Notes from Chair of Rugby Meeting held at Ashington on Monday 13th May, 6.30pm

Present: Dave Challenger (Dir of Rugby), Noel Mather (Whitley Bay Rockcliff / Senior Vice President), Andy McDonough (Wallsend / Referees Soc Appts / Comps Working Group), Paul Walker (Ponteland / Comps Working Group), Tom More (Ashington / Comps Working Group), Nick Cotterill (Novos), Ian Hiles (Tynedale), Ron Borley (Northern) and John Stafford (Morpeth) and Claire Sharpe

Dave began the meeting by welcoming those present and congratulating Wallsend on their superb win at the weekend in the Papa Johns competition.

One County, One Vision – aim is to pull the county together from a wide disconnect and divide. Aim is to unite as a CB going forward – pull everyone together and pull forward. Nothing is set in stone and all ideas are welcome. Irrespective of what form of the game you play, whether that is mini rugby, age grade rugby, adult rugby, mens or womens rugby, walking, touch rugby, mixed touch rugby or are part of falcons fit – you are part of Northumberland Rugby. We want to tie in everyone and move forward in one direction.

Work has begun on the "One County, One Vision" as the new Competitions Working Group referenced in the blueprint is now being formed. Group currently is: Dave Challenger, Claire, Andy McDonough, Paul Walker, Tom More (Ashington), Jack Pellew (Novos) and Simon Forster (North Shields).

Dave reported that after 18 years in the role, Rob Parkinson had stepped down as Chair of Colts. There is now a team of three looking after Colts in County - Alan Gardiner (Alnwick), Steve Turnbull (Tynedale / Lead Coach for County U17s and 18s) and Nick Cotterill (Novos).

Structured Season / Competitions – draft version of structured season circulated. Immediate comments were around length of season and the huge gap between end of league season and start of senior county season. County season finishes in June 2025 – the season is getting longer, not shorter!

Seeing how the structured season was laid out, gave those present an idea of the issues the comps working group has had to work through this year as there are so many other dates / competitions / events that have to be taken into consideration.

Lengthy discussion around cups and when you schedule them in and the number of matches.

Various options discussed around number of teams in each cup and with that number of matches to be played.

Given all the issues this season:
weather
teams withdrawing
re arranged league matches
length of season
Papa Johns and County Season dates
7s programme (when club 7s start at the end of league season)
Issues with cup tied players / rules / match cards

The following was agreed:

The **Senior Cup***, **Senior Plate** and **Senior Shield** would run with four teams so only two matches were required.

The **Senior Bowl** will run with 8 teams. First round losers will go into a Shield Competition to allow more playing opps for these teams (second teams).

The **No2 Cup** will run with 8 teams. First round losers will go into a Shield Competition to allow more playing opps for these teams (second teams).

The **No3 Cup** will run to a flexible format with two dates in April – 10/12 a side / Game On Principles and will follow a similar format as the No4 and No5 Vets Cups run this season as the flexibility allowed within No4 and No5 allowed more players game time. If Adult Recovery / Target Funding pots are available again from the RFU next season, there is potential to put No3 Cup into one of these funding pots. We need to encourage teams to participate in the No3 with the Game On / flexible format – adapt the cup to suit the rugby landscape and given we know the format used for No4 and No5 worked, it makes sense to adopt a similar format for No3.

No4 and No5 Cups – the **Vets Cups** – to be scheduled in again next season as the Good Friday Vets Cup Competitions.

Suggestion – as the No5 Cup is in memory of County stalwart, Terry Owen Smith, is there opportunity to bring in two cups dedicated to Malcolm Jarvie and Alan Lockey? Noel agreed to follow this up as conversations will need to be had with respective families.

***One extra match will be required in Senior Cup (see Cup Structure)

Cup Rules will be tightened next season.

Rules to be reviewed over the summer to incorporate some of the issues dealt with this season around cup tied players and communications.

Match Cards required from all teams.

From a draft cup structure already produced by Paul Walker, discussion then took place around which teams should be in each competition – **cup compositions** were sorted and agreed.

Cup dates – agreed. Agreed that dates need to be set so clubs know what they are working to and players know when the cup matches are. Agreed to avoid Papa John dates so not overloading the calendar. Dates were agreed and set, with Andy confirming he can accommodate the number of referees required on the agreed dates.

Also agreed to send the Northumberland Cup dates to Durham in hope they can work to similar dates as this will help with CANDY fixtures – less cancellations if both CBs run cups on same weekends.

Moving on to the **County and CANDY Leagues**, noted that the Tees Valley League is now coming over and CANDY 3 South now exists! Numbers need to be capped in each of the CANDY Leagues so we don't have situation we had this year with too many in one and some teams only playing each other once. Needs to be home/away straightforward league programme.

Rules need review, especially now the TVL teams are joining. CANDY Whatsapp has already agreed change of points scoring system for next season (all leagues will follow the CANDY system). Some suggestions made around player eligibility which will be followed up on and incorporated. Also need to include more focus around "Game On" principles in CANDY (already available in the County and Merit) so a review needs to take place. Current thought from Claire is to add in the new elements from CANDY to the current County/Merit rules as Game On and flexibility is already built into those rules. Working Group can then have a look at the suggestions made by Claire over the summer, agree or further amend and then we move on and work to the new set of rules – one set rather than two.

Agreed that there needs to be someone from Durham on the Working Group. Agreed to approach Steve Colwell from Bishop Auckland and Ian McGeorge from Consett.

Fixtures for CANDY Leagues. Lengthy discussion around this topic.

Various observations and points of view put forward.

