



## HON. SECRETARY'S REFLECTION

It is my sad duty to record the deaths of three Lancashire stalwarts during the past year. Last August, Ted Whiteside died after a long illness. Ted, a member of the Southport Club, was President of the County in the 2002/2003 Season, and was a true Lancastrian who served his County well over many years. Having been Chairman of the County Disciplinary Committee for a number of years, he then became the first Manager of the newly formed Community Task Group and did sterling work in helping to solve the problems facing our clubs - particularly the smaller clubs. Unknown to most, Ted also kept in touch with former players who had become seriously disabled through rugby related injuries. He would visit them, take them out and ensure that they did not feel forgotten by the County. He, too, will not be forgotten.

In September, we were all shocked by the sudden and tragic death of Ivon Hodgson. A member of the Burnage Club, Ivon was their representative on the Lancashire General Committee for many years. During that time, he served on both Cup and Disciplinary Committees proving to be a reliable and effective member of both Committees. His most important contribution to Lancashire was as the County's Representative on the RFU North Competitions Committee where he was most zealous in protecting the interests of the Lancashire Clubs. He was a big man in every way and he will be sadly missed.

A month later, we learned of the death of Sue Garnett, a member of the Vale of Lune Club and Secretary of Lancashire Ladies. Sue had been ill for a long time and had borne her illness with great fortitude. She was always cheerful, never complained and absolutely never let it get in the way of her rugby duties. Sue served both her Club and County extremely well. The packed church at her funeral bore testament to the esteem in which she was held by all who knew her.

On to brighter things and none has shone brighter during the past Season than our President, David Herriman. David has proved to be a most splendid President arguably one of the best in the County's history. He has attended meetings of all Committees on a regular basis and his intelligent and helpful contributions to the proceedings have been most appreciated. David has also travelled far and wide to offer support at games at all levels within the County - and outside - and his encouragement has been well received by the players. He also took over Ted Whiteside's liaison with the seriously disabled players with no little enthusiasm. Two of them attended the County Championship game against Warwickshire as his guests. David has also had the onerous task of attending many Club Dinners. Many thanks, David, for your massive contribution to Lancashire over the year. Our thanks also to Margaret Herriman for her support and her genuine interest in the County.

Lancashire continues to be represented in high places. Bill Beaumont continued as Vice-Chairman of the IRB, Rob Briers and Bill Chappell as the Lancashire Representatives on the RFU Council and Tim Stirk as the English Schools' Representative on the RFU Council. Rob Briers was appointed as Chairman of the RFU Competitions' Committee - a prestigious position indeed. All these gentlemen spend a great deal of time serving our interests and we are most grateful to them.

Elsewhere in this Report, you will read of the massive amount of excellent work that is carried out in the County particularly with regards to Schools and Youth. In addition, the RFU passes more and more work on to the Counties. This places a great deal of pressure on the volunteers who carry out this work. In order to ease this pressure, Lancashire - like many other large Counties - has decided to appoint a full-time employee to assist the volunteers in their admirable work.

We have, therefore, appointed Tom Fitzgerald as the County's Operations Administrator and he commenced his duties on the 12th May, 2008. His duties include being Administrator for Club Lancashire, Club Lancashire Schools of Rugby, Club Lancashire Members, Elite Team Playing Kit, Sale of Supporters Kit, Lancashire Programme, Club Lancashire Festival Events, Club Lancashire Sponsorship and liaison with the RRDM, RUSLO and RDOs in all CB rugby matters. In addition, Tom will continue as Secretary of the important Rugby Development Committee.

With the U20 County Championship campaign completed - full details given elsewhere in this Report - Chairman Tom Fitzgerald and his coaching team must be congratulated on the team's performance in the Group matches with the only blemish being a loss to the old enemy, Yorkshire. The lads played some excellent rugby throughout but, with only one team from each Group progressing to the final stages of the competition, the loss was enough to end our interest for another year. Our thanks to the coaches who are retiring but I am happy to report that Tom Fitzgerald continues as Chairman of the 19-24 Group.

