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**RUGBY  
FOOTBALL  
UNION**

**WORKING WITH  
THE MEDIA**



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FOREWORD



**DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
**RICHARD PRESCOTT**

Club rugby at every level is the lifeblood of our game. It feeds our representative sides and ensures that England remains a major force in the world. The importance of the media and the promotion of the sport to attract players, supporters and sponsors has never been greater. An ever increasing number of participation and spectator sports are chasing the same pot of money from personal, lottery, commercial and government sources, so it is vital that all clubs promote themselves in the best and most positive way.

The media at a national and especially a regional level is an ideal vehicle for promoting your club. They need your stories and information. Anything that you can do to provide them with the necessary information will ensure a close and productive working relationship with your local paper, radio and TV station. Whoever you decide to appoint as press officer will be performing an extremely important role for your club and providing a wide range of benefits for its commercial activities.

I hope that you find this second and updated edition of ‘Working with the Media’ useful. It is packed with tips and advice on how to make the most of your relationship with the media for the benefit of your club. Let’s do what rugby does best – talk about the playing of the game.

Good luck,

Richard Prescott  
Director of Communications



## NO NEWS IS BAD NEWS

*Patricia Mowbray,  
RFU Communications Manager*

Rugby union may be the greatest game in the world but even the best has to be publicised. It's no good imagining that people will simply know about it, that the media will somehow discover events or achievements. If God needs a publicity machine to spread the word it's clear that we mere mortals need one to get noticed.

Rugby has real media appeal. The game is news, features, pictures, captions. Rugby is a gift to the local, regional and national press. But a gift has to come packaged and labelled. A targeted and ready made, or easily written, space filler presented to any publication, local radio or TV station is likely to be seized upon.

Every youth development officer, coach, referee and rugby club official, all constituent bodies and the entire grass roots of the game has the best kind of publicity waiting to be utilised - editorial coverage. It is space that

money can't buy, more widely read and credible than any advertising because it is news and all it costs is time and effort.

A local or regional newspaper is usually overworked and understaffed. If they don't cover your story it isn't because they are not interested or because it's not a story at all. It is simply because they don't have the time or resources to find and write it. Senior reporters will be covering major incidents, local courts, council meetings, police stories. Junior staff probably won't have transport and will be busy visiting the town's vicars to unearth forthcoming weddings and WI meetings. The sportsdesk may consist of one person.

Set against the tedium of wedding reports, a snappy piece from the local rugby club will be a welcome diversion. Produce a few salient facts under the heading Press Release, fax it through or drop it at the front office, giving a contact number at the bottom of the page and the chances are it will make the paper. If you really want to grab some space and readers' attention, attach a usable picture to the release.



## THE NEWS AT THE RFU

To meet the huge demands of looking after the media needs of the Rugby Football Union, the England team and Twickenham Stadium, the RFU Communications Department was put in place in the summer of 1997, giving the union its own in-house press facility, able to respond directly to all its media needs.



Under the Director, Richard Prescott, the team consists of:  
Communications Manager,  
Patricia Mowbray;  
Media Relations Manager,  
Adrian Firth; Press Officer,  
Sarah Shelley and Community  
Relations Officer, Fraser Cullen.



The department puts out all RFU press statements, runs all press conferences and photo-calls, responds to all press enquiries, accredits journalists, photographers and broadcast media for all England representative games and looks after the press at the matches. It is responsible for political lobbying on behalf of the game. It takes care of the RFU website and all official RFU publications, like the monthly Touchline newspaper, the editorial content of international match programmes and media guides for SANZA and Five Nations competitions. Specialist in-house media training is made available to players, management and the senior executive of the union. In addition, media support is given to the England team for all games, home and away.

*Tony Simpson, is a rugby writer who sprang from writing Keighley's match reports to a job on the sports desk. A club press officer, he says, must be an enthusiast and...*

## EVERY CLUB SHOULD HAVE ONE

It has never been more important than it is now to project an accurate and positive image of the game and it's up to all of us who care about rugby to counteract negative stories and keep a continued flow of new blood into the game.

Gaining media coverage is an essential element of virtually all sponsorship deals. With only the biggest involving companies with their own PR set up, most companies will be relying on the clubs to publicise their involvement and their support for local or regional sport. They will value the work you do to promote them and a happy sponsor means continued funding.

Clubs need a press officer to let the public know of their contribution to the community. Even the smallest club has stories of collective and individual success, of charity fund raising and helping local causes. And if you never push your club into the public eye, don't complain if you get three men and a dog turning up to a game.

But how to set about appointing a press officer? What skills do they need? Must they be able to write prize-winning prose?

If you need to persuade someone to do the job, don't. You may need to sell it to someone who is diffident about their abilities but if they are diffident about the role itself forget it. The first essential for a club press officer is





enthusiasm. For the best press officer, add curiosity, reliability, attention to detail, the ability to get along with people and chivvy everyone from the Under 8s coach to the Chairman for information, and throw in a dash of the would be journalist and you'll have found your ideal.

It is a demanding task. But when it works it can be hugely satisfying. Seeing the column inches mounting up, the club in the headlines and knowing that it is because of you is immensely satisfying. Sometimes you might even get a by-line and that's a tremendous buzz.

