



**MANCHESTER AND DISTRICT
RUGBY UNION REFEREES' SOCIETY**

Almost the end of another packed season, David Leslie slipped seamlessly into the office of President with Colin Durkin elected as his Vice President. Geoff Cove took up the reins of Chairman and applied strict timing to discussions at executive meetings, the guillotine was often in evidence.

Andy Taylorson continues to progress on the RFU panel and this year was given the Cheshire Cup final in which he was ably assisted by the Wigan mafia of Lodge, Bennett and Singer. Kevin Warwick was unlucky to not make it to the panel this season: their loss not ours. Geoff Elliott did however make the quantum leap onto the panel of assessors and not before time we think. Our other representatives on the RFU again continue to acquit themselves well. In addition we have six referees on the North Group and a further five on the Federation.

On a sadder we lost a member of long standing, David Stewardson, he had also been a key figure at the Sale club in its heyday as a leading amateur club. He continued to serve there for many years after finishing his refereeing career, one position being the referee contact there, a role in which he was always most welcoming and courteous to match officials on their visits to Heywood Road.

Colin Durkin has organised a healthy exchange programme encompassing 16 societies including 4 in Scotland. On the International front referees have travelled to Kenya, South Africa and the Dubai 7's, the South African contingent have been the first to experience the new ELVs, their impressions are eagerly awaited. We have also continued the short haul trips to both Santander and Madrid in Spain and Croatia. These trips have been reciprocated with incoming referees and advisers.

Both the expanding Miller Homes and Colts leagues have stretched our resources fully this season, in the case of the Colts Leagues we have had to restrict appointments to cover only the A and B leagues for both U17s and U19s, regrettable but unavoidable given the number of referees who were available for Sundays and also CRB cleared. The re-appointments teams for both days have coped well under trying circumstances and few games have gone without a referee on the day. Non-availability can be coped with, it is the late cry-offs that cause the greatest problems. The Re-appointments teams would welcome a little more co-operation from both referees and clubs. The much heralded Rugby First from the RFU has yet to be launched for appointments/availability's and thus we are having to continue with spreadsheets, phone and e-mail not wishing to invest a large sum in a separate website which could then quickly become obsolete. The expanded local referee associations coupled with the newly formed colts league referees group has meant that many more games are now being covered by neutral 'qualified' referees and not just 'homers' all the time. We are building up good relationships with them in the interests of the game.

Abuse of match officials continues to increase, in particular at junior levels, although the problem is being actively pursued by both the RFU, Lancashire RFU and the Colts league organisation.

The crowded end of the season has seen the culmination of league and cup competitions at all levels from schools to seniors with teams of three having been provided for each event covering Lancashire, Cheshire and other organising bodies such as the Halbro cups.

We have a number of potential new referees in the pipeline awaiting completion of the required qualifications. The change to RFU Entry Level Referee Award with its greater emphasis on practical refereeing is producing referees capable of stepping straight into the game. The Junior Referees group now has five active members.

We welcomed a new sponsorship deal negotiated with the Halbro company this season which, coupled with a subsidy from the Society enabled a free issue of a smart new strip to referees. It was made a condition of issue that old kit had to be handed in and all referees would officiate in the new kit. This old kit was destined for distribution by the KitAid appeal, ably managed by our merchandise officer, Andy Thompson.

The North West State Schools Rugby Festivals programme continued its expansion in the months of October and March and gave opportunity for the Junior referees to officiate alongside senior referees on an equal footing. Hopefully we will continue to recruit from their ranks in the ensuing seasons.

The Annual Dinner in February was held in the luxurious accommodation of the Fylde club, where the main speaker was Ray French, a double International in both Union and League who became the voice of rugby league for the BBC at the end of his playing career. Ray had a wealth of anecdotal tales from both codes. He was backed up by the comedian Jed Stone (no not our Ged) who entertained the mixed audience well, without resorting to the blue material. Again it was disappointing that so few of the active referees attended. The Whistler's Trophy was presented to the Bowdon club, won by their 1st XV. The occasion also saw the award of an engraved tankard for 35 years service to the Society. Recipients on the night were Allan Townsend, Colin Durkin, Mike Massey and Brian Allcock.

Following on from the Society Strategy a statement of mutual expectations together with the appointments and grading policy have now been issued. To continue progress of the Strategy the Executive Committee have given up more of their free time and have organised an away day in June. Referee recruitment, development and retention will continue to be the key issues on the agenda.

Paul Renton, Chairman of RT&D writes:

"Despite one hiccup at our last meeting of the season, guest speakers have once again provided good entertainment at our Main Meetings. The introduction by the Referee Department of the Continuous Referee Development Award (CDRA) has provided materials that have formed the basis of inputs for the South Area Team Meetings. Despite the best efforts of North Area organisers meetings have again been patchy this year.

A clear pathway has now been established for enquiries for new members, especially those that have completed the Entry Level Referee Award (ELRA). Currently, the Society is aware, via the North Referee Development Officer, of 17 candidates who want to complete their ELRA Stage 3 process - 10 already have!

I am pleased to report on the successful introduction of a full programme of officials training course in co-operation with the Liverpool Society. This initiative will be continued next season. The match preparation and fitness session, based on CRDA modules, attracted a number of referees at the start of the season and a small 'band' has continued to use the facilities at Robin Park. All level 6 and 7 referees were invited to test their fitness at the end of the season and this element of referee development will be continued next season."

Once again on behalf of the Society, I would like to thank all the clubs in our area for the continued friendship and hospitality shown to our members on their visits. We are also indebted to those clubs who so freely provide the use of their facilities to hold our meetings and events, without their generosity we would find it extremely difficult to operate.

A number of individuals have been named above but many more have contributed to the successful running of the Society, to all those we would wish to offer our sincere thanks. My personal thank you goes out to those who have again assisted me in numerous ways.

GEOFF GILL

Honorary Secretary/Chairman of Administration