

Annual Report

A report on the activities of
Essex County RFU for the season
2022-2023

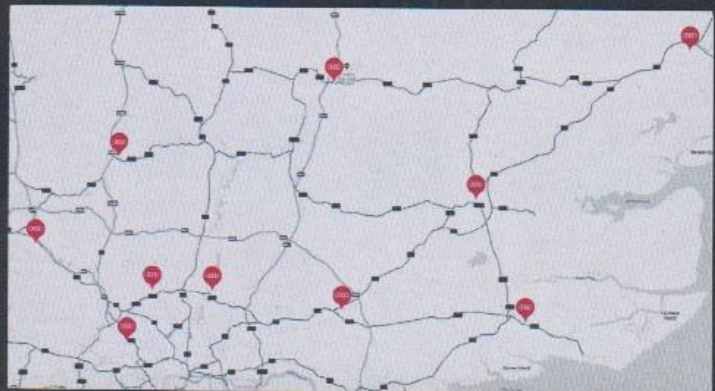
Essex County Rugby Football Union
Founded 1885 Re-formed 9th December 1954
Constituent Body of the RFU 13th July 2003



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Forward

Nick Bracken – President Essex County RFU

Firstly, can I thank you all for your support during my year as President and for electing me to be the County representative on the RFU Council. I consider both to be an honour and a privilege. I would also like to thank you all for what you do to help rugby in the County.

I have had the privilege of visiting many clubs throughout the County this year, and I have been amazed at the commitment of the hundreds of volunteers making our game possible. If we had to pay for a small fraction of the thousands of volunteering hours, all our clubs would be bankrupt!

It is for this reason, I particular enjoyed the honour of presenting the Honda valued volunteers of the year awards to the many nominees from many clubs at a reception held at Thurrock RFC in May, ahead our Men's and Ladies senior XV's playing County championship fixtures. It was a great occasion to see so many committed rugby people, and to thank them in person.

Whilst I have mentioned the fantastic volunteering within our clubs, I would also like to acknowledge the ample work undertaken by various people that operate the CB without whom the game wouldn't be possible. This includes activities ranging from volunteer recognition, discipline, tournament organisation, safeguarding & welfare, County representative sides and providing support to clubs in various ways. I would like to thank Alan Price, our immediate past president from whom I took over and I wish Keith Hill our President elect all the best for his upcoming year as President.

Our representative sides did us proud in all competitions and particular mention of congratulations goes to all involved in getting the U20's to the Regional final of the Jason Leonard Cup and to our Men's senior XV who made the County Championship final having won all three pool games.

Whilst it is always easy to talk about the positives, in signing off I feel I need to talk about some of the worrying changes the game is seeing post pandemic. We are seeing a serious reduction in the number of adult men playing rugby, with many 2nd & 3rd XV's folding. There is an erosion of the games cores values, this is evidenced by the significant increase in match official abuse and off-field disciplinary matters especially in youth games.

In order to address this and many other issues we are starting a process to redesign the CB. We want to make sure it is fit for purpose and best meets the needs of our member clubs, whilst delivering those activities mandated by the RFU.

For this to be successful we need the engagement and participation of all concerned and I would urge you to please give your full attention and input to the engagement process.

Thanking you for what you do.

Yours in Rugby

Nick Bracken OBE DL

Hon Secretary's Report Ivor Smith

In the Annual Report for 2003-4 Dai Davies the President of the day opened the report by saying:

"The past year has been a momentous season for Essex Rugby. Since achieving our long term aim of Constituent Body status last July, the County has made great strides. We have been faced with great challenges which have been met head on and, whilst on a steep learning curve, we can be proud of the progress that has been made, both with increased administration and our successes where it matters - on the playing field."



Figure 1 - July 3rd 2003

Now, after 20 years as a Constituent Body of the RFU the work of all our Volunteers in our clubs and as a Constituent Body management board, has been immense and valued.

This year the Honda Valued Volunteer of the year awards saw the County recognize just some of the outstanding work volunteers. Nominated by clubs, this season was no exception and it was pleasing to see most of the nominees attend the award presentations at Thurrock Rugby club prior to the County taking on Sussex Men and Ladies in the Gill Burns and Bill Beaumont County Championships.

Honda Motors Valued Volunteer of the year nominees.

Taking over from Mitsubishi, Honda Motors have taken up the mantle of supporting the RFU recognition and reward program for volunteers. Though the work of volunteers in our clubs is really appreciated the nominations for recognition this season were slightly down on previous years, however, the quality of volunteers nominated this year remained high.

The 2023 awards had three categories – Game for All, Unsung Hero, and Challenging Spirit – to recognise the outstanding contribution volunteers make to their rugby clubs and the wider community. Essex received nominations in the first two categories.

There were three nominees recognised in the Game for All category for work they do for their clubs. They were: Steve Wilcockson (Southend RFC); Ed Merry (Halstead Templers RFC); and Tahnika Talbot (Eton Manor RFC).

Nominated in the Unsung Hero category were: Alix Fitzgerald (East London RFC); Craig Nash and Tommi Gillingwater (both Canvey Island RFC); Brian Wren (Dagenham RFC); Neil Boggas (Harlow RFC); James Degiorgio (Maldon RFC); Peter Scott (Southend RFC); Matt Rumble (Stanford-le-Hope RFC); Jake Buxey (Clacton RFC); and Nicola Worthington, William Worthington, Robert Petrie, Rosie Isaacs, and Stewart Stevens (all Romford & Gidea Park RFC), and from the County, Marc Grange, Tim Ablethorpe, Kes Flitcroft, Scott Savill and Peter Mahoney, for the work they do for Essex County youth fixtures and competitions.

