



Berkshire Rugby Union Referees Limited
(operating as Berkshire Society of RFU Referees/Berkshire Rugby Refs)
c/o Reading RFC, Holme Park, Sonning Lane, Reading, RG4 6ST

2022/23 Season AGM

Held at Reading RFC & via ZOOM, on Tuesday 17th May 2022

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Roger Naish, Mike Muston & Mike Curtin

2. Minutes of the 2020/21 AGM (& any matters arising)

The minutes were accepted by the membership as an accurate record of the meeting (proposed by David Levy, seconded by Kirk Perkins)

There were no matters arising.

3. Executive Officers' Reports

Summary Report from the Appointments Team (SB)

Re-appointments – Richard Flower

The appointments team would like to welcome Dave Elliott onto the team.

The appointments team set up a re-appointment email and a WhatsApp group to ease communication for clubs and the Society.

This season as per last season, the appointments team made a decision to only appoint to fixtures that have been entered into GMS. GMS then populates WTR.

We are still sending out a mail to our clubs and schools at the start off the week to inform them of the fixture we are aware of.

Again, as per the last season, the cancellation of fixtures on Saturdays in the Zoo League, BBO leagues and TVIL caused issues, along with Sunday match cancellations for Colts and Ladies matches.

This season we struggled for referees at the required levels to cover the fixtures mainly on Saturdays and Sundays, especially for matches graded at level 8 and above, mainly due to unavailability.

Thanks must go to Hampshire and London Premier to cover fixtures that we at Berkshire couldn't cover due to a lack of referees, mainly at levels 6 to 8 on Saturdays.

Without this help matches couldn't be played.

Finally, thank-you for all the support you have given to the Society and the Appointments team.

Your understanding and volunteering for matches at the last minute has been very much appreciated.

Exchanges – Richard Flower

My thanks go to all the Societies we exchanged with for being helpful and amenable with their appointments.

This includes East Mids, Eastern Counties, Hertfordshire, Somerset and Bristol for senior exchanges and Buckinghamshire for junior exchanges.

Hampshire and London Premier offered one-way exchanges when we were short.

With the help of these Counties, we were able to mitigate most issues in receiving quality games for our referees.

This hopefully will enable the Society to offer a better spread of fixtures for our referees.

Finally, thank-you for all the travelling that you have made, I hope you enjoyed the experience of refereeing different clubs.

Re-appointments – Robert Reilly

A slightly busier year, we had 118 requests for Referees this year, a 10 % increase on the previous season; of those 118, we were able to provide a Referee for 69 games (58%), of the remaining 49, 23 (19%) were cancelled for various reasons and we were short of Referees for the remaining 26 (22%).

I would like to say big thank you to all those Referees who made the effort to be available for midweek games I know it can be hard with all the other commitments people have during the week with Work etc, but please know that the all the schools and Reading Uni really appreciate your efforts.

So, once again, thank you.

Appointments Summary – Simon Bourne

The first season under the new RFU League structures, with 'false' promotions from last Season, was always bound to give some very one-sided leagues and a shorter League season, and so it proved. However, the Appointments were still able to cover just over 450 games, through our own resources, supported by those Counties, which Richard has already referred to.

Dave Elliott was brought in to assist Richard with the re-appointments and the introduction of an Appointments team WhatsApp group, has certainly helped with improved lines of communication.

There were a few weekends where the weather intervened but, overall, the League season ran smoothly. The Season ended with the new 'Papa Johns' Community competitions, which gave us some very short notice appointments. Unfortunately, there wasn't much joy for those of our Clubs that chose to participate, but we hope for more success next time.

As with last season, there were still some glitches with fixtures not arriving onto WTR from the GMS site but, in general, this was an improvement on last year.

My thanks as always to Richard and Robert, now ably assisted by Dave. Also, thanks to David Levy for his guidance and input with appointments of the Advisers and Referee Coaches.

