



President's Newsletter

July 2022

Chaos at Dover, last minute flight cancellations, rampant inflation, petrol nearly two quid a litre, 40°C temperatures, two year NHS waiting lists: you may well think everything's gone to pot. But no, there is a glimmer of light: Rugby Fives is in good shape. Let me tell you what's been going at the RFA since my last newsletter in March.

Strategy update

At its June meeting the Board reviewed progress with our strategy as set out below in the strategy update slide. Hopefully all our readers are now familiar with our strategy but just in case you are not please check it out on our website [here](#).

1. Membership

One challenge the RFA has always faced is the extent to which it can offer concrete benefits to its members, over and above the obvious one of helping to keep the game going. We have two possible audiences for membership – those who play and have played the game, and those that have not yet come across it.

Recognising that Fives is not widely known and indeed is frequently confused with certain other sports, the RFA has been working with Peter Mellor to develop a short description of the game, its values and its benefits to players and organisations who possess Fives courts. Designed to be sent to anyone

RFA Strategy Update

Issue Five: 21st June 2022

OVERALL STATUS

Last Board Meeting

- Ranking system resource
- Reasons to join the RFA
- Values and qualities of fives

This Board Meeting

- Clifton courts
- Players paying for fives

Issues/Challenges and discussion items

- Set up of Stoke Newington community club
- Resource for website
- Resource to roll out Squash fives

Workstream	Key Activities
1 Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Dunstans' help with membership drive • Values document finalised
2 Reduce dropout rate after school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MIC webinar held in March • Renewed energy on social media through Lewis Keates
3 Protect existing courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaison with West of England re Clifton Courts
4 Encourage new players to the game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stoke Newington publicity day
5 Effective Fundraising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club KO Dinner held • Guardian and Telegraph articles published

new to the game, we have already found this useful in briefing journalists and new appointees at Fives playing schools, as set out in the Appendix to this Newsletter.

Taking this a step further we have developed some thoughts as to why past players might wish to renew their interest in the game, with a view to rejoining and/or to make charitable donations to the RFA. All these pointers in favour of Fives will be set out in a glossy brochure which will be sent to all our members for onward distribution to their friends and colleagues, be made available for spectators at tournaments and be sent to potential sponsors and donors.

On the topic of spectators we had over 200 people attend the National Schools Championships in March, which could be something of a record. As an early initiative in his tenure, Chris Blakeley our relatively new general Secretary, had obtained a number of promotional items which at least made people aware of the fact that Fives was taking place, not something that has always been the case!



Concerning concrete membership benefits, a very practical step has been to make a series of coaching videos to support the [Activator Coaching programme](#) developed by Wayne Enstone earlier this year. Stuart Kirby is leading the charge on the video production of “How to Play Fives” and is always on the lookout for players to be videoed playing different types of shots. So if you consider your cross court drop shot from the back of the court to be in a class of its own please let him know at stuart.kirby@rugbyfives.com and it could be preserved for posterity 😊 The videos will be released for viewing over the next few months and will be of great help for coaches and players in improving various aspects of their game.

