

**THE RUGBY FIVES ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 23rd SEPTEMBER 2021**

General Secretary's Report

I very much hope that my report this year is unique in that it will be only occasion when there is so little fives played to comment on during the year. Restrictions brought about by the pandemic meant that all competitions and matches between September and July were called off. A few clubs were able to resume weekly sessions in the autumn but these were ended by the reimposition of lockdown in December.

Nevertheless, the onset of summer and the subsequent easing of restrictions saw a marked determination to get back to playing wherever possible. The ever enthusiastic City of Durham Club led the way with a highly successful Challenger tournament in early July which attracted players of all abilities. This was followed by the South West tournament, the date of which was put back by one month following the untimely death of Tim Lewis, one of the games' most well-known players and entertainers. More recently, herculean efforts behind the scenes by Dave Butler, Hamish Buchanan and Alex Smith resulted in the National Schools' competitions for boys and girls taking place in Dulwich together with a backdated U18 Tournament for the previous 2019-20 academic year. The Derby Moor Invitation Doubles and the South East tournaments rounded off a busy summer which hopefully lifted spirits and encouraged fives players to look forward to a busy and enjoyable 2021-2.

Inevitably, some anticipated developments did not occur, notably the resumption of fives playing at Stoke Newington. There was, however, some good news regarding courts. At Christ's Hospital, a disused squash court is in the process of being converted into a fifth fives court whilst in Scotland, the renovation of the Roger Whait Fives Courts at Loretto was completed. With consultation and support from the RFA, the East Lothian school undertook the complete refurbishment of both the viewing area and the courts themselves – reflooring, replastering and painting the playing areas to create a thoroughly rejuvenated venue for fives.

On a smaller scale, the nineteenth century courts at Bedford School also benefited from some love and care, with additional high quality safety measures installed following a recent inspection: barriers around the viewing platforms and bannisters on the stairs (to go with the recent addition of storage cupboards); to be followed by new signage, noticeboards and a 'league table' whiteboard to encourage pupil competition. On a less cheerful note, fives playing at Bloxham came to an end at least in the short term with the demolition of their courts in favour of a performing arts centre

Off court, the new website (therfa.uk) was launched in January together with a new logo and slogan "Let's Play Fives". Recent website developments included the introduction of online entry into tournaments with several other enhancements planned in the course of the forthcoming season.

Two further series of informative and often amusing Fives Pods were broadcast covering a wide range of topics including player profiles, the history of fives balls, the Y Club and the Jesters' tour.

As part of the RFA's Sustain, Nurture and Grow strategy, 2021 saw the launch of the Patronage scheme, the Young RFA initiative and the start of a regular Presidents Newsletter. The Patronage scheme enables members (and non-members) to contribute more than the annual membership subscription in order to help fund the repair and refurbishment of courts and set up coaching programmes in schools, while the Young RFA scheme is designed to encourage younger players to socialise more easily and frequently with a view to staying in the game beyond school and university days. The Newsletter reflects the Board's recognition that we need to get better at informing members about the wide range of activities in which the RFA is engaged. None of this would be possible without the help of the many volunteers who raise money, repair courts, run tournaments, manage clubs and fixtures and look after the day to day admin of the charitable not-for-profit company that we are. Our thanks go out to all who help us.

Gareth Price completed his three year contract as the RFA's Development Officer in May and we are grateful for his hard work in initiating a number of projects such as the Young RFA and the (now delayed) relaunch of fives at Stoke Newington.

Apart from Tim Lewis, a number of deaths were reported during the past twelve months:-

- **John Whittenbury (Haberdashers' Aske's) – former RFA Committee member and Honorary Auditor**
- **John 'Jock' Evans (Bristol Grammar) - who drove the campaign for new courts at Rugby School in 2010**
- **Michael Haslam (Sedbergh) – an early proponent of the Winchester Fives Doubles Championship (Barnes Bridge)**
- **Clive Orpen (UCS) – secretary of the Old Gowers fives club for forty one years**
- **Ian Puckle (Hackney Downs) – ex Clove Club and President's Cup winner**
- **Paul Coker (Merchant Taylors') – a leading light in both OMT fives and cricket**

**Phil Atkinson
General Secretary
August 2021**