

Notes from RFU CB Engagement Event

Wed 7th Feb 6.30pm

The Northcote, Clapham Junction

Attendees RFU – Bill Sweeney, CEO
Steve Granger, Development Director
Sue Day, FD

CBs – variety of council reps, board members and individual club chairs. Most from London and South East. Circa 20 in total

Summary

1. Briefing from each RFU person on:
 - a. Professional game
 - i. 8 year plan for national team rebuilding
 - ii. TV rights
 - iii. Long term plan for building out second tier clubs
 - b. Finance
 - i. Recovery since COVID
 1. No debt
 2. Breakeven at operating level
 - ii. Long term investment plan following £90m investment from CVC
 1. £30m to reserves
 2. Reinvesting in Twickenham
 3. Circa £30m for community development plan
 - c. Community Game
 - i. Changing patterns of adult play accelerated by COVID
 - ii. New formats of game emerging and developing
 - iii. RFU exploring split of development and long term strategy to a regional structure working with groups of clubs on specific issues. CB to retain focus on enablers of rugby, support and compliance.
 - iv. Maximising benefits of hosting 2025 Women's World Cup
2. After each person's brief there was a group discussion.
 - a. I sensed frustration about the lead session being about the professional game. Arguably there were not enough links made to revenue generation in this part of the game funding all community activity. Some people wanted chapter and verse on the negotiation of TV rights – somewhat off the ranch for a community audience was my observation.
 - b. Widespread understanding of the need for fundamental change in structure, culture and organisation of community game. Each CB at different stages in addressing these but all worried about lack of understanding/ acceptance of the need for change from some of their members.
 - c. RFU to promote a new development plan in coming months. Want to explore new ways of organising the game – not all clubs to have a 'universal' offer, hub-and spoke for developing specific groups eg. Girls, clubs grouping together rather than be rivalrous on all aspects.
 - d. Exploration of regional structure grouping several CBs together. Acknowledgement that CB coordinates the foundations for delivering rugby but game development needs a to operate on a larger scale with a move away from 'all must have prizes'

culture. Current RFU initiatives are too watered down and fail to respond to the major societal changes that are taking place.

- e. Some people went down into the weeds on particular issues eg. Latest article in Rugby Paper about finances of RFU, publicity that rugby is tantamount to child abuse. Quite a lot of armchair experts on communications strategies but all coming from a place of good intention and desire to be positive.
- f. At my suggestion a discussion of Communications was left until the end as this would need to be derived from the other topics.

By this point the event was running very late and people were starting to drift away to catch trains, etc.. This was a valuable opportunity to meet others with the same challenges and opportunities we face. The opportunity to meet more central RFU people was also valuable in developing relationships. I do feel the size of the group was too big for 'one conversation' and it may have been better were we in three smaller groups each led by one of the RFU Directors. I think a couple of these events per year would be a good idea and I definitely feel we will benefit from splitting our attendance across several of the events.

Let's coordinate our feedback after colleagues attend the March event. In the meantime if any of you have questions or queries please don't hesitate to call.

Lucy Armstrong