Various ideas considered on how fixtures could be done eg one person sorts per league – but this then led to further observations around this not working as one person needs to do them all as you could end up with all teams away or all teams home etc. Fixtures Generator – but then dates will change as whatever is generated and sent out doesn't work.

The group kept coming back to the same observation – that the club fixture secretaries should be sorting out the fixtures. It was therefor agreed that this would be the process going forward – club fixture secretaries sort out the CANDY fixtures for their club.

Some of the observations from discussion:

When 1st team leagues come out some clubs look at the "bar take" days when they know they will get good support – local derby etc. They then work out 2nd / 3rd team matches based on that.

When 1st team league dates come out some clubs do not have full access to facility as its shared sport facility so start of season may mean a number of away matches if for instance cricket is still being played.

When 1st team leagues start some clubs do not have all their players back yet (farmers, other sport eg cricket, students) so putting 2nd teams and 3rd team fixtures in straight away when the 2nd team players may have to cover 1st team positions start of season will lead to cancellations.

Cup dates need to be considered.

Clubs know what their pitch usage will be better than anyone else – factoring in things like Colts matches or womens rugby.

Clubs may wish to double up on 1st and 2nd team home/away dates.

Clubs may wish to have local derbies on set dates.

Fixture Secretaries traditionally sort out the fixtures – its part of their role! It was never an issue with County Leagues and worked well. It should be no different with CANDY.

Given the CANDY is now 2nd, 3rd and in some cases 4th teams, the club fixture secretary needs to co-ordinate all the teams from a club with one spreadsheet in front of them.

Anything sent out centrally will end up being changed so the work is being done twice which is daft.

Tradition is as soon as 1st team fixtures come out, clubs look at what their 2nd, 3rd, 4th teams will do – so lets just put on a fixtures night to facilitate this!

Fixtures night was agreed – Blaydon suggested and date of Monday 1st July.

1st team fixtures are due mid June so this date should work well.

CANDY Fixture lists then come into the office to Claire so one master spreadsheet is created, any fixture clashes can be identified early and sorted, Claire uploads the fixtures to GMS and everyone starts the season on the same page ready to go!

Thanking everyone for some really good, constructive discussion, the meeting closed at 9pm.

Cup Draws Season 2023-24

Senior Cup

Alnwick Morpeth Northern Percy Park Tynedale Raiders

Prelim match to be played asap

Game A	Northern	v	Tynedale Raiders

Loser goes into Senior Plate

Semi Final

To be played by 5th October latest (so if not played by then, has to be played on the 5th October)

Percy Park		v		Alnwick
Morpeth		v		Winner of Game A

Final – if Clubs do not agree an alternative date, the final will be played on Saturday 29th March.

Senior Plate

Medicals Novos Ponteland Loser of Prelim Match from Senior Cup

Semi Final

To be played by 5th October latest (so if not played by then, has to be played on the 5th October)

Novos		v		Loser of Game A (Senior Cup)
Medicals		v		Ponteland

Final – if Clubs do not agree an alternative date, the final will be played on Saturday 29th March.

Senior Shield

Ashington Blyth North Shields Whitley Bay Rockcliff

Semi Final

To be played by 5th October latest (so if not played by then, has to be played on the 5th October)

WB Rockcliff		v		Ashington
Blyth		v		North Shields

Final – if Clubs do not agree an alternative date, the final will be played on Saturday 29th March.

Senior Bowl

Alnwick 2	Berwick Bears	Medicals 2	Morpeth Reivers
Northern Wanderers	Novos 2	Percy Park Lions	Tynedale Hadrians

Quarter Final

To be played by 2nd November latest (so if not played by then, has to be played on the 2nd November)

Tynedale Hadrians		v		Percy Park Lions
Northern Wanderers		v		Berwick Bears
Novos 2		v		Medicals 2
Morpeth Reivers		v		Alnwick 2

Semi Finals – which includes a Plate Comp for those knocked out of Cup in QF round – to be played by 25th January (so if not played by then, has to be played on the 25th January)

Semi Final Cup

		v		
		v		

Semi Final Plate

		v		
		v		

Final Cup

		v		

Final Plate

		v		

Final – if Clubs do not agree an alternative date, the final will be played on Saturday 12th April.

No2 Cup

Alnwick Lions Ashington 2 Gosforth Morpeth Edwardians

Prudhoe & Stocksfield Seghill Wallsend Tynedale Centurions

Quarter Final

To be played by 2nd November latest (so if not played by then, has to be played on the 2nd November)

Alnwick Lions		v		Ashington 2
Wallsend		v		Prudhoe & Stocksfield
Tynedale Centurions		v		Gosforth
Morpeth Edwardians		v		Seghill

Semi Finals – which includes a Plate Comp for those knocked out of Cup in QF round – to be played by 25th January (so if not played by then, has to be played on the 25th January)

Semi Final Cup

		v		
		v		

Semi Final Plate

		v		
		v		

Final Cup

		v		

Final Plate

		v		

Final – if Clubs do not agree an alternative date, the final will be played on Saturday 29th March.

No3 Cup

Blyth 2 North Shields Crusaders

Novos 3 Ponteland 2

Whitley Bay Rockcliff Vikings

To be played over two dates in April with a flexible format to suit the teams playing.

Game On principles to be applied.

Prov date for Final – Saturday 12th April Final

No4 and No5 Cups – Vets Rugby Cups

To be played on Good Friday.

Simon Cox has joined the Comps Working Group.

Note – Ncle Ravens wish to join Cups – tbc which cup (No3 or the No4/No5 Comp)