

RFA GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT 2008-09

As I approach my second AGM as General Secretary of the RFA, I can look back on a fine 12 months. That said though, what is potentially the most momentous event is yet to happen and, as I write, it's tantalisingly close.

Having new courts at Rugby School is of huge symbolic importance to the RFA, and we are behind the scheme 100 per cent. The plan has always been for the courts to be up and running by September this year, and the campaign is now within touching distance of its goal. It's an indication of how keen the Association is to support the scheme, that it agreed to make a substantial donation to the appeal. How it would delight me if the lead story in our next Newsletter could be a report on the first games taking place on Rugby's new Rugby Fives courts...

At the same time, Ian Roberts is continuing with our application for charitable status, and we are very grateful for his efforts. This could have some important benefits for the Association, and we are currently waiting for a response from the Charity Commission as to the success of our application.

Sadly, since the last AGM, there has also been some less welcome news. For example, we received confirmation that the courts at Rutlish have been lost, and that the proposed work at Alleyn's has been put 'on hold' because of the economic situation. However, the saddest news was surely the death of Charlie Colquhoun, for so long a keen supporter of the game at Clifton. I trust you have all read the kind words by Alan Brown in the Newsletter, which sum up the man far more ably than I ever could.

Charlie may be gone, but we hope to ensure that his name will live on. With his wife's blessing, the RFA is looking to establish a schools' competition in the South West that will bear his name, and we hope it will be played for the first time next season.

Schools are of course crucial to the future of our game, so I am delighted to see that several have recently recruited active Fives players: as well as many established masters, we now have the likes of Ed Brooke at Radley and Ed Hatton at Christ's Hospital, while from this September, RFA board member Alex Smith will take up a position at Eastbourne College. It's also great to see Fives being actively played again at Sutton Valence, while Dulwich College has found a very able and keen successor to Ed Hatton, who restarted the game there before moving on.

We have also been able to promote the game in some rather more unlikely places such as Poland, where an Old Cliftonian is now teaching. After getting in touch with us to discuss his plans to start the game on squash courts in Gliwice, he requested some help, and we have been only too happy to oblige, covering the cost of eight pairs of gloves to introduce the game over there.

We also have plans to stage a demonstration game on a recently rediscovered court in East Preston in Sussex. Although some more senior members were aware of the existence of a court in the village, a careless bit of googling brought it to the attention of a slightly younger board member, who immediately emailed the parish council; and, to cut a long story short, we have been invited to stage a match on the court on their behalf. With luck, we will encourage them to make the investment to repair the court and encourage the game in the village.

Looking to the future, we have also co-opted two new young members to the board in the last 12 months. Both

are already tournament organisers, as well as regular competitors and active elsewhere in the game: Tom Maconie is the Jesters' Rugby Fives representative, while Adrian Lee is the England 1-Wall Fives captain. Their experience and knowledge will be crucial in helping to take the game forward.

Further good news is that we are seeing a very talented crop of youngsters emerging in the adult game. As Dave Hebden has pointed out, for the first time in the near twenty years that he has compiled the RFA's rankings, three of the top four singles players are only in their twenties. Back this up with the strong showing from several schools in both the National and West of England Schools' Championships, and it's clear that there should be no shortage of young players entering the adult game in the future.

Our challenge is to maintain contact with these players after school, and we are trying to do just that. As well as our website, which remains our main online outlet, we have just set up a group on social networking website Facebook. The two will work in tandem and allow us to maintain contact with more players. On top of this, the RFA has also established a sub-committee under Ed Fuller specifically to safeguard the future of the game.

We also hope to improve the RFA website by working with the Fives Federation. Plans are at an early stage, but we hope to have one online 'portal' for Fives, to which players of all codes will have access, and which will guide them to the information they want, whether it be on Rugby, Eton, Winchester or 1-Wall Fives. It may sound complicated, but if you look at the Annual Review and Newsletter, where all versions of Fives sit side-by-side, you can imagine how this will work online.

This is just one example of how we work with the Federation, and perhaps our most important recent topic of discussion has been medical cover. We are aware of our obligations as tournament organisers, and the RFA has set up a sub-committee, led by Frank Akerman, to look into the issues. After consultation with our friends at the Federation, we will draw up recommendations to be placed in the forthcoming Pocket Book and displayed at courts (following the example of the Eton Fives Association). We will also be making further recommendations to our tournament organisers to confirm what we expect of them. None of this, I hasten to add, will be too onerous – indeed, most are already more than meeting our expectations – but it's a further example of how seriously we take our obligations.

Last, but very definitely not least, while I think of tournament organisers, I must thank all the many and various people who so selflessly give of their time to further our beloved game: the organisers who smoothly run such successful events and send me reports so quickly for the website; all those who contribute words and pictures to all our various printed and online publications; all our match managers and, well, everyone. We – and every player of the game – are profoundly grateful.

Andy Pringle