*If you want coverage for your club it's important to...*

## GET TO KNOW THE JOURNALISTS

*says Steve Williams*

### REGIONAL PRESS

Before you begin to compile a report or issue a press release you need to know exactly who to contact. Send your story off to nobody in particular, on a day when the local paper has just gone to press and it will not hit the headlines but the bin.

As a club press officer most of your time will be spent feeding information to the local paper. But who do you contact? In most cases it will be the sports editor, so call and ask for an appointment. Arrive with your ideas, facts, stories, forthcoming events, on paper as well as in your head. Keep the meeting brief and to the point and leave the club's fixture list and prospectus, if you have one. Then keep in regular contact, providing copy, facts, whatever you have agreed. Invite the sports editor to the club on a Saturday, to a

function, like the annual dinner.

Ask for the name of the news reporter covering your area and keep them informed of anything which isn't strictly rugby related. This will probably have to be done two or even three times if you have a weekly paid for paper, an evening publication and a freebie in your area. Don't neglect the local give-away as it will have a sizeable readership. And don't imagine that by giving information to all the local papers you destroy a relationship you might have built with one of them. 'Exclusive' is not a tag likely to be attached to a local rugby club story, unless someone has sold the club silver and run away with the vicar's wife, in which case you might make the 'News of the World'.

### MAKING THE NATIONALS

All national papers have rugby writers, who in general, are interested in the top class game. However, most have a small 'around the clubs' section at some time during the week and welcome any off-beat stories. Find out the name of the journalist who writes the column and the fax number for the sports desk and send in any truly unusual items.

### THE RUGBY MAGAZINES

Monthly rugby magazines usually have contributors around the country who provide copy for every edition. Find out from the magazine who your local contributor is and make contact to find out what he wants from you. Keep on top of happenings at the club so that you have something to offer when he rings.



*Dave King, sports editor of The News, Portsmouth, also writes for Rugby World. Working on the Gulf Daily News in Bahrain he once put down his notebook to play for Bahrain R C who were short for a Gulf Championship game. Here he tells us...*

## WHAT MAKES A STORY

What makes a story? People. It is that simple. There's no rocket science involved in getting newspapers, radio and television interested in your club. Sell them the "people angle" and the media will bite.

How about the story of an 18 stone, no-nonsense second row forward who ran a flower stall in Bournemouth, and was certainly no pansy on the rugby field? There was the experienced prop forward who was asked to make a national league comeback at the veteran age of 48 in front of Redruth's Hellfire Corner because of a front row shortage. Even he was a relative nipper compared to the 80-year-old who refused to hang up his boots and could still be found occasionally turning out for his local side in Hampshire at weekends.

Rugby is this country's number two winter sport behind football. But it has to compete with a whole host of other sports for column inches and air time. The bread and butter for any club press officer is publicising a match and then, for those news organisations unable to attend a game, filing a report soon afterwards.

The preview is vital. You are selling the game to the media, hoping that they may send a reporter and a photographer/cameraman down to the match. And through them you are also selling the match to the public.



Tell the media about the game and its importance. What's the story – are any players making their debuts, someone returning from injury, or perhaps a team is missing key personnel. And then afterwards, file a report on the game. Sport lends itself to some great stories about winners and losers, the victors and vanquished. So tell the story. The dramatic last-gasp winning try or the desperate 80th minute conversion which just faded across the uprights. Great individual performances, or teams which have come back from the brink of defeat. Turning points which have changed the course of a game. There are tales of bad luck or players struck down with injury.

Good journalism is about being able to communicate simply and effectively. Find an angle, an emphasis for the story - "Teenage scrum-half John Doe grabbed a late try as....", "Newtown coach Fred Bloggs could only look on in frustration after....", "Oldsville skipper Sid Smith will return from injury this Saturday to lead his side for a key clash with....", "New-signing John Brown has been thrown into the fray for..."

The people angle makes the story personal, it gives rugby a human touch. If you are a press officer filing a report to the local media, get some quotes off the player, the coach, whoever - let them tell the story.

Outside the pre and post-match routine there are always stories worth putting out which maintain that spotlight. It's simply a matter of realising that what you might think is commonplace would interest a great many people. If you are successful with a lottery grant application, then make a song and dance about it to the media. Set up a photo call. Let the public know how ambitious you are.

Some of the best yarns are what we call off-diary stories. Such as the rugby club who bought a £5,000 scrummaging machine only to find that the shed meant to house it was too small. The club whose pitches became so waterlogged that they had to train in the supermarket car park avoiding stray trolleys. Or the quick-thinking player who, after his team-mates had scarpered from the team bus with smoke rising from the engine, managed to haul all the kit out of the boot before the vehicle was engulfed in flames.

Rugby is a great game, full of larger-than-life characters. Don't be afraid to promote your club and equally don't regard the media as tabloid sleaze merchants who would be about as welcome in your clubhouse as a barrel of warm beer! They need you as much as you need them, and hand-in-hand you will pack a pretty formidable combination.

