



NORTH REGIONAL RUGBY FORUM

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Minute of the Mini Conference of the North Regional Rugby Forum held in the **Sherwood Suite of the **Eight Acres Hotel, Elgin** on **Sunday 12th June 2016****

Present

Mike Monro (MM), SRU Board/Council (Chair);
Ed Crozier (EC), SRU President;
Ken Russell (KR), Head of Domestic Rugby;
Brian Bell (BB), Caledonia Club Services Manager;
Pete Young (PY), Outreach & Equality Manager;
Mark Salter (MS), Caledonia Comps Administrator;
Gordon Cox (GC) , Forum Committee Member & Secretary (Minute),
Vernon Fawcett (VF), Paddy Hart (PH), Alistair McKenzie (AMcK), Frank Nicol (FN), Bob Richmond (BR) (all Forum Committee); and
Representatives of Aberdeen Wanderers, Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen Referees Society, Deeside, Dyce, Ellon, Fraserburgh, Garioch, Gordonians, Highland, Highland Referees Society, Inverness Craig Dunain, Kinloss Eagles, Lochaber, Mackie Acad FP, Moray, North Police Scotland, Peterhead, RAF Lossiemouth, Ross Sutherland,

Apologies/Absent

Aberdeen Grammar, Aberdeen University, Aberdeen Uni Medics, Caithness, Huntly, Peterhead, Scottish Golden Oldies, Shetland, Stornoway

Welcome

MM welcomed and thanked all for attending the meeting, particularly those from BT Murrayfield as well as the Caley Comps Administrator.

SRU President

EC stated that it was a great pleasure for him to meet and talk with the meeting in Elgin at what had become an important exchange of information and ideas – the mini conference on the game in the north.

What the North had been doing for a number of years was very much the template he had in mind behind the conference which was held for all member clubs at BT Murrayfield earlier in the season.

The mini conference was a chance to talk about common experiences regarding the ways in which the North had overcome challenges or been able to access more players.

The day was about sharing best practice and continuing to sustain our love for the greatest team game.

Hailing from the central belt as he does, there was a huge amount to admire about our rugby communities throughout Scotland.

He was well acquainted with some of the challenges of geography that his friends, for example at the Isle of Mull rugby club, experience. But he was also very familiar with their resilience and their attitude that no problem was insurmountable, a view he firmly believed was shared by many present.

His remarks were intended to be brief but sincere.

Congratulations were due to Highland, Deeside and Highland second XV on winning their respective Caledonia Regional League North divisions.

Congratulations were also due to Orkney on cementing their position in BT National League Division 3, after a first season in the national leagues.

Garioch were congratulated on winning the BT Women's Club of the Year at the Scottish Rugby Club Awards Dinner at BT Murrayfield last month, and to Andrew Findlater and Steven Routledge, both of Highland RFC, for winning BT Caledonia Regional League Player of the Year and Scotland's try of the year respectively, which was a remarkable achievement. On Friday he had attended Highland's annual dinner, which was a wonderful, friendly and memorable rugby evening, held by a Club who are going places!

It was heartening to see our women's and girls' game growing and that was a particularly commendable feature of rugby here in the north with women's sections increasing the participation in our game in Caithness, Orkney, Shetland, Aberdeenshire and Inverness Craig Dunain, to name but a few.

One of the biggest challenges clubs faced, irrespective of location, was finding volunteers willing to take on a task for the collective good.

He knew that would be a topic that featured in later discussions but he encouraged all to have a wee think about how they, as a club, approached this vital area of recruitment.

With the demands on our work time these days seeming to increase, "me" time and family time were precious. So he asked all to think about how they structure their committees. Some might be doing it already but if they had a volunteer who had a specific skill – maybe it was IT, maybe it was fund-raising – then maybe just get them to concentrate on that specific skill rather than making them master or mistress of so many others?

Scottish Rugby is here to help all get more out of the game. Brian Bell, the Club Services Manager for Caledonia, had a wealth of experience and could point members in the right direction on a variety of topics. On that subject he took the opportunity to thank Brian and his BT Murrayfield colleague Pete Young for all the hard work that they undertake on Caledonia's behalf to keep rugby flourishing in this part of Scotland, the largest geographical area within the SRU.

There were always sources of information such as the website and the participation agreement, which can help clubs alongside our people in the rugby family.

Thanks were due to Gordon Cox and Mike Monro for all the arrangements and planning they had undertaken to make the day a success.

Likewise, sincere thanks was passed to Frank Nicol for many years' service on the Scottish Rugby Union's national and regional championship committees. That work was so much appreciated.

Most of all he thanked the meeting for listening. He hoped that they would enjoy the mini conference, have a good summer, and return for the start of the next season refreshed, brim-full of ideas and ready to drive their club forward.

Women's Rugby

PY, Scottish Rugby's Outlook and Equality Manager, made a presentation on the Women and Girls' game and advised that it had the biggest potential growth area over the next decade.

A strategic approach would provide an opportunity to grow the game and achieve success, in the medium to long term, by creating our own culture for the Women & Girls' game.

