

# LANCASHIRE COUNTY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

## ANNUAL REPORT

**2025-26**

### **THE SECRETARY'S OPENING REMARKS**

As ever my first job is to thank our President, Ian Spivey for a great season in the role. As well as filling this role he is also Chairman of the 7-16 Junior Rugby Committee. A trip to Twickenham completed the season as guests of Deborah Griffin the RFU President for the Bill Beaumont Cup Final.. Ian has been supported all the way by his wife Christine who also wears many hats in the world of Rugby Volunteering. Our thanks for keeping on track Christine.

To Rugby, for the Senior Mens XV we only had 2 games to get to the final and this unusually was home and away fixtures against Yorkshire. The southern half of the tournament saw return fixtures for Kent and Cornwall. This has to change and hopefully the County Championship review group and do something. Many Counties chose to opt for a lower division leaving just the 4 counties above to fight it out to become the "proper" County Champions.

Sadly we came second in the final at Twickenham but the lads played out of their skins and I'm sure the experience will be a lifetimes memory.

The Womens XV had a good start to the season beating Northumberland but came up against a very strong Yorkshire side at Hull Ionians, Yorkshire eventually lifted the Gill Burns Cup in the final at Twickenham.

A message needs to get through to some of the senior club sides who put pressure on players not to trial. Let the girls play....

The U20s could not recreate their success from last season but fought very hard in their games and we will certainly be seeing some of their talent stepping up to Senior County Rugby.

My congratulations and thanks for all who administered, coached and most importantly, played for the County during the season.

Once again the RFU have been meddling with the structured season and have brought in promotion / relegation for the back end of the season. This makes it virtually impossible to plan venues and playing squads due to the unknown factor of who will be in the club playoffs.

Finally on Senior County Rugby I would urge the RFU to consider the financing of the competition, there is just not enough to make the experience for the players the best it could be. Dig Deep Down There.

Our Royals had their usual run out at Tyldesley over the Christmas period in their annual fixture against the Anti Assassins. My thanks to all players and coaches for putting this together and to the AAs for providing stout opposition.

The Finances are in good health, but as with everyone, some more funding would never go amiss. This funding is well allocated by the team of Chris Smail, Paul Deakin, Stephen Briers, and Catherine Ryan are thanked for their continued work for the County and ensuring that the limited funds we are given are used wisely.

Ian and Christine Spivey, as mentioned above, along with their Mini & Junior team are thanked and hopefully the forthcoming season will continue their great work. Organisation of leagues and finals days have been thorough and enjoyed by all who took part.

I pass on my thanks to Malcolm Worsley who stepped down at the start of the season as Director of Club and Community Rugby.

Chris Gaffey has taken over Malcolms role and certainly hit the ground running with a series of very successful geographic cluster meetings which were very lively and fostered some great debate and collaboration. Thanks Chris to you and the members of the sub-committee.

Chris has also been instrumental in the rebranding of our social media and the build and population to the new website which I'm sure those who have seen it will agree is excellent5.

Dave Clarke and Paul Deakin have been reappointed by our clubs to serve another 3 year term representing the Counties interests at Twickenham.

This season has seen the Governance Review Report version 2 published and taken to an RFU Special General Meeting for Clubs to vote on. The fundamental point which was not made very clear was that the Council would lose their right to vote. This is the keystone for the voice of the game and in my personal opinion it was rightly voted down by the clubs. An alternative needs to be looked at and I hope that the incoming RFU President, Sir Bill Beaumont can reunite the Council and move forwards.

The County Schools Union under the Chairmanship of Adam Jackson with Secretarial duties being done by Robbie Jones. Thank you both as well as your committee for the work you do on our behalf in the County schools.

Thanks to Kate Bennetta for her work with the Womens and Girls players and teams in the County. With Club rugby, Pathway rugby and Representative rugby to oversee it's a big task.

It feels that each season when I write this report I mention the number of lower teams who are folding but this has happened with whole club, Thornton Cleveleys who could not compete due to lack of players. This is indeed a worrying trend.

Our lower teams within our clubs are wonderfully looked after by the NOWIRUL merit leagues, administered by Fred Swarbrick and John Powell and I thank them for all their hard work and Tommy Hughes our County Representative to their committee.

Once again the Disciplinary committee have been busier than ever, sadly with a large increase with issues from the junior game. Thankfully there has been a sharp drop in the number of cases of referee abuse. Thanks to John Greenwood and his team for dispensing justice, especially Brian Stot, a very busy man.

My personal gratitude's go firstly to Brian Stott the assistant secretary for covering for me when I have been unable to attend meetings. Secondly, our Chairman, Dave Clarke, Treasurer, Paul Deakin and Director of Rugby, Howard Hughes, a triumvirate who have been invaluable to me. To Carol Baker for keeping us all Safe and Gill Burns for so ably looking after our Volunteers. Anne Clarke for her help with minute taking, Arthur Crabtree, who is new to the Board and focusing on Rugby Safe amongst other things, lastly Anne-Marie Briers, our Membership Secretary, all of whom are invaluable.

To club administrators at all levels, to my County colleagues, players and members, as ever, summer well.

### **Mark Downs**

*Honorary Secretary*

## **REPRESENTATIVE RUGBY**

On the Male Representative stage all Four Squads acquitted themselves well and showed just how much rugby talent we have in Lancashire.

### **U17s**

Another mammoth nomination process ultimately led to a Squad of 30 being selected from 119 nominations. Always a tough decision to make but the Coaching Group led by **Chris Marsh** ably assisted by **Martin Scott** and **James Smith** delivered some excellent sessions with a squad that bonded quickly. **Mark Owen** stepped in to the role of Team Manager and did really impressive job. First game of the U17 schedule was away in the desolate part of the country known as Yorkshire. Our boys game home recording a fine 12-19 victory. The second outing was a Lymm against Cheshire and despite looking good for another win and brief lack of concentration let the home side nick it at the end by two points.

Final game for the U17s was up at a sun-drenched Vale of Lune where Cumbria made the shortest of trips down the M6. Some great grafting forward work laid out the platform for us to use the width early on and we never looked like coming second.