*Katie Coker, former deputy sports editor at the Gloucester Citizen newspaper and currently a reporter for Rugby World, reports on Gloucester Rugby Club's matches every week, covers international matches and also deals with reports sent in by the many clubs in her area. Here she tells how to...*

## AVOID COMMON MISTAKES

Local papers welcome articles from sports clubs but the onus is on you to provide the information required at the time it's required. Most potential problems can be easily avoided by following this checklist

### KNOW YOUR NEWSPAPER

Daily regional newspapers and weekly newspapers work in different ways. Most weekly papers have a sportsdesk staff of just one or two people, whereas local dailies will have anything from four or five to more than a dozen. Find out the name of the sports editor or the reporter responsible for rugby coverage. When writing in or phoning try to deal with the same person each time as continuity will help.

### MEET THE DEADLINE

There is no point sending in a report after the sports pages have gone or the paper has been put to bed. Find out what the deadline is. Talk to the sportsdesk – a weekly paper with a Wednesday afternoon deadline may accept reports up to Wednesday lunchtime. If it is a daily paper they may only feature rugby reports on certain days and you may need to submit your report sooner. Discover what's appropriate and keep to it.

### WRITE TO LENGTH

When talking to the sportsdesk ask how long the paper likes a report to be. Fifty



words over the ideal is not a problem but pages and pages, with the essential information buried in hundreds of words, may well end up in the bin as the report would take too long to sub edit. Don't be tempted to describe every move in the match and don't try to mention every player's name just to keep them all happy. A journalist will cut any unnecessary flannel so you will have wasted your own time and theirs.

WRITE CLEARLY

It sounds obvious but you would be surprised how often illegible writing brings a report to grief. If you cannot type your reports make sure that you write clearly and, most important of all, print all names in capital letters. Busy journalists do not like to spend hours deciphering poor handwriting and they will be happier to help you if you keep them happy.

GET THE NAMES RIGHT

Always include players' first names and surnames in your report. After the first mention of any player you can then just refer to them by their surname – as long as there is not more than one person in the team with the same surname. Make sure that you spell the names correctly. When people see their name in print they like it to be spelt properly, so ask if you are unsure. Never use players' nicknames in your reports.

GIVE GOOD NEWS AND BAD

Few things annoy journalists more than clubs who send in match reports when they win but do not bother when they lose. If you want your club to be in the paper then be fair and send something in after every game, no matter what the result. If you have a player sent off do not try to cover it up. The paper will usually find out and will not be happy to have had the wool pulled over their eyes. If you are up front with your local paper they will treat you with respect but if you shy away from the bad news they will have less time and sympathy.

LEARN FROM MISTAKES

Look at the way your report is presented in the paper as the finished article. Compare that with the original report you sent in. If there are things the paper changes every week, try to learn from your mistakes and put them right yourself instead of leaving the paper to correct them every time.

RESPECT THE LOCAL PAPER

Don't be tempted to include 'in jokes' in your reports or to send in something colloquial or slapdash just because this is the local paper and not the Daily Telegraph. Treat your local paper with respect and they will do a good job for you. If you have any complaints about something the paper has done, phone your contact there to find out why it happened. Communication is the key to a happy relationship.

WRITING A MATCH REPORT

by Steve Williams

The better written your match reports the more chance you have of them being printed. They need to be punchy, informative and contain quotes. And they must be accurate because a lot of people are likely to read them.

If you are unsure of an event or just why the referee made a crucial decision find out after the final whistle.

Writing a report isn't difficult if you keep it to bite sized chunks. Let's take a league match between two neighbouring clubs – Eastwick (the Witches), needing two points for promotion with home advantage and Westport (the Mariners) desperate for two points to avoid relegation from South East Division One. Beyond these facts, the writing should follow naturally.

MATCH FACTS

- Venue: The Coven, Bessom Road, Eastwick.
- Weather: Heavy rain at start with strong wind blowing down the pitch, easing off towards half time. Eastwick win toss and decide to play with the wind in the first half.
- Referee: John Thomas (Barchester)

2 MINS – Line-out to Eastwick lock, Simon Cole, good jump. Scrum half Vern Morgan out to fly-half, Steve Michaels, to centre, Andy Cole, full back, roaring in, splits Westport cover to feed No 8 Percy 'Foggy' Langhorn, who crashes over to left of posts. Michaels' conversion hits upright, bounces back in play. 5 – 0

6 MINS – Penalty Eastwick, over the top from Westport forwards on their

own 22, Irish prop Michael O'Donnell penalised. Michaels shaves kick to left of post.

7 MINS – Fracas, off the ball incident involving Eastwick flanker, Rick Partridge and Westport's left wing, Jon Williams. Both packs join in. Partridge yellow carded for punching when everything dies down.

