Boys and Girls Age Grade Rugby Meeting – Planning and Catch Up

Monday 11th March at Northern Rugby Club

Present – Nicola Smith, Andrew Neal, John Davidson, Adam Lenham (Joint Chairs of Age Grade), Ben Drury (lead coach Girls Rep Rugby), Rob Parkinson (Colts Chair), Dave Challenger (Dir of Rugby) and Claire Sharpe (County Admin/Office Manager)

Apologies – Iain Douglas

Acknowledgement that the U14 to U16 and U18/Colts age bands need to be the focus to help with club sustainability. Rugby needs to be fun and structured and players need to feel included and part of a team / part of the club so they want to stay and play male and female adult rugby. Focus on club sustainability needs to be at the U14 to U16 Groups building on the foundations that are there now. Rugby needs to be a good experience.

Ideas for Season 2024-25 with Summer Programme 2024 lead in

U16s Boys transition to Colts Rugby. Ideal to run a festival for current U16s (going into colts next season) and current U17s (going in to senior colts next season) to ease the transition up to colts rugby. Skill development and fun day. Alan Gardiner (Alnwick) has offered to host a festival. No date as yet and we need clubs to buy in to the idea. Rob has been in touch with Colts leads to float the project to them. Now needs follow up and costed out so its run as a celebration end of season event (post match BBQ etc) ***Action – Rob (and Alan Gardiner)***

Under 18s Girls transition to Womens Rugby. Idea to run a "break the ice" event before the Womens County match v Cheshire on 12th May. Morpeth have been approached to host. Invites to U18s Girls who will be moving up to Womens rugby from September and to Womens club players and coaches/team managers who are not playing for County that day. Liam is approaching Tamara Taylor to see if she can attend and talk about her rugby journey, playing for England, her route into coaching etc. All players then go outside, everyone mixed up and play some touch rugby for an hour, come back in and have a BBQ type lunch and then stay and watch the County Match. End of the day aim – when the U18s go to clubs for pre season they recognise people from the event and have a friendly face to great them when they make that step up to adult rugby. Project needs costing out once venue is confirmed. Never been tied before so a bit of an experiment, but once venue is confirmed we can start on the promotion of the event with some socials etc. ***Action – Adam and Iain to lead with assistance from a couple of leads at clubs (Annie at Tynedale? Stephen at Morpeth? Mandy at Percy Park? - wont be involved with county team hence idea to ask them to assist!)***

Summer Rugby X Pitch Rugby festival for all clubs – 19th May 2024

X Pitch Rugby festival for all clubs – 18th May 2025 at Tynedale

For U14, U15 and U16. Male and Female. Venue(s) for 19th May 2024 tbc – ***Andrew to lead*****.** Needs writing up and costing out for both seasons.

Summer 7s Festival for Boys U14, U15, U16 – date and venue tbc. (John, do you want to lead on this?) Idea floated and needs further thought and costing out – series of dates or a couple of one off events?

Ideas for Season 2024-25 – new projects to support club rugby

Note, Season 2024-25 runs Saturday 7th September 2024 to Monday 5th May 2025

Start of Season Festival for U15s and/or U16s – flexible format, 10s Festival? Idea floated – date in September? Needs further thought and costed out if this is to run. ***Action – Andrew, Nicola and John***

Under 17 (Boys) Midweek Floodlit Competition – flexible format, every 6 weeks or so, different hosts for each event. Teams short can borrow players. (Follows similar format to the Friday Night Vets Under Lights). Suggestion that this could also be a good project for **Under 16s boys rugby**.

Needs to be written up as a project and costed out – ***Action Andrew and Rob*** (Claire has a template for funding of the Vets project if this is helpful)

"Silent Sunday" - Noticed that this season there is more of the "shouty coach" being seen. "**Silent Sunday**" or similar next season? Let the players organise themselves on the pitch and control the game. Coaches have to stay silent and let the players manage the game. (Also good for player development – leaders on the pitch.) Suggestion - select a couple of dates in the calendar that are flagged as "Silent Sundays" – all age groups and includes weekends when clubs have matches. (Younger age groups may need some help on grounds of safety and ensuring half game rule is covered off so provision to assist at the U7 to U11s will not be an issue.) Dates need to be selected so that they can be ringfenced in calendar and benefits of a "silent Sunday" can be promoted. ***Action – Adam (Girls) and John (boys)*** select date (s)**.** ***Rob – do you want to do this at Colts?***

U15 and U16 Player Development Evenings – maybe designed as a Midweek or Friday Night Pitch up and Train / Play event. 3 or 4 events during the season. Designed for players who are not in the DPP and who are not playing a lot of Wednesday afternoon or Saturday morning rugby at school. Idea needs further thought and costing out, but all present thought this a good idea is it gives a new play/train opportunity for those not at the top of the playing tree.

