Kent County RFU Ltd. Annual Report 2024-25

Summary

The highlight of the season was undoubtedly the Kent Senior Men's squad's victory for the third year in succession in the Final of the Division 1 Bill Beaumont County Championship, beating Yorkshire by 39 points to 32: an outstanding achievement. Our Senior Women, too, had a further improvement in performance in the Gill Burns Division 1 County Championship.

The CB has completely reorganised the structure of coaching and managing County representative teams and appointed Taff Gwilliam, as part of his role as Director of Representative Rugby, to take charge of this and the CB's relationship with Saracens' and Harlequins' Academies.

With over 1,600 Youth and Minis girl players and 1,100 women signed up in GMS, Kent is one of the largest counties in England supporting Women's and Girls' Rugby. Graham Withers played a key role as Chair in establishing the Women's and Girls' Committee and worked with us on the Executive until Christmas, shadowing Amanda Johnstone before she took over the position.

The CB's financial position remains healthy, not least to the very welcome and increased sponsorship from Shepherd Neame and Henderson Rowe. With regard to our member clubs, we have in place a comprehensive system to monitor their financial health, with full club compliance in most cases.

We organised conferences, providing 'Continuing Professional Development' opportunities for Health Care Professionals, Club and County coaches.

We embarked on a joint initiative with the KSRFUR on a development programme for club referees.

A Review of the CB's governance structure is underway to ensure that they are fit for purpose. The Review Group is expected to produce recommendations by the end of 2025.

We established the Kent Youth Council, showcasing the KCRFU as a national trailblazer in youth engagement and representation. We also provided mini rugby kits to all clubs with Age Grade sections funded by Festival entry fees.

The CB hosted, in partnership with the charity 'Bravemind', two workshops to train club volunteers in Mental Health Awareness; we have now trained over 20 clubs in mental health support.

The CB has provided substantial financial support through our Injured Players' Fund to a self-employed player who was badly injured and has been unable to work for several months.

The CB reinstated its 'Small Grants Programme', making available a budget of £11,000 to support successful applicant clubs to improve their clubhouse changing rooms and social spaces. We also set aside £10,000 specifically for Age Grade-related facilities applications, but with no applications forthcoming this was reallocated to Age Grade kit funding, with clubs receiving a total of £7,359 in grants.

In what has been a challenging year for the RFU, with the fall-out from the bonuses awarded to the RFU's CEO and Board members, though the 'Long-Term Incentive Plan', and the continuing review of the RFU's governance (the 'Wharton Review'), we supported and advised clubs with positioning and proxy voting arrangements for the RFU's SGM and AGM.

Executive Committee (Roger Clarke)

The KCRFU Executive Committee met on 5 occasions during 2025-26, including its annual Strategy Day meeting in July.

The season saw significant developments and achievements. The Executive Committee welcomed new members, including the Women's and Girls' Chair, Graham Withers and his successor, Amanda Johnstone; the National Youth Council Chair, Will Disbrey, and, subject to his election at the 2025 AGM, our incoming President, Alan Thompson as Senior Life Vice-President.

On the field, our representative rugby teams had a successful – even spectacular – season, with the Senior Men winning the Bill Beaumont Division 1 County Championship for the third consecutive year. This being only the second time this has been achieved in the history of the Competition following Lancashire. Our Senior Women had a further improvement in performance in the Gill Burns Division 1 County Championship and only a late 3-point loss vs Buckinghamshire prevented them from also competing in an Allianz Twickenham final.

Financial Performance The KCRFU's financial health remained strong, with additional revenue from investments and various income sources such as entry charges at County Festivals and Leagues, the fees for discipline panel hearings, annual subscriptions, and International Ticket administration charges. We are especially grateful to our sponsors: Shepherd Neame and Henderson Rowe, as well as support from Schroders. This income supported initiatives like providing equipment for Mini sections, funding the Injured Players fund, and developing coaches and young match officials.

Volunteer Contributions Approximately 80 volunteers supported the County's committee structure. Special recognition goes to Tracy Pettingale for her invaluable support as Administration Manager and Assistant Finance Administrator. Pam Kilmister organised two Volunteer Awards evenings at Ashford and Blackheath to honour County volunteers in the Honda Awards and the KCRFU equivalents.

Game and Club Development The Game and Club Development Committees were pivotal in the County's activities. Jarrod Lawrence chaired the Game Development Committee, while the Club Development Committee was chaired by rotation, due to the lack of a successor to Kevin Cope, by Nigel Fray, supported by Tracy Pettingale and me.

Executive Meetings and Presentations The Executive Committee continues to organise at each of its meetings an in-depth discussion of a specific topic to learn more about the various activities done in the CB's name and to see if the Executive can lend more support to any area covered by the presenters. This season we heard from Alan Crane (COO of Kent Referees Society), Dawn Waters (Chair, Mini and Midi Rugby), Taff Gwilliam (Representative Rugby), and Ali Boyd (Mental Health and Wellbeing).

Governance We are initiating a review, led by Nigel Fray, of the CB's governance arrangements, to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and if not, what steps need to be taken to remedy any gaps / shortcomings. The Review Group is expected to report its findings and recommendations by the end of 2025.

RFU Audits Two mandatory RFU audits (Safeguarding and Discipline) were conducted satisfactorily, with thanks to Dawn Stanton and Huw Gronow/Andy Gent.

The Safeguarding Audit identified a need for additional support for Dawn, given her increasingly complex case load. We are therefore seeking one or two Assistant Safeguarding Managers to support her. If you or someone you know can assist, your help would be greatly appreciated by Dawn and the County. We also thank Dawn for her outstanding contributions and the excellent reputation she has built at the RFU level.

Discipline Issues Discipline cases declined from the previous season's unacceptably high number but still remained too high. This includes the number of Match Official Abuse cases. Our thanks to Huw and his discipline team for all they do. Remember: they would be able to expedite cases much more quickly if discipline at club level were better.

Conferences and CPD Days The County led conferences for clubs, including the Health Care Professionals' Conference and Coaching CPD days. Dawn Walter's organised her very well attended Mini-Midi organising Conference.

Acknowledgements: Doug Hursey agreed to remain as President for an extra year to facilitate a seamless transition, subject to his election, to Alan Thompson. Thank you, Doug for all you have done to support us as President, for your visits to clubs around the County and for your unstinting support of the Men's County Team and the Competition in general.

Tracy Pettingale plays a key role in the Kent County Office, supporting numerous activities as Administration Manager and Assistant Finance Administrator to Hon. Treasurer Ben Ashby. Her expertise is also valuable to the Executive, particularly in Match Official Development and as administrator to the Kent Society of Rugby Referees. We wish her success in her officiating roles at the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup.

We welcomed Jarrod Lawrence as Chair of the Game Development Committee and who is making a positive difference leading its work. Special thanks to those stepping down from their roles, including Graham Withers and John Day. We hope that Graham will soon find another role with the County, For John, after over 20 years' service, he now takes a well-earned retirement having chaired our Competitions Committee, presided over County Finals day; he was also co-opted to the Executive Committee during COVID as we looked after the health of our clubs.

