NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY RUGBY LIMITED

COMPANY NUMBER 14063768

ANNUAL REPORT FOR SEASON 2025-26

Presented at the Annual General Meeting

at Novocastrians RFC, Monday 29th June 2026

Chairman's Address

The 25/26 season has been challenging, and the establishment of the new Board has enabled the CB to develop the structure to drive rugby forward within Northumberland. Stability was the key focus and the development of a structured and open cohesive working relationship between the Clubs, Trust and the Board, was essential.

With the full support of all stakeholders within the game in Northumberland the Board has presented the CB with a detailed and focused budget to support the game at all levels and is the first phase in developing a vision, strategy and development plan to protect and support the growth within Clubs, Schools and Higher Education in Northumberland.

The partnership between the Newcastle Falcons Foundation and the CB has established a successful School to Club development programme with increased participation and transition rates of children from schools to clubs. Following the recent acquisition of the Newcastle Falcons by Red Bull, the CB has agreed to support and jointly fund an initiative to provide four full time Rugby Development Officers to maintain and further develop this growth.

We are indebted to the Trust for their continued support with this project.

Closer working partnership with the RFU team has strengthened the relationship and we value their guidance and support. Building on the relationship the CB agreed to run an RFU pilot initiative in establishing a Revenue Generation Consultants which is as detailed in the Club Development Directors report.

Without the continuing support of all of our volunteers in Northumberland Rugby would not succeed and we value your support.

We should note success on the field as well as off and our congratulations should go the Northumberland Mens Senior team who had a tremendous season culminating in playing in the County Championship finals at Twickenham, sadly losing narrowly to North Midlands in the final.

Our congratulation to Novos who finished a very successful season in winning the RFU Mens Counties Championship finals at Twickenham.

Finally on behalf of the CB, I would like to thank our County Administrator, Claire Sharpe for all of her support to the Clubs, Representative teams and the CB.

Peter O'Brien
Chairman, Northumberland County Rugby Limited

Hon Secretary's Report

It has been a tough year, but a productive year, with so much happening and things achieved over the last 12 months since the AGM back in June last year at Wallsend. Craig was sworn in as President and having spoken to him a lot this year I know he has achieved what he wanted, and more, finishing representing Northumberland at Twickenham with the Senior Men Final. Craig, I hope you have had a great year and enjoyed your year, it's now time to become a Past President and pass the baton on, well done for all the work you have put into the role this past 12 months!

I'd personally like to thank the Trust for backing us this year with our proposed, and accepted, budget we presented to them, it was a tough financially large budget for them to accept, but they backed us financially to allow us to deliver our plans, which we have done and achieved. Thank you to all our Trust members who put their trust in us in their backing of our budget, perhaps time to discuss next year gentlemen?

We have demonstrated to the Trust the development of our game is increasing after many years of our clubs playing numbers declining. This increase will continue feeding youth players from schools into clubs via Keith Atkinsons hard work with Mel Magee of the Newcastle Red Bulls Foundation in introducing rugby back into schools who had dropped the sport from their curriculum, sending boys and girls back into our clubs to become the future of our game. This was all backed by the Northumberland Trust.

Some of the objectives we set out was to streamline the office functions and utilise the website for what it was designed to do and how it would work in lowering the demand on office time, there are many things here which have been achieved.

- We have re-established, having moved away from the RFU forms (with the blessing of the RFU), the CB forms for age grade playing up/down, age grade combined teams, age grade buddy up teams, playing adult rugby and playing cross border matches. All of these forms have a full timeline and audit trail as they move through the approval process, and clubs have access to their approved (and rejected) forms, which the RFU systems did not show or allow.
- Our concussion and IPW (Injured Player Welfare) systems continue to work excellently with player welfare a priority. Systems we have in place have helped identify players who may have needed extended time out or additional medical advice having received multiple concussions within a calendar year.
- We have enhanced our systems around player welfare with follow ups direct to players or parents (if age grade) if there is information on Representative Rugby forms that we feel needs to be followed up so that we have necessary care plans in place in event of an incident / emergency.
- We have worked on cost savings across the board with a change to kit storage (reducing our rent costs), introducing a central stock for kit (so all kit is used by all groups) and spending on kit has been brought under control. We have negotiated our insurance down giving us a saving of circa £800 on this cost. Computer systems have been changed to give us a more cost-effective system and better system by changing over to Office 365.
- During the season we moved over to a double screen on the new office desktop computer (which replaced the machine that had reached end of its life) to remove the need to print papers for refence when completing numerous streams of work. The initial cost of the extra screen has most certainly paid for itself in significantly reduced costs against stationery and printing and has proved more time efficient and we expect further savings next season when we see a full year working like this.
- We have also further enhanced our digital systems with new age grade update and entry forms for all age groups and entry forms for CANDY Leagues.
- Representative Rugby nomination forms are now digital across all representative teams (new for season 2026-27) having trialled this very successfully in the last six weeks with new

U16sGirls PDG group. The new digital form will streamline the nomination process, save time and again, save money on stationery and printing.

- We are also in the midst of negotiating our kit supplier contract with options from a number of potential suppliers which will reduce our kit spend if these changes are made. There are more and vendor assessment will continue to drive down the cost burden on the CB.

Some of these initiatives would not have been achieved without our diligent Administrator Claire Sharpe. Claires work in the office is outstanding and her understanding of our game and the rules, regulations, and running of Northumberland Rugby, how and when things need to be carried out and achieved throughout the season, and the way she just gets on and gets everything sorted and communicated to all is outstanding, and we are lucky to have her, thank you Claire.

I need to mention our Council Rep Penny Stewart, a self-confessed workaholic, and a great asset for Northumberland at Twickenham. Penny tirelessly works for the benefit for the CB and for Rugby development on a whole. One thing she has introduced which we see as a great project is working hard to develop our relationship with the Universities to increase activity between both our entities, working to have greater access to players, not only for clubs to tap into to play for them but for students to help in schools, delivering coaching to children to then hopefully attract them into our clubs. This project will grow, we've had an initial meeting, and this will develop on with Penny behind it driving things forward. Penny is unwell currently so won't be at the AGM; we wish her a speedy return to health and fitness, take care Penny, and get well soon!

Our Value the Volunteer event at Morpeth RFC was again a huge success and again showed how proud we are to have all the volunteers in the County putting in the effort and hard work to make our County run smoothly and successfully. I mentioned this last year too but do not tire of saying thank you to all our volunteers in the work and effort they put into their clubs, the CB and everything Rugby within the CB. Thank you again for all your efforts, it is appreciated by your clubs and the CB!

The Board have more challenges this coming season and we have a great deal of work to do to achieve what we want to achieve for the CB, but we will achieve our goals and make Northumberland a more successful CB going forwards and look forward to this development challenge coming to further fruition.

Thanks, and good luck for season 2026/27.

Graham Crozier
Hon Secretary, Northumberland County Rugby Limited

Finance Director - End of Year Report - Brian Russell

A detailed budget was put forward in the Autumn which was agreed with the “Trust”. This agreed a significant increase in the income for us for the year ended 30 June 2026, although the final tranche of the funding is still outstanding.

The major elements of expenditure for the CB are Representative Rugby, Club Development, in conjunction with Newcastle Red Bulls, and running a busy office.

We are currently running seven county teams. A decision was taken, which was supported by the clubs, that we should ensure that the experience of playing and assisting a county team was a positive one. This has resulted in excellent results for the teams

Current financial issues are around the level of RFU funding, funding for the Club development programme that is run in conjunction with the Red Bull Academy and ongoing grant funding from the “Trust”. There is a need for a collaborative approach whereby a long term budget is agreed and the Trust sets out an investment strategy to achieve this objective.
Value for money from suppliers
Planning for the activities of the CB
Budget management.

Club Development - Director End of Year Report - Keith Atkinson

End of Season Overview – How Well Have We Done?

At the end of last season, I commented that our partnership project with Newcastle Falcons required a more focused and robust school-to-club transition approach. Whilst this season saw delivery to fewer young people overall (-218 participants), building upon established relationships with schools and clubs, the revised focus on transition has produced significantly stronger outcomes.

The most important measure of success is not simply the number of participants engaged, but the number successfully transitioning into club rugby. As a result of the more targeted approach, our known transition rate has increased from 1.41% to 11.8%, representing a substantial improvement in converting school participation into sustained club involvement.

Our School to Club Development Programme, delivered through partnerships with Newcastle Rugby Foundation, the Coastal Project, RFU North of Tyne, and the RGS Rugby School Manager programme, has engaged 4,600 individual young people during the season.