By engaging with clubs we would create a better environment for the Women & Girls' game and make women's rugby one of the top team sports for women in Scotland.

The vision was for every woman and girl to take part and benefit from rugby at a level and role to which they aspire, from their early years throughout their life.

The Women's game had grown in the North in recent years with teams from Inverness Craig Dunain, Orkney, Shetland, Caithness and Ross Sutherland in the Highlands & Islands, whilst Grampian contained teams from Kinloss, Banff, Huntly, Ellon, Garioch, Aberdeen University, Aberdeenshire Quines, Aberdeen Wanderers, Robert Gordon University and Deeside.

He outlined existing and proposed competition details for the Women's game, as well as appropriate Coach and Referee Development and various Pathways for clubs.

Details are contained in the copies of his presentation and the strategy document attached to this minute.

Reserve/2ndXV Rugby

The pointers of BB's presentation were:

- Reserve/2nd XV unfulfilled fixtures had increased from 17% in 2012-13 to an alarming 30% the following season and an unacceptable 33% in 2014-15. Something had to change!
- A Male Player Survey had been conducted, from whom
 - 80% had been from state schools
 - the majority had attended college or university
 - had started paying around 12
 - the majority played regional and reserve rugby
 - they expected to play to 35 but would start thinking about stopping at 26
- Background
 - Society has seen many changes in many areas including technology, communications, employment and leisure since the 1970s. In the last 42 years – since Scottish Rugby first launched official leagues – there has been some tinkering of the structure but, by and large, it's still the same. Leagues start in the autumn and are played (home and away) until the spring, almost entirely on a Saturday afternoon. Is this a major reason for players dropping out as they move from school and youth to adult rugby? Is it a contributory factor to a rise in unfulfilled fixtures, as above in reserve team rugby?
- A survey had investigated:
 - What determines if someone plays rugby?
 - How to increase participation and reduce drop-out
- Working with Edinburgh Napier University, Scottish Rugby had conducted questionnaires with around 10% of the adult male players (from all ages, levels and regions of the game).
Findings - A typical player will

- Be in his mid-20s
- Be slightly larger than the average man
- Come from a state school
- Have started playing before they were 15
- Have attended college or university
- Be playing in reserve or regional league
- Play mainly for enjoyment, social, fitness and competitive reasons
- Expect to play until age of 35 but may recently have thought about stopping due to lack of time or injuries
- Be loyal to his club
- Be looking for the game to be played at more convenient times and in better weather
- Why Play? – enjoyment, social/camaraderie, health and fitness
- Why Stop? – injury concerns, effect on work & life, aches & pains, time, convenience, busy with work and family
- What do we need to do?
 1. Retain players transitioning into adult rugby – a priority for quick and long lasting benefit to the game
 2. Target school leavers moving into higher education
 3. Create a structure that makes it more convenient to play; easier to fulfil fixtures, and avoids worst weather
- How do we keep players?
 - Convenience
 - Better Weather
- Key Insights
 1. Traditional sports participation is trending downwards. The market demands customised solutions which offer it all (health, social and enjoyments benefits) as well as the flexibility to fit into consumers' time poor lifestyles. Self-organised is taking over from structured environments. The use of technology such as digital infrastructure integration will be more important in program design given preferences of younger cohorts, in particular.
 2. Rugby players want social interaction, fitness and achievement from playing rugby.
 3. Challenges in program development have resulted in inconsistent programs across nations with few Rugby participation programs being standardised globally, let alone 'within the country'. Gaps exist in knowledge around the drivers and barriers of Rugby participation which were investigated in the bespoke survey.
 4. There is no trend towards shorter, more intense versions of the traditional sports, eg 5-a-side football, Fast4 Tennis and 3 on 3 basketball, Specific commonalities in these programs reflect the changing needs of the market with these programs positioned as requiring less time investment, offering greater health benefits and having less rules leading to more fun.
- The Rugby Product
 - Mostly one version, namely 15s
 - Saturday afternoons
 - Eight month long season
 - Through the winter
 - Home & away

- How can we evolve?
 - Product fits the committed rugby player
 - What are we up against?
 - Social rugby player
 - Day
 - Time of the season
 - Duration
 - Travel

Recommendations of Working Group

- Relaxation of Regulations
 - Players registered at other clubs able to play
 - Initially just lowest level
 - Prioritise playing over eligibility
 - Accept risk of loading
- Friday Night Fixtures
 - Proactively scheduled by Scottish Rugby from the start
 - Where floodlights available
 - Local opponents
 - Pitches can be rested
- Discussion on other options to improve situations --- winter break, shorter season, schedule 3 or 4 clubs to one venue, etc

Our Situation in the North

- Successful (current) Caley 1 preparing teams for National 3
- Integration of 2nd XVs into leagues (as in old NDRU)
- Caley North leagues still playing in June
- Variable standards of facilities
- Are we prepared to modify what we do?
 - Tartan Touch is coming!
 - We are developing a 'non-contact' version that is accessible and focuses on fun, friends and fitness
 - Tartan Tens is here!
 - Some people just want to play locally, at a time and place that's convenient for them

Caley North League Structure 2016/17

Having outlined, in detail, the promotions and relegations of clubs in National 3, Caley 1, Caley 2 (North) and Caley 3 (North), at the conclusion of season 2015-16, a twelve team league in Caley 2 (North) existed for 2016-17, which was considered unworkable. The proposal, therefore, was to split, in the first instance, the league into what loosely could be described North East and North West.