Many thanks to Tom Stradwick who has been an outstanding Captain, player and coach of the Men's County team during our last three visits to the Allianz, and our development tour to South Africa. Tom retired from playing after our win against Yorkshire in June but remains as a County Men's coach.

I am grateful also to a very busy Nigel Fray, our Hon. Secretary and Director of Governance, stand-in Chair of the Club Development Committee, Facilities Funding Manager, and acting as the CB's liaison with the Kent Schools RFU. That list says it all, I think, and without his support I would find it very difficult to deliver my role as Executive Chair.

Finally, my gratitude to our RFU team led by Adam Cottingham (CB Liaison Manager) who attends all of our Executive Committee meetings and helps and prompts to the benefit of the County; and Mark Finnis (Club Support Manager) for all he does in directly helping both our 55 voting (and other, non-voting) clubs, and keeping the Executive Committee up to date and ensuring we liaise as much as possible with them.

Objective for 2025-26 The clear objective for 2025-26 is to reach a total of 20,000 players in Kent across various categories.

Diversity & Inclusion: (Nigel Fray)

The CB, liaising with clubs and leveraging the work led by the RFU, seeks continually to attract both playing and non-playing participants to the game from across the Kent community. The backdrop to this task is difficult, as the results of the RFU's 'Community Game I & D Survey' identified:

- Participation has increased from 328k (Nov 2020-22) to 389k (Nov 2021-23). However, it remains **significantly lower** across all age groups than the 549k, pre-Covid.
- The percentage of those playing Rugby from ethnically diverse groups has **increased** from 9 per cent (Nov 2018-20) to 10.6 per cent (Nov 2021-23); **still less** than the 18 per cent of people in England & Wales who belong to a black, Asian, mixed, or other ethnic group.
- Participation has **decreased significantly** among the second most and most deprived quartiles of the population.
- Experienced or witnessed incidences of discrimination have **increased**, but there is some comfort that that young people and those from LGBT community have experienced less.

We strongly encouraged participation in the 'Rugby United' project, which, part-funded by the Rugby Football Foundation, helps clubs to engage with and become more accessible to their local Black and South Asian communities, to attract players, coaches, volunteers, and match officials. Regrettably, only two clubs showed an interest in the project. This was insufficient to provide a realistic chance of

delivering the project's objectives. The CB therefore returned to the RFU the grant money it had received to support the project.

We, nevertheless, continue to provide clubs with the necessary information and tools to reach out to their communities; Ali Boyd, the CB's Player & Volunteer Well-Being Officer, is for example working with the RFU and Gravesend RFC to deliver an initiative on 'Neurodiversity and Inclusion', which was launched in April 2025. However, we need to be realistic as to what we can achieve. We are clear, therefore, that it is for each club to determine for itself and based on its own particular circumstances whether and how to do this, but the CB remains ready to support clubs in their endeavours.

Youth Council: (Will Disbrey)

The Executive Committee is focused to drive greater youth involvement within Kent rugby. In line with this aim, William Disbrey, Chair of the RFU's National Youth Council, was appointed to the Executive Committee and entrusted with the responsibility of establishing a Kent Youth Council.
During the first half of the season, we conducted a youth engagement strategy survey, attracting responses from over 50 young people representing clubs and schools across Kent. The consensus from these respondents indicated strong support for forming a Kent Youth Council.

Early in 2025, eight volunteers—representing both boys' and girls' rugby—were chosen from the survey participants to serve as the inaugural members of the new Council. The initial meeting of this group took place in June, where members discussed key focus areas and organised themselves for the coming season. Their primary objectives include increasing school engagement in rugby and facilitating connections between schools and local clubs, thereby helping young players transition from school and Age Grade rugby to the adult game.

The Executive Committee will maintain regular communication with the Youth Council, seeking input on issues that impact young people and using these perspectives to inform decision-making. The Youth Council members, meanwhile, will support the Executive Committee and focus on matters relevant to the youth game.

In its first full year, the Kent Youth Council will strive to maximise its impact, showcasing the Kent County Rugby Football Union as a national leader in youth engagement and representation.

RFU Councillor's Report (Roger Clarke)

The 2024-25 season has been challenging on several fronts:

- **The Long-Term Incentive Plan (LTIP):** The RFU's Chief Executive Officer, Bill Sweeney, and several Senior Executive team members received substantial bonuses. Although these were deferred for three years, they lacked sufficient oversight from the Council and some Board members. Following a special Council meeting, the Board's Chair, Tom Ilube, resigned and was replaced on an interim basis by Junior Vice President, Sir Bill Beaumont. Additionally, the RFU's President, Rob Udwin, agreed with the Council to conduct an independent review by the law firm Freshfields to ensure no malfeasance or governance errors regarding the LTIP.

  The review, managed by three independent Council Members, found no malfeasance but identified governance and communication issues between the Board and the Council that needed improvement. It was decided that the CEO, Sir Bill, and other Senior RFU members would organize a Road Show to gather member clubs' views. This resulted in various pledges and a commitment to accelerate the Governance Review of Council conducted by Malcolm Wharton and his Committee. Other issues, such as increased RFU staff presence, competition structure, and communications, were deemed equally important. Kent hosted one of these road shows at Dartford Valley RFC in February, allowing clubs to express their views.

- **The SGM and AGM of the RFU:** The fallout from the LTIP and concerns about the RFU Board's performance led to the formation by the National Referees CB of the 'Whole Game Union' (WGU) and comprising many grassroots clubs and CBs, including Kent. The WGU secured enough support to call a Special General Meeting, and after the RFU Board's Road Shows, the

WGU tabled a resolution calling for the CEO's resignation. However, it was comfortably defeated despite some Kent Clubs voting for the motion.

The WGU also tabled 11 resolutions to amend the RFU's Rules to give the Council greater power to run the Community Game. At the Annual General Meeting held in hybrid form at the FA Training Centre at St George's Park, these resolutions were all defeated due to club apathy, the timing of the AGM, and the complexity and number of resolutions.

- **The Future:** The final Council meeting of the year saw unanimous objection to the published results of the Wharton Review of Council Governance. The report, published without Council's prior review, was shelved until September. The Group, chaired by Malcolm Wharton, was instructed to present a broader range of options for Council consideration. Additionally, Council secured more representation on the Group, marking a significant success.

  In the meantime, a new Chair of the RFU Board has been appointed: Sir James Wates. With a background in running and chairing his family building business and a lifetime association with Dorking RFC, Sir James brings relevant experience in chairing high-profile committees. We hope he will provide calm and wise counsel as we embark on the 2025-26 season.

During 2024-25, I have fulfilled the following tasks as Kent RFU Council Member within the RFU structure:

- Standing Committees:
  - Chair of the RFU game Development Committee which oversees Match Official, Coaching and Safeguarding issues nationally.
  - Member of the RFU Community Game Board which approves Community game spending and the future structure and priorities for the Community Game.
  - Trustee of the RFU Rugby Football Foundation. This is the charity through which the RFU Community game budget is directed each year. £30m over the next 3 years.
  - Member of the RFU Council Services Committee. This Committee looks after all of the Council Members in their day-to-day activities.