As always, thank-you all for your support and I hope you enjoy the off-season.

Simon Bourne
BSRFUR Appointments Director

(There were no questions raised by members)

Membership & Recruitment Lead's Report (RC)

This report brings together Membership, CRefC development work, RFU Training within Berkshire, and Society Safeguarding.

This season has seen a lot of interest in refereeing from all quarters of the game, including Age Grade from Schools and Clubs, parents supporting Age Grade children and from ex- players. These have predominantly come through the RFU's 'Introduction to Refereeing' course, though some have been so inspired that they have progressed onto the RFU's 'English Rugby Refereeing Award' and have then chosen to join the Society.

The CRefC side of things has benefited greatly from these courses and the clubs are, for the most part, able to meet their 'internal' needs from the numbers coming through. We're confident that all of our clubs are looking after the club refs and ensuring that they get the necessary feedback on their performance after the game. Match Official Abuse continues to be an issue, but the majority of the clubs are actively addressing any instances that arise in a positive fashion. We have had several catch-ups and the CRefC WhatsApp group is used regularly by CRefCs to 'share' club refs when a club has a shortfall. However, out of county teams frequently apply pressure to ensure that

an independent or Society referee is assigned to their games, so there is still a need for clubs to help populate that pipeline of new Society refs. I'd like to thank all the CRefCs for their continued support, however, the work that Colin Stonehouse is doing in Reading, along with Alan Davies in Windsor and Billy McLean in Maidenhead, supports the whole group.

I've recently taken-on the Society Safeguarding Officer role, and have completed the necessary training and I'm now looking forward to working with the clubs in this space. The renewal of many members' DBSs is coming up – so please check yours and let Dan White or me, know if yours needs renewing.

Pre-season training will commence on the first Thursday in June (June 1st, during half-term) and we'd like to encourage all members to take advantage of this excellent opportunity to keep fit and socialise with the other refs during the off-season.

Russ Clark

Q – *Crispin Davis* – *Has there been any revision to the fitness criteria for the 2023/24 season?*

- *NC – no - (we can recirculate the details as previously distributed to all members, in July'22 – also replicated here:*

Recently, the RFU issued some guidance regarding fitness testing targets (Bronco & Yo-Yo) for referees across all levels of the game - unfortunately, as seems often to be the case, they don't appear to have consulted with any refereeing bodies before settling on their targets, so are somewhat out of kilter with the wider population of Referees Societies across the Community Game (L6+). However, as a result of their communication, we have made some alterations to how we will apply our own targets, going forward.

We will now work with three concurrent criteria:

- 1. Referees with aspirations to advance to higher levels, beyond Berkshire** (ie. to Southern Federation and higher up the MO Development Pathway), should be targeting the RFU's Professional Game MO Team (PGMOT) target of a Bronco score of 5:15 or below (equivalent to a Yo-Yo score of 18.1+), which is applicable to all grades above L6.
- 2. Our own guidance for referees within Berkshire**, based on several seasons' experience of (and feedback from) the clubs and teams we cover, of what is a reasonable level of fitness test achievement:

- a. L6: Yo-Yo score of 15.5 or above
- b. L7: Yo-Yo score of 15.1 or above
- c. L8: Yo-Yo score of 14.3 or above

NB - whilst these levels are no longer a mandated requirement, achievement will help support a referee's grading and our assessment of their capability to cover certain fixtures. Any referee that does not meet the guidance target at a particular grade, should expect additional focus from MO Developers on their ability to "consistently keep up with play" at that level, and it may affect their future progression and appointment to certain fixtures.

- 3. The lowest level RFU 'baseline'** that we would expect all referees to try to meet/exceed - this is currently the equivalent of:

- a. Bronco score below 7 mins, up to L7 (6:15 for L6)
- b. Yo-Yo score of 12.1 or above, up to L7 (14.1 for L6)

(Different targets apply for ARs, at L5 and above, which are available should members want them.)

