



## LIVERPOOL & DISTRICT REFEREES' SOCIETY

In our 101st season it is refreshing to report that the Society has entered its second century in the very good shape. The Centenary Season may have faded into the memories of all but the prospects for the future is looking very healthy. At the time of my last report we had still to enjoy the wonderful events of our Centenary Dinner at the Adelphi. Over 300 attended and the evening was a tremendous success with wives, partners and guests from many of our constituent clubs and close associates from other societies and the Rugby Union representatives enjoying an evening of high quality. Our thanks must go to those members of the Centenary Events Committee who co-ordinated the entire season of events and whilst not wishing to single anyone individual out it was appropriate that the inaugural recipient of the David Yorke Bowl was Geraint Davies, a true reflection of his contribution not only to the Centenary but the Society as well.

If there was a downside to the season then it was surely the fact that one of the attendees that night was sadly taken from us in cruel circumstances a few short weeks later. The Society lost a valued member and friend when we heard of the loss of Ian Robinson from Merchant Taylors' whilst on tour in Australia. Ian's funeral service was one that those who attended were certainly all left with a deep sense of grieving and warmth for an individual who was colourful, genuine and widely respected in all spheres of his life. The tributes that came from his family, friends and school colleagues will long remain in the minds of those who knew him. As a lasting epitaph, with the permission of both Margaret Yorke and Ian's widow Liz, the Society have proposed to name the School of the Year Award in Ian's memory; not only as a legacy but as a mark of the effort that Ian put into the winning of the award and as Dave Edmunds knows the disappointment when Ian lost out to another school - such was his desire to win, as he displayed in the rest of his life.

Whilst on the reflective side of the year's analysis, may the Society wish speedy recoveries to both Ian Robinson - little Ian that is and Steve Lander. To have had two of our most senior officials out of the game - hopefully only temporarily- has certainly left a void in the Society that has created opportunities for the rest of the members. We offer them both the good wishes from the rest of us.

In terms of on the field activities it has been a year of progression and challenge for some and development opportunities for others. We have had two members of the Elite Referee Unit - albeit in support capacities and David Matthews' eloquent use of his Television Match Official skills was certainly witnessed by many in the Harlequins versus Ospreys match in the Competition - if not the referee on the day. Modesty forbids personal mention but Touch Judging on the Elite has certainly refocused the mind of your scribe and it has been an eye-opening experience, hard work, plenty of travelling (Benetton Treviso included) and intensity. The reality check kicks in when the first foul play scenario of the season involves reporting on an International skipper from the World Cup Finals, clarity and accuracy of detail certainly demands attention.

In terms of other National Panel activities, Gareth Hodges and Dave Edmunds have carried the baton with distinction, I am sure Gareth has had some salutary lessons with the reality that the game at senior level offers some sobering moments. Robbo had also started the season off well and it is hoped that he may be able to take to the field in the future, we wish him well again. Our two National Panel Coaches continue to prosper with their charges making progressive steps up the refereeing ladders.

The Society input at Levels 5 and 6 has certainly provided plenty of talking points with the Federation based scheme for Level 6 working well and talk of this cascading down to Level 7; it has given a balanced structure to the preparation for referees hoping to make the move upwards. Stuart McCormack, Ian Tempest and Mark Jackson have certainly noticed the benefits of the scheme and it is hoped that these three can progress in the right

direction. The importance of the scheme working well is dependent on the numbers of local clubs available at each commensurate level; it is a measure of the strength of the Society that there are sufficient first teams playing at each level, it is frustrating for many referees to officiate teams at a lower level to their particular grading and it is for the strategists in the planning rooms to ensure each referee of potential has the requisite matches to officiate to enable progression. Patience is the key to all those aspiring referees.

The most pleasing aspect of this season is seeing the number of new names and faces that are coming into the Society, the hard work and development of the Entry Level Referee Award scheme under the jurisdiction of Will Halford and the training skills of David Matthews has seen a raft of names wishing to join the Society, the interest is testimony to the efforts of David and his support team; what we as a Society need to do is retain these individuals and develop them - the rewards are out there looking at the progress of certain individuals on the national panel. To date there have been in excess of 100 candidates taking the various courses, some of them coming through the Junior Referees Scheme or at the lower end of the age range and to date at least 13 have shown an interest in joining the Society. Overall this is a very positive achievement with one or two already making favourable impressions with their skills. In addition those ELRA candidates who currently wish to develop their skills at Club level; it can only improve the standard at the lower levels in a positive fashion. Whilst this new interest is satisfying it is essential that the Society looks at the longer term strategy regarding the development of Coaches, Assessors and Trainers. To this end there is a significant change proposed in terms of development of the new ELRA faces which will hopefully align the Society to the RFU Pathway and the proposal to fill the Society Coaches Development Officer position that was unfilled last year.

As is usual at the end of each season there are changes, farewells and thanks to be made; most notably our Centennial President Tony Rossall, who after his two year tenure stands down. He has led the Society with distinction over the last two years and his contribution to the success of the Centenary events themselves should not be dismissed lightly. His knowledge, direction and presence at all Committee events has been noticeable and his successor has big shoes to fill, on behalf of the Society I am sure we would all like to thank him for his work - thanks too for Sylvia for her patience. Another change sees Brian Harris stand down from the role of Honorary Secretary of Grading and Reports, in his term of office Brian has developed a robust structure that has certainly offered an immense change from his predecessor that only the computer literate would understand!! Thanks go to Brian for his sterling work. On the Isle of Man our long standing Chairman, Joe Phelan has made way for younger blood (!!!!) in the form Paul Dougherty; I don't know if Anno Domini or the Tax Man has caught up with Joe but again a massive vote of thanks must go to Joe for his contribution in bringing the profile of the Isle of Man Referees up the levels. I have been told he will still be active within the Society.

On the Club front the position of the Liverpool Clubs would appear positive, there is a new club joining the League Structure - namely Ramsey from the Isle of Man - this will present further logistical challenges to our appointments team. Currently we wait to hear if Hutton RFC will affiliate themselves to us next season. West Park sadly could not retain their foothold in the National Leagues but level 5 will be competitive locally with West Park joining Birkenhead Park and Chester - the latter two receiving commiseration's and congratulations respectively for making your scribe's prediction of an all North West Intermediate Trophy Final at Twickenham come true. Commiseration's to the following as well: Liverpool St Helens, Anselmians, Ruskin Park, Oldershaw, Liverpool Collegiate, Parkonians and Prenton on their respective demotions but praise to Ormskirk and Douglas for their worthy promotions.

Season 2008-09 would appear to hold much promise but words of caution to the wise old owls, the expectation of Experimental Law Variations, whilst the Law Makers may have designs on improving the game please do not forget the grass roots of the game, whilst everyone is in favour of speeding the game up to the 2nd XV and 3rd XV referees on the back pitch wherever you might be there needs to be an element of sympathy in explaining to those players who are still using jerseys with no numbers, no touch judges available or individuals who don't know a maul from a fall - does the game need changing for the better?

**MARTIN BUCK**

*Hon. Secretary*