in the County Championship season.

The Senior Men' Final at Twickenham was a great occasion and one that, for much of the first half, Lancashire dominated, utilising their vast experience in the competition (having won the County Championship on no less than 25 occasions). However, Kent showed great spirit, determination, and tactical nous to change their game plan, deservedly winning the County Championship for the first time in almost 100 years. It was a great honour to represent the County in the royal box, made even more enjoyable by the nature of the victory and the clear disappointment of Bill Beaumont, who sat next to me, as his beloved Lancashire saw the game slip away from them. He noted, too, that the County Development Squad is currently on tour in South Africa, having won the first two (of three) of its matches. The final game was being played that evening.

The arrival of the new league structure, with lower XVs joining, seemed divisive when it was first proposed at this time last year. However, the leagues quickly settled into competitive matches, with none of the anticipated walkover scores; and from his conversations with clubs, they seemed happy with the way the system had worked. This will be expanded next year with more lower teams entering the leagues and Kent now having 5 divisions.

He congratulated all the County's teams that won promotion (Blackheath, Westcombe Park, Old Alleynians, Dover, Canterbury 2nd XV, Medway 2nd XV, Dartford Valley, Tonbridge Juddians 2nd XV, and Sittingbourne) and hoped that all the CB's member clubs flourish wishing them all good luck for the new season.

Adoption of KCRFU Annual Report for 2022-23

The Annual Report was adopted by consensus and without comment. (*Proposer – Sylvia Taylor (Aylesford RFC) / Seconded – Giles Hilton, Canterbury RFC*)

Questions to The Executive Committee

Giles Hilton (Canterbury RFC) welcomed the RFU's decision to open the English Clubs Championship leagues below Level 7 to senior clubs' lower XVs. This had been a far-sighted and welcome approach, given the comments he has received and the envy that has been expressed by clubs outside of Kent that did not vote for the change. **Andy Pritchard** (Gillingham Anchorians RFC) noted that his club had, perhaps, been one of the proposal's strongest nay-sayers, but was happy to concede that introducing the lower XVs into the ECC has, albeit on the evidence of one season only, been a success.

The **Hon. Secretary** replied, noting that although Kent approved the change, due to the number of votes against not meeting the RFU's voting criteria, he felt that the introduction into the leagues of the lower XVs had passed off reasonably smoothly. The CB had taken a great deal of care to ensure that lower XVs were placed in the most appropriate leagues and by-and-large, the CB had got this right, with few if any extremely uncompetitive matches having taken place and, thankfully, with no player safety / welfare issues having arisen (which many lower-level clubs had feared). Any slight misallocation seems to have 'naturally' ironed out themselves or would likely do so over the next season or two.

Rory O'Sullivan (Blackheath FC) reported that Blackheath FC has been successful in its application to the Community Ownership Fund for a grant to assist in the purchase of the freehold of the club's ground at Well Hall. This represents a tremendous vote of support for Blackheath's ambition to own its own ground for the first time in its history.

Reinstatement of Financial General Meeting (FGM) into the Annual General Meeting

The **Hon. Secretary** explained that the annual FGMs have for recent years been held separately to the AGM. For governance purposes and to ensure better attendance and thus a greater opportunity for questions from members to be put to the Executive, it would be desirable and administratively tidier (incl. from a governance perspective) to include the annual financial report and publication of the KCRFU's annual accounts within the AGM.

The KCRFU's financial year is end-June, and the Executive is comfortable that the audited accounts can be produced in time for the financial reports to be included in the AGM. Should there be any delay, then the KCRFU's Rules allow for its AGM to take place as late as September, as was the case during Covid.

The proposal was carried by consensus. (*Proposer – KCRFU Executive Committee / Seconded – Giles Hilton (Canterbury RFC)*)

Honours

The **Hon. Secretary** recalled the Honours Review, the recommendations from which were adopted at the 2022 AGM. He explained that, should any individual member and/or member club wish to propose anyone for an award, nominations should be submitted to him, with a citation, explaining and evidencing why that person should be honoured, noting their contribution both to the County and their Club. This

will be submitted to the Executive Committee for consideration. Subject to the published criteria being met, the nomination will be submitted to the membership for approval at the 2024 AGM.

For 2022-23, the Executive Committee wished to propose that **Colin Smart** (Tunbridge Wells RFC, Newport RFC and 17 caps for England) be made a Life Vice-President of the Kent County RFU. The proposal was carried by consensus. (*Proposer – KCRFU Executive Committee / Seconded – Giles Hillton (Canterbury RFC)*).

As regards the President's Award, **Doug Hursey** announced that this would be presented to **Ian Lunn** (Askeans RFC). Ian has been "the rock" upon which the club's survival for the past over 20 years has been founded. Quite simply, without Ian, there would no longer be an Askeans RFC. Ian's award was accepted on his behalf by Steve Homewood; Ian could not attend the AGM, because he was at the club assisting with training.

Election of officers of the County

President – Doug Hursey (*Proposer – Executive Committee; Seconded – Giles Hillton (Canterbury RFC)*). Elected by consensus.

Hon. Secretary – Nigel Fray. (*Proposer – Kevin Cope (Bexley RFC); Seconded – Sylvia Taylor (Aylesford RFC)*). Elected by consensus.

Hon. Treasurer – Ben (*Proposer – Kevin Cope (Bexley RFC); Seconded – Sylvia Taylor (Aylesford RFC)*). Elected by consensus.

Election of Executive Committee for season 2023-24

Roger Clarke, Doug Hursey, Ben Ashby, Nigel Fray Kevin Cope, Jarrod Lawrence. (*Proposer – Steve Homewood (Askeans RC), Seconded – David Oliver (Vigo RFC)*). Elected by consensus.

The Hon. Secretary noted that the Chair of the Executive Committee is elected by its members at the beginning of each season.

Appointment of Auditors

The **Hon. Secretary** noted that Crane & Partners were elected as the CB's auditors for 2022-23. However, the Executive Committee has decided that we move to take advantage of the small company exemption and use existing accountants. This will save the County £2,000 per year.

This was noted without comment.

AOB

The **Hon. Secretary** reminded those present that clubs' views are invited by 31 July 2023 on the result of the RFU Club Key Priorities 2023-24 survey, details of which have been circulated, including on the CB's website.

Mark Finnis (RFU) noted that the RFU, to support players, coaches, referees, volunteers and CBs with tackle height changes ahead of the 2023/24 season, will be holding a series of Community Games outreach events (virtual and face-to-face) during July and August.

There being no other business, the meeting finished at 8.16pm.