



## MARKETING & MEDIA COMMITTEE

With a new Chairman in place, the season for the Marketing Committee began with the heretical proposal of updating the red rose that adorns all our literature, clothing, pin badges and the like. Once the spluttering from the county grandees evaporated, a suitable compromise was introduced. The greatly revered rose that adorned the old circular badge stayed in place whilst around it an elliptical shape offered a link to the pumped up bladder we pass and kick around with varying degrees of skill.

The advantage of the new 'Club Lancashire' logo was the addition of a variable strap line, giving a unique identity to kit supplied to all our teams and other groups.

### Kit & Equipment

The major disappointment throughout the season has been the supply of branded kit and equipment to the teams and other groups. Having accepted an offer of sponsorship from a new kit supplier, Bob Grant, the County Treasurer has battled throughout the season to fulfil the county's requirements from a catalogue of products that were said to be 'from stock' and in the event were unavailable or subject a very long supply chain from the Far East.



We have to accept, having taken a while to build a relationship with our previous suppliers, that these contracts take time to settle in, but it is of no consolation to the players, parents, coaches, and equally important the Team Managers who are 'in the firing line'.

Lessons have been learnt, particularly that the first demand for kit from a supplier is in August. Getting it right for the Senior XV in May is not acceptable and, writing as a Team Manager, it has been an embarrassing experience. Planning for 2008/09 is well under way.

A new virtual shop, linked to Lancashire's RugbyFirst website, will be launched over the summer. Let's hope we have readily available stock to sell!

### RugbyFirst

Since its introduction on 6th October 2006, a date that to some equates to the date of the death of a favourite uncle, the arrival of "RugbyFirst" has been a major talking point at rugby meetings the length and breadth of the Union. Vaunted as 'the most modern administration system in British sport', RugbyFirst is a game-wide internet-based tool to help run rugby at all levels, with the details of more than one million coaches, referees, players and volunteers held on a single system.

In time, it will live up to its billing, but in the meantime Lancashire (together with Staffordshire and Eastern Counties) is at the forefront of its development. Even the referees' pilot scheme is based on the Manchester & District Society's working model.

After eighteen months, Chris Smail is one of the most adept users of the RugbyFirst communications module, and is slowly persuading both clubs and the RFU staff that this is the way forward. We have two Lancastrians, Robbie Briers and the writer, sitting on the RFU's RugbyFirst Board, so – slowly – matters are improving. We may not meet our self-imposed September deadline, but electronic communication continues to be the aim.

### Communications

Whilst communication is mainly channelled through the website, up-to-the-minute alterations to the schedule or weather updates are now added to the new Lancashire Hotline, (07516 400494). We have recognised that parents on their way back from work, pupils returning home from school, or coaches and teachers still working with players on the pitches don't have access to an internet site on days when venues are changed or cancelled. Not everything is perfect, but at least this innovation has been extremely well received.

In terms of news items, we have received good press coverage at local level and in the RFU publication, Touchline. In feeding to, and drawing off the RFU Press Officer, Tony Simpson is a rugby journalist who has offered a regular information exchange. Despite his Yorkshire roots, we again acknowledge with thanks his assistance towards Lancashire's publicity machine.

### Sponsorship

Part of the publicity was, by necessity, directed towards our new sponsors, Butlers Farmhouse Cheeses (through their "Blacksticks Blue" brand), and Barclays Commercial. We are grateful to Butlers' Colin Hall and his national sales manager, Philip Webster for their support at the festival days at Manchester, Sefton and ultimately, Preston Grasshoppers, and to Jeremy Smith for adding a more professional touch to the Mini Festival at Blackburn.

The County has learnt a few lessons from both, and in future these important days in the calendar will see a more focused 'Lancashire' approach on festival days.

The Women and Girls sides, the District Development programme and the extensive Senior, Colts and Schools competitions all remain available as sponsorship opportunities. Whether the Sportsmatch scheme returns, government-backed funding to attract new business sponsorship, and which we drew upon for the Butlers and Barclays agreements, is doubtful.

### **Match Day programme**

Changes at the production company, Collins and Darwell, who hitherto had raised the advertising revenue to pay for the programme, together with the late withdrawal of the intended back page advertiser, led to the county producing separate bespoke editions for all the home fixtures.

This proved to be an expensive option, but for almost all the home games the Lancashire match-day booklet was available for each venue plus our ten festivals & county finals occasions. Given how late in the day that team lists or other information arrived, and sometimes it was very late, our thanks must go to Chris Travers of our printers, Collins and Darwell, who never let us down.

### **Membership**

The challenge for 2008/09 is two-fold: to increase the membership of the County, either by way of an annual membership subscription of £15, or through a life membership of £150, and to build up the number of participants in the "Club Lancashire 125 Club".

This is a monthly, open-ended draw, established in our 125th anniversary season. Prize money is dependant on the number of entrants, and an application form is enclosed with the Annual Report. The support of our members, patrons, players, coaches, etc., is directed to the development of our younger players. I hope that you can support this objective.

To maintain one of England's most active rugby calendars, including seven representative squads, twelve District development squads, plus the increasing number of competitive opportunities for players on festival and finals days, Lancashire must build its revenue base.

Finally, the Marketing & Media Committee spans a number of disciplines, and in thanking its Secretary, Brian Minor for his contribution, the other members who have attended, and in particular our County President who has been ever-present, may I make an appeal to anyone who feels he or she has something to add, to contact Brian through the usual channels.

Fresh ideas are always welcome!

**KEITH MELLALIEU**

*Chairman*