Therefore, we would continue to encourage all of you to take advantage of the funded fitness training on offer, every Thursday evening until the end of September, and also to post a fitness test score, as part of your preparation for the coming season.

Grading & Advisors Report (DL)

There have been a number of further challenges for all of us, over the last season, due to the continued impact of the pandemic and following the restructure of the Leagues. We also found a reduction of games for some teams, with the inability of some Clubs to field adult sides below 1st and 2nd team level. This unfortunately meant that fixtures were often cancelled at short notice. However, with the continued efforts of all concerned, we were able to appoint Match Observers to cover as many games at all levels as best we could.

Many thanks again to the Appointments Team, (Simon Bourne, Richard Flower, Dave Elliott & Rob Reilly), for their sterling work, and to the Grading Committee, (Simon, Richard and Peter Kruger) who make such valuable contributions in, helping us to identify the potential of referees.

The mid-season meeting in December 2022 enabled us to further evaluate and consolidate the progress of individual referees, enabling us to consider the grades of 39 active referees, following which we have at least two new members join us.

The end of season grading meeting will be held later this month, on a date to be fixed before the 28th May, and the results will be circulated immediately thereafter. We will consider reports for well over 33 active referees.

Thanks to the following MO Developers: Richard Flower, Mike Curtin, Nick Curtin, Peter Kruger & Chris Parker; as well as Crispin Davis and Russ Clark, who have been able to assist by fitting advising in, alongside their refereeing duties. We have also been blessed with the addition to our ranks of the returning Dave Marsh and other experienced MOs including Dave Watkins, Dan White and Donald Coppen, who offering their valuable help in watching and supporting referees.

I would also like to thank our senior coaches, Roger Naish and Mike Muston, for their support for both mature and new referees, in developing their skills and awareness.

We still need more coaches and advisors, to support the development of referees and to assist with mentoring them, so that our members may progress onto Federation and beyond if that is their wish, so I would invite anyone interested to contact me as soon as possible.

I would also like to report that, at last, our longstanding member Dean Richards of RFU Panel fame, and current TMO and RFU AP XVs MO Manager, has finally succumbed to pressure and kindly started his active coaching and mentoring role with the Society by providing a valuable Coaching report on Laura Lewis a couple of weeks ago. Thank you, Dean.

We have had the benefit of a number of new members joining the Society in the last few months including Laura, Dean Crossley (transferring over from Hampshire), George Batty, Arnaud Cottey, and Billy Bailey. Of course, any new members who have joined since January 2022 will be included in the forthcoming Grading exercise and will potentially swell our ranks to up to nearly 40 active referees!

Simon Long has made excellent progress with the Southern Federation squad at level 6, and the new Region 1 SW LMOT at level 5 and has already successfully completed several level 5 Matches. In addition, Jack Kingman has made good progress with the Federation, at level 7.

Sadly, on a more sombre note, we lost a wonderful coach and adviser with the passing of Steve Wood, earlier this season. Steve was an inspiration to us all, in his commitment and support for the

game, and all referees, and continued to participate for as long as he physically could, despite his illness. He is greatly missed.

David Levy
Hon Grading Chair

(There were no questions raised by members)

County Rep's Report (PL)

As County Representative, I act as a conduit between the CB and our Society. As part of that function, I report to the County on a monthly basis on refereeing matters, and vice versa where relevant. Here is a summary of my reports – mainly picking on the key efforts made by other committee members and which will be mentioned in others' reports (for which I take no credit).

It is worthy of note that, except for the addition of tackle height, all topics are the same as in prior year.

Referee Shortages

This was a regular topic obviously.

Simon will discuss the detail, but we really struggled on several weekend during the year and great thanks are due to the appointments team in solving issues.

There has been a great deal of recruitment activity, with ERRA courses at the beginning of the season and Introduction to Refereeing towards the end. The issue is how to make sure attendees pursue their refereeing careers (many are YMOs and were from out of county); that clubs generate referees for club games; and also encourage onward membership of the Society.