Yorkshire U17 12 Lancashire U17 19 @ Hull Ionians RUFC

Cheshire U17 33 Lancashire U17 28 @ Lymm RFC

Lancashire U17 38 Cumbria U17 7 @ Vale of Lune RUFC

Physio's **Sarah Rothwell** and **Ethan Redmond** looked after the medical side of things and we are truly grateful.

### U18s

The U18s had two excellent wins to start their programme. A big win over Durham in the North U18 Festival at Lymm, saw us nil the opposition and that was followed by another win against Northumberland at a very wet Preston Grasshoppers with yet again no score against.

The final game at Cheshire was a tough one as home side proved too strong but plenty of the Lancashire boys showed great promise.

Coach **Rob Jones** along with **Theo Hulbert** and **Alex Gaughan** were very pleased with the way the squad grew game by game and Team Manager **Gavin Butterworth** kept the information flowing.

Lancashire U18 34 Durham U18 0 @ Lymm RFC – North U18 Festival

Lancashire U18 15 Northumberland U18 0 @ Preston Grasshoppers

Cheshire U18 38 Lancashire U18 12 @ Lymm RFC

### U20s

After last season, this campaign was always going to be difficult to match it. We began our defence of the U20 National County title with a trip to Billingham to face Durham U20. We were in control for long periods and led 24–12 at half-time, but three late tries saw the game slip away from us. Matters improved in game two away at Cheshire, where we snatched a 34–32 win at the death. By game three, we knew we needed a victory to keep our hopes of topping the group alive, but despite controlling long spells of the match, we fell to a 31–29 defeat against old rivals Yorkshire. With our final group game scheduled for the end of the season, we had a lengthy list of injuries and unavailable players and had to call four players in for their debuts. With that said we still managed to record the victory over Northumberland 19-12.

Lead Coach **Chris Johnson** led his team of **Jack Weare** and **Mark Dickinson** with a calm steely approach with additional help from **Alex Gaughan** and **Theo Hulbert**.

Physio **Hayley Sumner** was a re-assuring presence throughout.

### Royals

The **Royals** our Community County XV faced our regular “challenge” opponents the Anti-Assassins RUFC on a relatively dry and sunny Festive Fixture at Tyldesley RUFC. Lead Coach **Martin Scott** along with assistants **Jonty Wilson** and **John Gavin** knew that this Royals squad was talented and they proved that with yet another dominant display over an AA’s side containing players from Levels 4, 5 and 6. Team Manager **Stephen “Baz” Bailey** did his usual sterling job in getting the side together which never easy at Christmas.

Lancashire Royals 45 Anti-Assassins 24 @ Tyldesley RUFC

## **Senior Men**

The **Senior Men XV** faced with a two-legged Semi-Final came out on top against Yorkshire.

Coaches **Alex Loney & Stephen Briers** assisted by county stalwart **Scott Rawlings** are doing a sterling job.

Thanks also must go to Mark Nelson, Guy Lovgreen, Craig Steel. John Greenwood, Roly Heptonstall and Jordan McClaughlin as part of the Support team along with our medical team of Greg Littler and Molly Hart-Ryan.

Lancashire 38 Yorkshire 18

Yorkshire 22 Lancashire 20 – Agg. 58-40

Lancashire Senior Mens XV sadly came runners up to Cornwall 39-24 at Twickenham in the final. The game was a thrilling encounter and was a great advert for County Representative Rugby. The whole team gave their all but came up against a stronger Cornwall side who certainly had the majority of the support behind them.

Thanks to **Chris Johnson** for his captaincy this season who proved a great mentor to many of the debutants.

All in all, a good season and as we continue to build on our strengths there is no reason why we can’t continue to **#TargetTwickenham** once again.

## **Howard Hughes**

Director of Rugby Development

## **WOMENS & GIRLS RUGBY**

### **U16’s Report**

The 2025/26 season saw several changes within the Lancashire U16 Girls programme, with Sean Phillips stepping into the Head Coach role and a few new coaches joining the

management team. Following a review of the training programme and feedback from parents, three additional training sessions were introduced, which contributed significantly to player development, squad cohesion, and overall success. Strong relationships were built across both the playing and management groups, creating a positive and productive environment throughout the season.

### **Player Nominations & Squad Selection**

- Total nominations received: 100
- Clubs represented in nominations: 15
- Returning players from the previous season: 25
- Final squad selected: 45 players
- Clubs represented in the squad: 11

### **Match Programme**

The team completed fixtures against NLD, Cheshire, and Durham, winning all matches played. Throughout the season, the players showed excellent commitment, adaptability, and teamwork, applying the skills developed in training to produce strong performances on the field.

### **Season Highlights**

- Additional training sessions enhanced player development and squad cohesion.
- A team-building pizza evening encouraged friendships beyond club affiliations.
- Outstanding commitment from players despite challenging weather conditions throughout the season.
- Excellent parental support, particularly for the Durham away fixture on Mother's Day.
- Strong relationships were quickly established within the coaching and management team, creating a positive environment for the squad.

Overall, the season was highly successful, with significant player development, strong performances, and a positive team culture established throughout the programme. The future of Lancashire U16 Girls rugby looks extremely promising.

### **U18's Report**

The 2025/26 season reflected the continued growth, talent, and depth within the Lancashire U18 Girls programme. Strong engagement from clubs across the county, combined with the

commitment of players, coaches, and management, contributed to a positive and productive season. The dedicated coaching and management team provided stability and support throughout, helping players develop both individually and collectively.

### **Player Nominations & Squad Selection**

- Total nominations received: 58
- Clubs represented in nominations: 18
- Final squad selected: 37 players
- Clubs represented in the squad: 12

### **Match Programme**

The team completed a four-match programme against Cheshire, Northumberland, Durham, and Staffordshire.

- Wins: 2 (Cheshire and Northumberland)
- Losses: 2 (Durham and Staffordshire)

### **Season Highlights**

- Record club engagement, with 18 clubs represented in the nomination process.
- Broad representation across the final squad, reflecting the strength of the girls' game throughout Lancashire.
- Strong player development demonstrated through improved communication, cohesion, and decision-making across the season.
- A committed and supportive coaching and management team that provided consistency and stability throughout the programme.