Programme Delivery

- Curriculum Delivery: 4,600 participants
- Regular After-School Participation: 342 participants
- Festivals, Fixtures and Transition Events: 685 participants
- Known Transitions to Club Rugby: 81 participants
- Overall Transition Rate: 11.8% (Of note, the percentage rate was initially 16%; however, school delivery continued following the club transition events, reducing this figure. Despite this improvement, it remains 1.8% above the target rate of 10%)

The increase in transition rates demonstrates that our delivery is becoming more effective and better aligned with the long-term objective of growing sustainable club membership across Northumberland.

There have also been encouraging developments within the school game. We now have 45 of the county's 57 secondary schools actively engaging in rugby, representing the highest level of secondary school engagement seen in the last six years. This provides a strong platform from which to further strengthen participation opportunities and club pathways.

Securing the Future

From the outset, Northumberland Rugby's long-term ambition has been to secure funding for four Rugby Development Officers, dedicated to strengthening school-to-club transition and supporting club growth across the county.

A significant opportunity arose following the takeover of Newcastle Falcons by Newcastle Red Bull. Importantly, this opportunity was not missed. Through positive discussions with the new Newcastle board, who share our vision for rugby development, funding has now been secured for four Rugby Development Officer posts, supported by a three-to-five-year development plan.

This represents one of the most significant strategic developments for Northumberland Rugby in many years.

The aims of the programme are:

- To establish the long-term adoption of a focused and targeted approach to rugby development across Northumberland.
- To support the recruitment and retention of school-aged players participating in rugby.

- To support the recruitment and retention of young people within rugby clubs across Northumberland.
- To embed rugby within a targeted number of schools linked to Northumberland clubs, creating a sustainable culture of participation.
- To work collaboratively with clubs and schools to develop strong, long-term partnerships.
- To improve the standard of rugby across the region through the 4 Cs: Curriculum, Coach Development, Competition and Coaching.
- To strengthen the relationship between Newcastle Rugby Foundation, Northumberland rugby clubs, schools and the Newcastle Red Bull Academy.

Each Development Officer will be given ownership of a geographical area, allowing them to build meaningful relationships between schools and clubs and develop a deeper understanding of local challenges and opportunities.

This direct and targeted approach should lead to a significant increase in school-to-club transition rates and, in turn, help create stronger and more sustainable rugby clubs across Northumberland.

The key indicators for measuring success will be:

1. Engagement / Exposure

The number of young people who engage in rugby activity within schools, providing opportunities to experience and enjoy the sport.

2. Participation

The number of young people attending rugby festivals, participating in County Cup competitions, and taking part in regular fixtures throughout the season.

3. Transition

The number of young people who continue their rugby journey by joining and playing within a Northumberland rugby club pathway.

As Club Development Director, I would like to place on record my thanks to Mel Magee, Newcastle Rugby Foundation and the Northumberland Trust for sharing this vision and helping make it a reality.

This project will continue to be the cornerstone of Northumberland Rugby's strategy moving forward and represents the most significant step we have taken towards securing the long-term future of the game across the county.

RFU and Northumberland Rugby Union Club Development Project

My second major workstream this season has been the management of the RFU grant led Northumberland Rugby Union Club Development Project.

Following the successful recruitment of Jess Terry, the project commenced on 9 March 2026 as an 18-month programme supporting four clubs, each facing different demographic and operational challenges.

In a relatively short period, the project has proven to be an undeniable success. Jess's overview will follow separately, but several key themes have already emerged.

The project has highlighted that rugby clubs can no longer be viewed solely as facilities where rugby is played. Increasingly, they must operate as sustainable community businesses, balancing governance, finance, membership growth, facilities management and long-term planning.

For volunteer-led organisations, navigating these challenges is far from straightforward.

Jess's business knowledge, practical experience and ability to work alongside club volunteers have proven invaluable. Her contribution has demonstrated that the scope of this role extends well beyond revenue generation alone.

Indeed, the evidence available to me suggests that the programme would be more accurately described as a Club Business Management Project rather than a Revenue Generation Project.

Perhaps the greatest lesson from the project is that this RFU grant led support should not end after 18 months or be limited to four clubs. There is a clear case for extending this service and making it available across Northumberland.

As we move forward, one of our key challenges will be securing the resources necessary to retain Jess's expertise and ensure that clubs throughout the county can continue to benefit from the support she provides.

If we are serious about building stronger, more sustainable rugby clubs, then this type of business support must become a permanent feature of our development strategy.

RFU / Northumberland Rugby Union Club Development Revenue Generation Consultant Project

Author: Jess Terry

Over the first three months of the Northumberland Rugby Clubs Pilot Scheme, substantial progress has been made across Percy Park RFC, Morpeth RFC, Wallsend RFC and Ashington RFC. The objective of the pilot has been to improve commercial performance, strengthen operational structures, reduce inefficiencies, identify new revenue opportunities and create more sustainable community rugby clubs.

The work undertaken has extended far beyond traditional consultancy support and has focused on developing long-term frameworks that can continue to generate value beyond the pilot period. Significant time has been invested in sponsorship development, financial management, catering reviews, asset utilisation, membership systems, governance improvements, commercial partnerships and community engagement.

Whilst direct revenue generation remains in the early stages, the foundations have now been established to create meaningful long-term financial gains. In several cases, substantial cost savings have already been identified and implemented, whilst multiple new revenue streams are now being developed.

A key theme emerging across all clubs has been the need to move away from reactive management and towards structured commercial planning, operational accountability and long-term sustainability.

Club A

During the first three months of the pilot, Club A has undergone a detailed operational and financial review aimed at improving transparency, accountability, and long-term sustainability. Structured reporting systems have been introduced to monitor revenue performance, labour costs, staffing deployment, forecasting accuracy, cash management, and outstanding actions. This has provided the committee with significantly improved visibility over business performance and supported more informed decision-making. The club has also achieved notable improvements in wage control, consistently operating within its target wage percentage.

A major focus has been the redevelopment of the catering operation. Analysis identified significant missed revenue opportunities from private functions and events, leading to the development of a fully costed in-house catering model. New menus have been designed around sustainable profit margins, creating an opportunity to retain revenue previously lost through external providers. Additional work has included a feasibility study into improved coffee provision, sponsorship development, supplier reviews, and the creation of asset registers to strengthen governance and support future funding opportunities.

Club B

Club B has focused heavily on sponsorship development, community engagement, and maximising matchday income. A structured sponsorship programme has been created, including the development of sponsorship packages, prospect databases, and systems for managing commercial relationships. This work has established a strong pipeline of future sponsorship opportunities and provides a framework that can continue to generate commercial income over the coming years.

Alongside sponsorship activity, significant progress has been made on a community development project designed to strengthen the club's role as a local hub. Community consultation has demonstrated strong support for the initiative, and early-stage funding and partnership discussions are already underway. Operational reviews have also identified opportunities to improve retail sales, stock

control, pricing structures, and customer experience during matchdays, with several low-cost initiatives already beginning to generate additional revenue.

Club C

At Club C, the primary focus has been on catering profitability and operational efficiency. A detailed review of the existing catering model identified substantial opportunities to increase income and improve financial control. As a result, a proposal has been developed to bring catering operations under greater direct control, supported by improved procurement systems, supplier relationships, menu development, stock control processes, and profitability monitoring. Financial modelling suggests that these changes have the potential to deliver significant additional annual revenue.

Further work has focused on event planning, hospitality opportunities, and community engagement initiatives. Support has also been provided to strengthen funding applications through improved measurement and reporting of social value, helping the club better demonstrate its impact within the local community and improve access to external funding opportunities.

Club D

Club D joined the programme more recently, with initial work concentrating on governance, operational structure, and long-term sustainability. A detailed business case has been developed to support future management and operational improvements, including financial forecasting, KPI frameworks, governance recommendations, and workforce planning. The aim is to reduce reliance on volunteers while creating a more consistent and commercially focused operating model.

The club has also begun planning community-focused events designed to increase footfall, attract sponsorship, generate revenue, and strengthen local engagement. Early reviews of membership systems and income collection processes have identified opportunities to improve administration, financial control, and member retention, providing a strong platform for future development.

Strategic Partnerships and County-Wide Initiatives

Alongside individual club support, several partnership opportunities have been explored for the benefit of multiple clubs.

These include:

- **Utilita** – discussions around solar installations, sustainability initiatives, and reducing long-term utility costs.
- **be.EV** – initial conversations regarding EV charging infrastructure as a shared revenue-generating project across rugby clubs.
- **Evri Parcel Lockers** – passive income and increased site utilisation.
- **ClubZap** – improved member communication and engagement.
- **Beyond Limits Gym**, **We Buy Any Car**, **LWC**, and **One Club** – commercial, sponsorship, and cost-saving opportunities.