- *Ad hoc* roles:
  - Member of the 3-man Management Committee for the Freshfields review of the LTIP.
  - Member of the Review Group on the 4 Year Competition Budget for England.
  - Member of the Working Group charged with the introduction and oversight of the Adult Registration system.

Delivering the RFU's 2024-25 programme of work: Despite the challenges that the RFU has faced this year, it has still delivered significant support to the Community Game:

- Delivery of the Community Game 4-year plan and budget at £30m *per annum*.
- Some progress on the Community Game Future Plans to 2029.
- Introduction of and expanding the team of Schools Liaison Managers (SLMs) to oversee the introduction of World Rugby non-contact game T1. Kent now has 3 SLMs and will seek to increase this number ion 2025-26.
- Delivery of the Adult Registration System with over 100,000 Adult Male and Female players registered in 2024-25. Kent aims next season to reach 20,000 registered Age Grade Senior Men, Women, Boys and Girls. This information is already becoming invaluable in helping to plan for the game and will be an invaluable communication tool with Players as we grow the response.
- Progressing the 'Blueprint for Match Officials' (MOs) to ensure even greater coverage of all games with MOs of the right standard for the games they are appointed to plus encouraging cross County co-operation where one County has a surplus of available MOs and an another a deficit
- Piloting of national registration schemes for Match Officials and Coaches.
- Pilot work to develop systems of coaching and mentoring of U14-18 boys and transition to Senior Rugby.

- Further Development of County Assistant Safeguarding officers to support the County Safeguarding Manager. Guidance to clubs to ensure Pitch side first Aid Provision where contracted support has been lost.
- Ensuring that the new RFU Communications Director, Ali Donnelly is integrated into all Community Game issues and all Community Game Social Media opportunities, to enhance greater and better engagement with clubs and CBs.

In my role as County Chair and RFU Councillor, I received invitations to visit the following Clubs: Aylesford Bulls, Ashford, Blackheath, Canterbury, Charlton park, Gravesend, Tunbridge Wells, Redruth as well as visiting the Allianz for the Men's Division 1 County Championship Final.

As ever, I am very happy to discuss any of the issues which appear under my name in the report or any others either by phone or at their invitation by visiting our clubs. I'm also happy to bring the Bill Beaumont Cup with me, should clubs wish to have it on display for a day. Alan Thompson, our in-coming President and Nigel Fray, our Hon Sec and Director of Governance are also available to visit, and we all look forward to seeing you in 25-26.

Discipline (Huw Gronow, Andy Gent)

Adult Discipline: The Adult and Age Grade Discipline Committees report to the Executive Committee but act independently in their judgements. They are trained and accredited by the RFU and operate under RFU Regulation 19, with the right of appeal through RFU Discipline and not the CB. Their remit covers the community game at levels 5 and below.

The Adult Discipline Committee is chaired by Huw Gronow, with members Mark Huntley, Paul Woodhouse, Tim Cross, Jayne Ashdown-Denney, Sophie Warren, and Michele Mayhew. Andy Gent is the *pro tempore* Adult CB Discipline Secretary. Efforts are ongoing to diversify the Committee. The Chair and two members form tribunal-style Panels to hear cases. The Executive Committee, which the Discipline Panels act independently of, appreciates their impartiality and diligence. We thank the previous Discipline Secretary, James Connerton, for his efforts this season.

The 2024-2025 season was the fourth full season post-COVID-19. Last season, the Kent RFU warned clubs that increased Match Official Abuse (MOA) would result in severe sanctions, and indeed, for proven cases and to deter further incidences, did invoke them, including the deduction of leagues points from 1st and 2nd XVs (even for Age Grade offences) either immediately or suspended, and financial penalties. This warning was heeded by most of Kent's 55 member clubs, but 24 cases were still heard this season, albeit a decrease from the 38 heard in 2023-24. Referees are encouraged to report abuse to eradicate it from the game.

The Discipline Committee publishes the outcomes of all disciplinary decisions to deter future offences and provide transparency. The RFU allows Kent to publish offenders' names, but we have chosen not to, to protect individuals' lives outside rugby. However, if trends continue, we may reveal identities to increase deterrence.

Less serious cases, accompanied by an acceptance of the red card, are dealt with "on the papers" without an in-person hearing but follow the RFU process. More serious cases, repeat offenders, and Match Official Abuse are heard in person as quickly as possible. The Panel sat in person 16 times this season, hearing up to 7-8 cases per evening. The RFU protocol is to hold hearings by video conference, which the Committee will adopt more next season.

In 2024-25, the Adult Committee dealt with 119 cases (down from 157 in 2023-24 – or a decrease of 24%), including 59 (62) red cards and 10 (65) citings; MOA cases saw an encouraging fall to 16 (25), yet this is still too many. Only 17 cases were referred from the CB Age Grade Discipline Secretary (CBAGS), down from 64 the previous season. This is a welcome improvement in the Age Grade game but suggests no room for complacency in this and the Adult game.

The most severe sanction this season was a two-year ban for a conduct issue and a 14-match ban for MOA. Discipline infractions remain widespread, with 42 of the 55 member clubs and 3 universities in Kent having at least one case this season. The Discipline Committee aims to deal with MOA cases as severely as possible. The RFU introduced mandatory upward aggravation of sanctions from 1st January

2024, adding 2-4 weeks to final sanctions depending on the offence's severity. This is beginning to have the desired effect, but offences remain elevated compared to historical levels.

In September, the Chair of the Adult Discipline Committee and CB Discipline Secretary will hold a webinar for Kent clubs to remind them of their obligations and how to maintain respect for match officials. Clubs are responsible for ensuring all those in the playing arena adhere to RFU Rules and Regulations.

We support our referees through the disciplinary process. The Kent Society of Referees appoints officials for nearly 1,000 games per season, with less than 2% producing disciplinary issues. This is due to the skilled management of the game by match officials, thanks to the rigorous training and development by the Society. We thank them for their vital role in making the game safe, enjoyable, and disciplined.