Overall, the season was a positive one for Lancashire U18 Girls Rugby, with continued player development, strong club engagement, and valuable experiences gained both on and off the field. The foundations are firmly in place for future success within the programme.

### Senior Womens

The 2025/26 season saw several changes within the Lancashire Women's programme, with Ben Hyde stepping into the Head Coach role and several new coaches joining the management team. Under the management of Kate Bennetta, the squad continued to develop and build for the future, with a strong focus on player progression and creating a competitive environment.

## **Player Nominations & Squad Selection**

- Total nominations received: 79
- Clubs represented in nominations: 15
- Final squad selected: 38 players

Lancashire competed in the Gill Burns Division 1 Championship, playing two fixtures as part of the competition.

The opening fixture saw Lancashire host Northumberland at Waterloo. In a closely contested and highly competitive match, Lancashire secured a hard fought 12–10 victory. The team's resilience and defensive commitment proved decisive, providing the foundation for a memorable win.

The second fixture was an away match against Yorkshire at Hull Ionians. Unfortunately, the result did not go Lancashire's way, with Yorkshire proving to be a highly experienced, physical, and well-drilled side. Despite the outcome, the squad demonstrated tremendous commitment and determination throughout. As a relatively young group, the players and coaches gained valuable experience and lessons that will support continued development heading into next season.

The result brought the 2025/26 Gill Burns campaign to a close.

## **Season Highlights**

- Strong engagement from clubs across Lancashire, with 79 nominations received from 15 clubs.
- A competitive Division 1 Gill Burns campaign, including an impressive home victory against Northumberland.
- Continued development of a young and talented squad with significant future potential.
- The introduction of new coaching personnel, bringing fresh ideas and experiences to the programme.

Overall, the season provided valuable development opportunities for both players and coaches. While the campaign was shorter than anticipated, the foundations remain strong, and the programme is well placed to continue its growth. Following the nationwide competition review scheduled for later this year, it is hoped that future competition structures will provide additional fixtures and further development opportunities for county players.

**Kate Bennetta**

*Womens & Girls Representative Rugby Lead*

## **RFU LEAGUES**

This report only deals with clubs at Level 5 and below which is the North Area of delegation.

At Level 5 there were no Lancashire clubs in any Promotion or Relegation play offs. Manchester however were involved in the Relegation Play offs but after beating Wirral they then faced Vale of Lune at home , narrowly losing that game and therefore relegated to North 2 West..

In North 2 West we had two clubs involved in the Play offs , Vale of Lune and Widnes. Widnes suffered a narrow loss to Sandbach away, Vale of Lune however , after beating Douglas at home, went on to beat Sandbach , West Bridgeford and the afore mentioned Manchester , to win Promotion to North 1 West. The Relegation was a straight play off between Northwich and West Pk St Helens with West Pk St Helens losing narrowly 32 -25 and were subsequently relegated.

In the ADM Counties Leagues , Wilmslow and Warrington were the two standout teams at the top, separated by only 3 points at the end of the season. Wilmslow were the winners with Warrington and runners up. Both teams were promoted to North 1 West. At the bottom of this League relegation came down to the last game of the season with Wigan and Liverpool St Helens securing enough League points in the final game of the season to stay up with Trafford MV and Aspull being relegated.

In ADM 2 three teams , Southport , Bolton and Littleborough, fought it out for two Promotion places. Southport winning the League by 1 point. Bolton were runners up with both teams promoted. There was no relegation from this League as two teams dropped out during the course of the Season.

In ADM 3, three teams again fought it out for Promotion , Bury, Fleetwood and Orrell, this again went to the last Saturday of the season with Orrell winning the League and Fleetwood as runners up. Both Teams were promoted.

Fixtures for the 26/27 season are due to be published on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2026.

**Dave Clarke**

*North ROC Secretary*

## **CLUB & COMMUNITY RUGBY**

### **Introduction**

Following election to the role of Director of Club and Community Rugby at the Lancashire RFU AGM in June 2025, I laid out my objectives and strategy for the board of directors and began work in July on identifying the challenges facing clubs and the long term opportunities for the growth of a vibrant, passionate, flourishing community game in Lancashire. This report provides an overview of the last 12 months of club community activity and the proposed future direction of projects.

## Survey

- To assess the health of community rugby in Lancashire, and plan for its future development, clubs were invited to take part in a survey aimed at identifying the urgent issues and most common challenges that clubs were facing ahead of the 2025/26 season. The survey was sent to clubs on 1st August and 54 Clubs in total responded (20 of those clubs required multiple prompts and up to 6 weeks to respond, in some cases due to inaccurate contact details). 2 clubs (Eagle, Sefton) did not respond, 2 clubs (Broughton, Thornton Cleveleys) folded ahead of the 2025/26 season and did not participate. 9 University clubs were contacted separately.
- The survey provided opportunity for free expression, which resulted in honest, unfiltered feedback, but also lead to vague responses and detailed descriptions of unique circumstances which made identification of common themes difficult.
- A detailed survey report was published on the Lancashire RFU website. What follows is a summary of the key points.
- Firstly, on a positive note, 14 clubs (26%) were feeling confident and looking to achieve growth this season. 22 clubs (40%) have a women's team, 26 clubs (48%) have girls teams and 10 clubs (20%) stated they'd like to improve their female player recruitment, reflecting the expansion of female rugby in the region. 18 clubs (33%) identified facilities improvements as an ambition, with many of those clubs specifying the growth of women's and girl's rugby as the driving force behind the desire to create a better environment.
- In comparison, 20 clubs (37%) stated that surviving the season would be an achievement and a further 20 clubs (37%) reported that hanging on to what they had would be considered a success. 31 clubs (54%) identified Mens recruitment and player retention as their #1 greatest concern and a further 13 clubs (24%) reported insufficient male adult players as the #2 most important issue they faced. 11 clubs (20%) reported they were attempting to survive with a single mens team - some of them did not make it to the end of the season.
- Many community rugby clubs in Lancashire are facing critical threats, the most commonly highlighted being:
  - Declining player participation** (colts and men, shrinking player pool).
  - Financial pressures** (from inflation and energy costs).
  - Facilities issues** (pitch drainage, climate-related damage, ).
  - Volunteer burn out** (shortages and lack of successors due to aging base).
  - School disengagement** (lack of commitment and communication).
- When asked how could Lancashire RFU improve its support of clubs the feedback included:

**Community Support** (collaborative club networks to share best practice, general promotion of the game, look beyond representative rugby, be approachable, accessible and proactive).

