

Secretary's AGM report 2019

Lutterworth RFC

Committee Report (Secretary; Nick Langridge)

Our 150th birthday is in just 3 years so let's make it big. Formed in 1872, just 1 year after the formation of the Rugby Football Union and before the break out of Rugby League, we are the oldest rugby union club in Leicestershire and we believe the second oldest in the Midlands. A Club steering group has begun work to create a 2022/23 event calendar, capturing the interests of every group and team. Thoughts and ideas should be forwarded to Mike Entwistle, Mick Brown or myself.

In the meantime our town is expanding, will shortly double in size creating opportunities. New faces will step through our door with new knowledge and ideas. They will experience our teamwork, want to be part of our family and maybe even want to lead. We must pick their brains, involve them, make them part of our journey, make them feel at home. Our Club has a bright future.

The season

Comprehensive team reports can be found in the separately documented 'AGM 2019 Squad Reports'.

In March we achieved a record 313 age grade players (23% increase over 4 years) and just last month we decided to split the U6/U7 age group as we already have 14 U6s awaiting the 2019/20 season.

Safeguarding was high on agendas. In early 2018, late dropouts left Colts and Mens 3s awaiting no-shows; parents watched as fathers and sons played the game together; every parent's dream but paperwork was overlooked. We have all learnt lessons and a clean disciplinary slate through 2018/19 was one result of raised awareness across the Club. Another was our insistence at away games (as well as at home) of the staggering of Colts and Mens games on Saturday afternoons to ensure separation where changing facilities, especially showers, were shared.

66 DBS checks were completed this season, providing both continuity and introduction into the ranks of new age grade managers, coaches and first aiders. Rest assured every effort is made across the Club to maintain the safety and safeguarding of players, opponents and spectators of every age; never be fearful of raising concerns to Team Management or Club Committee.

First Aid support was received from Coventry University student sports therapists; a regular occurrence thanks to Tony Taylor's tenacity. Whereas we usually chase the colleges, Northampton University has for next season requested a placement partnership with us for the supply of students. A number of club members have also attended RFU Emergency First Aid Rugby Union training ready to further assist flexibility.

Past injury tolls (dads thinking they can still side step and Ivan Tivey taking it far too seriously...!) forced a rethink and a tag game replaced the usual dad's vs coaches Xmas game. A success as both mums and dads took part; I'm told it was hilarious and the bar took quite a hit. Thanks Maddy Simons for organising... in fact, congratulations to Maddy for being awarded 2019 Clubman of the year, an award which in the future will be decided by most recent winners.

The Mens 2s were the team to beat at season end, claiming both County Cup and Clonmell Cup ("the 5th time in the last 7 years" I hear Ian Evans shout). I must also applaud the Mens 3s on their return to the County leagues and honouring every fixture, ably managed by Joe Walker and Rhys Jones who now move up to coach the Colts and manage the Mens 2s respectively, providing them well earned progression and continuity to players.

Six 'ten' ties were awarded (when a Colt plays ten or more senior games during their two season Colts time); designed to provide incentive to gain experience, they appear to work. Succession was also on the Ladies' minds with an abundance of Girls keenly considering progressing very soon with second teams hotly debated. What a problem to have.

Match programmes have returned. With support from across the Club, Tony Taylor produced keepsakes worthy of collection. Chairman's words, histories of opponents, match reports, squad pictures, sponsors and Mick Brown's innovative 'Mick Brown Column' where invitees suggest their dream team from across the Lutterworth ages; Charlie Turner, Paul Wilford and Pat Donovan each separately picked eight times or more.

Josh Johnson, our DoR Youth, organised the first Lutterworth schools' varsity between the College and the High School in March. A link between Club and College was lost some year ago but this may form the basis of a new even stronger relationship with both schools.

The Minis Awards evening provided memories which will last a lifetime. Overviews for each team were provided by team managers and then awards presented to every player by Colts Nick Rigo, Justin Trombas and George Chapman, each recalling receiving awards themselves often in the marquee the night before a summer ball.

Congratulations to our home grown Steve Lamb on passing his level 3 RFU coaching award. Steve will lead again next season but now fully overseeing Mens, Ladies and Colts coaching. Congratulations also to Leon Brown for accepting the County Senior Mens Manager role; does it feel like a promotion?

Our last committee meet agreed to place a whole club advert in the Swift Flash ahead of the new season. Steve Russell and Rhys Jones have done a fine job, will Joe Benjamin be embarrassed.

Marcus Stevens Jnr is taking a well-earned rest. A cornerstone of the Mens 1s scrum, he turned his arm to coaching over a nine year period with his greatest achievements raising the Colts to three County League and two County Cup triumphs from 2016 to 2018.

Every year massive numbers of youth players enter various academies and Tigers DPPs, together with seniors represent themselves and their Club at Leics and Warks County, Midlands and occasionally at the very highest level. We wish them all the best and pray they reach their potential. We also await their return, either to console or to celebrate; our doors are always open.

The membership

So many faces and so much effort. Hours, days, weeks, months and for some years of dedication brings smiles on faces and memories to young and old.

The 2018 AGM had a record turnout for recent years, much swelled by players for whom our club exists so I welcome that. Matters raised were by both youth and senior representatives, discussed as promised by committee during the season, and concluded. Two club stalwarts were mentioned to receive Honorary Membership and together with a third were ratified at the first committee meeting; Martyn Holmes, Martin Willey and Mike Entwistle.

