



Annual General Meeting of the Rugby Fives Association 22nd September 2022 Report of the General Secretary

I took over as General Secretary in the middle of the season, formally at the Board Meeting of 24th February, and I would like to start by paying tribute to Phil Atkinson for his seven years of service as RFA General Secretary, and to thank him for his handover and for the assistance he has provided me with as I have settled into the role.

Our President, David Parlby, is also stepping down from the Board at the end of his term, having also served as Treasurer and Deputy President. Out thanks also go to him for all his work, notably on the Strategic Plan.

The past season has been one of returning to normality after Covid, which has allowed the regular tournaments and club matches to be played. Inevitably the epidemic has pushed back some of our strategic goals. Despite the current good financial position of the RFA, we do not have adequate funds to consider building new facilities, so in the short term we need to focus on the projects falling within the 'Sustain' and 'Nurture' sections of our Strategic Plan, and use these to provide evidence which would allow those with funding to agree to support our long-term goals in the Strategy document.

Overall membership has stayed more or less static with 415 members of whom 21 were under 18 as of the end of August. A concerted campaign has started to promote the RFA to school pupils and to ensure that school leavers are kept in contact with Fives through Twitter, Instagram and the RFA website to try to reduce numbers who simply stop playing after leaving school. We acquired a stand, flags and a banner advertising the RFA for use at events as appropriate. Letters about the RFA were sent out to all masters in charge with a request that this was passed on to their leavers. This is clearly important to the long-term future of the RFA, as currently very nearly half of our membership is over 45 years old. Similarly, we are trying to provide increasing competitions for women player, for mixed doubles, and additional 'Challenger' Tournaments for players outside the 16 top ranked players. The coming season has 3, scheduled in December, March and May, and one was recently held on day two of the SE Championships.

Another important part of the work to sustain the game has been the design and production of a ball specifically designed to be used in Squash courts, thanks to the persistence of Stuart Kirby. This ball is non-marking and provides a bounce similar to a Fives ball in a Fives court. It is to be hoped that this

ball will allow Fives to be increasingly played at squash clubs in parts of the country where Fives courts are not available, and significantly expand the opportunities to play the game.

The re-opening of the six courts at Stoke Newington, to which the RFA made a substantial contribution, marks a significant moment in promoting the sport for inner city areas. The priority at SN over the next few months will be to set up the community club which will use these courts in the evenings. The hope is that by demonstrating that we can make this work, we will establish a model which we can use to seek external support or sponsorship for facilities to be created in similar venues.

The other area of concern within 'Sustain' is existing courts under threat, and in particular those at Clifton currently seem destined to be swallowed up in a redevelopment of the Bristol Zoo site. The Fives Courts, the gym above them, and the music school to which they are attached actually sit in the street block occupied by the Zoo. The RFA is in active discussion with the West of England Club to try to determine the ownership and possible outcomes for this Site.

In the medium term, most Fives clubs based on School courts are going to have to pay for their use, as it seems inevitable that this is the only way to persuade schools to keep courts where little Fives is played by their pupils. Thought will be given over the next few months as to a model which could work, bearing in mind that 'a one size fits all' solution won't. However, all clubs will need to start thinking about how much they could charge players per session, month or season in order to be able to sustain the game. Other ideas currently under consideration for assisting schools to keep Fives going are helping with coaching, and part sponsorship of sports graduates able to teach Fives.

With regret we report the passing of one of our former Presidents, Geoff Sherratt, after a long illness. His contribution to Fives notably at the Y Club, and to the RFA have been documented in a tribute from David Hebden. Also departed are Tony Tiffin, captain of Fives at Cambridge 1958 and master i/c Fives at Whitgift, Denstone and Rugby, and Tim Wilson -- Old Whitgiftian, loyal participant in and supporter of the Cambridge Past versus Present.

Chris Blakeley

General Secretary

August 2022