**Financial Support** (petition RFU, signposting to funding, assist with applications to the RFU).

**Competition Support** (player loans, cup regulations review, greater flexibility). **School Support** (promote a state school programme, facilitate connections, community coaching).

**Communications** (better consistency and clarity of website and social media, increase the visibility of rugby).

#### Club Cluster Meetings

- Following publication of the survey results, six regional club cluster meetings were organised to take place around the county during November and December 2025. The aim of the meetings was to get clubs talking to each other about the collective problems they faced in their community and to provide easy access to funding for rugby initiatives that could help address them. A specific focus was placed on the two areas of concern that the majority of clubs wanted to tackle and improve:
- Mens' engagement with rugby (player retention & recruitment)
- **School engagement with rugby (participation & club connection)**
- Attendance at the meetings was better in some regions than others. In total 45 clubs and 120 representatives participated (including Referee Society, Colts League, RFU and other rugby organisations). At many of the meetings there was a good balance of Junior and Senior rugby people to ensure equitable conversation on both topics. On the whole declining participation in Mens rugby was the dominant conversation in all meetings.
- £1400 funding was made available to each of the six regions. Each community voted and agreed on a project they wanted to achieve.

#### Club Community Projects

- **Lancashire Mid-West** - supported 3 projects (Tuesday Night Touch at Ruskin Park, School engagement through Try It Rugby at Eagle, and School engagement at Liverpool St Helens) all of which were commenced and have made progress.
- **Lancashire Central** - conceived 'Scrum Down Sessions' to address the shortage of trained front row players in the community with specialist coaching. This had initial enthusiastic support from clubs with the first two sessions hosted at Eccles and Tyldesley before its momentum petered out.
- **Lancashire North** - Following the success of the Fylde Rugby Community Foundation the meeting wished to support the launch of a similar East Lancs project with Blackburn, Clitheroe, Colne & Nelson, working towards an April launch with the aim of growing opportunities for community and schools engagement to support long-

term club sustainability. Phil Mills has also met with the board at Vale of Lune regarding the potential set-up of a North Lancashire Community Foundation. Waiting for a progress report on this.

- **Lancashire South** - proposed a 'Friday Night Vets & Colts' pre-season engagement event for their community of clubs, hosted at Didsbury Toc H. Leadership is in place and planning is in progress.
- **Lancashire East** - wanted to improve their region's pre-season player retention/engagement with a 'Summer Social Sevens'. Waiting for a progress report. This project needs leadership. It was agreed at this meeting that Blackley (who do not have senior teams) would receive funding from Lancashire RFU towards cost of hiring undercover sports venue hire to help with participation during winter months.
- **Lancashire West** - conceived a 'Summer Rugby Community Event' to improve pre-season player retention/engagement, male & female, adult & age grade, through a carousel of coaching zones. No progress on this at present. Needs leadership.
- The enthusiasm between clubs to collaborate is stronger in some communities than others. Shifting club culture, from one of independent mistrust to commonwealth co-operation, is going to take time. The community projects need leadership to get off the ground but the club representatives who attended the meetings already have their plates full with commitments and are unable to devote additional time, effort and commitment to new projects.

## University Club Meeting

- Following a request by several clubs to improve engagement between universities and clubs in the region, a meeting was arranged with representatives from men's and women's teams of the nine universities in Lancashire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester.
- Strong participation numbers were reported at all University clubs, in some cases with more players training that could be accommodated in teams. Some Universities reported issues with access to funding, facilities and coaching. However the Universities were reluctant to foster relationships with clubs (citing previous poor experiences and affordability of paying two lots of membership fees as the reason) and wanted to focus on fielding teams in their own BUCS competitions.
- Membership of Lancashire RFU did not appear to offer them any meaningful benefits and two Universities have playing links with clubs in Cheshire!

## Mens Rugby Struggle

- While Womens' and Girls' rugby has grown significantly in the last two years, and Mini and Junior Rugby appears to be thriving at many clubs, Mens rugby has continued its state of noticeable decline, and could be facing an existential crisis with falling participation, clubs folding and difficulties in fielding teams and fulfilling fixtures.
- In Lancashire, at the beginning of the season, Broughton and Thornton-Cleveleys confirmed their withdrawal. The survey also highlighted 11 more clubs that were attempting to survive with a single mens team and were in real danger of folding.
- Many clubs are now struggling to field two mens teams, many games have been conceded due to a lack of players. 4 clubs have lost lower XV teams this season from the NOWIRUL divisions (Rossendale 2, Rossendale 3, Eccles 3, Eccles 4, Sedgley Park 3, Colne & Nelson 2) and five more clubs are on the verge of losing teams (Burnage 2, Preston Grasshoppers 4, Trafford MV 3, Liverpool St Helens 3, Wigan 3).
- The reported reasons for this decline in mens participation and loss of commitment fall into 3 categories:
- **Lifestyle Changes:** High-intensity rugby is struggling to fit into the lives of amateur players, who have increasing family and employment expectations on them and are less able or willing to commit time to training and full weekends to rugby.
- **Safety Concerns:** Growing awareness of risks, including injuries and concussions is having an influence on player participation

- **Volunteer Burnout:** In addition to the difficulties in recruiting and retaining players, clubs are also struggling to recruit volunteers to handle the mens rugby administrative burdens and pitch / clubhouse maintenance.
- RFU hierarchy are not in touch with the realities of grassroots rugby and the solutions to secure the community game going forward are unlikely to come from the top. If they are to survive and thrive, clubs need to work together, cooperatively as a community, to solve the collective problems they face.
- The traditional Saturday rugby model is facing increasing pressure to adapt. If we can't find a way to keep men interested in community rugby we will continue to loose more of our clubs each season and, without Mens Rugby to sustain our clubs, Junior, Girls, Colts and Womens Rugby will all come under threat.

