



**The Rugby Fives Association**  
**99<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting**  
**Thursday 18th September 2025**  
**General Secretary's Report**

As seems to be the norm for Fives these days, the 2024-2025 season has thrown up several positives, offset by some negatives. First the, good news.

The redesigned Fives gloves made for us by Killshot are now available through their website at a price that competes well with the standard Pilling gloves sold through Gloves and Balls. The reception for these gloves has been positive, and we shall see over the next year whether their durability compares well (hopefully a lot better) than what we had. Similarly, after a crisis over balls 18 months ago, we have identified a new manufacturer in Spain from whom we have now bought 100 balls to be tested as widely as possible. This is a professional ball manufacturer (mainly for Pelota) who seems well able to reproduce the standard ball, and successfully tweak the manufacture to adjust for bounce and speed. While we would always like a home-based ball maker, Howard Wiseman, who has made balls for us as a sideline to his main business for around 20 years is looking to hand over this cottage industry to someone else and discussions are taking place to try to put a fair value on that business.

There has been progress at some schools, with Radley, Bloxham and Mount Kelly entering players in the National Schools for the first time for several years. Bloxham courts have recently had new roofs, and Mount Kelly are, with help from the RFA, renovating a second court which had been used for storage. Thanks to the efforts of Alex Driver, a former Giggleswick student now living nearby, Fives has restarted there, and the RFA has offered funds for some upgrades. St Paul's did not carry through their idea of turning two of their courts into bouldering facilities. A group of old Bedfordians led by Peter Mellor are paying for the renovation of their courts (again with help from the RFA), and 5 of the 6 courts at Stoke Newington are being extensively upgraded (new floors, repainted walls etc) thanks to money from the RFA and contributions from individual members. Richard Guthrie has plans to build two courts at a sports club in Scarborough, and the highlight of the year was the opening of the new courts at Winchester, which must rate as near to perfect as can be imagined currently.

Inevitably, there have been setbacks. The Manchester courts were flooded early in the year and are still out of commission, forcing the NW Open to be played in Derby. The condition of the Whitgift

courts had deteriorated over the last couple of years due to the poor design and construction of the roofs, replaced a few years ago, with water cascading down the front wall of a couple of them. Following a surveyors report the OWs were asked to use only the back courts and eventually the school pushed them out of even those. The two least affected of the courts are currently being used, rather bizarrely, as temporary changing facilities. The school showed no willingness to discuss the survey, or the estimated costs for repairing the courts, and there seems to be absolutely no interest in the school for restarting Fives at any level. The financial situation within the Whitgift Trust is apparently shaky, and they have other priorities. The situation at UCS seem similarly bleak. The one currently useable court will be demolished in 2027 to make room for development of additional academic facilities at the school, and although there is room on their sports fields, and despite several different proposals being suggested (including combining forces with Alleyn's who have acquired two north London schools, and the RFA leasing land to build courts) it seems somewhat unlikely that new Fives courts will be built. Less serious but still worrying is that Tonbridge are again without a Fives MiC, and looking for coaching help.

Another disappointment has been the lack of progress on Squash Fives, mainly due to the very poor service that we have had from Price's of Bath. Despite Peter Grant and the Gen Sec making a personal trip to their HQ, they have still not produced the next model. The time has probably come to work with another manufacturer. Finally, the plan to work with St Mary's University, Twickenham to try to develop Fives coaches failed to materialise, due mainly to lack of support from the academic staff. The Gen Sec is now trying the same concept with Roehampton University in the hope that they will be more enthusiastic.

Membership has remained stable at just under 500, but another push is required. Efforts to make Fives more social and appealing so that younger players stay in the game are continuing, as outlined by our President, Andy Passey, in his introduction to this year's Annual Review. But unless and until we can somehow break out from Fives being just a school-based sport we are going to continue to struggle.

Finally, it would be wrong not to mention David Barnes, who has decided to retire from the role of Honorary Archivist, a role which he has occupied with distinction (with help from David Hebden) for 20 (?) years. His breadth and depth of knowledge about the game is without parallel, and his final task, which he is currently actively engaged in, is ensuring that everything in the physical archive (which is destined for the Gen Sec's attic room) is copied and sorted into electronic files so the next archivist doesn't have to sort through them. A volunteer is still needed to fill this post.

**Chris Blakeley September 2025**