Key Achievements

Over the three-month period the pilot has delivered:

- Improved financial reporting and visibility.
- Stronger governance and accountability.
- Sponsorship pipelines and CRM systems.
- Catering and hospitality reviews.
- New revenue opportunities.
- Asset register development.
- Supplier and cost reviews.
- Community event planning.
- Strategic partnership development.
- Sustainability and energy initiatives.
- Long-term commercial planning frameworks.

Conclusion

The first three months of the pilot have focused on understanding operational challenges, identifying opportunities, and creating the systems required for long-term sustainability.

Across all participating clubs there is now stronger financial oversight, clearer commercial direction, improved sponsorship infrastructure, and a growing pipeline of revenue-generating opportunities.

The next phase will focus on implementation, accountability, and delivery. This includes converting opportunities into measurable income, embedding operational controls, progressing strategic partnerships, and ensuring each club has the systems and structures required to become more financially resilient and sustainable in the long term.

Collectively, the work completed to date has established a robust platform for future growth and has demonstrated that relatively small, structured interventions can generate meaningful improvements in both financial performance and organisational sustainability across Northumberland rugby clubs.

CB Communications, Marketing and Sponsorship – Director End of Year Report - Dean Gray

Introduction

It is now five years since I was asked to become Northumberland's Director of Marketing, Communications and Sponsorship and we began to modernise the way we communicate, educate, inform and, occasionally, entertain to catch up with an increasingly digitalised age. That process continues to evolve.

Over recent years or so we have seen major changes to the Board, with a new Directorship (Women and Girls) added, but also a number of resignations requiring the appointment of new Officers and Directors to replace those who have moved on, often after some delay.

This and the protracted debate on allowing lower-level teams to enter the National Leagues undoubtedly impacted on all our ability to move forward some of our initiatives, which of necessity had been placed on hold.

Areas of Responsibility and Achievements

Communication and Marketing- Website

Despite some initial teething problems, the website is now being well used and, as practice makes perfect, is bedded in.

The website has good functionality and capacity and should last us around another fifteen years.

I highlighted last year that we don't have any Referee Society input on the website – something I am keen on pursuing to develop better links and understanding between the clubs and NRURS. It's always easy to blame a referee for decisions which don't go your way rather but, I have said before and well know, without referees we simply don't have games!

Social Media

Northumberland must be relevant to it stakeholders who are its constituent clubs and all their members. If we follow that logic, we should therefore not solely promote the CB, its events and matches on our social media, but also share anything which is directly Rugby related posted by our clubs in order to increase our engagement with and promote them as well.

Since the re-launch of the website and many of the forms we need migrating to it, the engagement figures have increased every year.

The number of people looking at our Facebook pages as a result has also increased hugely and continues to grow - from 1,035 in Nov 2021 to 2,300 (as of 13/6/2025)- and 2,800 as of June 2026 (a total increase of 271%).

X (Twitter) users have also rise from 1,416 three years ago to 2,687 – an increase of 190%.

Instagram figures are also up over twelve months – from 1,817 to 2,285 (up 26%).

The more traffic we get through our social media and especially our website, the greater the opportunity we have of marketing the CB, attracting sponsors, informing and educating our stakeholders and selling our goods, and the better the relationships we can foster with our clubs.

The Northumberland RFU Gilbert Shop

The revenue from sales did increase substantially following renegotiation of the contract, but I would like this to grow even more - especially at key times of the year - i.e. the start of the season, Christmas and during the County season with special offers including bundles of kit.

Since the renegotiation of the contract, we now receive a GoK on a sliding scale, irrespective of sales figures. This ensures that we have revenue coming in when our sales are lower in any one season.

Although accurate figures aren't available from Gilbert yet, the GoK is likely to be in excess of £2,000.

The contract with Gilbert ends in August and is being reviewed against other providers on a range of metrics.

Sponsorship

This continues to be difficult to attract with it being well known amongst the rugby community that the Trust(s) have substantial assets. Budget changes to the national minimum wage and employer NI, along with worry about concussion and brain damage and the poor form of the regional team in Newcastle Red Bulls, have all played a part in making rugby a difficult "sell".

However, we do have a number of smaller, but still hugely valued, sponsors, including Henry Cave, Cathryn Clark Physiotherapy, Total Business Group (Rob Winter) and Aspire Digital Marketing (James Barnett) as well as Switch (who sponsor the Value the Volunteer Awards regionally and nationally).

We are very grateful to them all for their ongoing support and will continue to look for potential new sponsors.

Lottery

The CB launched a Small Lottery to enable the CB to raffle International Tickets the CB had purchased. This made a small profit, and a decision was taken not to carry it forward because of that. I am pleased to say that that has been looked at again, streamlined and it is back up and running.

Other Marketing

The Team of the Month Award was once again negotiated with the Falcons this season, with the successful entrants winning 20 tickets to a Falcons match of choice. Ian Richardson of WBR has asked to take this on and I was happy to relinquish the reigns to him, although ToM has now been running for a number of years in its current format and we will look with the Red Bulls at refreshing the concept over the Summer once again.

Other

In one of my "other" rugby jobs, I am the rugby Union commentator on Red Bulls matches for BBC Radio Newcastle and Radio 5 Sports Extra in which I try to promote local rugby by interviewing officers from local rugby clubs at half time in our live coverage.

This past season I have spoken to representatives from many of the clubs in Northumberland, inc Whitley Bay Rockcliff Red Roses, Wallsend, the Ravens, to promote LBTQ+ Rugby and their excellent Hadrian Rugby Festival, as well as the Wooden Spoon, and a piece on Northumberland RFU's Senior Men's County Team who have reached the Bill Beaumont Division 2 Final at the Allianz at Twickenham.

If I don't have any guests lined up, I preview local matches and/or go through their results.

In summary

We will continue with the work to engage partners within the CB to try to ensure that Rugby in the County generally is promoted in the most favourable and best light possible.

We want to grow the revenue streams coming into the CB by focusing on opportunities for income generation and sponsorship to a greater extent with sponsorship packages tailored to appeal to the corporate world.

As I said in my last Report, I feel that we are still a long way short of marketing the enormous positives in playing sport in general, and Rugby in particular, to the wider public.

We need to work hard to unlock partnerships to promote our game - which has undoubtedly taken a battering with internecine warfare raging within factions in the RURS and the RFU and the ongoing knock-on effects of the two C's - Covid and Concussion still being felt.

I think it is important for County Officials to be known and recognised in the rugby fraternity and I intend to continue to be as visible as I can amongst the Clubs by refereeing or going to local games to talk with volunteers about their experience and communication with the CB and how we can improve that.

I think it is vital that we keep The County relevant to the youth of today as well - they are the senior players of tomorrow and the administrators in years to come.

CB Governance - Director End of Year Report – Rob Gibson

This is my first year as director of Governance and I readily acknowledge there is much to learn. I am grateful to those who have helped me and contiue to do so.

The County is a stand-alone Company, which interacts with both Clubs and Northumberland Trustees.

This year all sides have made strong efforts to improve communications and working relations, which is good to see.

The County finances are overseen by Brian Russell. He will produce Accounts for sign off in due course. I consider finances to be stableand we operate in credit but I acknowledge that is for him to say definitively.

There are regular Board meetings and meetings with Club representatives, minutes for which are published on our website. This is transparent and accountable. The Board is working well collectively and all sections have a plan and budget to match, which they work towards. I am grateful to the Trustees for their constructive engagement with the Board and for making funds available which will greatly help in delivering on key objectives. Without their support we would struggle.

I now turn to safety and discipline. I attach the report of Cathryn Clark and thank her for her involvement in RugbySafe player welfare and First Aid. I gently remind all Clubs of the need to appoint a RugbySafe lead and of Regulation 9 requirements for all teams to have a suitably qualified First Aider and to undertake a First Aid risk assessment.

Mark Reade as our Safeguarding Manager, has confirmed various matters have been referred to the RFU for investigation and have been dealt with. I am informed there are 2 incidents of alleged racial abuse which are pending a response.

Chris Davy deals with adult behaviour in age grade rugby. His statistical report of incidents in Northumberland is attached. There are various initiatives at National level which are being pursued and this will trickle down in due course. It is an issue and it requires a collective approach from all of us. As Chris now intends to step down, I would like to thank him for his sterling work on our behalf over the years.