9 MINS – Penalty Eastwick, Westport back line off side at ruck in Westport 22. Michaels kicks from wide out. 8 – 0

17 MINS – Penalty to Westport, following first real break out from their own half by centre, Luke Brown. Good covering from right wing, Jack Lambkin and full back, Jeff Ball but Eastwick defence stray offside at break down. Full back, Steve Marshall, misses awkward kick 30 meters. 8 – 0

23 MINS – Eastwick lock, Jim Goodhew takes well in line-out on Eastwick 22, good rolling maul off tail, led by prop, Sam Parfitt, hooker, Reggie Noone and flanker Dennis Gear with No 8 Langhorn crashing over close to posts. Michaels kicks conversion 15 – 0

32 MINS – Following good period of pressure from Westport the homeside forwards go over the top at a ruck in their 22 and Marshall kicks from difficult angle. 15 – 3

38 MINS – Westport tight-head prop, Chay Bodin, penalised for collapsing and Marshall kicks from 40 meters wide out. 15 – 6

HALF TIME 15 – 6

43 MINS – Westport continue where they left off after the break, with pressure on the home line. A series of quickly taken tapped penalties by Westport scrum-half and captain, Matt

Dixon, results in a close range try for centre, Brad Hanson. Marshall slices his conversion wide. 15 – 11

48 MINS – Westport. Tails up, pound Eastwick line. The back row of South African, Fritz Van Heuten, Jim Hanson brother of Brad and Craig Caskie prominent, along with Dixon. From scrum 10 meters out Westport take ball against head, No 8 Caskie goes on blind to left wing, Jon Williams, who flips inside to flanker, Van Heuten, to score. Marshall misses conversion from wide out. 15 – 16

50 MINS – Eastwick attack from the kick off, well taken on by lock, Simon Cole, Westport concede penalty, prop, Alan White, coming in on the side of ruck. Michaels kicks from 30 meters. 18 – 16

53 MINS – Shoulder injury to Eastwick prop, Chay Bodin, replaced by Mike Steele.

60 MINS – Eastwick period of pressure, urged on by home crowd of 1,000. Morgan sees big gap on right hand touch and neatly places kick in to space for right wing, Peter McDonald to run on to and score near corner, despite desperate tackle by Westport wing, Martin Willman. Michaels conversion fades to right of post. 23 – 16

73 MINS – Westport, fired up, force line-out two meters from Eastwick line. Great jump in middle of line from Jake Power, ball mauled and prop, Mike O'Donnell crashes over in corner. Marshall kicks superb conversion from touchline to level. 23 – 23

85 MINS – Westport scrum 10 meters inside Eastwick half, out to centre, Hanson, whose pass to Brown is intercepted by centre Sven Jonsson, who takes off upfield, commits full-

back Marshall and finds No 8 Langhorn on his shoulder to race in close to corner. Michaels' kick goes wide, ref blows for full time.

QUOTES

Eastwick skipper, Vern Morgan, "The boys really played their hearts out today and in the end justice was done but full credit to Westport, they don't deserve to go down on a performance like that."

No 8 Percy Langhorn, "It was the toughest game I have ever played and to score three tries was just fantastic. I thought we just shaded it up front but they were hard. Boy were they hard!"

Westport wing, Jon Williams, "We were robbed! Archie had made a superb break and I was coming up fast on his shoulder when he was stopped and passed inside to me. It was never forward. The ref cost us our league place!"

Westport skipper, Matt Dixon, "I'm gutted! I never thought we would go down. The boys played magnificently and obviously I'm disappointed that the ref disallowed Jono's try but then again we shouldn't have given away that try at the end."

Eastwick: Jeff Ball, Jack Lampkin, Sven Jonsson, Andy Cole, Martin Millman, Steve Michaels, Vern Morgan (capt), Sam Parfitt, Reggie Noone, Chay Bodin, Simon Cole, Jim Goodhew, Rick Partridge, Dennis Gear, Percy Langhorn. Rep – Mike Steele for Bodin 53 mins.

Westport: Steve Marshall, Pete McDonald, Luke Brown, Brad Hanson, Jon Williams, Archie Lovell, Matt Dixon (capt), Alan White, Cliff Miller, Miuke O'Donnell, Steve Power, Jake Watson, Fritz Van Heuten, Jim Hanson, Craig Caskie.



REACTING TO  
NEGATIVE STORIES

By Patricia Mowbray

There are two kinds of news - good and bad. You have to attract one, the other arrives uninvited and if you, or your club, are in a difficult position the chances are it will make a story, at least in the local paper.

As a journalist I was delighted when I had a story all wrapped up and the company, government department or organisation concerned wouldn't talk to me. The best response from my point of view was "No comment", which meant it could be run unchallenged And "No comment" is a comment. It is printable and says "I don't want to talk about this. It's true but it's too awful to respond to."

Consider, for a moment, that one of the vets' team has suffered a heart attack during a match and died on the way to hospital. No comment suggests that your game is dangerous and your club heartless. Imagine that your first XV, plagued by injuries, has not won a game all season. No comment means a piece which will probably ensure that they won't even turn up to training if they read it. What if a visiting team has cavorted around the neighbourhood frightening the horses and waking local residents? No comment says you'll do what you darn well like at the rugby club and to hell with the neighbours. And suppose that the opposition have called your lads all kinds of rubbish prior to a needle match, no comment says nobody's prepared to talk your team up because they're a bunch of no hopers.

The first thing to remember if someone comes to you for a reaction to a negative story or a lead they've picked

up from some unnamed "source" is not to be caught on the hop. Don't imagine that the tape recorder or the pen starts running when you've gathered your wits. Beware the instant quote like "Which b..... told you?" or "I'm not b..... well talking to you about that" As a quote attributed to you it won't look good.