Adult Discipline offences fell into the following categories:

Kent RFU Discipline Stats Adult 2024 - 25		
9.11	Reckless play	1
9.12	Bite	0
9.12	Contact with Eye - Intentional	0
9.12	Contact with Eye - Reckless	0
9.12	Contact with Eye Area	1
9.12	Strike Punch	22
9.12	Strike with Open Hand	0
9.12	Strike with Arm	0
9.12	Strike with Elbow	0
9.12	Strike with Shoulder	0
9.12	Strike with Head	1
9.12	Strike with Knee	3
9.12	Stamp or trample	1
9.12	Trip	0
9.12	Kick	5
9.12.	Other Physical Abuse	0
9.12	Verbal Abuse	3
9.13	Dangerous Tackle	3
9.13	High Tackle	1
9.13	Tackling Early Late or Dangerously	1
9.14	Tackling player without the ball	0
9.15	Hold, push, obstruct a player without the ball	0
9.15	Charging a player without the ball	0
9.16	Dangerous charge or knock down of player with no attempt to grasp	0
9.17	Tackling the player in the air	0
9.17	Charge, pull, push or grasp the player in the air	0
9.18	Tip Tackle - lift and/or drop/drive opponent	5
9.19	Dangerous play in a scrum	0
9.20a	Charge into a ruck or maul (contact made without binding onto another player)	2
9.20b	Contact with an opponent above the line of the shoulders in a ruck or maul	1
9.20c	Collapse a ruck or a maul intentionally	0
9.25	Late charge on kicker	0
9.27	ACTGS Hair Pulling	0
9.27	ACTGS Spitting	0
9.27	ACTGS Grab twist or squeeze of genitals	0
9.27	ACTGS Other	0
9.27	ACTGS Two Yellows	13
9.28.	Failure to respect match official	4
9.28	Verbal abuse of a match official	5
9.28	Physical contact with a match official	0
9.28	Threatening words or actions to a match official	0
9.28	Physical abuse of a match official	2
5.12.	Match Official Abuse - Physical	0
5.12	Match Official Abuse - Verbal	16
5.12	Match Abandonment	1
5.12	Entering Field of Play	0
5.12	Failure to Control	6
5.12	Other Misconduct	14
Regulation 15 - Playing into Adult		4
Regulatory Breach - Other		4
TOTAL		119
Dismissed		8

Age Grade Discipline: The CB Age Grade Discipline Panel operates in accordance with Regulation 19 Appendix 6 as they relate to U13 to U18 games at club, school, college and Regional Academy level.

The Panel, chaired by the CBAGS, Andrew Gent is comprised of representatives from the clubs and, where necessary, other members of the Discipline Committee to form Panels to hear cases. We were pleased this season to welcome Jayne Ashdown-Denney to the Committee who 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 to education, prevention, and restorative sanctions alongside or in combination with match bans. This will be adopted with effect from the start of the 2025-26 season by all CBs in the country and the regulations are now being amended to facilitate this.

The 2024-25 season has seen a sustained high level of cases similar to 2023-24, with 82 cases, including two carried over from the previous season. Of these, 48 cases 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 last season and coincides with an increase in incidents (3 MOA) arising from coaches of cluster teams in the girls' game accounting for 8 clubs facing disciplinary hearings.

Of the 32 Age Grade cases, only 4 were from schools and all cases were dealt with in the season. These were spread across the age range from Under 13 to Colts with 10 at Colts level.

The 32 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 resulted in the whole team of the offending player having to undertake mandatory RFU training.

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 (by 37 per cent) from last season. However, the significant increase in adult misbehaviour on Sunday mornings, particularly from coaches, is disappointing and worrying and is now the focus of the Disciplinary Committee's attention.

In line with the publication of adult disciplinary outcomes on the Kent RFU website, Kent remains the only CB to publish, suitably 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/).

We will be running 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: 2025 has been yet another successful year for Kent Rugby, with the highlight being the men's Senior XV, comprised of players from seven different club, crowned National County Bill Beaumont Cup Champions for the third successive year.

On 21st June at Twickenham the squad, led by coaches Tom Stradwick David Marshall and Seb Sherwood, successfully defended the title with a convincing win over Yorkshire. The squad s.

The Senior Women's team, competing in Division 1 of the Gills Burns trophy, and led by Peter McCallister, narrowly missed out on going to Twickenham on the same day with 2 wins and a loss from their 3 pool games. The loss at home to Buckinghamshire proving their undoing.

To improve the player pathway for women, we are introducing an U20 age group which will be led by Andy Miller of Charlton Park RFC. This will bridge the pathway gap between U18 girls and the Women's team.

The Men's U20 squad went out at the quarter final stage of the Jason Leonard Trophy. Having been victorious in all three pool games, the team was defeated narrowly by Essex in the quarter-final.

The County U18 boys beat Hampshire but lost to Essex and Hertfordshire. The results failed to reflect the talent available, having underperformed in the first two matches, but came good in the final game to finish on a high.

The coming season will see a different selection system put in place with a new scouting system aligned with the coaching network around the county to better identify talent. This combined with the established pathway between U17 to U18 will improve the dynamics of selection.

The County U18 girls had a difficult season although losing every game did so narrowly. Mark Cornford has stood down as the girls Lead coach at Both U18s and U16s and is replaced by Adam Vosper in the U18s from the Dartfordians Club

The U17 boys continue to be led by Dan Webb. They were victorious in their inter county programme defeating Easter Counties, Essex and Sussex.

The U16 girls played Surrey winning 2 out of 3 games than played Sussex again winning 2 out of 3 and finally losing both games against Hampshire.

The age group also has a new lead coach with Tony Wood from the Ashford club taking over from Mark Cornford.

Game Development Committee (Jarrod Lawrence, Chair)

The 2024-25 season was extremely busy across the range of the Committee's responsibilities with huge successes across Kent's clubs and Representative sides.

In the Minis, Dawn Waters has done a huge amount to support our clubs' U6s-U11s players, providing them with vouchers for RFU courses, 'Thank you' packs (including ball bags and balls) and arranging the most successful Kent Minis Festivals, to date, with c.3,000 young players having participated, which included a touring side. Thanks to Dawn and all those who helped to host the various festivals and help make them so successful.

The Youth section, Alan Erskine was helped by age grade representatives and all helped to facilitate successful competitions in the face of time pressures and regular postponements for various reasons. It was also noted that 34 clubs had applied for 17-year-olds to play senior rugby, up from 24 the previous season.

In the Women's & Girls' sections there were hugely successful competitions across the 12s-18s at County level and Dartfordians' U16s Girls reaching the semi-final of the National Cup. The Women's leagues were also highly competitive, with much work being done to boost retention and make the most of the upcoming Women's World Cup. The section has seen great growth over the last 5 years, and huge thanks go to Graham Withers as Chairman of the section – Graham stood down at the end of this season and we look forward to future success under the leadership of Amanda Johnston.

The County continued to support the coaching development, having held its second Coaching Conference in July, which was a great success.

Kent Representative sides had a decent season, culminating in the men's Senior squad winning their third Bill Beaumont County Championship on the bounce when in June they defeated Yorkshire at

Allianz Twickenham. Congratulations to Taff Gwilliam and all those involved. Work has also been ongoing to build on the U16/U18/U20s girls' squads to ensure there is a strong player pathway and build on the strong foundations within the Women's squad.

Within the Kent Club League Competitions, the fulfilment of fixtures remained mixed, and I thank all those at the County organising the leagues/cups, as well as those working hard at the clubs to ensure match completions. Special thanks to Ian Sutton (Kent Met League Sec), Howard Pearl (Kent Rural League Sec), Steve Allen (Kent Cups), Richard Ewence (Vets Cup) and particularly huge thanks to John Day, who has stood down as Kent Competitions Chair after 15 years and all he has contributed to Kent Rugby.

Finally, thanks to all the volunteers at all levels across the County – without you the game does not exist, and I look forward to working with you in 2025-26.

Club Development Committee (Nigel Fray)

The Club Development Committee (CDC) met regularly during 2024-25, although with no permanent Chair, meetings were led either by the Chair of the Executive Committee or the CB's Hon. Secretary.