The North East league would comprise:-

Aberdeen Grammar 2nds
 Aberdeen Wanderers
 Banff
 Ellon
 Garioch
 Shetland

North West would comprise:-

- Highland 2nds
- Lochaber
- Moray
- RAF Lossiemouth
- Ross Sutherland
- Stornoway

For logical reasons it is appropriate to have Shetland (who travel to the mainland via Aberdeen) in one league and Stornoway (who likewise travel via Ullapool) in the other. The proposal was that each of the six team leagues play each other, home and away, (ten games).

Thereafter, the top three from each league would play each other home and away (further six games) to decide promotion, whilst the bottom three from each league would similarly play each other to decide relegation. All teams would only carry forward their results against the other two in their original split league to the promotion and relegation leagues.

As a consequence each of the teams would play a total of sixteen league games. The consequences, with regard to the numbers promoted and relegated will be dependent on the set up presented to us prior to season 2017-18. That will be partly dependent on the Grangemouth Motion at the AGM, relegations into Caley1 from National 3 and such issues as optional drop outs.

An eight team Division 3 was suggested with a Division 4 comprising newly formed XVs or social XVs playing friendlies. The use of the Northumberland set up was considered, even for adaption. However, eight clubs had been identified to comprise Caley3 (North). It was suggested that the format could be of a merit/social league, playing every fortnight, with a 3 week Christmas break and with registration of players not an issue. The idea was that there would be no pressure, such as sanctions, on struggling clubs in this league and that there would be plenty of time to play other fixtures if required. This league could start on 27th August. Otherwise, the season would start, at least for Division 1 and 2, on 10th September; Cup/Bowl/Shield rounds were scheduled for the following week.

MS advised that he had to have league structures in place by the end of the General Meeting in order to prepare fixtures for timely release. The attendees agreed with the above proposals for 2016-17.

Grangemouth AGM Motion

MM appraised the meeting of the "Grangemouth Paper", which proposed that the Caley 1 league should be replaced by a Caley 1 (Midlands) league and a parallel Caley 1 (North) league, both comprising ten teams. The top teams from each league would play off for promotion to the National leagues with up to three relegated clubs being accepted into each league, as appropriate.

Apart from the hurt caused by being stabbed in the back by the Midlands, it was noted that the Midlands league would include six of this season's Caley 1 whilst the North league would only include four. This suggested a dilution in playing standards. It was anticipated that, below Caley 1, the North might have four lower leagues and the Midlands six. At the same time, AMcK pointed out that, if the proposed split continued

into age grade ranks, only one club from the Midlands would constitute the Midland league!

The proposal was all about travel; Midlands travel would be dramatically reduced, whilst North travel would increase equally dramatically.

A possible flaw in the motion existed in the fact that as the rules for the Caledonia League competition were already in place for next season, therefore the competition itself could not be changed until the 2017-18 season. At best, this delayed the argument and allowed further husting of clubs outwith Caledonia; at worst it delayed any change by a season.

MS asked how a Midlands/North Div 1 arrangement would affect the selection regarding use of referees, whilst the position of the Aberdeen placed Caledonia Academy was also questioned.

The meeting was unanimously against the motion, the threat of a resultant under strength Caley 1 (North) being the main concern.

AOCB

1. GW offered the congratulations of the meeting to Kenneth Knott, Secretary of the Highland Referees Society, on his election to the Scottish Rugby Council as the Referees' representative.
2. BB asked that clubs please read the Participation Agreement for next season, in order to fully understand what they were committed to. He was asked about participation monies for teams in any merit league, as proposed for the North; he opined payment would be made as long as games were classified as being part of a league. BB reminded clubs that insurance should be properly looked at, including available extras, and members advised.
3. GW gave a resume of the Kings of the Sevens circuit, where Gordonians had beaten Deeside for the title. 15 clubs had participated at four tournaments.
4. RAF Lossiemouth cited their unique access-to-station problem whereby station security demanded proof of identity. He asked that opposing clubs due to play at Lossiemouth timeously provided details of identity for camp access. This included players, back up and supporters – a passport or driving licence was required as proof of identity on the day.
5. Banff advised that a 4G pitch was being constructed at nearby Macduff. The Council would have to license the pitch for rugby, if appropriate. Costs were mentioned including use of the pitch at £40 per hour. Would Caledonia be interested? – BB was aware.
6. GC asked, again, that clubs timeously advised him of attendance at such meetings/conferences, in order to help with accommodation and catering arrangements.

GLJC