I attach Frazer McDermott's report in full, showing the activities of the disciplinary panels. 25 cases are a lot and I am immensely grateful to him and the various panels for the time they take to deal with these matters. MOA (Match Official Abuse) is a real issue for all of us and respect for referees historically has been one of the great strenths of rugby. No ref, no match, is as true today as it has always been.

Finally, my thanks to Claire Sharpe at the County Office. She has been extremely helpful to me and her work as administrator is crucial in keeping “the show on the road".

RugbySafe Report

RugbySafe is the RFU's overarching initiative to support player welfare at all levels of the game. It covers the elements of Playing Environment, Research, The Game, Education and Development, Values and Culture.

In recent years Women and Girls Health has also come under the RugbySafe banner. This season we ran two Female Health Event with speakers Jojo Maddison, Specialist Physiotherapist and Lindsay McNaughton, Professor of Nutrition. These events were well attended by age-grade and adult players and coaches from the Women and Girls game across the CB. A third event is being run for Newcastle Ravens alongside our Inclusion and Diversity representatives.

The RFU Emergency First Aid in Rugby Union course was withdrawn due to issues out with the control of the RFU around HMRC, new employment laws and also the changing requirements of qualification awarding bodies that come with delivering a national qualification. A new system was introduced with the RFU providing a Tutor Map of Training Providers who had applied to the RFU to be on there. Tutors had to be delivering Level 3 Emergency First Aid at Work, or equivalent courses, and meet standards expected of Regulation 9. There "RFU recognised" tutors were provided with materials to enhance Emergency First Aid at Work courses to ensure that rugby specific material can still be delivered.

I was successful in being accredited by Qualsafe as an awarding body to deliver Level 3 Emergency First Aid at Work. I therefore set up another trading arm of my business, CC Rugby First Aid Training, and was accepted onto the RFU Tutor Map. I have also taken on two other former RFU tutors; Andrew Wilkinson and Joanne Chadwick. Andrew is based in Northumberland and Joanne is based in Yorkshire. We have thus far delivered courses in Northumberland, Durham, Cumbria, Yorkshire and whichever CB Sale Sharks comes under. In Northumberland alone we have delivered six courses this season. We have one booked on behalf of Northumberland CB for the end of August.

I will add that other providers are available! However, please ensure that any course delivered meets the standards set out by the RFU. You find all the information here:

https://www.englandrugby.com/run/player-welfare/pitch-side-first-aid-immediatecare#1737095712-1388541592

I will just take this opportunity to remind all clubs that under Regulation 9 it is recommended that all teams have a First Aider who has completed an Emergency First Aid at Work qualification or equivalent, which the RFU course was.

Also under Regulation 9 is the requirement that ALL clubs MUST complete a First Aid Risk Assessment and record that this has been completed on the Player Welfare page of GMS. This season Howden's launched an online Risk Assessment Tool which is excellent and takes clubs through a step-by-step process for their Risk Assessment, compliant with Howden's the RFU Insurers. This can be accessed via the Player Welfare page on GMS.

This season I completed Regulation 9 Audits on three clubs as requested by the RFU. This is something that will be happening each season now. If any clubs would like a copy of the audit tool please do get in touch. It serves as a good way to check that your club is regulation 9 compliant.

We also underwent a Regulation 9 audit as a CB. I am happy to report that Northumberland CB continues to be praised for our approach to RugbySafe and player welfare. Our Immediate Care and Physiotherapy/Sports Therapy set up for CB Representative Rugby was particularly highlighted as one of the best in the country by the RFU Head of Player Welfare. As a result it seems I may be asked to help with producing guidelines on best practice going forwards.

This season we continued using the Proactive Injury Reporting Tool for CB Representative Rugby. This has proved a valuable tool, allowing the CB Physios and Sports Therapists to record injuries and share that information within our team as necessary. Proactive is something that I would still encourage clubs to look at to make sure they are meeting the requirements of injury and incident reporting and being GDPR compliant. It also reduced admin time if an injury is one which requires reporting to the RFU you

simply tick a box. Likewise, if the injury occurred on a rugby365 AGP. The concussion tracker allows coaches, players, parents and physios to keep a track of where players are at in their GRAS. It sends an immediate email and/or text to the player or parent involved. However, it does not share any information out with the player's club. Therefore, we still need Clubs to utilise the Northumberland Suspected Concussion Reporting Forms and Injury Report forms as and when necessary.

Concussion continues to be a very important issue. The Suspected Concussion Reporting process has continued in Northumberland with facilitated communication between players, parents, Clubs, Schools, Universities and Representative Rugby. The process continues to be very positive and goes above and beyond what the Proactive concussion tracker can do by having information disseminated, with consent, outside the club that the injury occurred in where required. It saves a lot of leg work for players, coaches and parents and ensures that players are kept safe from further harm when these events occur. I must thank Claire Sharpe the County Administrator for her good work and support as without her this protocol of reporting and dissemination would most certainly not be possible. I also thank all coaches, teachers, first aiders, Physios, Club RugbySafe Leads, and others who have submitted forms this season. However, I do think we have had massive under reporting again this season, either that or some clubs have players with canny hard heads! I will therefore be making a renewed effort to spread the word amongst clubs, schools and universities next season.

Last reminder for all; the role of Club RugbySafe Lead is a Golden Role and as such every club must appoint a RugbySafe Lead and ensure that role is updated on GMS. If this position is vacant in your club, please reach out for some help and guidance. This season I have supported two clubs in filling this role and it is very much part of my role to support all clubs with this.

Cathryn Clark, NRU RugbySafe Lead

CB Safeguarding Managers Report

Several incidents have been referred to the RFU for investigation, most of which have been dealt with.

There are a couple of incidents involving allegations of racist abuse ongoing which have been passed to the Age Grade Discipline Secretary however I have not received any updates.

Mark Reade, Northumberland CB Safeguarding Manager

CB Age Grade Discipline Stats – Northumberland – Chris Davy

CB Discipline Stats Age Grade 2025-2026	CB Name
9.11 Reckless play, including leading with the forearm or elbow	**0**
9.12 Bite	**0**
9.12 Contact with Eye - Intentional	**0**
9.12 Contact with Eye - Reckless	**0**
9.12 Contact with Eye Area	**0**
9.12 Strike Punch	**4**
9.12 Strike with Open Hand	**0**
9.12 Strike with Arm	**1**
9.12 Strike with Elbow	**0**
9.12 Strike with Shoulder	**0**
9.12 Strike with Head	**0**
9.12 Strike with Knee	**0**
9.12 Stamp or trample	**0**
9.12 Trip	**0**
9.12 Kick	**0**
9.12 Other Physical Abuse	**0**
9.12 Verbal Abuse	**1**
9.13 Dangerous Tackle	**0**
9.13 High Tackle	**0**
9.13 Tackling Early Late or Dangerously	**0**
9.14 Tackling player without the ball	**0**
9.15 Hold, push, obstruct a player without the ball	**0**
9.15 Charging a player without the ball	**0**
9.16 Dangerous charge or knock down of player with no attempt to grasp	**0**
9.17 Tackling the player in the air	**0**
9.17 Charge, pull, push or grasp the player in the air	**0**
9.18 Tip Tackle - lift and/or drop/drive opponent	**0**
9.18 Lifting and/or droping/driving opponent	**0**
9.19 Dangerous play in a scrum	**0**
9.20a Charge into a ruck or maul (contact made without binding onto another player)	**0**
9.20b Contact with an opponent above the line of the shoulders in a ruck or maul	**0**
9.20c Collapse a ruck or a maul intentionally	**0**
9.20d Drop their weight onto the jackler or target the lower limbs in a ruck	**0**
9.25 Late charge on kicker	**0**
9.27 ACTGS Hair Pulling	**0**
9.27 ACTGS Spitting	**0**
9.27 ACTGS Grab twist or squeeze of genitals	**0**
9.27 ACTGS Other	**0**
9.27 ACTGS Two Yellows	**0**
9.28 Misconduct Failure to respect referee	**0**
9.28 Verbal abuse of a match official	**4**

9.28 Physical contact with a match official	**0**
9.28 Threatening words or actions to a match official	**0**
9.28 Physical abuse of a match official	**0**
5.12 Match Official Abuse - Physical	**0**
5.12 Match Official Abuse - Verbal	**0**
5.12 (Other)	**0**

Number of cases heard	Number of cases dismissed
9	0

Club	8	**Level**
School	1	
College	0	
Regional academy	0	
County	0	

U13 (boys)	1
U14 (boys)	0
U14 (girls)	0
U15 (boys)	0
U16 (boys)	1
U16 (girls)	1
U17 (boys)	0
U18 (boys)	3
U18 (girls)	0

Red Cards	6	**Type**
Citings	0	
Two Yellow Cards	0	
Regulatory	0	
Match Abandoment	0	
5.12	3	

Player	6	**Role**

Open	0	**Status of the Cases**
Awaiting	0	
Police Investigation	0	
Closed	9	

Yes	0	**Dismissed**
No	9	

Accepted	9	

Denied	0	**Plea**

Guilty	9	**Guilty/Not Guilty**
Not Guilty	0	

Northumberland Rugby Union Discipline Report

This was my first year as Discipline Secretary which in itself brought a number of challenges but on the whole the process has worked smoothly. I have had the opportunity to get to know a number of the club discipline officers and the dialogue we have had hopefully assists going forward.