When a journalist rings take their number, discover as much as you can about the information they already have. Ask if they can fax over, or read over, any comments, statement or accusations, so that you know what you are reacting to and ask when they need your response to catch their deadline. This buys you information and thinking time.

If you have followed the advice in the rest of this publication you may well know the journalist who approaches you, which will make dealing with the issue easier. But if you are acquainted be careful not to get caught in the chat trap. "Look, mate, you know Tony's a nutter when he's had a few" will only cause you grief if someone has swiped knickers off a local washing line and run them up the club flagpole.

Once you have all the information at your disposal, give your response careful thought. Remember if any

disciplinary or legal proceedings are involved it is appropriate to say that it would be improper for you to comment until after the case has been dealt with.

When you have your answer ready, issue it as a written statement, rather than verbally and keep it tight. This means it is more likely to be used exactly as you intended and in its entirety. "I never said that" is a typical reaction to quotes in a newspaper article. The truth is you did but over a ten minute conversation which has been edited down.

What you want to convey to the world is the image of a club that cares, that is open and honest. If the story is not accurate correct it, if you have blundered express regret and say you will rectify it. Organisations survive huge scandals by doing the right thing. What nobody will forgive or forget is a big, fat lie, or feeble excuses.

Remember that any story is soon forgotten. The health and hygiene regulations mean that this week's news no longer wraps next week's fish and chips – it's probably being recycled. Your situation can be recycled too – hit them with some good news and you'll find you are back in the headlines in a positive light.



EVERY PICTURE  
TELLS A STORY

By Patricia Mowbray

Pictures sell stories and often in both national and local newspapers, they are actually stories in themselves, run with an extended caption instead of with an associated story.

It is important to remember that most local newspapers only employ one or two photographers if any and rely heavily on the contributions of both free lances and enthusiastic amateurs. Editors will often use good unsolicited pictures because they will want to fill the sports pages with something other than results and league tables.

It could be well worth persuading any keen amateur snappers to develop their skills by covering your club. Here are a few pointers to help you to take better pictures at your club:

GENERAL POINTS FOR  
ALL PICTURES

- 1 Fill the frame – try not to leave huge gaps above, below or around your subject.

- 1 Get the whole of the subject in the frame – try not to cut off arms, legs or feet.

- 1 Get the shot in focus.

- 1 Use a nice clean background – as a general rule, trees and bushes make good backgrounds, people and buildings don't.

- 1 Newspapers and magazines rely on accurate information, so make sure that every picture sent out, in whatever format, is correctly captioned with the who -left to right - what, when and where (and by whom).

- 1 Be prepared to run off a whole roll of film to get one good picture (professionals often do).

ACTION PICTURES

- 1 If you are relatively inexperienced concentrate on taking pictures of players who are standing still. Shots of players waiting for the ball at a line-out or preparing to take a kick can be very effective.

- 1 If you have one particularly good shot from a match and are supplying a number of sources it is worth getting the picture duplicated rather than sending one paper a good shot and its rival an inferior shot.

PUBLICITY SHOTS

- 1 The old adage 'never work with animals or children' is fine for TV but the opposite is probably true for publicity. Pictures of children are a staple diet of local newspapers.

- 1 Make sure that you offer editors a couple of choices on publicity shots.

- 1 Make sure that where kids are involved there are enough shots or copies to give one to each child.



Andrew Titheridge, rugby correspondent for the IRN Network and for London News Direct, advises on getting your message over...

LOUD AND  
CLEAR

Local radio does just what it says on the label – it's local and it's radio. Its strength is in the "local" because it supplies a need in a limited area for news, traffic reports, sport and events of interest to the local community. Its besetting weaknesses are that finance is limited and that there is little response from the community at large in terms of supplying information.

There are now more than 500 local and community stations throughout the UK, split between the BBC and commercial independent stations. English Local Radio has more than 450 stations whose sole source of income is from advertising.

Many stations run a Saturday afternoon sports programme and nearly all will run sports bulletin services at breakfast, from 6am until 9; at lunchtime, from 12 until 2pm and 'drive-time', from 4.30 until 7pm. To ensure that your club gets regular coverage on your local station the following advice is worth taking.

Get to know your local sports editor or reporter by inviting him to the club to meet the players and administrators. If it doesn't work first time, keep trying. He may not understand rugby or its culture. Don't give up and he will eventually succumb. Always invite him to major club events.

Offer the local station: perimeter advertising, programme notes or any sort of promotion for the station in return for guaranteed air time.

If the station cannot send a regular reporter offer to telephone a 30 – 45 second match report after every game home or away and line up the captain or man of the match for a two-way interview. Ensure that the man you appoint can precise a game to a maximum of 50 seconds and that he can speak without hesitation, repetition or deviation!

During the week ensure that there is a contact that the sports desk can call if they have a "poor news day", so that items of news regarding the club can be used: new players, needle matches to come, or any story that can be made newsworthy and interesting.

If you are attempting to attract spectators, offer competition prizes for the radio station to use and offer some form of incentive when new supporters arrive at the club.

You may find it difficult to gain air time if you are in competition with larger rugby clubs in the area. Stations like BBC Leicester will have an onsite reporter and summariser at every Leicester Tigers match, home and away but feel that there is no need to even report on any other clubs in the area.