The Committee's membership comprises:

- Steve Homewood (Membership).
- Trevor Martingell (Leadership Academy).
- Peter Thompson (Rugby Safe).
- Pamela Kilmister (Volunteer Officer)
- Ali Boyd (Wellbeing Officer)
- Dawn Stanford (Safeguarding Officer).

As well as needing still to appoint a Chair for the CDC, we continue to have vacancies in both the Facilities and Marketing & Sponsorship roles; the former role has been covered by the Hon. Secretary. Throughout the season, we have been well supported by Tim Holmes, RFU Club & Volunteer Manager and Mark Finnis, our RFU Club Development Officer, who regularly engaged with struggling clubs, helping several improve their playing delivery.

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

- **Facilities**: The CB reinstated its 'Small Grants Programme', making available a budget of £11,000 to support successful applicant clubs to improve their clubhouse changing rooms and social spaces. The CB awarded grants to five clubs. We also set aside £10,000 specifically for Age Grade-related facilities applications. Surprisingly, no club applied, so, with the approval of the Executive Committee, this money was reallocated to Age Grade kit funding, where the CB received 16 applications, of which 15 were successful and a total of £7,359 in grants awarded.
- **Marketing & Sponsorship**: Shepherd Neame Ltd kindly renewed its sponsorship of the CB. Henderson Rowe, once again, supported our Kent Women's representative teams.
- **Safeguarding**: The CB continues to encourage clubs to embed safeguarding as a key plank of their internal governance and culture, and to complete the RFU's annual Safeguarding Audit
- **Volunteering**: Volunteers, who give their dedication and commitment, are essential to the success and sustainability of rugby clubs and their associated activities. The CB and RFU (supported by Honda) proudly recognise volunteers from across our grassroots clubs, who are nominated by their peers for going above and beyond in their activities to support the game; the 2024-25 season was no exception. Celebration evenings of the volunteers recognised were held at Ashford and Beckenham rugby clubs, and we congratulate all those who received awards (details of winners are at **Appendix I**).
- **Wellbeing**: Led by Ali Boyd, the CB hosted, in partnership with the charity 'Bravemind', two workshops to train club volunteers in Mental Health Awareness; we have now trained over 20 clubs in mental health support. We are working, also, with Aylesford Bulls RFC to develop a toolkit for when clubs experience a sudden death/traumatic event. Ali represented the CB at the RFU's Diversity and Inclusion Conference, and she continues to provide mentorship, and field enquiries from clubs who have well-being questions/concerns.

- **Membership**: Steve Homewood successfully oversaw the distribution and sale of International tickets for the Autumn 2024 and Six Nations 2025 matches.

Coach and Referee Development (Taff Gwilliam)

The County led two coaching CPD days for both male and female coaches to link this with the work the Representative Rugby team is doing to overhaul the coaching structures and performance of all County representative groups, including Boys' U17s and 18s, Girls' U16s and 18s, Women's Adult Rugby, Men's U20s and Adults.

Women's & Girls' Rugby (Amanda Johnston)

The 2024-25 season was another positive year. With over 1,600 players (901 Juniors, 717 Minis) and 1,100 adult females signed up in GMS, Kent is still one of the largest counties in England supporting Women's and Girls' Rugby.

The annual Girls' Rugby Forum took place at Dartford Valley in May, at which representatives of 21 clubs engaged in a vibrant discussion around our plans for 2025-26. Additionally, we have introduced a Women's Forum; a few clubs attended. This gave teams the opportunity to voice their concerns and celebrate what we have, and we hope that more clubs will join as the Forum develops.

Kent Women & Girls Committee: We have had a few role changes this year to reflect the evolution and growth of the game.

Role	**2024-25**	**2025-26**
Committee Chair & Treasurer	Graham Withers	Amanda Johnston
Competitions Manager	Graham Withers	Jak Lipka
Senior Women's Clubs	Natasha O'Leary	Chloe Cannon
Recruitment & Retention	Charlotte Simpson	Role incorporated into other roles
18-25 Officer	New role	Scarlet Lygo
Under 18s Officer	Amanda Johnston	Rich Warren
Under 16s Officer	Jak Lipka	Rich Warren
Under 14s Officer	Richard Warran	Tom Jury
Under 12s Officer	Eirlys Withers	Phill Collins
Kent Representative Girls Rugby	Mark Conford, Cerys Harper & Gary Evans	Taff Gwilliam with Tony Woods, Adam Vosper (TBC),

Competitions: With the volume of clubs in the waterfall, we have spread the U12 & U14 tournaments over several weekends and several locations. This has made logistics much easier. The U16 & U18 league and cup continued, with fantastic play from all. Details of the league competitions are at **Appendix II**.

Looking ahead: We have identified a misalignment between Junior and Adult teams/clubs; clubs with strong Adult teams with no Youth / Minis or *vice versa*. This does not help to limit the drop off rate and is an area of attention for this coming season. We are working on 'Bring Your Boots Home' events to re-engage players that return for holidays with their clubs.

The clustering is helping the newer teams. However, the longer-term plan to assist clubs to become self-sustaining needs to be encouraged for those that can. Visibility to the clusters that register will help significantly.

There is a significant number of girls in the Minis who no longer want to play with the boys. This is a delicate area, and we are working closely with the Minis Coordinator to accommodate the best we can.

Representative Rugby: For 2024-25, Mark Cornford and his team handed the baton to Taff Gwilliam. It's been a great run of years for U16 and U18 and we're sure Taff will take the program from strength-to-strength. We have introduced an U20s team, which is generating a lot of excitement.

Age Grade Rugby (Alan Erskine)

The 2024-25 season was very successful with some great rugby on show at all levels. There were some close matches and table deciders in the final games.

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.

Competition managers have been a great help in organising and disseminating information to the teams, and without them the competition could not have gone ahead so my heartfelt thanks go out to them.

Age Grade rugby continues to have challenges in certain areas not just in Kent but countrywide which requires combining age groups or clustering clubs. These solutions in themselves cause other issues not least with older players playing down a year which has caused some challenges this season. Needless to say, all approvals are conducted rigorously and in accordance with the RFU's regulations. That said, clubs that need to combine age groups will need to demonstrate their plans to recruit so that single age teams are the norm.

Discipline remains an issue and whilst the main discipline report can be found 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. Touchline behaviour should be positive and inclusive and the adage "if you haven't got anything nice to say, say nothing" should be our watchword.

Thanks to all those parents and volunteers that have called out poor behaviour at the time – this is the best way to eliminate it from the game.

Finally, thanks to John Reilly in particular who, again undertook the monumental task of organising the Youth Sevens competitions single handedly. This is a great event and one that John has made his own!

All in all, another great season for youth rugby in Kent against a challenging national landscape and a stepping stone for another successful season to come.

Minis Rugby

See Game Development Committee report, above.

Competitions (John Day)

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

Kent Society of RFU Referees (Alan Crane)

A very busy 24/25 season Kent Referees.

We appointed Referees to over 1,900 games, but sadly 290 of those were subsequently cancelled by the Clubs primarily due to shortage of players.

