

Thanks also to Cliff Chipperfield in Jersey and John Moxon in Guernsey for keeping the lid on discipline in the Channel Islands. John Collins, Rick Scott, Sue Pazdzierski, Albert Winterbottom and of course Past President John Sneezum, all of whom do their best to ensure that competition Rugby in Hampshire works properly.

I am so well aware that we have a major difficulty with our County Cup. There just are not enough free Saturdays nor are there enough Clubs of similar standard to make this work as it once did. Fortunately both the Bowl - which has its full complement of eight entries next season - and the Plate function very well and meet the needs of the Clubs. As do the Veterans Cup, the Merit Tables and the Colts Leagues all of which provide many players with competition Rugby.

Simon Thomas continues to Chair our Referees' Society in a most efficient manner - when he's in the country - and it would be very remiss of me not to give special mention to Dave Davies - as the weekend Re-Appointments Secretary he has the most difficult task of almost anyone else in Rugby in the County. Your Second XV Captain may not think much about it but when he tells Dave on a Friday night - or even worse - a Saturday morning that his match is off then his task is done. Dave will then probably have another three or four phone calls to make to find that referee another match: Before the next skipper phones him. If nothing else changes next season let it be a massive slow down and reduction in the number of cancelled matches; for everyone's sake.

Someone else also closely involved in that scenario is another unsung hero and background person - the Secretary of the Fixture Bureau for the past thirteen seasons - Andrew Mott. Every Club owes Andrew a big vote of thanks for his contribution as well.

Our affiliated Union, HRFUW chaired by Stuart Barlow continues to work smoothly. Women's Rugby is beginning now to find its proper niche in the overall scheme and there is great progress in the promotion and participation in Girls Rugby. This regrettably adds to the problems of not having enough qualified referees for Sunday Rugby.

This leads me nicely onto Youth Rugby and the need for referees for the highly successful Leagues now in place for our Under 14, 15 and 16 players. I say highly successful but I suspect there are others like me who just feel that the needs to win at all costs attitude of some coaches in Youth Rugby may just be turning away the less talented players - the Jed Stones of today.

I do thank however Debbie Morgan, Julie Millar and Cliff Titcombe for managing those leagues and Steve Downes for looking after the Seventeens Cup. And Vince Kitley and Peter Hill for their overseeing the Youth scene.

Finally in the Community Rugby area I congratulate our Rugby Development Officers, Jon Brookstein and Jamie Sanders both of whom have contributed greatly to the strides made by David Marsden in improving the development of facilities in our Clubs and in getting the various Club Development Groups to progress.

Last Sunday I heard the outgoing President of the RFU say that the messages he had got during his year in office while going around many clubs in the country was that they had fewer players and too many who did not want to play away. Five minutes after that I heard the Chief Executive state that the RFU Go Play initiative last autumn had produced ten thousand more players and two thousand more administrators for the game. I wonder if your experience is more in tune with that of the President - or not. My guess is those extra ten thousand had a brief encounter with a Mickey Mouse match on a beach somewhere.

Thank you Mr. President for giving me this opportunity to speak.

The President invited questions from the floor. None were forthcoming so therefore, proposed by D. Marsden and seconded by N. Hagerty the President declared the Report adopted, nem com.

Item Five Presentation of Awards

The President made the following statements and presentations.

The First Award is the FMT Bunney Trophy for the County Championship Player of the Year which goes to Russell Forster. Russell only decided to make himself available for the County after a lot of persuasion as he had had a long demanding season with Rosslyn Park and was carrying an injury. However, he played in

our first championship game which was against Dorset & Wilts but on the understanding that would be it. Maybe John Byett said "Never say Never" or maybe he just enjoyed it so much and in the end played all the matches of the campaign. His spirit coupled with superb match performances and his partnership with skipper Scot McKecknie was the cornerstone of the County's success. A good line-out jumper, great around the park and all in all a unanimous nomination!

In Russell's absence the award was accepted by Cathy Whapham (Portsmouth RFC) on his behalf.

The next Award is The Brian Short Memorial Trophy for the Young Player who Best Epitomised the Spirit of Hampshire Rugby which goes this year to James Monck. James has been nominated by the 20 Group Management for his commitment and loyalty to the Squad over three seasons. During this time he has attended just about every game and training session. Although studying at UWIC he still drove up from Wales to attend Hampshire sessions and always at his own expense. He has accepted those occasions when he has been dropped from the starting XV with good grace and no decrease in his loyalty to the Squad.