However, if results, news and views were submitted on a regular basis, I am sure that they would increase their rugby coverage.

You will be astounded at how large an area a local radio station covers and the value of free editorial compared to the cost of advertising. Get moving – it's never too late!

*Mike Field, of Meridian TV whose rugby coverage is an important part of their schedule says it's well worth cultivating your...*

## REGIONAL TV

The kind of thing which will interest regional TV is an event like international players going to a club or a school for a training session, which is also a very positive image of the game.

So how to let the TV station know that something newsworthy is about to take place? Press releases and faxes are fine but nothing beats the personal touch. A couple of days before the event, phone the relevant news desk to see whether they have received your release and whether they will be sending a film crew and reporter.

Most regional news programmes have a nightly sports desk and need to fill four to five minutes of air time so they are always on the look out for material. You may not be able to make contact with anyone on the sports desk as they are always extremely busy and often out filming. So leave a message and ask for their mobile numbers. Newsrooms are frantic places and usually understaffed. Develop a thick skin and persevere if you get a curt reply.

It pays to cultivate your regional sports reporters. Invite them to social events to and find out the sort of material which interests them. If they are rugby aficionados you'll have no trouble, they will probably be chasing you but rugby tends to be overshadowed by soccer and cricket and if the reporters are not rugby minded you will have to chase them.

Remember that most of the air time at your disposal is during the week even if most rugby matches are at the weekend. So the regional TV programme will be

looking at previewing major matches. This means organising something visual – training sessions under floodlights are the favourite option. Clubs should co-operate over times and player availability and try to give some "quality" time to the camera and reporter. They will want to do special close ups and repeat moves and the best solution is to give them about half an hour out of the training schedule. Make sure that you offer them articulate players for interview.

Regional TV magazine programmes attract large and faithful audiences and regular appearances can only help to raise the profile of the sport and in some cases increase attendance. Some schools appoint teachers to act as press officers and every club should have its press officer to contact a television station direct with interesting forthcoming events.

Some regional TV companies do, of course, send their outside broadcast cameras to cover special matches when proper recces will be necessary and scaffolds erected for camera positions. But often one news camera will turn up to cover a match at the weekend. The camera person may know very little about the game so it helps to have a club official made available to ensure accuracy on the information sheet. The club should also have at least an elevated position or even some temporary scaffold available.



Adrian Firth manages the award winning RFU website and advises on how to...

## MAKE THE INTERNET WORK FOR YOU

The world wide web/Internet is now recognised as one of the primary sources for sportsmen and fans to obtain important and instant information about their sport. The present government is committed to providing Internet access to all schools, so the web is clearly well past the 'some-fad-from-the-US' stage and has already entered the 'oh-dear-the-kids-can-do-it-better-than-me' phase. Web sites are firmly established as an important arm of the sports media.

### RUGBY ON THE WEB

Sports sites account for a large and hugely popular part of the web and rugby union has a major presence. Although not yet able to match football for sheer volume of sites, rugby has much to offer fans on the web in terms of both quantity and quality. The IRB, Rugby World Cup and all the major unions have their own sites as do many

clubs. There are also commercial sites which offer news, fixtures, results and reports from across the globe.

### USING THE INTERNET

The two main advantages the Internet has over traditional media are that it is instant and interactive. You can call up a web site at any time night or day for the price of a local telephone call. True, you can turn on the television, pick up a newspaper or magazine at any time too but they won't answer questions or give competitions you can enter straight away. It's this instant accessibility that makes the Internet such a boon for hard pressed club officials acting as press officers or marketing officials. For those dedicated amateurs hammering away on their home PCs the Internet offers information and inspiration at the bash of a key and the click of a mouse.

One of the major resources available to clubs and their press officers on the web, is the results and fixtures database which is run as part of the RFU's web site, [www.rfu.com](http://www.rfu.com). This service offers the user a fully searchable database with the vital information for every game played under the auspices of the RFU. From the England team through to all the regional games, every club and league is represented. [www.rfu.com](http://www.rfu.com) also offers the user a club

database with the address and other contact details. Other items included on [rfu.com](http://rfu.com) are all press releases from the Twickenham press office, the laws of the game and names and addresses of all Youth Development Officers and referee societies.

### SELECTED SITES

RFU ONLINE the official voice of the RFU and English rugby on the net can be found at [www.rfu.com](http://www.rfu.com)

#### [www.rfu.com](http://www.rfu.com)

is set for a re-launch in autumn 2001.

#### [www.onerugbyplace.com](http://www.onerugbyplace.com)

is an independent commercial site with rugby news from all over the world, a great range of content and an excellent on-line shopping section.

#### [www.scrum.com](http://www.scrum.com)

is a commercial site which provides good player interviews and fixtures/results from all the home nations.



#### [www.rugbynews.com](http://www.rugbynews.com)

a good site for world-wide rugby news.

#### [www.sporting-life.com](http://www.sporting-life.com)

this site is widely acknowledged as the premier sports site in the UK, as the news comes from the Press Association, this site is always first with stories and has a great rugby news section and good links to other sites.