## Club Communications

### Website

- The new Lancashire RFU website is now 10 months old and getting closer to the comprehensive communication platform we had envisaged. Issues with GMS have been resolved and most County Teams now have fully functioning fixtures, results and match events data. News articles focused on providing clubs with timely guidance and information are now published on a regular basis.
- There is detailed information on girls and colts rugby plus an explanation of the PDG pathway and Sale Sharks Academy requested by many clubs.
- A Lancashire rugby community map has been added to the website to illustrate geographic relationship and density of clubs across the region.

### Social Media

- Alongside the regular county team updates (now tagging in clubs) and invitations for nominations, there has been an increase in club community updates this season with an effort to make these more visually engaging. We've also shared notifications for coaching development opportunities with Sale Sharks Academy and RFU.
- To ensure all Lancashire county fixtures are captured with high quality images, a recruited roster of experienced volunteer photographers has been assembled.

### Newsletter

- The purpose of the newsletter is to bring the Lancashire rugby community together with a collection of articles to keep players and volunteers informed and connected to each other, with more detail than is practical on social media. However, Insufficient material and interest from clubs, and insufficient capacity to produce it is preventing this initiative from reaching its potential.

## Actions for the 2026/27 Season:

- Club Contacts: Clubs to be reminded in August 2026, ahead of the new season, to ensure GMS and Lancashire RFU have accurate contact details for their club Secretary, Chair, Treasurer and President.
- Future Surveys: Establish club name first and to adopt multiple choice options and a “don’t know” response for swifter analysis of results.
- Club Community projects: A review of the summer events/initiatives is needed to assess the success of clubs working together to solve collective problems. Evidence of participation and engagement (e.g. photos on social media) will be needed to secure future funding. Tangible RFU support of these volunteer-run community projects would help to ensure delivery and address the resentment expressed by some clubs.
- Mens Rugby: The unsuccessful transition of colts into the senior game and the disengagement of universities from clubs both need attention. Universities could provide a fertile environment for the recruitment and development of (male & female) players and coaches, but there is a large piece of work to do here to improve the relationship before it could bear fruit. If it’s possible to stem the haemorrhage of players between 16 and 22, and arrest the departure of men in their early 30s by offering more attractive flexible formats, we may have a chance of saving community Mens Rugby.
- Communications: There are a number of website sections that need attention and completion, most noticeably Mens Rugby.
- Communications: Website published guidance for M&J rugby touchline conduct (parents entering pitches) is planned but awaiting input from BS and CB.
- Communications: The first edition of the Newsletter received an ambivalent engagement from clubs. A review of how news is gathered from clubs and how the newsletter is published/shared with the community will take place during pre-season.
- Communications: To continue the upward direction and momentum, we now need to assemble a Lancashire communications team of volunteers with relevant design experience and social media creation skills.

## **Chris Gaffey**

*Club & Community Rugby Chairman*

### **Senior Mens Cup Competitions**

This season’s Cup Competition has been very difficult to organise, with several of the finalists being in the RFU Community Cup or being involved in playoffs.

This made it impossible to hold one Finals Day and we had to hold three finals days altogether. I would like to thank the clubs who hosted those finals.

I would also like to thank all those clubs who made the effort to enter. We had a total entry of 34 clubs taking part in the four competitions.

The winners this season were -

Vale of Lune in the Cup

The Trophy was won by Warrington

The Plate was won by Southport and The Bowl was won by Fleetwood.

Hopefully, next season will be easier to run as there will be no RFU run cups, I hope that more of our clubs will make the effort to enter.

**Brian Hurst**

*Cup Committee Secretary*

**COUNTY SAFEGUARDING**

As another season comes to a finish, I wish to thank all Club Safeguarding officers (CSO's) for their continued commitment and dedication to their role within clubs. Keeping adults and children safe. In Lancashire we are fortunate to have a wealth of experience and persons who commit to their role with dedication and professionalism.

Safeguarding can at times be a role which people shy away from and something that a club can struggle to appoint an officer in role. Once in the role CSO's find a wealth of support, advice, information and training enjoy the role and stay; some for many many years.

The support especially via our Lancashire CSO WhatsApp group is enviable.

Mention here must be made and very sincere thanks to Lisa Johnson; specifically (Lisa is a deputy CBSM and CSO at Littleborough RUFC amongst other roles).

Lisa this season has continued to supply inflation and advice. Links and training to various sources; has answered queries for CSO's almost instantaneously, via the WhatsApp medium.

Lisa, I thank you so much for the help and supporting me this past season in particular, it is GREATLY appreciated.

As Club officers come and go, I thank those leaving post and welcome those new to the role.

Safeguarding can be very much a Common-Sense approach (in the main) with advice and guidance required; BUT when mandatory reporting of Child protection is required the new online direct reporting 'webform' sent to Twickenham initially, has been a very welcome addition to our toolkit.

Twickenham record all incidents and information received, create unique case files and then triage to appropriate case managers, CBSM's or CSO'. Dependant on what actions are required. I again urge all persons involved within rugby to use this reporting form.

(It is far better to report, and no action required.... than for incidents to be missed and not recorded). This is invaluable for audit trail and reporting mechanism and a legal framework in keeping Children and Adults at Risk safe.

<https://webform.clue.co.uk/RFUSafeguarding>

Our requirement as a county to perform In-Depth safeguarding audits at 10% of our clubs on time, has almost made the mandatory requirement sent by RFU this season.

Christine Spivey (Deputy CBSM) has been completing audits along with Lisa Johnson and most are now completed and submitted. The Safeguarding department at HQ are aware of the delay in full 10% completion but are happy with progress and are being kept up to date by Christine. I thank you

Christine for taking on this task and I know it has been complicated with you supporting the Lancashire County's outgoing President.

As the season draws to an end and the "off-season" begins; I will be planning the next County Safeguarding conference and look forward to seeing people in person within the next few months

### **Carol Baker**

Lancashire CB Safeguarding Manager

### **LIVERPOOL & DISTRICT REFEREES SOCIETY**

The Society appointed referees to in excess of 1,100 games during the 2025-26 season despite continuing operational challenges across the grassroots game including reduced player numbers, short format rugby and late fixture cancellations. Thanks to John Stitt, Gary Williams and Lewis Johnson for their work across appointments during the season.