Thought process behind this suggestion - All players need to feel valued and those not put forward for DPP or playing a lot of Wednesday and/or Saturday Schools rugby do not get the opportunities of those who do, and this project is designed to support those core club players so they are not lost to the game having become disillusioned due to lack of opportunity and support. ***Action – Andrew, Nicola and John***

Pitchside Behaviour

Topic of **general pitchside behaviour** generated quite a bit of discussion as "shouty coach" is also manifesting itself and crossing over to "shouty parent or grandparent". There is an Active Bystander project with the RFU, however those present wanted to act quickly and get some reminders out to clubs. ***Action – Andrew*** *t*o draft junior rugby rules and pitchside protocols. (Junior Rugby rules to note half game rule and mixed ability sides, pitchside conduct to include player and parent conduct.) Once these are received, they will be circulated and added to website. **Action - *Claire*** will also speak to James/Faye re some socials to flag the subject lifting some of the protocol info from what Andrew drafts up.

General reminder to clubs – pitchside barriers – **do all clubs have pitchside barriers** (or enough pitchside barriers) for Sunday morning rugby? If clubs do not have these they need to get in touch – tell us where they fall short (which age group(s) and how many sets of barriers they need. In meantime costs for some removable pitchside barriers will be sought from Liam Nicholls. ***Action – All Clubs, Claire*** (costs from Liam), ***Liam*** *(costs).*

Further discussion around the topic led to an idea around "shout out the shouty coach or parent" – similar to a "call it out" anonymous method of flagging issues at a club / age group. It became clear when talking about this that there is an issue at club across a couple of age groups – but until this group had sat down together and the topic discussed, the dots did not join. Agreed to develop with James (website) a "shout out the shouty coach or parent" digital platform form where anyone can note issues that they see at a club at any time (not just a Sunday). Form can be completed anonymously (but will give option to leave name) and will have very strict criteria for use so it doesn't get miss used. Idea is that this should give a route in to report bad behaviour that does not reach Safeguarding threshold. It will be made very clear the portal is not an avenue to having a whinge about a match going ahead in bad weather, or for having a dig at someone as reporter doesn't get on with the coach. Once a report is received (will feed to county office mailbox) it will be reviewed with CBSM and if required actions taken to follow up with Club CSOs and bringing in joint Chairs of Age Grade as necessary. ***Action – Claire and James*** to develop the idea, test the form and have it ready for launch for new season.

Also seeing more social media posts highlighting big wins and scorelines. ***Action – John*** – agreed to draft some reminder notes for clubs around general language used on social media and a reminder of core values of game around respect and scorelines. If you reach a 50 point margin, stop the game. Mix up the teams, mix up the rules, change the focus. A 50 point win does not benefit anyone. Some recent good examples of use of social media posts can be seen with Wallsend U13s – highlighting great team spirit. Two of the most recent posts show muddy players and a great shout out to effort and team spirit with no scorelines even mentioned.

RFU Age Grade Calendar Season 2024-25

RFU Age Grade Calendar is now available however will be adapted to the NRU template version as RFU version is pages long and not user friendly! (Copy of the RFU Calendar will however be added to the County Website for reference as there are a number of notes within the document which will clubs give a greater understanding of the restrictions around activity and dates and give useful insight to other events within the playing calendar.)

- *All nationally organised competitions, Academy pathway and aspirational pathway activity and international preparation and events, remain nationally pre-populated in defined weeks not to be moved.*
- *The Girls calendar has Touch to Twickenham (mixed non-contact) and a window for Love Rugby Festivals where CBs are encouraged to organise girls playing opportunities under the Love Rugby national campaign banner (more details to follow).*
- *The Boys calendar has Touch to Twickenham (mixed non-contact) added in.*

NRU Calendar will be circulated in due course along with a minis fixture template which clubs can use.

In the meantime, some dates to be aware of for season 24-25 are noted in the information that follows below.

Waterfall Competitions, Cups and Festivals for Season 2024-25

Easter Falls late next year – weekend of 18/19/20/21 April.

U12, U14, U16 & U18 Girls Good Friday Festival at Morpeth – Friday 18th April 2025

Alnwick Festival – U7s, U8s, U9s – 27th April 2025

Tynedale Festival – U10s, U11s, U12s Boys & U12s Girls – 27th April 2025

Andrew is running the U13, U14 and U16 Boys Cups, while Nicola will run the U15s Cup.

U16s Cup – already drawn with 9 teams entered.

U15s Cup – ready to be drawn (9 teams entered).

U14s Cup – ready to be drawn (9 teams entered).