I have reiterated to club Chairmen this need – some clubs are very active but others less so. I have reminded them that they need to enrol candidates on the ERRA courses in October otherwise they lose the ability for a year. Almost all our clubs will fund the course for their members.

Of course, once qualified we need to be able to give referees experience, and lack of lower level games continues to be an issue.

Club Referee Coordinator (CRefC)

In order to make sure referees are trained and supported at club level, and to be a liaison to the Society and the wider referee network we strongly believe that clubs should have a named individual to be a CRefC. Such a role is similar to the Club Coaching coordinators that most clubs have. County encouragement has led to almost all clubs having such a role this year, with Russ taking a lead role in their coordination.

Discipline and abuse

I will not repeat Nick's report, suffice to say that I report to County on specific issues, particularly abuse.

Tackle Height

Your ExCom position on the revision to tackle height can be summarised as:

- Broadly supportive of reducing the tackle height (despite vocal objections of several Society members and many of our club Chairs)
- However – issues around definitions, sanctions and implementation timetable create large challenges.

Kirk and I attended one of the discussion forums.

Berkshire clubs unanimously voted against the change and instructed their RFU Council Rep to vote accordingly. Whilst they were broadly supportive of reducing tackle height (with more reservations) they very worried about implementation and its impact on players, and the refereeing challenge.

Despite this as you know Council voted for the change, and implementation materials have now been issued. I suspect there are going to be challenges as the new season starts.

Personal

I now have both children in Australia, and hence spend a large part of the season travelling. I think I can continue with my role but am happy to discuss any concerns.

Paul Lee

(There were no questions raised by members)

Treasurer's Report (KP)

(ref. unaudited accounts for 10mths to 30th April, as previously posted to website by KP)

Andy Green – apologies to KP, for not providing him with details of kit held in stock, for inclusion in his financial summary

- KP: minimal value, given size/quantity of items, so not material to the Society's overall financial position

Paul Lee – would like to commend KP on a good summary & report on the Society's finances

Report from the Chair (NC)

As both Simon & David have mentioned, this season saw the introduction of a revised league structure, and I would like to think that we have adapted well to it, despite the obvious challenges it presented – in fact, through the Southern Federation, we have helped establish a very effective and well managed SW Region 1 MOT, for which Simon (as the Appointments Lead for Berkshire, Southern Federation and now the SW MOT), must be recognised as a key contributor. There has been very positive feedback, both regionally and at a national level, on the positive and collaborative working that SW MOT has established and encouraged over the past year. It is also no coincidence that SW MOT was the only Region 1 MOT with 100% (BRONCO) fitness test compliance.

Simon Long continues to progress as a L5 referee and whilst it may mean that we see less of him in-county, it is good to know that he is proudly representing Berkshire Referees, across the South of England and beyond.

Having appointed to more than 400 games this season, special mention must go to Russ Clark & Dean Crossley, who each covered more than 30 Society appointments. Six new referees also took their first games for us, and I look forward to watching more of them, and other new faces, over the course of next season.

Russ & David have also mentioned the new referees we have welcomed this season – that is due, in no small part, to the fact that last season Berkshire put 115 candidates through 8 Introduction to Refereeing courses (second only to North Midlands, nationally), and I'd like to thank Russ, David, Dave Watkins and Laura Lewis, who have all joined me in completing the RFU Educator training, which allows us to either support or lead delivery of the RFU's refereeing courses in Berkshire. Russ has attended a number of ITR courses recently and we will be making sure that someone from Berkshire Refs attends the second day of the ERRAs being hosted locally, in the coming weeks.