Next are the Robbie Keast Awards which were presented to our Schools Union by his family in memory of Robbie Keast a County Age grade player and a young man who was tragically killed in January 2000. Both his parents are here this evening. There are two Awards; the first to our outstanding 18 Group player who this year is Toby Hill of Barton Peverill College. I was delighted when Toby's name was put forward for this award. Apart from his very able captaincy of the County U18's this last season, I saw him lead his College XV on several occasions. And it was in that role that I believe he best exemplified the qualities that this award is intended to mark. When he first joined the Barton Peverill College the rugby squad were not too impressive and suffered a number of quite heavy defeats. But Toby led by example and soon had them playing with commitment, discipline and pride and no more so than in the Birch Plate Final when they beat Farnborough VI Form College 24-10 at the end of this season. The Keast Award for Sportsmanship, in the words of the citation goes "not to an outstanding Divisional or England player (though they should not be excluded from nomination) but to the player who has best shown the qualities of commitment, dedication and example to the rest of his team". Toby Hill please step forward and Well Done!

The Robbie Keast Bowl for our 16 Group is awarded to Joe Atkinson of Churchers College and Petersfield RFC- Unfortunately, Joe is away at the moment but I am delighted to say that his Dad is here to receive the Award on his behalf. Like the first recipient of this Award, Tom Rees in 2001, Joe is an open side flanker and at the risk of embarrassing Dad, I believe he is an outstanding prospect. He has been a star player for his College XV, and Petersfield RFC and although still only sixteen is a standby reserve for the England U18 Squad currently on a three week tour of Argentina.

And now to the League and Merit Table Winners and I call upon John Collins to assist me in this.

This club has got to the top of the Hampshire structure for the first time and will now be in London 4, the last 3 seasons they have been 3rd, 2nd and 1st

Winners of Hampshire One & The NEWS Cup

Ellingham & Ringwood

Making a swift return to Hampshire One

Winners of Hampshire Two & The ECHO Cup

Eastleigh

Winning twice as many games as any-one else 18 out of 18 they dominated Hampshire 3

Winners of Hampshire Three & The CHRONICLE Cup

Overton

My congratulations to

Winners of the Senior Merit Table & The PINNOCK Cup

Winners of Merit One

Winners of Merit Two

Winners of Merit Three

Trojans 2

Winchester 3

Fordingbridge 2

Southampton 3

At this point last year I should have presented an RFU Award to Ryde RFC as they were Runner-Up in the Enjoyment Category of the RFU President's XV Awards but they were not present, nor are they this year.

I should be presenting a similar RFU Award tonight to Jersey RFC as Runner-Up in the Community Category but they are not present.

Nor am I able to present on behalf of the RFU President, the RFU Seal of Approval Club of the Year Regional Winner Award to Aldershot & Fleet RFC.

Hopefully these Awards will be presented during the coming season at an appropriate time.

Finally I am able to present the Referee's Society Award for the most Hospitable Club of the Season to New Milton & District RFC.

Item Six To receive a Financial Report

The President invited the Finance Chairman to deliver his Report.

Thank you again Mr. President.

Depending on the results of the next couple of Agenda Items this conceivably could be the last time you hear me speak at an AGM.

I forecast in the Annual Report another surplus; I was not quite correct. For the first time for six years our expenditure has exceeded our income. By at least £2000 subject to audit!

Our income however was very close to the Budget forecast - we actually received £1600 over. And in addition a further £11500 for reaching, and hosting, the Semi-Final and Final of the County Championship Plate and £3000 for reaching the Semi-Final of the Under 20 Championship.

But winning Finals doesn't come cheap; we spent £21000 on the County XV including all entertainment of the opposition and all of that came from the RFU; so we did not really spend our own money. None of the players or coaches were paid but all were well treated to transport, stash and beer. And worth every penny to win silverware at senior level after 40 odd years.

We spent £12800 on the Under 20's which was also funded by the RFU plus the players themselves who purchased their own stash and met other costs as well.

Overall we met all of our playing costs at all ages from income received, none of which came from the Clubs.

It has been on the Admin front where we have incurred our loss - had it not been for £5000 saved on not having an Admin Officer for so long it would have been that much more.

All of the money we take from the Clubs - except that specifically for Youth Competitions and Registrations - goes to meeting the cost of the staff, the office and all other administration.

This leaves the Community Rugby budget which has managed this year to spend around £15000 for the benefit of our Clubs in Facility Development and People Development.