On a really positive note, we were able to cover the whole range of County and School youth festivals and tournaments, girls and boys, 15 and 7 a-side with what appeared to be more participants than ever: a good portent for the future.

In partnership with the County, we secured RFU funding for a very successful recruitment and training programme for new Club Referees, a number of whom have also elected to join the Society.

Our 75th season as a Society culminated in a special celebratory Awards Dinner at Leeds Castle, attended by 120 members and guests.

Election of Officers & Committee for Season 2025-26

Executive Committee Membership - Nominations

President Alan Thompson
Hon. Secretary Nigel Fray
Hon. Treasurer Ben Ashby

Committee Leads that were in place in 2024-25

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
tba	Chair, Club Development Committee
H Gronow	Chair, Discipline Committee
A Gent	Secretary, Discipline Committee
A Gent / J Ashdown Denney	Chair, Youth Discipline Committee
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 / A Johnston	Chair, Women's & Girls' Rugby
A Erskine	Chair, Youth Rugby
D Waters	Chair, Mini Rugby
P Kilmister	Volunteering Development & Recruitment
S K Homewood	International Ticket Secretary
A Boyd	Player & Volunteer Well-being Officer
-	Marketing & Sponsorship
-	Education
P Thompson	Rugby Safe
-	Social Media Manager

Appendix I

RFU / Honda Volunteer Awards for 2024-25

Justin Zarb (Blackheath FC) and **Sally Taylor** (Canterbury RFC), both of whom have been invited to Twickenham to attend the prestigious National RFU Awards.

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 **Dave Phillips, *Dartfordians RFC***
Runner-Up **Mark Scott, *Cranbrook 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 **Alan Farmer, *Old Elthamians RFC***
Runner-Up **Ben Giles, *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 **Adam Vosper, *Dartfordians RFC***
Runner-Up **Chris Freeman, *Gravesend 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 **Sophie Durman, *Blackheath RFC***
Runner-Up **Maddy Harlow, *Folkestone 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 **Jamie Bond, *Medway RFC***
Runners-Up **Sophia Wahab and Amelia Smith, *Old Gravesendians 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 **Justin Zarb, *Blackheath RFC* and Pippa Blyth, *Aylesford Bulls RFC***
Runners-Up **Gravesend *RFC* and *Old Gravesendians 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 **Tony Carollo, *Canterbury RFC***
Runner-Up **Elly Cole, *KSRFUR***

Kent County RFU Social Inclusion Award

This award 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. Initiatives include targeting 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.

Winners **Mario Garcia and Andy Bull, *Thanet Wanderers RFC***
Runner-Up **Tracy Bullock, *Medway RFC***

Appendix II

Cup and League Competition Winners 2024-25

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

Kent Cup – Not contested.

Kent Shield (aet)
Winner – Beccehamian 2nd XV (51)
Runner-up – Thanet Wanderers XV (46)

Kent Plate
Winner – Bromley 2nd XV (24)
Runner-up – Dover 2nd XV (17)

Kent Vase
Winner – Brockleians (25)
Runner-up – Cliffe Crusaders (24)

Kent Salver
Winner – Sittingbourne (21)
Runner up – Ash (0**)**

Men's RFU Leagues

National 1: Blackheath (6th position)

National 2 South-East: Tonbridge Juddians (1st and promoted to National 1)
Canterbury (4th), Westcombe Park (5th), and Sevenoaks 10th

London & South-East Regional Leagues

Regional 1 South-East Central: Tunbridge Wells (10th)

Regional 2 South-East – Winner: Medway
Regional 2 South-East: Beckenham (2nd), Sidcup (3rd), Old Colfeians (8th), Dartfordians (10th), and Gravesend (11th).

Counties 1 Kent – Winner: Canterbury 'Pilgrims' (2nd XV)
Counties 1 Kent – Runner-up: Bromley

Counties 2 Kent – Winners: Old Elthamians
Counties 2 Kent – Runner-up: Gillingham Anchorians

Counties 3 Kent – Winner: Tonbridge Juddians 2nd XV
Counties 3 Kent – Runner-up: Beckenham 2nd XV

Counties 4 Kent – Winner: Canterbury 3rd XV
Counties 4 Kent – Runner-up: Old Williamsonians

Counties 5 Kent – Winner: East Peckham & Paddock Wood
Counties 5 Kent – Runners-up: Sevenoaks 3rd XV

Men's Shepherd Neame Kent Leagues

Kent Rural A – Winner: Snowdown CW
Kent Rural A – Runner-up: Edenbridge

Kent Rural B – Winner: Gravesend 3rd XV
Kent Rural B – Runner-up: Ashford Barbarians

Kent Rural C – Winner: Whitstable 2nd XV

Kent Rural C – Runner-up: Gravesend 4th XV

Shepherd Neame Metropolitan League

Kent Metropolitan League – Winner: Blackheath 'Bandits'
Kent Metropolitan League – Runner-up: Bromley 3rd XV

Shepherd Neame 'Spitfire Gold' Veterans' Competition

Cup - Winner:	Deal & Betteshanger	(runner-up Tunbridge Wells)
Plate - Winner:	Beckenham	(runner-up Thanet Wanderers)
Bowl - Winner:	Cranbrook	(runner-up Aylesford Bulls)
Shield - Winner:	Blackheath	(runner-up Vigo)

'Papa Johns' Men's Community Cup

Men's Regional 1 Shield Final
Winner: Tunbridge Wells (47) beat Leek (36)

Men's Counties 1 South Shield Final
Runner-up: Ashford (33) lost to Gordon League (44)

Men's Counties 2 Championship Final
Winner: Old Elthamians (33) beat Smiths Rugby (19)

Women's RFU Leagues

Champ 1 - Beckenham 1

Champ 2 - Blackheath

National Challenge 1: Dartford Valley Roses, Medway, Canterbury, Tonbridge Juddians

National Challenge 2: Thanet Wanderers, Aylesford, Ashford, Lordswood. Gravesend, Beckenham 2, Beccehamian

National Challenge 3: Bexley, Dartfordians, Sevenoaks, TW, Maidstone, Sheppy, Folkestone

Girls' Rugby

U12 - Bromley, Ashford, Dartford Valley, Medway, Westcombe Park, Dartfordians
U12 Clusters – T. Wells, Gravesend/OGs, Crimson Beccs, Kent Barbarians, Bass

U14 – Ashford, Dartfordians, Medway, Tonbridge Judians, Old Alleynians
U14 - Clusters - Beccs Valley (Beccehamians and Dartford Valley), East Kent Barbarians (Thanet Wanders, Deal, Canterbury, and Dover), GAS (Old Gravesendians, Aylesford and Sheppey), BASS (Beckenham & Sidcup Stars), 7Wells (Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells)

U16 – Ashford, Dartfordians, Medway, Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells
U16 Clusters – BASS, East Kent Barbarians, COBRA, BeccsValley, GAS, TJs Academy
[Of special note, Dartfordians U16G who won the National Cup Quarter Final.]

