

## President's Report for AGM (17th July 2024) Season 2023/2024

During the 2023/24 season, I managed to visit all Buckinghamshire clubs (with one exception), although my schedule after Christmas was disturbed by the wet weather which led to waterlogged pitches and postponements. I also attended 6 county matches and the end of the season. Others will comment on our county progress.

It was evident from my travels that the same common discussion points remain from the previous season (albeit not across all clubs):

- Commitment of senior players across the season – evident in the high number of players used to regularly turn out the 1st XV.
- Ongoing problems 2<sup>nd</sup> XV fixtures
- Junior age grade gaps
- Smaller leagues impacting on club revenues

We all thought that 2023/24 would be a difficult season. Players, coaches, referees and spectators would need to show a degree of restraint with the new tackle height. Whatever our opinion about how the RFU managed and communicated this change, we all knew it was necessary for the safety of our players and the good of the game in the long run. I have to say that despite all the pre-season reservations I believe that the rule change has largely been uneventful and for the most part players and referees have adapted well. We do, however, still need to educate some of our spectators, and respect for referees and match officials needs to be a priority going forward.

Most of our clubs (11) entered the Papa John's Cup, with mixed fortunes and there were several unfulfilled fixtures. This may well have been down to rescheduled league matches resulting from the wet weather we experienced in the second half of the season. Congratulations go to Olney who reached the Regional 2 North Shield Final, played at the Darlington Mowden Arena, only narrowly losing to Keswick (20-17).

I must also mention the success of the Southern clubs Veterans' league and I do hope this model can be replicated in a similar fashion by the Northern clubs. Keeping players engaged with our clubs will be hugely beneficial.

I can attest that the County Executive continue to work tirelessly on your behalf and manage a constant and, at times, uncoordinated flow of information from the RFU. My thanks go out to each of them.

The highlight of my season came at the Volunteers awards lunch at Aylesbury rugby club. This was a wonderful event, and a poignant reminder that our volunteers are the lifeblood of our clubs and I encourage you to continue to recognise and reward them appropriately. This was closely matched by my award of a 150 players cap to my own daughter at Bletchley RFC.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my five years as Senior Vice President and President but now I am looking forward to watching my own club Bletchley play on a Saturday. Chris McCombie is your new President and needs no introduction as he is already well known to most of you. I am sure you will extend the same warm welcome to Chris that I have received during my term in office.

And finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to all the club Presidents and the club officials who have hosted me over the season. You have made my time as President both enjoyable and rewarding.



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