*Chris Skeat, Sports Editor of the Richmond & Twickenham Times, used to handle their advertising and says...*

## IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE

Advertising is big business and can be seen to have multi-million pound potent links with sport and the raising of its awareness in the national psyche. But advertising works just as well at the other end of the scale and it is worth bearing this in mind when your club's administration approaches the subject at the start of a new season or as a response to the need to attract support.

The key to success is basic knowledge of how to maximise your budget and there are a number of fundamentals before money is thrown at the problem. For newspaper advertising, first and foremost, take a good look at which papers cover the catchment area, are they are tabloid or broadsheet, paid for or free sheets? Take a look at all their sports pages to see who they cover and how they cover. Is rugby prominent or football? Does coverage tend to be factual or gossip? This way you can gauge which will hook your potential customers.

Hopefully, your club will already be featured in the fixture list and will be submitting weekly sports reports. If the take up is good it will be because the paper knows rugby is of interest to their readership.

It is also a bonus if you have a good reason to advertise. It could be that you were promoted last season, have moved ground, built a new clubhouse or stand or simply that you want to raise awareness with those fickle floating voters because you mean business this time around. There could be a change

in the management, a tempting cup tie or home fixture to plug.

But make sure that you know what else is happening at the same time. If your Crusaders Second XV fixture is on the same day as the F.A. Cup final keep your advertising funds in your pocket for another day.

Meet the advertising department's representative and ask what they have to offer you (it is their job to have that information at the ready). If you lay your cards on the table it will be easier to get straight answers. Tell them if your budget is limited but also if you intend to advertise on a regular basis, a regular customer deserves a better deal.

Most local papers have an art studio, which can design ads at minimal extra cost. Supply them with your logo or a good picture and remember that a colour or spot colour ad will be more eye catching, especially if your team strip colour stands out on the page.

As for the advertising copy, the simpler the better and generally the bigger the better but here you will have to work within your cost limitations. It is also preferable to start with a series of ads, rather than just one – local papers are all about recognition through repetition because the same people read them week in week out.

Your ears should prick up when you hear the words "late space" because it probably means somebody has pulled out and you can get a knock-down price. However, a bargain is only a bargain if it is what you want when you want it.

Talk with the circulation department about competitions, ticket offers (two for the price of one) and ask if there are any relevant editorial features. If you

go ahead don't forget to ask if you are entitled to a proof copy as this should guarantee the content. Don't worry too much about position. If your ad is good enough it will stand out anywhere but usually a rugby ad will be best placed with the rugby copy or on the entertainments page.

The time that it pays to advertise is when it is done well and with the right publication. Chris Blackwell, music business executive and former chairman of Island Records, recognised the power of the press. In the early eighties he had a poster on his office wall. It was deep blue and in the foreground was the tropical island company logo. Above it were the words "If you don't promote a terrible thing happens." And at the bottom of the poster coming out of the water was the word "Nothing".

*Alan Black, the RFU's Community Rugby Manager, says...*

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PAYS

A rugby club can't thrive in isolation, which is why forging strong links with the community makes sense. You should always tell your local authority what your club is doing. Contact the leisure / recreation officer, via the local council headquarters and if you don't already have a relationship with your local councillor, invite him or her to a home match and a pre or post match function.

Your local authority may have an officer who specialises in giving advice on lottery awards, European funding and millennium projects, this advice comes free so grab it. Local authorities are also often involved in coaching courses, community sports leaders awards, holiday play schemes, the identification of volunteers, sports

programmes and a variety of community events. They might be able to help with equipment, resources, small grants and for clubs demonstrating an active community policy there may be a concessionary rate relief. Linking up with your local authority can only pay dividends and bring good publicity.

If your club owns its ground and has a good clubhouse and facilities, used on match and training days, unlock the doors and bring in community groups: youth clubs, senior citizens organisations, groups catering for the disabled. Once the club has brought the neighbourhood on site the spin-offs will be really rewarding in every sense, including making funding initiatives available.

Open your gates and bring the community in. When you have become an intrinsic and important part of your neighbourhood you will find it easier to gain both publicity and local sponsorship. The two are inextricably linked.



## CONSTITUENT BODIES & PUBLICITY

It isn't easy to define the role of a Constituent Body press officer or to find a willing volunteer. The sheer weight of information to be handled, sifted and fed out is immense.

Some Constituent Bodies have appointed a press officer by paying a "a small honourarium" which hasn't always worked, possibly because the reward was small and the effort expected huge. Other Constituent Bodies have appointed a press officer simply to produce programmes for events like county matches and not to keep the media informed. But keeping the media supplied with information is an essential role, which needs to be covered by someone who can communicate effectively and who can be contacted by the press during the working day.

Roy Manock says it has been particularly important for his county to gain press coverage and Yorkshire appears to be one Constituent Body which has got it right. "We have always been centrally based in the Leeds area, so we stretch fifty miles in one direction and eighty miles in the other and need to get information into several papers. We encourage local papers to attend full committee meetings, which does work. If we are discussing RFU business they stay but don't report the proceedings, much as they would when a court goes into closed session.

"We are lucky to have an excellent press officer. We found relying on amateur help gave us very haphazard results but by employing a specialist we have had much more consistent coverage. The problem is if you are



going to pay someone to do the job you are looking for a very rare person for it to work.