Annex A

Kent County Rugby Football Union Limited

Report of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting held at Aylesford Bulls RFC on 30th September 2024

The Honorary Secretary of the Kent County RFU, Nigel Fray, opened the meeting and welcomed those 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:

Ashford Barbarians	Dartfordians /KCRFU	Tonbridge Juddians / KCRFU
Askeans	Gillingham Anchorians / KCRFU	Tunbridge Wells RFC / KCRFU
Aylesford/KCRFU	Langley Park	Will Disbrey (National Youth Council)
Bexley	Lordswood	Andy Gent (CBAGS)
Blackheath	Maidstone	Dawn Waters (Chair, KCRFU Mini Rugby)
Canterbury	Sheppey	

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

The **Hon. Secretary** noted that apologies for absence had been received from Doug Hursey, Alan Thompson, Graham Withers, Mick Day, Peter Dessent, Pam Kilmister, Ian Kenny, Ian Lunn.

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, as listed in the Calling Notice for the meeting and:

a. Philip Randall (Dartfordians RFC
b. John Milledge (Aylesford Bulls RFC)

A minute's silence was held in their memory.

Minutes of the last AGM held on 19th July 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on the 19th July 2023 were confirmed as a true record, with no matters arising. The minutes were adopted by consensus and without comment. *(Proposer – Kevin Cope / Seconder – Giles Hilton (Canterbury RFC)*

Financial report and presentation of 2022-23 and 2023-24 accounts

The **Hon. Secretary** recalled the decision taken at the 2023 AGM to reinstate the presentation of the KCRFU's financial statements into this and future AGMs, rather than at a separate Annual Financial Meeting. The last statement that had been presented to the membership was for the financial year 2021-22; the financial report and statements for financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24, copies of which had been circulated, would therefore be presented by the Hon. Treasurer for approval at this meeting.

The **Hon. Treasurer** delivered a presentation, explaining that the CB's income had decreased from £192,000 to £182,000 due largely to changes in RFU base funding, commercial deals and ticket income. Over the same period, total expenditure rose by 11 per cent, but much of this relates to ongoing development programmes; the CB's running costs had stayed largely flat, helped to some extent by its

use of the small business exemption to reduce audit costs. The net result was a £5,679 surplus in 2023-24, down from £33,036 achieved in the previous year.

In terms of the total balance sheet, this saw growth in fixed asset investments of approximately 10 per cent from 2022-23, rising to £668,203. The CB's liquid asset position remains extremely strong, with £120,674 in cash and most investments being available within 3 days. The cash position is elevated due to the CB having recently redeemed a discounted UK government bond (gilts). Whilst the dividend income remained flat, the use of discounted gilts added several thousand pounds of tax-free cash in capital gains. The CB would be restarting its reinvestment programme before the end of 2024.

The CB has successfully introduced its new financial reporting requirement regime under RFU Regulation 5 and has commenced reviewing clubs' accounts. This Regulation ('Insolvency, Funding, and International Tickets') requires all clubs at Regional Level and below to comply with their obligations under its Constituent Body's Financial Monitoring System (Reg 5.2.2). The purpose of financial monitoring is to allow the CB to be satisfied that its member clubs are financially sound and sustainable and if they are not (or there is a material risk that they may no longer be so), to intervene to provide support and advice to a vulnerable club, ideally before any financial risk crystallises.

Looking ahead, the CB will seek to promote further its online shop, which has generated £862 of credit for 2023-124. We are also exploring new commercial deals for 2025-26 and whether bulk purchasing can be extended to our clubs.

Approval of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 accounts: The annual accounts of the KCRFU were approved by consensus. *(Proposer – Executive Committee; Seconded – Kevin Cope (Bexley RFC))*.

Kent County RFU Annual Report 2023-24

The Hon. Secretary briefly outlined the highlights from the 2023-24 Annual Report, the most notable of which was the Senior Representative Men's retention of the Bill Beaumont County Championship Cup.

Other key points to note were:

- 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.
- The number of registered Age Grade Rugby players continues to increase year-on-year.

However, of great concern is the continuing instances of poor discipline and behaviour, especially cases of Match Official Abuse instigated by coaches and spectators. The CB, led by the Discipline Committee is seeking urgently to address this matter, reminding all clubs of their obligations to maintain the highest levels of respect for match officials, and that the responsibility they have to ensure that everyone adheres to the Rules and Regulations of the RFU, whether directly connected with the club or not.

The Annual Report was adopted by consensus and without comment.

Address of Kent County RFU President, Doug Hursey

In **Doug Hursey's** absence, the Hon. Secretary delivered his report.

> In my third year as Kent President, I have again visited as many clubs as possible and thank them all for their welcome and hospitality.
>
> The major theme present in all my conversations with clubs has been the perceived lack of support of community game by the RFU Board, with all its resources focused solely on the professional game. Many of the smaller clubs in the county are struggling for existence, with the downturn in playing numbers, and need all the help we can give them. Mark Finnis is doing a sterling job in trying to provide support and advice, but he is stretched too thinly across the county. The community game really does need to see urgently some of the Allianz money from the renaming of Twickenham.
>
> The County teams' performances, for both men and women, were of the highest order. The Women's team was promoted to the top tier of the County Championship and therefore faced a tough Southern

Group schedule of matches. I went to watch the game against Buckinghamshire where they played very well; at half-time the score was 10-10. They were only undone by the arrival off the bench of Rocky Clark, the record holder of England Caps. However, in beating Berkshire handsomely, in their second match, they assured their survival in the top tier. The experience gained at that level only bodes well for next year.

The Men's Senior and U20 teams performed at the highest level but again, with the confusion that is the RFU player eligibility policy for the County Championship, points were deducted from the U20s, who would without doubt have made the County Final along with the Men's team. Neither side lost a game in the County Championship season.

The Senior Men's Final at Twickenham was a great occasion once again, on this occasion playing against the other northern powerhouse, Yorkshire. We were in the game from the start and the lead changed hands several times before the break. After the Yorkshire 9 was red carded, we turned the screw and looked to be home and dried, only for Yorkshire to show no little grit and determination to make the score too close for comfort. Nevertheless, we saw out time and won the trophy for a second year in succession - the first time in the County's history. The coaching staff led by Taff Gwillam and the players deserve every praise for a great team effort through three tight matches.

This great success should not, however, mask the problems besetting community rugby and competitions below the professional game. These were highlighted to me when the Senior Men's County Championship group game against Surrey was called a Walkover as our opponents could not raise a team. Given this was the highest level of the County Championship, I am concerned by what this means for its future and players wanting to represent their county.

Congratulations to all the County's teams that won promotion in their various league competitions: Old Alleynians, Dartfordians, Sevenoaks 2, Park House, Old Elthamians, Beckenham 2, Brockleians, Canterbury 3, Bromley 2.

I hope all the member clubs flourish in the leagues set up and I wish them all good luck for the new season.

Questions to The Executive Committee

Kevin Cope (Bexley RFC) noted the RFU's proposals to restructure the Council and asked Roger Clarke (RFU Council Member for Kent) for his thoughts on this latest iteration.