There have also been a couple of new faces to the Discipline Panel which has been led as usual by Alan Beddis.

In looking at the number of hearings for 2024-25 it appears that there has been an increase over this year by some 25% in the number of cases that have had to be dealt with. I have scheduled below the hearings dealt with by the Panel over the year so that the breakdown of the offences and the sanctions applied can be seen.

There were three club citings (although two of these involved the same player!) although another case was run as a 5.12 as the time for a citing had elapsed and the RFU considered that in view of the serious injuries and the impact upon the player that the Panel should deal with the allegation in that way.

There were two cases of adult match official abuse which the Panel dealt with by way of significant sanctions. One was from a player and the second by a coach.

The balance of the hearings related to red cards and where possible eg no previous findings against the player and an absence of aggravating features, the Panel were able to deal with the outcome on the face of the papers.

Part of my role as Discipline Secretary is to take over cases from Age Grade where there has been for example MOA and touchline abuse. One of the cases this year was thwarted by the non engagement of a club referee from out of county who as a result of the incidents of which he complained gave up refereeing. The case was dealt with as a suspended sanction based on what had been accepted by the club but the whole scenario underlined the lack of support that referees feel they receive and this is particularly so at Age Grade level.

The RFU continue to take MOA seriously and there continues to be issues with Age Grade games. County does need to continue to address this at grass roots level with the clubs on a preventative basis. The RFU Discipline and Safeguarding conference next week are dedicating significant time to this issue and I will report back on any new proposals to address this with clubs.

As a final point I would like to offer my thanks to Northern RFC who regularly allow their facilities to be used for discipline hearings at no charge to the County and at some inconvenience to themselves.

Frazer McDermott
Discipline Secretary, Northumberland Rugby Union

Appendix - Discipline hearings season 2025/6

	Date	Event	Club	Outcome
1	6.9.25	Club citing	North Shields	Dealt with on 18.9.25 when player attended but indicated that he disputed the allegations despite the club having notified that the player accepted them The hearing was relisted on 2.10.25 with the witnesses attending from Hartlepool Rovers Elbow allegation not proven. Stamp proven. 4 week ban (mid entry)
2	13.9.25	Red card	Morpeth	Dismissed with no hearing as threshold not met.
3	20.9.25	Red card	Medicals	Dealt with on papers 25.9.25. One week ban (low entry)
4	27.9.25	Red card	Ponteland	1 week ban (low entry)
5	19.11.25	5.12	Northern	Not proved
6	22.11.25	5.12	Percy Park	Suspended sanction pending no further incidents this season (ref not cooperating)
7	4.12.25	Club citing	Percy Park	Guilty plea. 3 weeks ban (low entry)
8	4.12.25	Red card	North Shields	Guilty plea. 3 week ban (low entry)
9	29.11.25	Citing	North Shields	Guilty plea. 11 match ban
10	29.1.26	Red card	Alnwick	Sending off sufficient (two yellow cards)
11	5.2.26	Red card	North Shields	9 weeks MOA
12	19.2.26	Red card	WBR	3 weeks reckless head contact
13	5.3.26	Red card	Ashington	3 weeks punch to head
14	5.3.26	Red card	WBR Roses	3 weeks punch to head
15	12.3.26	Red card	Medicals	Sending off sufficient (two yellow cards)
16	26.3.26	Red card	Morpeth	3 weeks striking with forearm
17	21.3.26	Red card	Northern	Red card threshold not made out
18	14.4.26	Red card	Novos	2 weeks contact with eye area
19	11.4.26	Red card	Medicals	2 yellow cards different offences. Sending off sufficient
20	14.4.26	Red card	Novos	3 weeks punching to head
21	14.4.26	Red card	Morpeth	3 weeks punching to head
22	14.4.26	Red card	Morpeth	2 weeks kick to back
23	14.4.26	MOA	Morpeth	8 weeks consecutive to red card sanction
24	22.4.26	MOA	Percy Park	10 weeks
25	6.5.26	Red card	Wallsend	Dissent. 6 matches

Minis and Age Grade and Adult Male Club and Representative Rugby - Director End of Year Report – Tony Lenderyou

Director of Male Rugby End of Year Report

Unfortunately, Tony Lenderyou is on holiday when this document is going to print/send and as such we are missing his report. We will ensure Tony's report is completed and sent out to you all on his return.

Age Grade Season Report

Overall a very successful season, participation levels have remained fairly static which goes against the trend over previous seasons. Discipline incidents reported has dropped YOY and feedback has been generally good.

New Initiatives this season:

All age grade WhatsApp groups were brought into County control. This has improved information sharing dramatically and stopped the low level disturbances these groups were causing.

Silent Sunday. This has worked and gave the players an opportunity to be in charge of their own teams without the adults dictating. Some confusion over the name. Will change to Player led Sundays going forward.

Friday Night Lights: we had the 1st U16s Friday Night Lights at Percy Park, a huge success and we will increase these next season.

County Cups, we introduced forms to manage County Competitions and also made all 4 boys Cups into Waterfalls. These were a huge success and very popular with host clubs and also teams.

Discipline: we led a strong campaign against touchline disturbances this has definitely been well received and successful, however complaints still come in and the general perception from clubs is that County do not take action. This really makes talking to coaches and clubs difficult. At the Forums it was very clear that issues still exist and Clubs expect County to deal faster with any issues and be more transparent.

I feel very strongly that Age Grade Discipline should work with both Safeguarding and also with the Age Grade Committee as a together approach will work. It may also be worth looking at getting someone from the age grade setup who knows the clubs and actually watches matches to be involved with age grade discipline.

Festivals: we increased the number of fun festivals this year and gave hosting to a wider range of clubs. These were all reported as very successful.

Committee: the Age Grade Committee was pretty much disbanded after a reluctance to get involved. Nicola Smith has been superb all season and it ended up a 2 person committee supported by Claire which actually worked.

Andrew Neal, Chair Age Grade Rugby

Colts Report

17th Sept – 7's County Cup held at Alnwick RFC.

An excellent evening which saw 9 teams compete for the Cup, Tynedale took the cup in an exciting final v Alnwick 1, which saw enthusiastic crowd support.

Teams entered: Alnwick x2, Berwickshire (Berwick & Duns), Blyton (Blyth & Ashington), Gosforth, Novos, Whitley Bay Rockcliff, Tynedale, Barbarians team (Volunteer players on the night). Northern and Morpeth had to withdraw before the event due to a lack of players.

Good level of enthusiasm to continue with this cup event next season. I wonder if there is some scope to develop a 7's league?

County Cup (15's) 10 teams entered.
Cup Final – Tynedale (Winner) v Alnwick – held at Percy Park
Plate Final – Percy Park (Winner) v Gosforth – held at Ashington.
I would like to thank both host clubs who were excellent venues and hosts on the evenings. Wednesday evening events were well received with good support crowds and the plan is to continue with Wednesdays. AG to review County Cup Rules with TL – issue to provide clarity and fairness in the use of academy players within the competition.

Club Colts Autumn Festivals – these have not proceeded as clubs feel that there have been sufficient playing opportunities so far in consideration of varied player availability.

National Cup – 4 Northumberland Teams entered, Alnwick, Tynedale, Percy Park & Novos – Good representation as have to be accepted. Teams have struggled to commit to this along with league and county cup matches.

ACE Player management - A positive development following a meeting between Steve Turnbull and Lawrence Patton has been Lawrence joining our Northumberland Colts Committee and providing a weekly update on minutes played by each player in the ACE scheme. This allows for clubs to know when these players are available and for how long and so maintaining that crucial club relationship whilst not risking over playing.

In discussion with TL as to further improved working between academy and clubs with it being felt that maintaining the club relationship is vital to player retention in the sport.

