



## SENIOR SELECTION COMMITTEE

It would have been wonderful to mimic Maurice Parker's 2007 report by starting this piece with 'Here we go again!' Unfortunately, it was not to be, as we fell at the final hurdle this year in the Roses clash at Claro Road, Harrogate. And, as the Don Welsh and Maurice Parker team were always going to be a hard act to follow for David Hodgson and myself, so it was for the 2008 squad in the wake of recent successes. However, it would be very wrong for anyone to assume a lot of 'pluses' did not come out of this season's campaign - far from it!

The first game at Preston perhaps encapsulated the whole 2008 campaign - very early in the second half we had built up an excellent 35-13 point lead with some stunning back play, and a finishing rate of probably around 90% of chances, with only 40% possession, but then our concentration levels seemed to drop, and with the introduction of some of Warwickshire's replacements that possession rate fell further in the last 15 minutes and the result of 35-25 was not as conclusive as it might have been.

This lack of possession was a feature that continued away to Cheshire at New Brighton. A highly motivated Cheshire team made us fight for every bit of ball we won and were it not for some resolute defence, then there were times when it looked like Cheshire would open up a significant lead. However, we managed to keep Cheshire in our sights and again with high quality finishing eventually got our noses in front with four minutes to go. The drama had not finished there, with a penalty awarded and converted by Cheshire with two minutes left on the clock, put us a point behind once more. With great resolve our pack dug deep, took possession up to 10 metres from the Cheshire line, and won a penalty which was confidently taken by Steve Nutt from wide out on the right hand touchline to give us a 23-21 victory.

So, on to Claro Road, and in the end a well earned win by Yorkshire highlighted the lack of possession we had been able to secure throughout this year's Championship, and yet, even then, we had our chances and with a better rub of the green might have narrowed the gap.

On behalf of the whole Lancashire senior squad many thanks are offered to Mark Nelson and Martin Scott for their dedication and coaching input; Helen Pennington and Dr. Tim Weighman for their medical support; Billy Gregory, Rowley Heptonstall and John Greenwood for their assistance with the logistics of kit and equipment; to Barrie Barton for his camera work, and Bob Grant for his expertise, advice and hard work. Also, to Preston Grasshoppers for hosting the Warwickshire game, and for their training facilities, and also to Howard and his team at Tyldesley Rugby Club for hosting two sessions there.

So, what did we get from this year's County Championship? There were many positives - we have had to re-invent the squad from the one that dominated Northern county rugby a few years ago, and now have a younger group whose best years are still to come. The greatest indication of this is personified by our current captain, Jason Duffy, who at 22 years old will undoubtedly develop his leadership skills further from a very impressive start.

Our back line, with ball in hand, was as good as any we came across, and were very exciting to watch with our wingers and full back scoring seven out of our season's ten tries! A new pack, with only two or three forwards from previous years available at any one time, found it difficult to win enough ball, but there were still many impressive performances within our three games - Seb Moss marking his debut with a 50 yard try against Warwickshire, James Jones and Alistair Davidson playing well coming off the bench, and the overall commitment of the pack was never in doubt.

Also, a plus, was the playing of a Junior County final prior to a Senior County home game, which was a big success and swelled the crowd, and perhaps could be considered as an annual event prior to Senior home matches.

Three players received their caps this year - Steve Nutt, Richard Kenyon and Petrus du Plessis - so many congratulations to them, and to the 5 players selected for the England Counties Tour; Seb Moss (Manchester), Oliver Brennand (Fylde), Jason Duffy (Waterloo), Petrus du Plessis (Sedgley Park) and James Doherty (Wharfedale). A very healthy Red Rose contingent, and much deserved!

We will look forward to the 2009 season with anticipation as we are confident we have a group of players who enjoy playing, and, are eager to play for their county and we will pull out all the stops to go one step further next year.

**STEVE RIGBY**

*Senior XV Team Secretary*