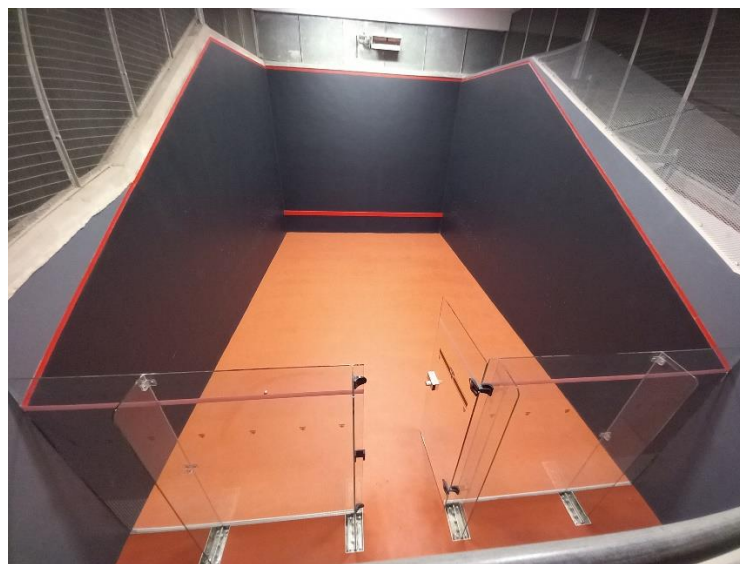
2. Reducing dropout rate

Chris Blakeley has been working with Bob Dolby to establish where Fives playing school leavers are intending to move on to after school. Chris is contacting all of them to let them know where they can play Fives at university or college and put them in touch with the relevant organisers. Additionally, David Butler and Hamish Buchanan are putting the finishing touches to the arrangements for the Festival of Fives for school leavers and university players to be held at Alleyns School on 20 and 21 August. Further details about the Festival can be found [here](#) – do please try to get along and see a lot of good Fives played by our future champions.

Recognising the importance of social media to the majority of active players, the Board gratefully and immediately accepted Lewis Keates’ offer to put some more resource and effort into co-ordinating our social media traffic on [Instagram](#), Facebook and Twitter. Already we are picking up good feedback from members as to the improved look and feel of our social media content and I hope that this will go far in ensuring the engagement of future long-playing Fives players.

3. Protect existing courts

I’m delighted to inform you that work to convert an old squash court into a new Fives court has now been completed at Christ’s Hospital. Hugo Middlemas, Director of Development and Bart Callaghan, Master in charge of Fives were the driving force behind the initiative. They led a very successful fundraising campaign targeted at Christ’s Hospital alumni, which was directly supported by the RFA. The grand opening will take place later this year for what looks to be an extremely smart court.



The RFA has also been busy working with Lionel Lawson and Kevin Brice at the West of England Club to try and secure and bring back into play more courts at Clifton College. It's very early days yet with a long haul ahead but this is a most important initiative given Bristol's previous eminence in terms of court provision and the Club's recent successes in the Wood Cup National Club Knockout.

In March the second webinar was held for club secretaries and Masters In Charge of Fives which was very helpful for us in terms of getting direct feedback as to what more the RFA can do for clubs and schools. Specific actions which we're taking on board include:

- Doing more to encourage people to sign up to the Activator programme
- Exploring the running of more "novice" tournaments in conjunction with existing ones to give newcomers to the game more opportunity to experience tournament play
- Looking into the running of challenger tournaments for schools
- Highlighting vacant teaching posts in Fives playing schools
- Setting out a simple one pager explaining insurance issues to do with the coaching of Fives players

4. New players

After a huge amount of work by Tom Maconie and Hamish Buchanan and a substantial grant from the RFA, Fives restarted at Stoke Newington School in March with coaching sessions led by Howard Wiseman. The joy of the occasion was perfectly expressed by Howard as follows:

Today was one of those days that any Fives Coach would dream of. Although the six Stoke Newington courts were in tremendous use in their derelict state during the 90s, and early 2000's, the game disappeared the moment that they were renovated and given a roof and doors. Building materials were stored in there temporarily, but that ran into years and the large, strong team that the school had at the time all left before there was any chance of having the courts back for their intended use. The success of the Fives had attracted a large grant that then, ironically, had put the Fives program out of business!

Many years later, this terrible "wrong" has been put right! The six standard Rugby Fives courts burst back to life today. The bell rang for lunch, and within minutes every court had been invaded by young pupils who had spotted open doors on a building that to them, had no previous identity.

Laughter, screaming and the cracking of the Fives ball on the courts, had all returned in a moment! It was fantastic organised chaos! The lunch session was followed by a double games lesson for year nine. Games lessons are fraught with problems as many pupils' collective mission in this context is to cause mischief! In fact, the game won through with most courts becoming quite focused and competitive with "king of the court".