U13s Cup - link for entries: https://forms.gle/5QC923xmgNpherE79

Dates for U13 to U16 Waterfall Cups: Preliminary round: 29th September

1st Round: 13th Oct

Semi-Finals: 26th Jan

Finals U13, U14 and U16: Sunday 30th March 2025

Finals U15: Sunday 27th April 2025

Adam and Iain will oversee the U14 and U16 Girls Cup Competitions next season and will follow the U13 to U16 boys dates so there is consistency across age grade rugby.

Dates for U14 and U16 Girls Cups: 1st Round: 13th Oct

Semi-Finals: 26th Jan

Finals U13, U14 and U16: Sunday 30th March 2025

Finals U15: Sunday 27th April 2025 Adam – which date did you want?

Dates for Colts County Cup and Plate Round One Cup: w/c 7th October

Round Two Cup: w/c 4th Nov

Round One Plate: w/c 18th Nov

SF Cup and Plate: w/c 17th Feb

Cup and Plate Finals: Sunday 16th March 2025

Combined Teams / Buddy Up

There are still a number of clubs who are following either the buddy up model or the option to combine age groups.

Correspondence has been received from Ponteland re their current U12/U13 players as they will need to be combined next season as U13/U14. Current expectation is that the provision for combined teams will be removed by the RFU (as per updates received start of this season). However, having reached out to Liam on the subject, Liam has in turn contacted Mark Saltmarsh who has responded noting that provision may remain but with more robust sign off criteria.

This does not help current situation with Ponteland (and any other clubs looking at this for next season) so at the Club Development Day at Morpeth on the 4th March when an opportunity arose for conversation around possible buddy up between Ponteland and Gosforth, it was taken, with John Chappell (Ponteland) and Neil

Jamieson (Gosforth) chatting about the possibility of working together at these age groups next season. This is actively being followed up on.

Update 19.03.24 – John Chappell called into office. Ponteland coaches keen to push on with the idea and keep the players together and playing. "Buddy up" to the benefit of the game – not individual egos! Andrew to be approached to support the conversations between Gosforth and Ponteland and offer advice where needed. Andrew being approached by Dave Challenger to lead on this subject if other clubs need advice.

Current "Buddy Up" Teams include "Blyton" at U13 to U16 (Blyth and Ashington), AG Raiders Colts (Ashington and Gosforth), Northern and Wallsend Colts, TyneVos U18s Girls (Tynedale and Novos) and North Valkyries U14 and U16 Girls (Alnwick, Morpeth and Ashington). All having successful seasons and entering into both local and national cup competitions so should be noted that buddy up is not a barr to competition entry.

Buddy Up led to further conversation around roles and responsibilities (and comms) on training and match days following a welfare matter reported in through a Club RS lead. Matters were followed up individually regarding that particular event – coach education and responsibilities – via Cathyrn Clark (CB Medical Lead) but this has led to further conversation around information shared/due diligence between clubs when club coaches have joint responsibilities. Conversation led to agreement that a "buddy up management form" would be created and uploaded to County Website (forms) which would be a jointly completed form noting, if using Gosforth and Ponteland U13s as a buddy up example, who the coaches are at each club, their RFU ID number, their DBS information, what their coaching qualifications are at their club, and what their first aid and safeguarding qualifications are at the club. The form once submitted and checked (on GMS) can then drop into both the Gosforth and Ponteland club folders so information is there for reference. Any shortcomings on qualification etc can be flagged and actioned. This should hopefully give peace of mind to parents/guardians so if Ponteland coaches are training Gosforth players, Gosforth parents are reassured that all the coaches present are fully qualified and have a valid RFU DBS and vice versa. ***Action - Claire to progress this with James*** over next few months so its ready for the summer.

Additional Agenda Item

Ruling around an U15 Cup Match that did not reach conclusion on Sunday 10th March.

As Cup organiser, Andrew briefed those present on the circumstances around the match between Alnwick U15 and Whitley Bay Rockcliff U15.

(Should be noted that John Davidson left the table while this was discussed.)

Having followed up on what was reported to him, Andrew explained circumstances around the match stopping and briefed on what the Society Appointed Referee had noted to him when contacted for his feedback on the situation.

Having discussed the information presented, the agreement was that the result of 19-0 to Alnwick would stand and the match would not be re scheduled.

Andrew agreed to relay decision of the group to the two clubs.

John then re joined the meeting.

Date for Diary - Age Grade Forum Meeting – Tuesday 7th May, 6.30pm start at a venue tbc.

Further dates to be added – Girls and Womens health linked to Keep Your Boots on Resources – delivery by Jojo Hall (Tynedale physio) and Cathryn Clark (CB Medical lead). Informal presentations and Q&A for players.

Subject also to be covered at the summer coaching / planning for 24-25 season event in July but delivered to coaches.