Communications, Marketing and Sponsorship Report

Date – 5th January 2024

Report compiled by Dean Gray

Key events, issues, and achievements

Team of the Month/ County "Newsletter" in Falcons digital home programme

Following Newcastle Falcons kind agreement to continue to sponsor the Team of the Month Award. This started in October for September. Applications have been received via the website with an online form- which will hopefully save me time chasing clubs for entries, photographs and rewriting entries. The Award is for any segment of a club, or a club as a whole, which has achieved something extraordinary over the previous month on or off the paddock. The winner will receive 20 North Stand tickets to a Falcons match of their choice and is decided by a voting panel consisting of County President, Noel Mather, Director of Rugby, Ian Moralee, Ian Richardson, CB Rep for WBR who sits on my Committee and Jordan Robinson of Newcastle Falcons. In the event of a tie, I have the deciding vote. Initially the cut off date was the end of the month following the award. This will now be two weeks after the end of the month which is ample time for clubs to put their entry together and will also encourage clubs to get their entries in quicker. At last count there have been two entries for September. (Ongoing)

I have also secured agreement with the Falcons that we have our own County page in the Falcons digital programme for another year. This is something I will continue to write to highlight all matters CB relating to clubs, individuals and County games. (Ongoing)

Website

James Barnett (Aspire Digital Marketing) and Claire are continuing to lead on the development of the CB website with James continuing to sponsor the County with free training for Claire on its use as well as engaging with me on writing and sharing posts and news articles. The reception to its introduction has been positive and more information and forms will continue to appear on it, but it will time for it to bed in and people to get used to accessing documentation/ forms etc on-line. I have recommenced sitting in on meetings once a month to discuss issues and check we are all on the same page. (Ongoing).

NRURS have chosen to run a separate website of their own at this time. Opinions are somewhat divided as to this as the quality of the new NRU website is widely recognised. Conversations continue with NRURS about giving them a dedicated section on the NRU website (Ongoing)

Sponsorship discussions

We have a small but growing number of sponsors who continue to support the growth of rugby in Northumberland but will continue to look to build upon this dependent upon what happens to County rugby moving forward (Ongoing)

The instigation of a former players' lunch will be an opportunity to build upon membership and sponsorship opportunities. This is something that we have been trying to get off the ground for a couple of years which I have now been tasked with setting up, alongside the Presidential Team. This will be at a home games for preferably the Senior County squad or u20 when dates are released (Ongoing- meeting to be set up with GC to further this now that County dates are known).

It has been suggested at a brainstorming session with James and Claire that we look at smaller, tiered sponsorship by way of a monthly direct debit (£5, £10 and £15 per month for example) from individuals and tie that in with County membership and free entry to the prize draw for International tickets and a range of benefits to reflect the commitment. I will ask the other CB Reps what their CB does/ has in the way of sponsorship deals. (Ongoing- to be dicussed)

Gilbert Contract

The renegotiated, more lucrative and enhanced contract with Gilbert is now into its third year of four. The Gilbert Shopbeing displayed on our Website in a prominent position. As a CB we now do all our business with Gilbert direct rather than as previously having a split contract.

Claire and I have fairly regular meetings with Dave Pennant of Gilbert (there is one coming up) and I will be discussing any special offers that we can publicise for them over the season as well as introducing them to the clubs within the CB.

In an ideal world, the CB's clubs and NRURS would come on board with Gilbert as part of our CB's contract and the Gift of Kit shared with them.- this is something I'd like to pursue.
Gilbert have also given the CB three tickets for Falcons matches on a monthly basis. Claire is organising distribution to the Clubs to reward volunteers / as a thank you to our county volunteers (Ongoing)

Marketing

As the Rugby Correspondent and main Radio commentator for BBC Newcastle- as such I will continue to to increase the profile of community rugby in Northumberland wherever I can in the forthcoming season with pieces at HT in Falcons matches on our Clubs and interviews with leading figures in the CB and Community game. I have so far this season interviewed senior figures from N'cle Gosforth following my having referred their 2nd team, the first to run after seven years, John Jeffrey about his roots in Newcastle and Whitley bay Rockcliff following their successful Remembrance Day commemorations and work to find and honour the War Dead of the Great war. A number of other clubs have expressed interest in coming on the gantry for a HT chat but

there must be a “hat to hang the story on” in terms of an achievement or ongoing point of interest. (Ongoing)

Social Media – Facebook/Twitter/Website

We continue to try to increase our engagement with clubs and direct people to the website by sharing posts/tweets or information from clubs which specifically promote the development and growth of playing rugby in Northumberland. This has been very well received, commented on by the RFU as one of the best in the country and mimicked by a number of other CB’s (Ongoing)

County Membership Drive (ongoing)

As stated earlier, we are still looking at options to increase County membership- and thence potentially- sponsorship by making the offering more attractive. An initial offer has been launched which has been well publicised, including in the Falcons Programme. I understand that this has led to 30 new members.

All CB Reps are encouraged to become County members (this has been posted once again on CB Reps Whats App Group) (Ongoing).

The Code of Conduct and responsibilities for CB Reps needs to be rewritten as the old version is out of date- this is on my to do list (Ongoing).

Ongoing- to be discussed at the next Board Meeting.

Small Lottery

As the previous Chair was off due to family health issues, I applied for and received the certificate in my names to run a small lottery for some of the CB’s allocation of International Tickets. This has been drawn twice now (Six Nations and Autumn Internationals) at a small profit. I have renewed the licence.

Communications

Figures are – F/book steady at 2,100 (up 16% since April) X (Twitter) 2,793 (marginal fall) – Instagram 1806 (small increase). Linked in 37 (static).

All Whats App and F/book Groups for information for various County teams and groups are well established and have proper oversight. There have been one or two spark points between clubs over the course of previous seasons - but these have been successfully defused. (Ongoing)

Current and impending issues, events, and work streams

See above – all projects are ongoing ones.

County games will dictate timings of former Players' lunch RFU Comms Focus Group – Whats App and Teams Meetings. I have attended all recent meetings, although post Covid these are now reduced.
Issues requiring Decision, Discussion or Dissemination Revised County Membership offering. Value the Volunteer Matchday programmes Former Players Lunch Sponsorship Packages.

NB – This report must not include personal or identifiable data as it may be appended to the Board Minutes. If there is a need to report on a Confidential matter, please forward that communication separately, marked 'Confidential'.