RC noted that the Council is currently comprised of 66 members, of which 33 represent geographical (i.e. county) Constituent Bodies. Such a large number has made it increasingly difficult for the body to reach decisions and for the 33 members to air the views of the clubs they represent (and which are the 'shareholders' of the RFU). The RFU's review of the Council's functions and responsibilities (led by Malcolm Wharton) seeks to address this. The review has a broad remit, both to seek to determine the best decision-making structure and process and the composition of the Council, including for example, whether it should have a greater youth representation. The review is also considering how the Council should convene, perhaps through a mixture of physical and virtual meetings, as well as a two-day conference.

He noted that the creation of the new Professional Game Partnership was the culmination of 18 months' difficult discussions, but that it aims to deliver over its first four years, £33m pa to the professional game and £30m to the Community Game.

Honours

Prefacing this agenda item, the **Hon. Secretary** noted that the recently signed Professional Game Partnership agreement brings to an end the long-running Developing Player Programme (DPP). It also draws to a close **Neil Wiltshire's** long service to the County in overseeing the DPP. He invited Roger Clarke, on behalf of the CB, those players who had participated in the DPP, and all those present, to express their gratitude and appreciation to Neil for his efforts over many years. Roger did so, highlighting Neil's achievements over 20 years as a volunteer for the KCRFU. The **Hon. Secretary**

asked Jayne Ashdown-Denney (Hon. Secretary of Aylesford Bulls RFC), who was present at the meeting, to pass on to Neil the CB's thanks as expressed by Roger**.**

The **Hon. Secretary** explained that, in accordance with the criteria agreed for the award of County Honours (as per the review that was presented at the 2022 AGM), there are two individuals from Kent who merit recognition for their achievements within the game, both of whom have represented England at full international level. The Executive therefore proposed that the award of LVP be given to:

a. **Shaunagh Brown:** Shaunagh played rugby at Medway, and continues to support the club, as well coaching girls at Gillingham Anchorians. Highly decorated at Club and International level, earning 30 Caps, she won four Six Nations Grand Slams, as well as playing an integral role in Harlequins' victorious 2020/21 Allianz Premier 15s campaign. She also represented England in the Hammer at the 2014 Commonwealth Games and is an ambassador for Great Britain Wheelchair Rugby.

b. **David Flatman:** David started playing rugby as ab 8-year-old at his local club, Maidstone where he was inspired by his father, who was a prop. A product of Dulwich College also having played for Sevenoaks, David joined the England Schools squad including touring Australia 1997 with teammates that would go on to become greats of the game. The following year he went to Argentina with the *England Colts* as his progression and growth as a player continued. He also represented *London & South-West* and *England Under-21s* against South Africa in the autumn of 1998. He won 8 caps for England; and 7 for England 'A'

(Proposer – Executive Committee; Seconded – Steve Homewood (Askeans RFC). Carried by consensus.

As regards the President's Award for 2023-24, this would be presented to **Tom Stradwick**.

Proposed amendment to Section 11 (Composition of Executive Committee) of the County Rules

The **Hon. Secretary** said that what he hoped was a self-explanatory paper, seeks members' approval to amend the composition of the Executive Committee, to ensure that it has a membership sufficient to meet the opportunities and challenges that the game in Kent faces over the forthcoming season and beyond, not least to leverage the Women's RWC 2025.

The Executive Committee proposed to appoint (by election or co-option) to the Committee three roles:

a) Senior Vice President (Elected position – see next agenda item proposing to amend Section 12 of the KCRFU's Rules).
b) Chair, Women & Girls Committee (Co-opted position).
c) National Youth Council representative (Co-opted position).

This will necessitate amending Section 11 of the County's Rules, increasing the limit of additional elected or co-opted members of the Executive Committee from 25 per cent to 50 per cent, i.e. a membership of nine individuals, in total. Both co-opted positions will be reviewed at the end of the 2024-25 season.

There being no questions from the floor, the proposed Rule amendments was approved by consensus. *(Proposer – Executive Committee; Seconded – Kevin Cope (Bexley RFC)*.

Proposed amendment to Section 12.4 (County President) of the County Rules

The **Hon. Secretary** observed that the role of County President is an important one, being the 'face' of the rugby in Kent and our figurehead and representative across the game.

An important part of the Executive Committee's function is to identify individuals of sufficient stature and reputation within Kent to fulfil this role, such that we can generate a line of succession as each President completes their three-year tenure.

Alan Thompson has been approached and agreed (subject, in due course, to being duly elected) to succeed Doug. However, Alan, due to existing commitments, is unable to accede to the position until 2025-26, subject to successful election at the 2025 AGM.

The County Rules state (paragraph 12) that the individual elected to the position of County President shall not hold the position "continuously for more than three years". However, given Alan's situation, it is necessary to amend the Rules, to make provision, on an exceptional basis only, for an existing incumbent, who may already have served three years, to serve for a further one-year term, subject to him being duly elected at an AGM.

Doug has kindly agreed to serve as President for a further year, subject to the proposed Rule change being approved and then being elected by those present to do so.

Kevin Cope commended the proposal, but asked for clarification as from which cohort the Senior Vice-President would be selected. The **Hon. Secretary** noted that this is an important point. The SVP would be selected from those who are already either Life Vice-Presidents or Vice-Presidents (noting that those holders of the latter award will not be added to, per the outcome of the 2022 Review of County Honours).

(Proposer – Executive Committee; Seconded – Taff Gwilliam (Canterbury RFC). The proposal was caried by consensus.

Election of officers of the County

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

Hon. Secretary – Nigel Fray. (*Proposer – Kevin Cope (Bexley RFC); Seconded – Sam Whiskin (Sheppey RFC)*. Elected by consensus.

Hon. Treasurer – Ben (*Proposer – Taff Gwilliam (Canterbury RFC); Seconded – Dawn Waters (Chair, KCRFU Minis)*. Elected by consensus.

Election of Executive Committee for season 2024-25

Roger Clarke, Doug Hursey, Ben Ashby, Nigel Fray, Jarrod Lawrence, Alan Thompson. (*Proposer – Lynn Neal (Sheppey RFC), Seconded – Kevin Cope (Bexley 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. The Executive may also at its discretion co-opt individuals onto the Committee as required to fulfil its remit, strategy and objectives. Hence this evening's proposal to co-opt the Chair of W&G and a member of the NYC.

Appointment of Auditors

The **Hon. Secretary** noted that, as agreed at the 2023 AGM, the Executive proposes still to use the small company exemption and use Goldbond Associates.

This was noted without comment.

(Proposer – Executive Committee; Seconded – Giles Hilton (Canterbury RFC). The proposal was caried by consensus

AOB

Kevin Cope expressed concern that individual members of the CB (i.e. those not perhaps any longer members of specific clubs) had not received the Calling Notice and papers for the AGM. This was surprising, since the online notification had a hyperlink to the papers, which had been sent to all individual members for whom the CB has contact details (incl. an email address). **Steve Homewood** (Membership Secretary) apologised, on behalf of the CB and said that this issue will be addressed.

There being no other business, the meeting finished at 8.12pm.