The Society currently has 64 registered referees with 59 considered active during the season. Of these, 38 referees completed 10 or more fixtures. We welcomed 8 new referees during the year with several showing strong long-term potential. Thanks to Chris Higgins for his continued work around recruitment, retention and induction of new referees into the Society.

Regional meetings at Wirral and other local venues continue to be well supported and are proving a positive way for the Society to evolve and engage members in a more informal and practical environment. Thanks to Billy Coulter and Neil Fallon for their efforts supporting these initiatives throughout the season. Training and development has continued to move toward a more practical, experiential and multi-channel model with positive member feedback received. The Ref Feedback initiative introduced during the season has also been positively received and will continue to develop into 2026-27.

Welfare and Match Official Abuse continue to remain a major focus for the Society. The Referee Welfare Protocol is now fully operationalised across Society activity. There have been some encouraging signs within Cheshire with Match Official Abuse trends moving in the right direction and initiatives involving clubs, CBs and pitch marshal interventions beginning to show positive impact.

The picture within Lancashire remains more challenging, however Lancashire CB have remained supportive, engaged and aligned with the Society throughout the season. The Society continues to work closely with both CBs and RFU colleagues to improve standards, support referees and address behaviour issues where required.

The Society's RAG process, including formal Yellow club engagement, has been actively used during the season where standards or behaviours have fallen below expectation. In most cases clubs have responded positively, however where improvements are not seen the Society will continue to work with CBs and the RFU where necessary. Protecting referees remains a core responsibility of the Society and that position will not change.

The THINK initiative continues to underpin expectations around behaviour and communication standards for all members. Whilst the overwhelming majority of members continue to represent the Society and the game exceptionally well, there have been occasions where standards have fallen below expectation and these matters have been dealt with through Society processes where appropriate.

Safeguarding remains a high priority for the Society. Thanks to Chris Maltby, RFU Discipline and Safeguarding teams, CB discipline chairs, safeguarding officers and club discipline secretaries for their support and professionalism throughout the season. DBS compliance and safeguarding awareness continue to remain areas of focus moving into 2026-27.

The Society remains financially stable and continues to operate within the framework of its Articles as LADS Ltd. Governance, communication and operational delivery continue to evolve positively with increasing use of electronic communication and greater delegation of operational responsibilities across the Society structure.

Society members voted for the clubs and schools they felt best represented RFU and Society values, hospitality and support toward referees throughout the season.

Club of the Year was awarded to Prenton RFC.

School of the Year was awarded to St Anselm's College.

The David Yorke Award for continued service and contribution to the Society was presented to Billy Coulter.

### Conal Scholes

*Hon. Secretary, Liverpool & District Referees Society*

## DISCIPLINARY REPORT

This season the breakdown of cases is shown in the table below.

### Season Statistics 2025/2026

#### Adult

	<u>24/25</u>	<u>25/26</u>	<u>Difference</u>	<u>%</u>
Outstanding	4	3	-1	-25.00%
Proved	182	113	-69	-37.91%
Dismissed	10	11	1	10.00%
Sine Die	0	3	3	100.00%
Total	196	130	-66	-33.67%

#### Youth

	<u>24/25</u>	<u>25/26</u>	<u>Difference</u>	<u>%</u>
Outstanding	2	2	0	0.00%
Proved	48	28	-20	-41.67%
Dismissed	1	1	0	0.00%
Sine Die	0	0	0	0.00%

Total	51	31	-20	-39.22%
-------	----	----	-----	---------

Total

	<u>24/25</u>	<u>25/26</u>	<u>Difference</u>	<u>%</u>
Outstanding	6	5	-1	-16.67%
Proved	230	141	-89	-38.70%
Dismissed	11	12	1	9.09%
Sine Die	0	3	3	100.00%
Total	247	161	-86	-34.82%

It is noted that the number of cases heard has decreased by just under 35%. This from both adult & youth matches.

### Match Official Abuse

#### Match Official Abuse Comparison

	24/25	25/26	Difference	%
Dissent	15	6	-9	60
Verbal Abuse	12	6	-6	50
Threatening Words	1	0	-1	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>-16</b>	<b>57</b>

For the last 17 years I have expressed concern about the increasing rise in MOA. It is therefore with immense pleasure I can report a 57% decrease in MOA for this season. Thanks to all clubs, players, and coaches for their efforts this season. Let us not rest on our laurels and work just as hard next season to continue this trend. To quote Winston Churchill *"Now this is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end, but it is, perhaps the end of the beginning."*

However, as in all good stories there is good news & bad news. Obviously the above is the good news, the bad news is under 16 rugby. There has been a growing number of matters both official & unofficial during this season. This has seen several incidents involving police complaints for the behaviour players, coaches, and parents. Before the start of Season 2026/2027 a document will be sent out to assist clubs in improving this aspect of our game.

In closing I would like to thank John Greenwood (Chair) and all panel members who have sat in hearings this season. All club officials in dealing with disciplinary matters promptly and correctly.

**Brian Stott**

*Disciplinary Committee Secretary*

## COUNTY SCHOOLS UNION

Participation across all Lancashire Schools competitions and festivals (U12–U16 and U18) increased significantly this year. A total of 42 schools entered competitions and festivals, including several participating for the first time and others returning following a lengthy absence. More than 2,500 boys and almost 400 girls took part in Lancashire Schools festivals and competitions across the season. However, some challenges were encountered in relation to schools meeting play-by deadlines, which resulted in several finals being played later than originally scheduled.

Participation in the Girls' Festivals more than doubled compared with last year, reflecting growing interest in contact rugby. Nevertheless, a number of schools have already indicated that they may be unable to participate in rugby next year, which is a matter of concern.

This year's cup competitions saw Stonyhurst compete in the Lancashire U18 Cup Final for the third consecutive year. Meanwhile, Kirkham's U16 age group reached the U16 Cup Final, meaning this particular year group has now competed in the last three finals at U14, U15 and U16 level.