Unfortunately, we have seen a significant increase in Red Cards/Sendings-Off: up from 21 last season, to 48 up to the end of April. Proportionately, the causes have not varied much, even if the volume has more than doubled; MOA has reduced, but is still an issue, and it is worth noting that – with the lowering of the tackle height effective from 1st July – the fact that more than a quarter

(27%) of our sendings-off were due to dangerous tackles, there is a lot of work for clubs & coaches to do over the summer, if we are to avoid a flurry of RCs in the autumn.

We are already speaking to the clubs, through the CRefC network, and will share more information with you, in due course, on plans to familiarise ourselves, and also work with them, to help coaches & players understand the new requirements before next season kicks off in earnest.

This will, no doubt, require time and effort on everyone's part, to get right – and so I thank you in advance for your patience and contribution as we work through it together.

And finally, I need to thank all of my colleagues across the Exec and Full Committee, for the untold hours & effort they have given up, in support of the Society, its members, and the wider game, in the past year. We are very lucky to have such dedicated volunteers (though, of course, more are always welcome!) and I am ever-grateful for their contribution.

Yours, as always, in refereeing

Nick Curtin

(There were no questions raised by members)

4. 2022/23 Season Awards

- Referee of the Year: Jack Kingman
- Member's Award: the recipient was not present at the AGM, so the Award will be presented to them in due course, and the details of the winner publicised subsequently.

5. Confirmation of Directors/Executive Officers for the 2022/23 Season

All of the current ExCom (inc. Russ Clark, who was co-opted to ExCom during the 2022/23 season) were re-nominated to continue in-role for the coming 2023/24 season.

Those nominations were as follows:

- **Chair:** Nick Curtin (Andrew Davis, Meg Mason)
- **Appointments:** Simon Bourne (Roger Naish, Dave Elliott)
- **Membership & Recruitment:** Russ Clark (Paul Lee, Laura Lewis)
- **Grading & Advisers:** David Levy (Chris Parker, Rhys Clark)
- **County Rep:** Paul Lee (Russ Clark, Charlie St.Aubyn)
- **Treasurer:** Kirk Perkins (Roger Naish, Andy Green)

6. AOB

Tackle Height DLV

Members were recommended to review the material already available on the RFU'S Tackle Height Hub (<https://www.englandrugby.com/participation/playing/tackle-height>)

Q – Andrew Davis – has any guidance been issued regarding sanctions?

- PL, AG – RFU guidance is available on the Tackle Height Hub

NC advised that ExCOM has already been considering how best to support our members & the clubs & schools we support (players, coaches & club refs), and we will – via WTR – look to collate details of when clubs would like us to assist them with pre-season preparations and also our referees' availability to do so.

Additionally, we will look at running training prior to the 'normal' pre-season members training meeting (on 3rd Tuesday of August), and those details will be circulated once agreed.

Q – Rhys Clark – what do we do if 5x RCs are issued, do we abandon the game?

- RFU Regs state the minimum number of players required to start an adult match (10), but no

minimum thereafter. However, we will seek to cover such eventualities as a part of the pre-season training being planned.

Social Event

Q – Geoff Barrington – following the recent survey of members' wishes, has any progress been made on organising a Society Social Event?

- KP – have been quite busy (both with work & AGM), but will look into options even though no suggestions have been received from members (Ascot Family Day not being viable this year, since it clashes with the Fat Blokes 7s)
- Andrew Davis – suggested Monday evening at Windsor Races as an option – KP to investigate

Recap on other members' survey outcomes:

- From the start of the 2023/24 season, training meetings will begin at 7:30pm (rather than 8pm), and food/refreshments will be served at the end (rather than between the 'training' and 'Admin/AOB' sections)
- The members' preference was for hot food (as trialled recently) rather than the buffet-style option

We will also be looking to run some sessions specifically focused on new/less experienced referees, as well as short sessions, prior to the 'main' members training meeting, for YMOs (as was done some seasons ago, by NC & Ritchie Denver, past STO)

There being no further 'formal' business, the AGM closed at 20:42
(Action: NC to write-up minutes and save to the website, for members' review)