"We know that it's essential to give the right impression of the game. When a referee collapsed and died on the pitch there was a lot of coverage, which sent out a negative message. This was balanced when the club set up a trust fund for his children to look after them as they grew up."

Constituent Bodies need a press officer because CBs, and the way they operate, are a mystery to all but a small band of rugby journalists. Sports writers on most weekly or regional titles won't have a clue about the workings of the county system, despite the fact that every CB is full of news waiting to be told. And if a CB secretary finds it a struggle to get written responses from clubs, a newspaper article or a piece on radio or TV which has implications for the clubs will soon have them making contact. The information to feed to the media will probably include:

**County matches** because county allegiances run deep and a paper will love to rerun the War of the Roses. Provide details of the opposition as well as your own team, venues, kick-off times and, in particular, changes to any of these. Ensure that the press can obtain coverage either by looking after the journalists on the day or providing a

match report.

**Representative successes** provide good copy. Readers will want to hear of players of all ages who move on from County duty to new heights. Keep track of your rising stars and send out releases when they reach Divisional level, or represent their country whether at Under 21, A or England squad level. Local boy makes good will certainly feature if you keep the media in the picture.

**Statistics** and individual successes and milestones make stories. Keep a record of each game, the results, scorers etc and feed this to the journalists.

**Knockout rugby** gives media coverage so feed out details of internal competitions – at all levels – and national and regional tournaments in which clubs from your county are making progress. Make sure the press have dates of draws, pairings, games and results.

**Committee decisions** will have an impact on different elements within the game in the county and be of interest to the press. Schools, youth, forward planning, coaching, YDO initiatives, junior, mini, discipline, cup competitions, sponsorship, changes in personnel, new committee men – all will regularly provide column inches.



*Training Officer and former YDO, Will Feebery, knows how to get...*

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ON TV

Having had no experience of dealing with the media before I became a Youth Development Officer, I decided to look upon it as a challenge and was determined not to get disheartened if ideas were rejected in the early stages.

Hampshire is not vastly different from any other area and we have achieved TV slots on BBC's Generation Game twice, on the BBC main news programme, on ITV's main news programme, 12 appearances on Meridian TV, several of which were lunchtime and evening slots on the same day, ten appearances on BBC TV South and eight on Sky TV.

So how have we managed to get coverage? I think persistence and being consistent has paid off and using a great deal of patience, being aware that it takes time to build up the kind of good relationships needed.

In the beginning I read everything available on dealing with the press and now, eight years down the line, it is clear to me that it is vitally important to make personal contacts with people in the local TV station. It isn't always easy. Sports Section personnel are constantly changing but the Head of Sport does tend to stay around longer so it really is worth getting to know him or her.

The local pub provides a good place to meet on the first occasion, especially if you are buying lunch. Journalists work off their contacts and once they know



that you are a constant source of information they are likely to contact you.

You do need to provide as much information as possible, including photographs and press cuttings but you also need to prioritise and give brief headings to events which might interest the TV station. We print out all our events for Hampshire four months in advance with simple headings:

Event	(What)
Date/Time	(When)
Venue	(Where)
Remarks	(Why & who is involved)

From the full events list journalists can select newsworthy items. Details of visits by England internationals or personalities almost guarantee TV coverage but the station needs to know in plenty of time.

As for timing we ring our contacts and talk the event through with them. Three weeks in advance we fax a press release with a name and contact number to all media contacts. A week before we get in touch and try to get a commitment to cover the event. Two days in advance we chase them up, discuss interviews, timings and finalise details.

We are always aware that even after all of this the media will sometimes just not turn up on the day. We know that we have an excellent product to sell and we make it sound exciting, always looking for an angle. We type everything we send, never make promises which we can't deliver and we follow things through. In Hampshire there's no such thing as getting disheartened.

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Keep it simple, include all necessary facts, date it and give contact numbers and those for outside office hours. The most basic rule still applies. The media will want to know: **WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY & HOW?**

**Date** 21st October 2000  
**Press Information**  
**WHO** Former England international, B L Zebub, who began his rugby career as a 10-year-old at Eastwick RFC  
**WHAT** will open Eastwick RFC's magnificent new clubhouse  
**WHERE** at The Coven, Bessom Road, Eastwick  
**WHEN** at 12 midnight on 31st October  
**WHY** following last season's disastrous fire  
**HOW** the clubhouse has been rebuilt thanks to the sponsorship of Eastwick solicitors Hagggs, Heath & Co and the club's many fund raising events, involving all sections from minis to vets.

**Please Note:** B L Zebub will be available for interviews and pictures with today's young Eastwick players

**For further details contact:**  
*Eastwick Press Officer*  
Paul Tergeist  
0358 1111  
Mobile 0410 666  
*Hagggs, Heath & Co*  
Val Kyrie  
0385 3333

Tea coffee and sandwiches will be provided.



### CONTACT NUMBERS

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Visit the RFU on-line at:

# WWW.RFU.COM



# RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

Designed and produced by The Bridge

Contact Rob Chappelhow on 01525 288000 or e-mail [rob.chap@the-bridge.co.uk](mailto:rob.chap@the-bridge.co.uk)

Photography courtesy of Allsport, Colorsport and Touchline Magazine