Lancashire Schools Cup Competitions Participation		
Age Group	Schools Entered 2025/2026	Schools Entered 2024/2025
U18 Boys	14 Schools	
U16 Boys	22 Schools	
U15 Boys	26 Schools	
U14 Boys	29 Schools	

### U18 Boys - 14 Schools

**Cup Final:** Stonyhurst College beat Scarisbrick Hall 31-17

**Plate Final:** Merchant Taylors Crosby beat Lancaster RGS 25-15

**Vase Final:** Holy Cross College beat Hutton GS 50-27

### U16 Boys - 22 Schools

**Cup Final:** Manchester GS v Kirkham GS Shared

**Plate Final:** Birkdale HS drew with Hutton GS 10-10

**Vase Final:** St Edwards Coll beat Outward Academy 46-21

### U15 Boys - 26 Schools

**Cup Final:** Kirkham GS beat Lancaster RGS 52-3

**Plate Final:** Stonyhurst beat Merchant Taylors, Crosby 25-19

**Vase Final:** Outward Academy beat Ripley St Thomas 38-29

### U14 Boys - 29 Schools

**Cup Final:** Lancaster RGS beat Audenshaw 20-5

**Plate Final:** St Edwards College beat Hutton GS 47-17

**Vase Final:** Bury beat Ripley St Thomas 24-10

**U13 Boys Festivals:** 34 Teams (3 tiers); each school selected own tier to enter

**U12 Boys Festivals:** 36 Teams (3 tiers); each school selected own tier to enter

<b>Lancashire Festivals</b>		
Age Group	Schools Entered 2025/26	Schools Entered 2024/25
U13 Boys	34 Teams	
U12 Boys	36 Teams	
U14 Girls T1 Festival	14 Teams	
U12 Girls T1 Festival	12 Teams	

### **Schools of the Year:**

All schools were invited to vote for Lancashire School of the Year and Emerging/Developing School of the Year from a shortlist drawn up by the competitions committee.

The following awards were made:

#### **The Emerging School of the Year**

This award is presented to the school that is relatively new to regular involvement in rugby and/or has demonstrated significant progress and achievement throughout the year.

The winner is:

**Haydock Outward Academy:** U15 Vase winners; U16 Vase finalists

#### **Lancashire School of the Year**

This award is presented to the school that has achieved success across the age groups in both Lancashire Schools competitions and, where applicable, national competitions.

The winner is:

**Lancaster RGS:** U14 Cup winners; U15 Cup finalists; U18 Plate finalists;

U12 & U13 Festival finalists

At County Age Group level Lancashire Schools continue to support County Rugby at U18 and U17 age groups this season. The table below represents the number of Players that represented Lancashire age groups and the number of Schools that are competing in the Lancashire Schools U18 Cup Competition.

<b>County Age Group Representation</b>		
Age Group	Number of Players	Number of Schools
U18	16	10
U17	19	8

Congratulations are extended to Kirkham Grammar School's Charlie Bray and Lawrence Ogbonnaya, and Scarisbrick Hall's Hendro Hattingh, who have represented England U18s this year.

A warm thank you is extended to all schools that entered the different competitions & festivals this season and supported the county age group county programmes. This is also extended to the clubs that hosted the finals, which were generally selected based on their proximity to the participating schools.

Appreciation is also given to MADREF and Liverpool Society for providing match officials for the finals, and to the Fylde Rugby Foundation and the Hoppers Foundation for their support with the festivals.

Further thanks go to Lancashire CB for its continued support of the schools' game, and to Mark Devine, John Morgan and John O'Ryan for their valued assistance throughout the season and to Robbie Jones who's unwavering commitment to Lancashire Schools Rugby and to National School Rugby is unprecedented.

**Adam Jackson**

*Chair*

*Lancashire County Schools Union*

## **COLTS RUGBY**

### **Entries to the Halbro NW Colts Leagues**

57 sides joined the leagues at the start of the (56 in 2023/24, 68 in 2024/25). The structure consisted of 5 senior leagues (36 sides) & 3 junior leagues (21 sides).

**The Leagues & League Structure** – the leagues were set up with preliminary leagues, with a rejig before conference leagues.

Sides from 5 counties competed across the season.

- Lancashire 36
- Cheshire 15
- Cumbria 3, Staffs 1, Shropshire 3

52 sides finished the league season

### **League winners for the 2025/26 season**

Senior A **Wilmslow**

Senior B **Preston Grasshoppers**

Senior C **Vale of Lune**

Senior D **Southport**

Senior E **Tyldesley**

Junior A **Chester**

Junior B **Bury**

Junior C **Aldwinians**

**Lancashire Colts Cups Finals were Played at Heaton Moor RUFC.**

26 Sides (16 Snr & 10 Jnr) entered the County Knock out competition. This was up by 1 club on the previous season.

The competition was played across 4 rounds. Those sides losing in their 1<sup>st</sup> round went through to the Trophy Competition allowing each side to enjoy a minimum of 2 knock out rounds.

The finals were (**Winners shown in Bold**):

- Snr Frank Morgan Cup **Preston Grasshoppers 36-22** Waterloo
- Snr Joe McDonough Trophy **Fylde 58 – 8** Liverpool St Helens
- Jnr Rob Briers Cup **Heaton Moor 46 -17** Wigan
- Jnr Alan James Trophy **Trafford Metro Vickers 54 - 10** Aldwinians

Preston Grasshoppers have now won the Frank Morgan U18s cup 8 times over the 52-year history of the competition. Heaton Moor Junior Colts won the Rob Briers Junior Colts Cup for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time.

Thank you to all at Heaton Moor RUFC for hosting a well-run and enjoyable finals day. Thanks to Chris Gaffey for his work in pulling together a well-crafted finals day programme & to Jon Kitchen background work in administering the competition insures that all ran smoothly throughout.

**League Cup Competition** - The Colts league cup was not able to run this season due to there not being enough available dates.

**National U18s Cup** – No Lancashire sides entered the National u18s Cup.

**Squad Numbers during the 2025/26 season** - The information taken from GMS via the EMC's indicate that most sides that managed to play through the season were able to maintain their playing numbers. The information coming from EMC's is helpful in seeing what is happening in the Colts age group in respect to playing numbers & match day squad sizes.

**MOTIQ Northwest Colts League Rugby for this coming season** - Entries are in for the 2026/27 season – the leagues are at 67 sides. Lancashire are with 35 sides, Cheshire 23, Cumbria, Staffordshire, Derbyshire & Shropshire making up the balance.