Colts Futures Festival (U16's / U17's) – Still being prevented from holding this by RFU despite overwhelming positive responses from everyone that I speak to about this. Aim to ease transition to colts, to be held around Easter before players head off to study for GCSE's. Player retention initiative. I know that Penny Stewart and others are pushing this forward. I look forward to an update on progress and timescales. Penny has advised that she is hoping that this will be accepted as an RFU national trial event. Despite huge effort from Penny and positive feedback, we did not manage to make this happen, again. Where can we go from here to make happen when is without exception received as a positive initiative? All in hand except Colts Futures Festival which I need help with! A safeguarding risk assessment proposal needs to be written to deliver to RFU to obtain consent. This could be a great test event for RFU with over 200 players taking part.

Alan Gardiner, Chair of Colts

Competitions Report

All cup finals leagues and cup finals complete. Need to update League and Cup rules.

Lower teams allowed into the national leagues with the creation of North East Counties Leagues.

Next season cup draws have been done. Cup and league rules need disseminating. Clubs may need a reminder of insurance needed if they want to keep the county cups throughout the season.

A successful presentation evening on 28 May.

Need to work on new Candy Leagues. Lots of teams have joined the RFU leagues and therefore Candy needs reorganising. These will hopefully be done early June

(22.06.26 – please see below for the confirmed new structures).

Counties 1 North East
Barnard Castle
Bishop Auckland
Darlington
Durham University
Gateshead
Hartlepool
Houghton
Medicals
Peterlee & Horden
Ponteland
Stockton
Tynedale 2

Counties 2 North East North
Alnwick 2
Ashington 2
Blaydon 2
Gosforth
Jarrovians
Morpeth 2
North Shields
Northern 2
Novos 2
Wallsend
Westoe
WB Rockcliff

Counties 2 North East South
Acklam
Billingham
Darlington Mowden Park 2
Hartlepool Rovers
Middlesbrough 2
Peterlee & Horden 2
Redcar
Sedgefield
Stockton 2
Sunderland 2
West Hartlepool 2
Yarm

Counties 3 North East North
Blyth
Consett 2
Durham City 2
Gateshead 2
Houghton 2
Percy Park 2
Ryton 2
Seaham
Washington
Darlington Mowden Park 3

Counties 2 North East South
Billingham 3
Bishop Auckland 2
Darllington 2
Guisborough 2
Hartlepool 2
Hartlepool BBOB
Middlesbrough 3
Newton Aycliffe
Upper Eden 2
West Hartlepool 3

CANDY 1
Alnwick Lions
Medicals 2
Morpeth Edwardians (3rd)
North Shields Crusaders (2nd)
Novos 3
Tynedale Hadrians
WBR Vikings (2nd)
Westoe 2

CANDY2 N
Ashington Pirates (2nd)
Blyth Marauders (2nd)
Consett 3
Gosforth Hurricanes (2nd)
Jarrovians 2
Newcastle Ravens (1st)
Ponteland 2
Seghill 1st
South Shields 1st
Sunderland Keelmen (3rd)
Tynedale Centurions
Winlaton Vulcans 1st

CANDY 2S
Acklam Tablots (2nd)
Barnard Castle Devt (2nd)
Darlington Oxen (3rd)
Hartlepool Friars (3rd)
Hartlepool Rovers Heughers (2nd)
Northallerton 2
Peterlee & Horden 3
Redcar Mariners (2nd)
Seaton Carew 1st
Sedgefield Saxons (2nd)
Stockton Stocktonians (3rd)

Craig Johnston – Chair of Competitions

Representative Rugby – County Under 17s

We put together a new coaching team of Myself, Scott Thompson and Matt Currie to support Steve (Turnbull) for this season with Billy (Shaw) also continuing. From the beginning we decided to make the players feel that U17s was important and not a selection process for U18s. Dan Swift was appointed captain and has been a superb choice.

The 2 assessment centres drew over 50 players which we trimmed down to a squad of 34.

Attendance and attitude at training has been superb with hardly any players missing sessions and a real enthusiasm and great attitude was displayed by a talented bunch of players.

Matches:

We approached the matches trying to give the players a real 1st team professional experience.

v Durham we had the game all sewn up then conceded a questionable try. This seemed to transform the match and we ended up losing by 1 point in a very close fought contest.

v Cumbria the team were really up for the match after the Durham result. A few changes were made and we won the game very comfortably dominating in most areas of the match.

v Yorkshire a really tough trip to Driffield to play Yorkshire. They took an early lead before we kicked into gear. The players showed some superb skills playing edge to edge rugby and also dominated in the set piece. Yorkshire, with a good home crowd, battled back and 2 quick tries levelled the scores. Northumberland showed great resilience to register the 1st win away in Yorkshire at u17s anyone can remember.

Overall a superb campaign with a really dialled in group of players.

Andrew Neal, Under 17s Team Manager

Representative Rugby – County Under 18s

The objective of the County U18 Management & Coaching team was to field the best team available of eligible players to represent Northumberland at u18 level with a view to getting as many players as possible recognised by the North 18 selectors and therefore to be invited to the follow on North u18 Assessment day.

Calendar

24th October - County Trials

31st October - Squad Development evening

21st November - Training

23rd November - Match vs Yorkshire @Lymm RFC – North Festival – Lost 24-31

5th December -Training

7th December - Match vs Lancashire @Preston Grasshoppers RFC – Lost 0-15

19th December - Training

21st December - Match vs Durham @Rockcliff RFC – Won 51-35

Invitees to North U18 Assessment Day

At the conclusion of the u18 County fixtures the following players were invited to attend the North U18 Assessment Day on the 25th January at Keighley RFC.

Nominees			
Ethan Thompson	Tynedale	Gosforth Academy	
Matthew Johnson	Blaydon	Newcastle School for Boys	Withdrew as not able to commit to North dates
Archie Middlemist	Alnwick	Duchess High School	
Nathan Bailey	Tynedale	Gosforth Academy	
Joshua Robertson	Northern	Kings Priory school	
Will Ainsley	Tynedale	Newcastle School for Boys	

Positives and Negatives

P - Positive results on the pitch – great to have so many players invited to Assessment day.

N - Poor weather conditions – particularly for the game vs Lancashire meant opportunity for boys to demonstrate their abilities were limited.

P - Good engagement with North u18 management and selection team.

N - Time of year means sessions are cold & travel can be difficult.

P - Stash supplied to players was well received – players proud to put on Northumberland colours.

N - Numerous pairs of shorts appeared to have gone missing following final fixture – to date calls for return have had limited response.

P - Availability of warm up tops, shorts & sub suits meant team looked very 'professional' during warm up – compared to some counties who didn't provide socks/shorts, etc.

P - Positive feedback received from parents & players on their experience from participating in the programme.

Nick Cotterill – Under 18s Team Manager

Representative Rugby – County Under 20s (RFU National Jason Leonard u20s Championship)

Introduction & Preparation

The 2025/26 Jason Leonard u20s competition was contested once again in the north by teams from the Constituent Bodies of Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire. There was again no representation in the tournament from Cumbria.

The season began in the summer of 2025, with Michael van Vuuren and Nyle Godsmark being retained as Head Coach and Assistant Coach respectively. Michael's and Nyle's individual and combined value cannot be overstated, and their excellent brand of coaching will be missed in the season ahead. I would like to thank both for their unrelenting commitment and passion during their time with the CB and I dearly hope to see them return in some capacity in the years ahead. Their forward-thinking approach sets a standard which is much needed in our game, and I have nothing but thanks and praise for their contributions.

In the early autumn, Claire Sharpe began the thankless process of securing player nominations from clubs within the CB, repeatedly chasing down the slow responders and processing registration forms as they arrived. More than 60 nominations were ultimately received, and having received the match

schedule from the RFU, we were able to establish dates and venues for trials, training and matches. Thanks also go to Catherine Cotterill who provided physio cover to the squad throughout the campaign and was ever-present at our training sessions and matches.

With our first match scheduled for 8th February, we initially designated 11th and 18th January as trial dates, however the weather intervened and the 11th was frozen off. We decided to treat the remaining three weekends (18th, 25th Jan, and 1st Feb) as trials to allow time to get to know everyone in the pool, and we used dedicated numbered bibs very effectively to identify and assess the many new faces. Some nominees did not materialise at some sessions and some not at any session so we resolved to hold the wider squad of circa 50 players together, knowing that the long season ahead would likely require us to draw on a wider than normal pool. It was agreed that WhatsApp would be the preferred communications method for the u20s this season and this proved to work well.