Looking ahead we need to survive the credit crunch, spiraling costs of fuel and the anticipated hard times ahead. I have been unable yet to present a Budget for the year just started as I am trying to identify the red, amber and green areas of our spending plans where red is an essential which must be paid and green will be the hand-outs. Our red area is already committed to an increase as you will hear shortly.

I fear that many of the Clubs face the same problems; at the end of the season 06/07 almost half of our clubs posted a loss and a number had no current assets at all. It will almost certainly be worse for last season and belts I suspect are being tightened.

My last item under Finance is International Ticket Allocations. The County has just had its allocation cut by 15%; I know there are many Clubs who have had cuts while others have had an increase. This was raised - in detail - at last Sunday's RFU AGM and all Clubs are being given one month in which to appeal. If you're Club wishes to appeal please send me an e-mail and I will send you an appeal form.

Thank you Mr. President I would rather not take any complicated questions - we will be having the Annual Financial General Meeting on 17 November 2008.

The President declared the financial report as received.

Item Seven To elect the Officers

The President stated that, as shown on the Agenda, we have no-one nominated as Hon. Sec. We do not have a person confirmed at this stage, so I propose we re-elect Jed Stone and that the Management Committee confirm his replacement at the appropriate time. This was seconded by Peter Topham and was approved nem com.

There having been no other nominations for the other officers received by the due date, those named in Agenda Item 7 were duly elected.

The President said, thank you for supporting our chosen men. The officers of your Union have been serving you well and I know will continue to do so.

Before moving onto the next item on the Agenda, that of electing our Vice-Presidents, this President would like to say a few words.

In rugby terms a County President could hardly have wished for a better first year in office and Hampshire beating Leicestershire in the Final of the RFU Plate back in May was the highlight of my season. It was the first time in 43 years that Hampshire have reached a final yet alone won it! I cannot continue, therefore, without asking the man who made this possible to stand up and be properly applauded. John Byett, well done and well done too to your coaching team and players.

The County Under 20 Squad did nearly as well, reaching the semi-Finals of their National Cup Competition and once again enjoyed inspired leadership from management and coaches who got the very best out of their players.

During the course of my first year as President I have visited Alton, Andover, Basingstoke, Eastleigh, Ellingham & Ringwood, Gosport & Fareham, Havant, Jersey, New Milton, Overton, Petersfield, Portsmouth, Tottonians, and Winchester. I thank all those clubs for the warmth of their welcome (the free drinks) and the opportunity it gave me to meet players and officials and to appreciate how much more a part of the Community rugby clubs have become since my playing days.

In addition to League matches I have also had the pleasure of attending competition events at every level. One especially memorable occasion for me was to see the work done by players and staff at Basingstoke Rugby Club helping severely handicapped youngsters play wheelchair rugby and also to see Matt Harvey, Hampshire Schools Special Needs representative, and his colleagues running an inter-county tournament (again at Basingstoke) with even a team from Belfast taking part.

Hampshire Schools RFU have staged some outstanding Cup Finals at their different age groups and I congratulate them for the tremendous work they are doing for our schools. It was a particular pleasure for me to hear that their Chairman, Ian Kerr has recently been Awarded the OBE for his services to education – that could also have been for rugby and refereeing! Well done Ian. Ian is unable to be here tonight so it is my intention to pass on our congratulations to him by letter.

The Hampshire Youth Committee has also been highly active with youth and mini/midi competitions and tournaments. In March, I watched the Hampshire Colts Cup Final at Portsmouth between Havant and Gosport & Fareham and saw an outstanding 23-22 cliff hanger of a game, superbly managed by the referee and his officials and played to the very last drop of sweat (or should that be blood?).

At this point it is right to remind ourselves that none of these games would have been possible without our referees and officials and I congratulate and thank the Hampshire Rugby Union Referees' Society and their Chairman Simon Thomas for their quite outstanding service to our game.

Whether it is running a rugby club or a County Union, the task has become hugely more complex and demanding than ever it was some forty five years ago. It would be very difficult to assume the powers and responsibilities delegated to the County by the RFU, without having one or two paid officials; but it would be impossible to function at all without the countless band of volunteers who administer our game across Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands. This Union is regarded by many in the game as a model of good governance and wherever I have been in this past year I have seen clear evidence of that.

The game in Hampshire belongs to the volunteers, not the professionals, and the RFU would do well to remember that.