There are no combined club sides from Lancashire playing in the league this coming season. Firwood Waterloo & Preston Grasshoppers are running 2 senior colts sides throughout the season -combining their 17s & 18s to achieve this.

**Changes /Challenges.** As reported in past seasons the over lapping of the Rugby Union & Rugby League seasons continues to raise challenges issues for our Lancashire clubs in Rugby League areas adversely impacting player availability. The timing in the AGPC of the CB U18's Sundays does not help with this matter, in that no sooner has the Rugby League season finished then the CB Sundays begin. The block on playing Colts League fixtures on these CB Sundays hampers sides from gathering any momentum.

**Thankyous & Congratulations:** As always, our thanks to both Manchester & Liverpool Referee Societies, who rise to the task to provide Sunday Appointments for Colts games. It makes a positive difference for the colts players to benefit from society referees officiating their matches.

To the players who played for the County, The North & For England, congratulations.

To the Coach's/Managers and parents who support their sons each week, as they travel around the Northwest of England - without your commitment, Colts Rugby, on such a scale would be hard to achieve.

Thanks to my colleagues on the MOTIQ NW Colts League Committee who work so hard and with such enthusiasm and dedication to ensure that Colts Rugby is enjoyed & played by 1000s of lads across as many clubs as possible in Lancashire and the wider Northwest of the country.

And finally thank you to those that organise Rugby within the Lancashire RU & wider region for their valued support over the season.

**Chris Barrett**

*Chairman*

## **MINI JUNIOR (7 – 16 AGE GRADE) COMMITTEE**

Lancashire Age Grade Committee

Overall this season has been quite successful with approx. 164 teams across both male and female teams. Players numbers in total were 3912 that participated in all festivals and challenge fixtures.

There has to be a concerted effort to get clubs to undertake to make sure all members be them players, parents etc to understand the core values of our game. We also need to ask our rugby members at all levels to encourage the take up of the whistle. There is such a shortage of referees and age grade teams keep asking for society referees.

This season has seen us have 5 finals venues. 4 for the boys and 1 for the 2<sup>nd</sup> season of the Lancashire/Cheshire Girls Challenge. The venues used were U12's festivals held at Burnage and Leigh. The U14's-16's were hosted at Rochdale and Vale of Lune. Without clubs stepping forward there would be no finals, so a massive thank you to those clubs and volunteers. The girls challenge day was hosted by Chester, and thanks must go to Sabrina McGill for stepping and organizing the day. Thanks also to Kate Bennetta for her assistance on the day.

From feed back from all venues all players, coaches and spectator had great days rugby.

Finally, my thanks go to the age grade committee who work so hard in the back ground making sure everything run smoothly. Special thanks to Phil Lord who is stepping down this season from arranging all the fixtures. We hope that he will be around for advice etc. As Phil steps away we welcome Glen Stevens to the committee. We look forward to working with Glen this coming season.

Ian Spivey

*Chairman, 7 – 16 Age Grade Committee*

## COUNTY OFFICERS & OTHER OFFICIALS 2025 - 2026

**County President** Ian Spivey  
**Vice Presidents:**  
Robbie Jones (Senior Vice President)  
Stephen Goddard

### **Members of the Management Board**

*Chairman:* Dave Clarke  
*Hon. Secretary:* Mark Downs  
*Hon. Treasurer:* Paul Deakin

### **Dir. Rugby Development**

Howard Hughes

### **Dir. Safeguarding & Player Welfare**

Carol Baker

### **Dir. Volunteering**

Gill Burns MBE

### **Dir. Without Portfolio**

Kate Benetta  
Arthur Crabtree

### **RFU Council Member**

Dave Clarke  
Paul Deakin

### **Hon. Membership Secretary**

Anne-Marie Briers

### **Safeguarding Manager**

Carol Baker

*Deputies:* Christine Spivey  
Lisa Johnson

### **County Committees:**

#### **Club & Community Rugby Committee**

*Director/Chairman:* Chris Gaffey

#### **Finance & Funding Committee**

*Chairman:* Chris Smail  
*Asst. Treasurer:* Stephen Briers

### **Cup & Competitions Committee**

*Chairman:* Ken Andrews  
*Secretary:* Brian Hurst

### **Disciplinary Committee**

*Chairman:* John Greenwood  
*Secretary:* Brian Stott

### **17-18 Committee**

*Chairman:* Tommy Hughes

### **7-16 (Junior Rugby) Committee**

*Chairman:* Ian Spivey  
*Secretary:* Christine Spivey

### **County Schools Union**

*Chairman:* Adam Jackson  
*Secretary:* Robbie Jones

### **Colts Competitions Committee**

*Chairman:* Chris Barrett  
*Secretary:* Jon Kitchen

### **Assistant Hon. Secretary**

Brian Stott

### **Assistant Hon. Treasurer**

Stephen Briers

### **Individual members Representatives**

Ian Scott-Brown  
Chris Smail

### **Chairman of Selectors for**

Senior XV John Greenwood

### **Team Manager**

Senior XV Guy Lovgreen

*Contact details can be found on the  
Lancashire County website:*

**[www.lancashirerfu.com](http://www.lancashirerfu.com)**

Note to Annual Members:  
Individual Subscriptions (£20.00) are due on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2025  
Royal Bank of Scotland: 16-29-34 10251318  
(not the former NatWest Account)

**The Lancashire County Rugby Football Union was established in 1881**

**Lancashire County Rugby Football Union  
is a company limited by guarantee**

**Registered Office:**

Hanover Buildings, 11-13 Hanover Street, Liverpool, Merseyside L1 3DN  
Registered in England & Wales – 06959820

Directors: M Downs (Company Secretary),  
CA Baker, K Bennetta, G Burns MBE, D. Clarke, AN Crabtree,  
P Deakin, C. Gaffey, H Hughes.

**The Lancashire Rugby Union Youth Trust**  
Referred to in the Annual Report,  
Is a Charity Registered with the Charity Commissioners – 1014271

**Contact details and other information can be found on the  
Lancashire County  
website: [www.lancashirerfu.com](http://www.lancashirerfu.com)**