The match schedule once again worked against us, with matches being spread over an inordinately long period making it difficult to retain and develop a core unit to provide consistency in team selection and performances. The schedule was as follows:

8th Feb v Cheshire (h) at Whitley Bay Rockcliff

22nd Feb v Yorkshire (a) at Bradford Salem

19th Apr v Durham (h) at Whitley Bay Rockcliff

3rd May v Lancashire (a) at Wigan

Some 85 days elapsed between match 1 and match 4, with an unhelpful 56-day hiatus between matches 2 and 3. It remains my firm view that the competition calendar should be condensed to a shorter timeframe to keep players engaged and add value to the competition.

Matches

Northumberland got the campaign off to a positive start, defeating Cheshire by 46 points to 29, and signs were good. The second match at Yorkshire began equally positively, with Northumberland racing to 21 points from three early well-worked tries, however Yorkshire found their feet in the second half and made their gameplan work to come away with an eight point winning margin, finishing the match 37-29. Yorkshire's ace card was their venue selection, opting for an extremely short and narrow pitch which strangled the game and nullified Northumberland's backs' threat. Game three saw the ultimate winners of the group, Durham, triumph 15-52 in a captivating contest which was much tighter than the scoreline suggests. This was an end-to-end encounter, with the point of difference being that Northumberland's attack was thwarted time and time again at the five-metre line by an impressive Durham defence. By the time game 4 came around, many players, including some of the leaders in the squad, had lost interest and declared themselves unavailable for the long trip to Wigan. Our ability to fulfil the fixture was in the balance for some time as Michael, Nyle and I exhausted all avenues to find more players, including the vital front row. Newcastle University's Liv Rowe was a huge help to me in securing new players and without her assistance we would have floundered. We got over the line with a reduced playing squad just a couple of days before the fixture was to take place, including debutants at loosehead and hooker who had not trained with us and only met their coaches and teammates for the first time on the bus down to Wigan. The new players acquitted themselves very well on the day and a closely fought encounter saw Lancashire narrowly inch their way home with a 19-12 win, having scored a couple of their tries when Northumberland were reduced to 13 players for two unrelated yellow card offences a minute apart from each other. Northumberland battled to the end of the match and in fact won the second half which was testament to the determination of the playing squad and the never-say-die approach of the coaches. Another five minutes and...?

Summary

Northumberland ended the campaign in fourth place, ahead of Cheshire, with Durham topping the group, Lancashire second and Yorkshire third. Durham progressed to a semi-final 45-29 defeat at the hands of East Midlands, and the final will take place at Twickenham on 6th June between East Midlands and Hertfordshire who defeated Berkshire 24-45 in the other semifinal.

Six players were selected from Northumberland u20s by the North of England selectors and invited to trial on 10th May at Keighley RFC. Two of those declined the invitation and the four who attended were unsuccessful on the day and did not progress further.

All in all, the season was one of mixed fortunes, with a very strong coaching team and promising initial player pool, undermined by a long calendar and fluctuating player availability. The four matches were well-contested, and the conduct of the entire u20s squad was exemplary on and off the pitch throughout the campaign, representing Northumberland Rugby Union admirably.

Ian Hiles, Team Manager Northumberland u20s

Representative Rugby – Senior Men (RFU Bill Beaumont Mens County Championship)

The senior men's season was everything the coaching team, the Board and myself hoped it would be, except for the final result.

We want to make the County team aspirational again and have players hungry to be involved.

I think the experience the lads had this season bodes well for that to be the case next year.

The Coaching Team brought together a select squad from a wide range of clubs from Berwick to Blaydon and gave them a plan. Shape from set piece and first phase but then just told them to play heads up rugby and enjoy it.

The lads rewarded their plan with an excellent victory in the first game, winning 33-15 over a strong Cheshire side, played at and hosted by Percy Park.

The second game was away at Penrith against a big Cumbria side but the lads stepped up once again and came away with a convincing victory 14-48.

Their final group game was away to Durham at Blaydon and resulted in another convincing victory 17-50, which left Northumberland at the top of the group and secured us a home semi-final.

Due to pitch maintenance and a wedding making other clubs unavailable, Percy Park again kindly hosted the semi-final against a Staffordshire side who turned up like they owned the place.

Their hubris did not last long, and the lads sent them on the long ride home with their tails firmly between their legs after a fantastic 51-3 victory, in an entertaining game of running rugby.

This meant we were off to headquarters for the final!

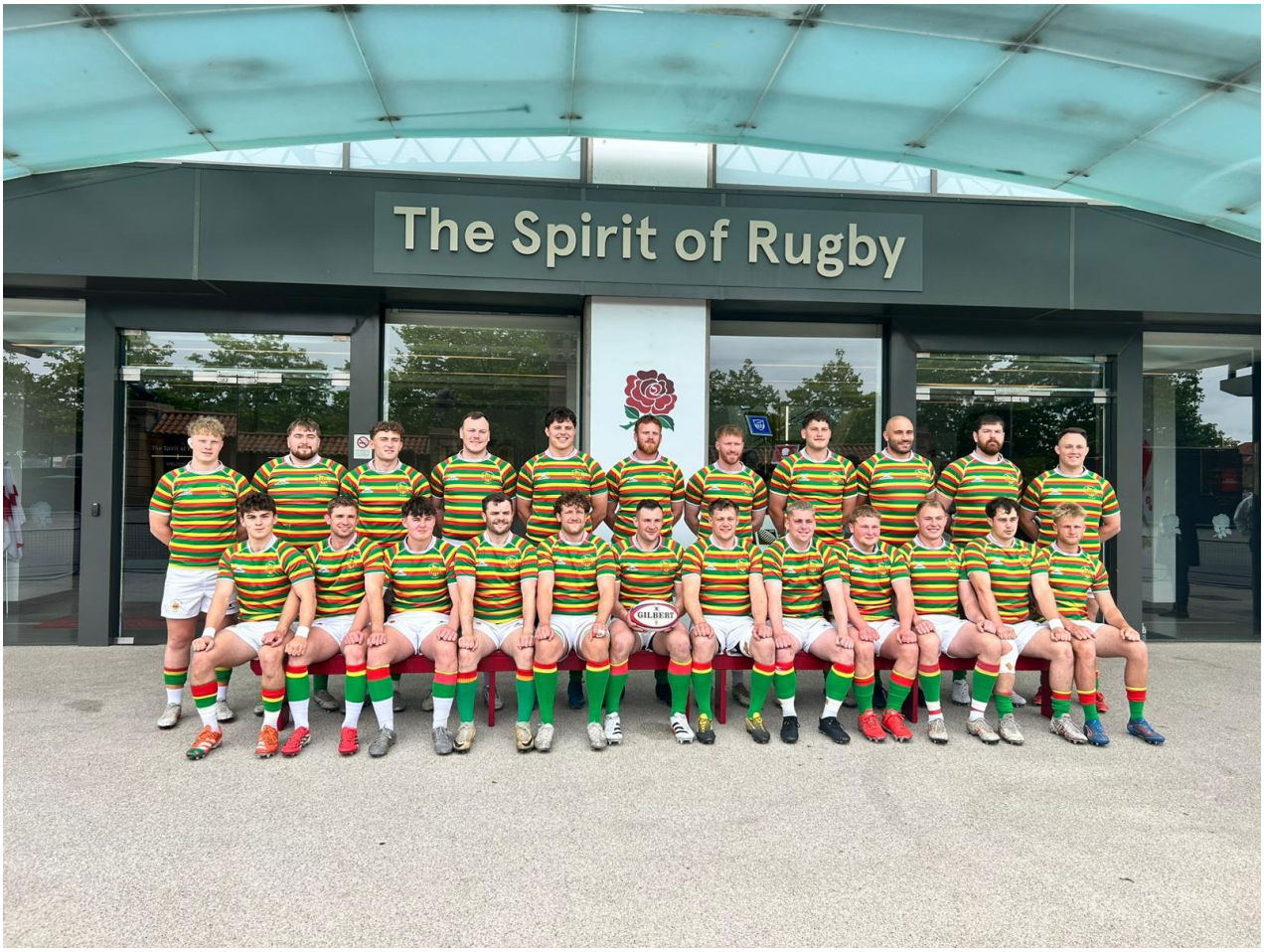
The excitement was palpable and frantic preparations were made with only a week to get organised.

Our thanks must go to Claire for getting the bus sorted at short notice and also to the Board/Trust for backing us financially, allowing the experience to be very special for everyone who was lucky enough to be part of it.

Sadly, we were beaten in the final 28-30 by a strong North Midlands side. The lads were understandably gutted but as the score suggests put up a brilliant fight for the title.

Altogether a very enjoyable and successful season, which will hopefully make the fight for a place in the squad, sought after next season.