Professionalism has made it inevitable that it is the top end of the game which gets the media attention (especially if it is England celebrating defeat). Winning, increasing market share and commercial success are the golden goals. However, the Community Game is just that – a community game. The vast majority of those running and playing our game – the so called stakeholders (How I dislike that term; how inappropriate it is: *a stakeholder is a person who has a financial stake in a company*) – The vast majority of those running and playing our game are amateurs, unpaid volunteers for whom rugby is recreation, a family event, an escape and in which **fun** is **fundamental**. It probably is costing all of us increasing sums to sustain our involvement but our interest in the game is not financial. Our clubs and this Union are non-profit making organisations; and so it is for a good 97% of the game.

Of course it is fun and enjoyable to go and watch London Irish beat Harlequins, but unlike soccer, rugby should not be the continuation of tribal warfare by other means; nor is it about marketing, exponential growth, maximising sponsorship, a financial activity, etc. etc. – providing a sound financial base for the game has its place but we must keep things in proportion and safeguard the game's true heritage.

So let me conclude by returning to where I began, but this time perhaps with a coach's eye.

I spoke at the beginning about the success of our Senior XV and the U20's and what was interesting for me was how much better the individual players seemed to play in their county games compared with when they were performing in a league match for their club. I had the opportunity on several occasions to watch the two sides play and to ask the players and county coaches as to why they had done so well. Interestingly there was a common theme: "The coaches 'gave us the ball' – they listened to how we wanted to play, and train. They invited us to run the ball at every opportunity and we soon found ourselves playing without the fear of making mistakes. We quickly grew in self-belief and were soon running up big scores and enjoying the party".

My message this evening, therefore, is to the RFU "Don't take over the game from its rightful owners" and to the coaches "Give the ball back to the players".

Thank you for listening and hopefully see you all at our "125 celebrations" in January.

Item Eight To elect the Vice Presidents

Election of the Vice Presidents was proposed by John Mist (Trojans), seconded by Cliff Fairley (Petersfield). Those in favour were invited to vote. There were none against; there were no abstentions and the Vice Presidents were duly elected nem com.

Item Nine To elect the Management Committee

There having been no other nominations received by the due date, those named in Agenda Item 9 were duly elected nem com. The Management Committee will be appointing a new Rugby Director instead of a Chairman of Club Hampshire very shortly.

Item Ten To consider a Resolution

The Executive Director was invited by the President to make the proposal.

Mr. President I propose that the accounts for the financial year 1st July 2008 to the 30th June 2009 be subjected to an Accountants Report and that the requirement for a full professional audit is dispensed with. This is within the rules and regulations of the Union. It will save us a lot of money and produces basically the same result.

The Meeting is asked to vote in favour of the Resolution which requires only a majority vote:

"to disapply the provisions of the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1965-1978 and any subsequent Acts governing or otherwise affecting industrial and provident societies, relating to the obligation to appoint Auditors".

This was seconded by Peter Topham. The President invited all those in favour of the Resolution to vote. There were none against; there were no abstentions. The President declared the Resolution carried nem com.

Item Eleven To appoint the Reporting Accountants

We are more than happy with the service provided by Rothman Pantall & Co. Eastleigh and strongly recommend they are appointed Reporting Accountants for the financial year ending 30 June 2008.

The Appointment was proposed by Peter Topham and seconded by Dave Marsden. The President invited all those in favour of the Appointment to vote. There were none against; there were no abstentions and Rothman Pantall & Co were duly appointed nem com.

Item Twelve To hear any other matter for the consideration of the Management Committee during the ensuing year but on which no voting shall be allowed

The President invited anyone who wished to raise any matter from the floor time to state their case.

Paul Simpson from the Isle of Wight RFC made an appeal to the mainland clubs to visit them on a more regular basis and reasoned that this would help to keep the game of rugby alive for everyone. Paul currently has a thriving squad in terms of players and can therefore lend players to any visiting teams where necessary. Paul also added that win or lose, everyone is very welcome for both the rugby and their hospitality and promises a good time.

The President asked the Executive Director to reply and he responded by expressing his sadness that a mere expanse of water was the reason for stopping people playing rugby. He said we would do what we can to encourage Clubs over to the Island and informed the attendees that there is a small amount of financial assistance available for clubs going to the Isle of Wight for League and Merit Table Games.

There were no other matters for consideration.

The President expressed his thanks to the Trojans Club for hosting the AGM and declared the Annual General Meeting CLOSED at 2015.

The Draws for the Knock-Out Competitions were then made.