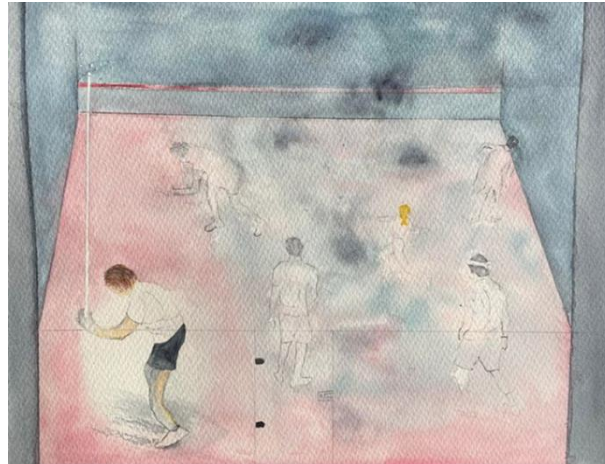
After-school club had been billed as the "team" practice, and whilst none were expected on day one, coaches Raheem and Howard were thrilled to see several year 7's turn up from the lunchtime session, and four years 8's who had done their homework, and signed up specifically. They were all terrific; attentive, eager and talented! Rose was the only girl in attendance, but was one of the most successful in the session ... certain apparently that she could bring a lot of her sporty friends with her next time.

So.... A magical start. Supportive and welcoming staff all keen to have a go and wonderful children. It is just wonderful to be back!

Recognising the huge significance of a school such as Stoke Newington (not private, not in a leafy suburb, not imbued with large endowments) the RFA organised a press launch event in June involving several journalists. This led to articles about Fives being published in the [Daily Telegraph](#), the [Hackney Gazette](#) and the [Guardian](#). We continue to work with Sally Jones a leading sports journalist who was instrumental in helping us with the press launch.

5. Fundraising

The RFA Dinner held at the Queens Club in April was both very enjoyable and successful with well over £2,000 raised by the Silent Auction. A description of the event with accompanying photos can be found on the RFA website [here](#). Particular congratulations go to Peter Mellor who secured the winning bid for his own painting “Fives”!



This will be my last Newsletter as I will be stepping down as President in September. It's been a very full, interesting and enjoyable couple of years and I look forward to the RFA continuing to make good progress under Julie McIntyre's leadership.

Best wishes to you all 😊

David Parlby
RFA President

APPENDIX

This is Rugby Fives

The sport of Fives has a long history in the UK, born out of church walls now centred in schools, universities and a variety of sports clubs. Its governing body, the Rugby Fives Association (RFA), has carefully nurtured, sustained and managed its assets, values and position in the sporting world since 1927. Today the RFA is a charity with over 400 paying members providing a strong foundation for the future. Additionally, there are some 40 playing venues available across the UK

To describe Fives as a simple handball sport played in a covered court with four walls using a hard ball and gloved hands is to belie its unique qualities.

Fives is noted for an environment of fair play, where no referee is required, and where winning is more of a value than a sum of money. It is a sport without complicated rules, easy to pick up and play, with competitive matches enjoyed between novices and experts alike. It is inexpensive to play, requiring only a court, gloves and a ball. There are National Competitions for all sectors to encourage a winning environment.

An advantage of Fives is that it can be played quickly, easily and safely with little or no supervision and without the need to bring together whole teams of players and support. At all levels, Fives can be fast and exciting. Uniquely played with both hands, it encourages a good level of fitness, balance and hand-eye coordination. It is an important observation that the use of two hands with no racquet promotes self-reliance and confidence – essential ingredients in youth education.

Played in covered courts, Fives is available around the year and around the clock. Those responsible for youth education - Schools, Parents and other educational bodies increasingly view the sport, not just for its own values but also for sustaining off-season needs. Importantly too, the typical major sport may not suit the needs of all. Fives clearly has a useful role to play.

It can be played as Singles (one on one), or as Doubles (two pairs). These modes of play are sufficiently different in terms of skills and styles that they enlarge the scope and enjoyment of the game within the single environment. Together with viewing platforms, this provides for an attractive social atmosphere.

Whilst Fives is undoubtedly competitive, its winning qualities are evident across a wide range of capabilities - strategy, quality of play and physical ability - making Fives very open to all-comers and to all sections of society, especially the young and those just starting out to play some form of sport. In this way, Fives can be described as a “gateway sport” - a real benefit not only to those who wish to enjoy playing over the long term but also to those who wish to use the sport as a baseline entry to other sports.

These values and qualities create an excellent all-round sport for any young person, from all backgrounds and cultures, from the sport-enthusiast to the sport-shy. The RFA believes that Fives, through the different playing environments of stand-alone courts, clubs, sport centres, schools and universities, can help to build strong communities - a vital component of social mobility. The RFA, as a sport charity, is committed to this future.