County Colts Committee Meeting – Minutes

Wednesday 23rd April 2025

Morpeth RFC - 7.00 pm

Present

- Alan Gardiner – Chair
- Rob Parkinson – Morpeth RFC
- Paul Frater – Alnwick RFC
- Matty Milburn – Alnwick RFC
- Mal Robinson – Whitley Bay Rockcliffe RFC
- Grant Taylor – Percy Park RFC
- Tom Kelly – Gosforth RFC
- Jonathan Portlock – Novos RFC

Apologies

Steve Turnbull – Tynedale RFC

Absent

Northern RFC

Ashington RFC

Blyth RFC

Berwick RFC

Thank you to those who were able to attend and represent your club. Thanks also to Rob for hosting the meeting at Morpeth RFC. I will follow up with the clubs who were not represented, and we may have another meeting pre-season.

I thought that this was a very positive meeting from which we look forward to improved inter-club communication and support of each other within the Northumberland club colts group.

There were some great ideas to build on. I would hope to see Northern RFC, Ashington/Blyth combined team enter the Count Cup / Plate next season and maybe even Berwick. I will be in direct contact with all of these clubs and keep you all updated.

For now we will have six clubs in the County Cup / Plate.

Season Feedback

As expected each club has had very different experiences and challenges over the season from Alnwick, Novos and Tynedale managing large squads and trying to keep all players and parents happy with sufficient game time to Percy Park that despite best efforts were unable to field a team by mid-season. The good news is that Park will be back and have a clear plan of action to develop. It was great to see Gosforth Colts represented for the first time after years of player development through the junior years. Morpeth and WBR were ever present with consistent numbers and both had good showings in the cup / plate.

ALL – can each club provide the following information

a) Number of registered players as at Sept 2024
b) Estimated number of players for the coming 2025/26 season.

It was interesting to hear that some of the Halbro (North East League) teams (Novos in particular) struggled with the lack of games, a particular problem with a large squad. Tynedale have entered Halbro and Borders League which seemed to work quite well. Alnwick were just Borders League but struggled to pick up additional friendlies.

Good feedback about this seasons County Cup / Plate which breaking with tradition, were on separate days. A big thank you to Percy Park who hosted the plate final on a Sunday and Ashington who hosted the final on a Wednesday with 300 + spectators. Both clubs did an excellent job hosting the matches.

Some good ideas with clubs having U16's doing early introduction with Colts for non-contact training and socials. It all helps to ease the younger players into it at this important transition.

Season Plan 2025/26

- All clubs will remain in existing leagues (Halbro and Borders Leagues) the only change being Gosforth's new entry to Halbro and Alnwick entering both Halbro and Borders leagues.
- Pre-season Friendlies – (4-way round robins) There are some organised at Morpeth and Tynedale. I would encourage other teams to organise and host similar events and invite guests from the Northumberland group. Please remember to let Claire know as there will be a Festival form to complete.
- Joint training – whilst we all compete against each other, I think that there is a lot to be gained by some joint training sessions. A lot of live rugby, game scenario work can be achieved whilst sharing ideas. Give it some thought an do let me know if you arrange anything.
- Autumn Festivals – to address the problem of void weeks it was agreed that I would look to arrange a couple of Club Festivals during the Autumn. These could be Saturday mornings or Sunday afternoons depending on host club and available space. I will review potential dates and keep you posted.
- National Cup – dates to issued in due course. I would encourage all clubs to enter. Well done to those who entered this season and had such good cup runs. A great opportunity to represent Northumberland and the North East and play different clubs.

- County Cup / Plater – it has been agreed to stick with the same format (dependant on number of teams entered) AG to review competition rules with NRU Competitions Committee. We did discuss the merits of running this in alternate formats and all matches in March. However, it was agreed to set similar dates across the season but with all matches to be played on Wednesdays where possible.
- Colts Futures Festival – as you are all aware this U16's/U17's festival was cancelled by RFU this season due to safeguarding restrictions. There is however, a good degree of support at RFU level for this concept and I look forward to being authorised to hold the event in a workable format towards the end of next season. The 2023/24 event held at Alnwick was viewed as a great success and one I hope we can build on to help U16's transition to colts and ease a few nerves.
- County Team nominations – Steve Turnbull (County U17/U18 Head Coach) has asked me to relay that club coaches need to be much more selective with their nominations for trials. 70-80 players at initial trails is an unworkable number and hinders giving every player the best possible chance of success. Please remember, your name and credibility goes with the players tat you nominate. They must have the required basic competencies. Steve is always happy to have a discussion about any players that might be marginal. Thank you.

Summary

Thank you again for all of your efforts this season and the positive feedback about this seasons County Cup / Plate. From me, I would encourage you all to talk more, use this forum to share good practice and problem solve as a group of Northumberland clubs.

Have a great summer and I look forward to hearing more about your plans for the coming season.

Various updates will come out from me as and when we gate dates confirmed.

Kind Regards,

Alan Gardiner - Chair