After appearing in the final of the Bill Beaumont County Championship for the past three seasons, our interest in this year's competition ended at Harrogate where we were beaten by Yorkshire. This created a three-way tie at the top of the Northern Group with Yorkshire taking the spoils on points difference. They now face Devon in the final at Twickenham. A full report on our campaign is printed later in this Annual Report. I would, however, express the Com thanks to our new management team of David Hodgson and Steve Rigby – plus the coaches and all the rest of the helpers – for all their efforts on the County's behalf. Most of all, I would like to thank the players who, after a long hard season, wore the red and white with pride.

Sad to say, politics at HQ have been dominated by the continued conflict with the Premiership Clubs - culminating in an agreement which virtually hands over the 'family silver' to the professional clubs. Now, as I write, the England players are embroiled in an unseemly dispute with the RFU over pay - the word greed comes to mind! As a Lancastrian, I must also record my sadness at the manner in which Brian Ashton has been treated over the past few months. He deserved better.

Whilst all this has been going on, the RFU allows the Community game to struggle along. I mentioned last year the demise of a number of clubs had seen our representation on the RFU Council reduced to just one member. However, a proposal that the number of Section 1 Clubs necessary for a County to have two representatives be lowered from 70 to 60 was accepted at the RFU AGM so both Rob Briers and Bill Chappell retain their seats on the Council. Many of our clubs continue to flourish but a few are struggling to survive. I am continually impressed by the dedication of the many club officials who toil long and hard to ensure that the bills are paid and a team takes the field on a Saturday. They are the true rugby men - and women. Playing an important part in ensuring a club's survival is our Community Task Group. Chris Smail and his Committee do an excellent job and long may it continue. Every Club is important and the RFU could do much more to help. However, they spend a fortune on promoting things like Leisure Rugby, e.g. Beach Rugby! Not much call for that in Wigan!

Our Schools and Youth Sections continue their excellent work in developing young players. I recommend that you read the respective reports which detail their activities. Both Sections carry out an amazing amount of work throughout the year. The enthusiasm of the parents, teachers and volunteers who work so hard in these sectors knows no bounds. Our youngsters - both boys and girls - are very fortunate to receive such an excellent start to their rugby careers. I would express the County's appreciation to all those who work so hard to ensure the future of our sport. In particular, I would highlight the tremendous amount of work that has been done by Ken Andrews (Schools) and Keith Mellalieu (Youth). The time these two gentlemen devote to their respective Sections is phenomenal and we are greatly indebted to them.

The Rugby Development Officers led by Dave Southern have again had a busy and successful year. Apart from the development of rugby in both schools and clubs, they have done sterling work in the development of facilities, coaching, refereeing, student rugby and Ladies' rugby. Our thanks to all the RDOs.

In Club rugby, my congratulations to all League and Cup winners and commiserations to all who were less successful. However, my main wish is that everyone enjoyed their season because that is what it is all about: playing with your mates and making new friends along the way.

Our two Referees' Societies continue to prosper despite the ever-increasing demands on their members - particularly from the highly successful Colts Leagues. Both Societies have provided an excellent service to our clubs throughout the season and off the fieldwork extremely hard to ever improve refereeing standards. A sincere thank you to all whistlers and to the officials who make it all happen. Next season, they will have the Experimental Law Variations to deal with and that will be interesting. They will test both players and referees and will require a sympathetic understanding from both. I would suggest that clubs arrange for referees to visit their clubs pre-season to work with the players. It will be to the benefit of both referees and players.

To my fellow officials and all those who serve on both County and Club Committees, my thanks for all your hard work over the past year. I would thank in particular my two assistants, Brian Minor and George Mullen, who have worked tirelessly in the County's cause. A special thank you to Martin O'Kane, our Assistant Hon. Treasurer, who is retiring from office. Finally, as ever, I must again record my thanks to the County Treasurer, Bob Grant, for all his efforts our behalf. His worth to the County is well documented but his talent is m recognised countrywide - and rightly so! Many thanks, Bob!

**BRIAN LEIGH**

*Honorary Secretary*