The 40 Club, formed in 1993 by Martin Willey, Colin Hudson, Paul Blake & Mike Entwistle, reached its 25th season. Membership, “of those that wish to give that little bit more” to Lutterworth Rugby Football Club, is open to all Club members, sits around 50 and rising. Benefits include organised pre-match lunches, 4 trips to away games and a Ladies day. Consider joining as it is good fun.

The 146th annual dinner in February set a record attendance and at one point had a waiting list. Early promotion of the event and persistence is a winning formula; well done Colin Hudson and Mike Entwistle. I’m informed that Neil Back was in fine fettle, gave an excellent speech and answered searching questions. A picture will be found in the 2019/20 fixture book centrefold.

Leics RU President Steve Rice and RFU Head of Safeguarding Vivien Rimmer were guests at the Volunteers Evening; a chance for all to appreciate the scale and complexity of help and support the Club receives from individuals across the membership. Playing and facilities don’t happen without organisation; we will have 19 formal teams in 2019/20 and this is one of the few events where you see all management teams together celebrating our ‘one club’ ethos.

Youth is bringing new ideas into the committee and the wider Club; us oldies must hold the leash loosely else inspiration will not flourish. John Oates has firm hold now of the purse strings whilst Josh Johnson strengthens ties to schools; new ways of coaching championed by Geraint Davies, developed further by Steve Lamb is inspiring new managers and coaches into the senior sides. Maddy Simons hands over the minis reigns to two newbies this summer and Club Safeguarding will be steered by new hands in 2019/20. Thanks also to Sally Critchlow who, already the Junior Coordinator, has now taken on the role of verifying disclosure applications.

The Club is full of unsung heroes and one such is Deb Ketteringham who acts formally as Ladies and Youth Registrar, also regularly providing guidance and level headedness on all matters.

I would also like to personally thank all volunteers, no matter your role, who endeavour tirelessly follow advice and regulation, in particularly those thankfully very few who are party every season to always challenging and often extremely emotional safeguarding cases. You know who you are; I thank you for your assistance, your patience and your confidence in me and the Club management team.

The business

There being considerable challenge to the committee's authority last season, at the very first 2018/19 meeting the Committee resolved unanimously that all who serves on the Committee serve in the context of the Club Vision Statement and if they don't agree with it then they shouldn't seek to be elected. Moreover; whilst clubs around experience the consequence of pseudo professionalism, Lutterworth Rugby Football Club resolves to remain steadfastly amateur and the new RFU Payment of Players Declaration has been signed to that effect. As a consequence the Club retains access to "RFU Benefits" including grants and loans without which our facilities would not be as you see them today having received hundreds of thousands of pounds from such as Sports England, the Rugby Football Foundation and landfill tax over the last few years alone.

The blight of Lutterworth bank closures continues with NatWest already gone and Barclays closed in December. They advertise use of the Post Office but choose to "forget" that it doesn't include cash re-floating, so where should Ron get his pennies from to change the £20 notes everybody hands over for their first pint. Clubs around the country are resorting to cash free (i.e. card only) because they can't source till floats; maybe we should resort to keeping cash under our mattresses.

Significant committee time was allotted to discussing gate charging. Experience of the Mens 1s in the West league was that we were missing a trick with many inner-city clubs taking significant gates. Resolving not to charge Club members was easy but much harder was identifying by what means the 'gateman' would determine who are members and who are not. The East is also far friendlier with only two clubs charging so we resolved to continue not to charge a gate at this time.

A substantial donation from long term sponsor A&A Lamb saw installation of a sturdy fence protecting pitches from unwelcome interlopers. Sponsorship is a crucial foundation of Club sustainability; Sponsorship Secretary Pat Donovan is a miracle worker but business links dilute as company roles change and contacts retire. Please all do consider the New Business Sponsorship Secretary vacancy.

Last summer's heatwave turned our pitches to dustbowls from which they never fully recovered. Take a look at them now "the best they've ever been" and acknowledge the dedication of our Premises Manager Colin Hudson.

A new car park entrance surface complimenting last season's widening of the gates is complete; no more broken concrete or a need for wellies if you are first on site. In addition, recently purchased post protectors sponsored by Graham Benford will shortly adorn new 13m high no1 pitch goal posts breathing fresh life into Club facilities for the 2019/20 start. Grants from the Rugby Football

Foundation and Leics RU have halved the cost to us of the new goal posts, the old ones having been damaged by high winds. Grants are offered where they see playing numbers and spectator footfall, which is what we consistently provide. Players this coming season will also appreciate non-slip flooring (previously simply concrete) in all changing rooms; far easier also for Allen Williams and David Lenton who clean them weekly throughout the season come rain or shine.

The online shop set up in late 2012 by John Hutchinson thrives; managed by Jackie Johnson it turned over a record £4.6k during the 2018/19 season. The new lockable “youth kit shop trolley” makes business far easier to handle and stock take, leading to increasing Sunday morning kit sales.

Work continues to obtain land and secure connectivity (broadband, mobile) to enable technology to upgrade bar tills, introduce smart membership cards and reduce financial administration.

Chairman

“Another rugby season is about to start but there’s just time to look back at last season.

The things that stick in my mind are some great trips and excellent rugby across all teams. I can’t remember a year where we have had no disciplinary issues; well done everyone may it long continue. We also have pitches (thanks Colin and team) and coaches that most teams envy.

The club grows and strengthens every year but it is only because of the hard work of the army of volunteers. As always I’m in awe of the support I’m given from all.

It is with great pleasure that I look toward the 150th year celebrations which will soon be upon us. I know a team of volunteers are looking for help to plan organising the special event.

Thank you all.”

Jason Woodward

Nick Langridge
Hon Secretary
Lutterworth RFC
July 2019

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