Noel Mather, Senior Mens Team Manager



Northumberland Squad – Bill Beaumont County Championship Division Two Final
Sunday 7th June 2025

Age Grade and Adult Female Club and Representative Rugby - Director End of Year Report – Ruth Scott

The 2025/26 season has seen continued growth in participation across the women's and girls' game, although perhaps not quite the level of increase anticipated following the success and profile generated by the Rugby World Cup. Recent figures shared by the RFU for Northumberland show a 12% increase in registered female players compared to last season, alongside an 8% increase in age-grade player registrations.

At senior level, Northumberland continues to be affected by the absence of a Premiership Women's Rugby (PWR) team within the region. As a result, players aspiring to compete at the highest level are often required to leave the area to pursue those opportunities. The RFU is fully aware of this challenge and has established a steering group comprising representatives from across the North East, including Northumberland, Durham and Yorkshire, to explore solutions and identify alternative pathways. One positive outcome has been the opportunity to participate in a pilot North of England Women's U23 County Challenge. This regional initiative, exclusive to Northern Constituent Bodies, aims to raise standards across the women's game in the North of England while strengthening the transition from age-grade to senior rugby.

The county has also hosted two highly successful educational evenings focusing on female health and nutrition, delivered by Jojo Hall and Lindsay Macnaughton. We are exploring opportunities to repeat these sessions next season, tailoring content more specifically to different age groups to maximise their relevance and impact.

Junior Girls Club Rugby

Despite the overall increase in participation, several clubs continue to face challenges in maintaining player numbers within certain age groups. Encouragingly, clubs have worked collaboratively to form clusters, ensuring girls continue to receive regular playing opportunities. County "Pitch Up and Play" events for younger age groups have proven particularly successful and will remain a key feature of next season's programme.

Adult Club Rugby

The adult women's game has seen the emergence of two new teams preparing to enter the Inner Warrior League next season, demonstrating continued growth and enthusiasm at grassroots level. Unfortunately, we have also lost one of our more established sides ahead of the new season.

Following Novocastrians' first-team relegation, the highest level at which a Northumberland club will compete next season is Championship 2.

U16 Girls

The U16 Player Development Group (PDG) programme has enjoyed a highly successful season. Coaches and management have created a positive and enjoyable environment for the players, culminating in a residential weekend that was extremely well received by all involved. We are pleased to retain the same coaching and management team for next season and will look to build further on this success, providing players with a strong platform as they progress towards U18 rugby.

U18 Girls

The U18 programme operates within a shorter season, which can make long-term team development more challenging. Nevertheless, the coaching team worked tirelessly throughout the campaign, and

the players produced some excellent rugby, featuring several highly competitive and entertaining fixtures.

Results:

- Northumberland 15 – 24 Durham
- Northumberland 31 – 5 Cumbria
- Northumberland 22 – 24 Lancashire
- Northumberland 50 – 0 Cheshire

Next season, we intend to supplement county sessions with a series of open training sessions available to all U18 players. These sessions will feature guest coaches and focus on developing core skills across the player group.

Senior Women

A new coaching team was appointed ahead of the 2025/26 season and has successfully established a positive culture within the squad.

In addition to the senior side, we were able to field a development squad, which played fixtures against Durham and a President's XV, providing valuable playing opportunities for a wider group of players.

The first team opened their campaign with a closely contested away fixture against Lancashire, narrowly losing 12–10. They then hosted a particularly strong Yorkshire side, ultimately losing 0–62, but demonstrated outstanding commitment and resilience throughout the match.

With no Northumberland club competing at Championship 1 level next season, discussions will take place with the coaching team to determine the most appropriate level of competition for the county programme, ensuring players continue to experience meaningful and competitive rugby.

Women's Veterans Rugby

This season marked the first time Northumberland hosted dedicated Friday evening women's veterans fixtures. The opening event was a successful "Pitch Up and Play" session featuring 10-a-side rugby, while the second event saw a full fixture against a Durham Veterans side.

The initiative was extremely well received, with participants thoroughly enjoying the experience. As a result, we are keen to continue and further develop this programme next season.

Male and Female, Age Grade and Adult, Season 2025-26 Leagues and Cups Record

County Cups - Congratulations to….

Senior Cup Winners – Alnwick RFC
Senior Cup Finalists – Northern FC

Senior Plate Winners – Novos RFC
Senior Plate Finalists – Percy Park RFC

Senior Plate Bowl Winners – North Shields RFC
Senior Plate Bowl Finalists – Ashington Joint Welfare RFC

No2 Challenge Cup Winners – Northern Wanderers
No2 Challenge Cup Finalists – Alnwick 2

No2 Challenge Plate Winners – Percy Park Lions
No2 Challenge Plate Finalists – Morpeth Reivers

No3 Junior Challenge Cup Winners – Wallsend RFC
No3 Junior Challenge Cup Finalists – Alnwick Lions

No3 Junior Challenge Plate Winners – Morpeth Edwardians
No3 Junior Challenge Plate Finalists – Gosforth RFC

No4 Junior Challenge Shield Winners – Novos 3
No4 Junior Challenge Shield Finalists – North Shields Crusaders

Colts Cup Competition Winners – Tynedale Colts
Colts Cup Competition Finalists – Alnwick Colts

Colts Plate Competition Winners – Percy Park Colts
Colts Plate Competition Finalists – Gosforth Colts

Colts County 7s Competition Winners – Tynedale Colts

U18s Girls Cup Competition Winners – joint Morpeth RFC and WB Rockcliff RFC
U18s Girls Cup Competition Finalists – Northern FC

U16s Boys Waterfall Cup Competition Winners – Northern FC
U16s Boys Waterfall Cup Competition Finalists – Percy Park RFC

U16 Girls Waterfall Cup Competition Winners & Winners of the Sarah Hunter Cup – Northern FC
U16 Girls Waterfall Cup Competition Finalists – WB Rockcliff RFC

U15 Boys Waterfall Cup Competition Winners – Gosforth FC
U15 Boys Waterfall Cup Competition Finalists – Morpeth RFC

U14 Boys Waterfall Cup Competition Winners – Tynedale RFC
U14 Boys Waterfall Cup Competition Finalists – Morpeth RFC

U14 Girls Waterfall Cup Competition Winners – Northern FC
U14 Girls Waterfall Cup Competition Finalists – WB Rockcliff RFC

U13 Boys Waterfall Cup Competition Winners – Northern FC
U13 Boys Waterfall Cup Competition Finalists – Novos RFC

National League Rugby - Congratulations to…

Northern Rugby Club on winning Regional 2 North

Novos Rugby Club on winning Counties 1 Durham & Northumberland

Wallsend Rugby Club on winning Counties 1 Durham & Northumberland

and Whitley Bay Rockcliff Roses on winning Women's NC 3 North

CANDY League Rugby - Congratulations to…

CANDY1 League Winners – Tynedale Raiders

CANDY2 North League Winners – Novos 2nd Team
CANDY2 South League Winners – Peterlee & Horden 2nd Team

CANDY3 North League Winners – Tynedale Centurions
CANDY3 South League Winners – Darlington Mowden Park 3rd Team
CANDY3 Central League Winners – Washington 1st Team

Merit League Winners – Seghill 1st Team

Age Grade Leagues

The newly introduced Under 16s Girls Leagues for season 2025-26, involving teams from across Northumberland, Durham and Cumbria were a huge success giving more playing opportunities to teams in each County. Congratulations to Northern U16s Girls on winning the main League and to WB Rockcliff U16s Girls on winning the Development League.

We should also congratulate the winners of the (Sunday) Colts Development League, this season, won by Percy Park Colts.

National Cup Winners

After an thrilling match at the Allianz Stadium on the 23rd May, coming back from 17-0 down against Cheshunt RFC, congratulations to Novos Rugby Club on winning the Men's Counties 1 Championship Cup Final, by 31 points to 24.

Hon Secretary's Summary.....

I have the pleasure to end this report with a huge thank you to everyone within Northumberland who has volunteered this year and made an effort to make the best of the CB and achieving what has been a fantastic year. Congratulations to the team of individuals who have got the new Counties Leagues over the line, and good luck to all clubs playing in these leagues with stable and meaningful Rugby being provided this coming season for all clubs.

I'd also like to thank my fellow Directors of the Board for their hard work and efforts for the season, Lady and Gentlemen, thank you for your efforts and steering the ship, I am sure we have carried out a great job and look forward to working hard again next season to make our plans and development even better.

We need to continue this positive attitude, all working with the same aim and pulling together in the same direction. We have the CB, the Trust, and the Clubs all back on the same page and we need to sustain this and build an even better County.

Enjoy your summer and looking forward to season 2026/27!

Graham

Graham Crozier
Honorary Secretary