Essex Rugby was invited to send the names of three recipients to Honda and the RFU for them to select one to be the County finalist at the Honda Valued Volunteer of the Year Award national final. A difficult decision to make from the nominations but the three were: Tahnika Talbot; Steve Wilcockson; and Alix Fitzgerald.

The person selected by Honda and the RFU to represent Essex was Tahnika Talbot, who was praised for her passion and commitment towards creating a safe space for black rugby players at her club and for setting up support networks for those struggling with racism in their everyday lives. She received a bottle of champagne as well as an invite to attend the National Awards presentation event at Twickenham to be held in September.

Essex County President Nick Bracken OBE said: “This is the second year that Honda have partnered with England Rugby to run the Volunteer Recognition Programme. Players at our clubs may give their all on the pitch, but without volunteers doing what they do week in, week out, they wouldn’t be out there. From our coaches to our secretaries and administrators; our grounds’ teams to our fundraisers; our chefs to our first aiders; and so many more, I thank them all for making rugby happen.

Most importantly, the award nominees were put forward by their fellow club members, players, parents and supporters, who have seen the difference those people have made to rugby in the community and feel they deserve a ‘thank you’ for their hard work. I thank Honda for giving us this opportunity to show that our volunteers are recognised and valued. I wish Tahnika good luck in the national final.”

Finance

Chair Of Finance, Alan Brooking.

Honorary Secretary, Beiron Rees.

This report covers the period, 1st July 2022 to 30th June 2023

All figures quoted are fully inclusive of VAT.

I would like to confirm that during the period the County has met all its legal obligation as required by the FSA and HMRC in terms of VAT, Corporation Tax, Annual Accounts and FSA reporting.

At the start of FY22-23, the County had £118K, in the bank, and had planned income of £93.59K, with a planned expenditure of £118.24K.

The actual income for the period was £141.98K, the increase coming from sterling work done by Ivor, Andrea, and Fran in raising £29.55K of sponsorship and we also saw an increased in International ticket Sales.

The expenditure for the period was £136.87K, the increase was due the cost of international tickets, an increase of funding to support school festivals, an increase in funding for the Boys U17/18 section and funding for a Minis Festival that was not budgeted.

In terms of expenditure, 52.88% (72.38K) was spent on supporting rugby, 24.91% (£34.12K) on purchase of international tickets, and 22.18% (£30.16K) on managing the CB.

In terms of Club Grants 7 Clubs were given £10.41K of assistance covering, new sets of posts, boiler repairs and travel expenses.

At year end the County has cash assets of £124,387.76, with no known liabilities.

All in All, this has been a good year for the CB following the past 2 years of difficulties and huge thanks need to go to Laker Goodwin Jones, our accountants and Beiron Rees, our Treasurer who done a sterling job in maintaining the accounts.

I would like to also thank the Management Committee and the budget holders for their support throughout the year.

Please see below 3 charts that further clarify the FY22-23 Accounts.

Chart 1 – FY22-23 Income.

CB Income	£1,173.00
Discipline	£1,755.50
Finance	£5,131.44
Sponsorship	£29,550.00
	£37,609.94
International Tickets	£33,599.00
RFU Funding	£70,774.00
Total Income	£141,982.94

Chart 2 – FY22-23 What we Spent our money on.

Accountancy	£3,265.50	
CB General Admin costs	£1,664.46	
Club Grants	£11,914.76	
Printing	£821.20	
Taxes and VAT	£2,245.47	
Trophies	£4,780.92	
	£24,692.31	18.04%
Volunteer Awards	£2,084.80	
Volunteer Expenses	£3,644.45	

Volunteer Stash	£4,388.29	
	£10,117.54	7.39%
International Tickets	£34,124.00	24.93%
Education, Coaching Courses	£5,198.60	
Facility & Pitch Hire	£5,083.06	
Post Match Hospitality	£8,112.20	
Medical Cover & Supplies	£14,914.29	
Player Stash	£6,810.58	
Playing Kit	£18,618.02	
Referee Expenses	£945.30	
Rugby Equipment (Balls, Cones, Bibs, Bags)	£2,714.40	
Rugby Travelling and Coach Expenses	£4,248.35	
Rugby Video Analysis	£1,298.40	
	£67,943.20	49.64%
Total Expenses	£136,877.05	

Chart 3 – FY22-23 Spend by Department.

CB Administration	£6,101.35	
Club Development	£10,414.76	
Discipline	£1,011.68	
Finance	£5,510.97	
Safeguarding	£1,117.26	
Schools	£6,210.00	
	£30,366.02	22.18%
International Tickets	£34,124.33	24.93%
Competitions	£9,994.61	7.30%
RFU FY22 Targeted Funding Carried Forward	£0.00	
RFU Targeted Funding Adult men	£3,353.60	
RFU Targeted Funding W&G's	£1,298.40	
	£4,652.00	3.40%
Boys U17/U18 Player Development & Representative Rugby	£15,084.80	
Men's U20 Representative Rugby	£3,650.06	
Men's Senior Representative Rugby	£12,033.44	
	£30,768.30	22.48%
W&G's Development	£607.38	
Girls U12 Development	£250.00	
Girls U16 ERDPP Women and Girls	£12,020.65	
Girls U17/U18 CB Age Grade Pathway	£5,272.80	
Senior Women's Development & Representative Rugby	£8,820.96	
	£26,971.79	19.71%
Total Expenditure	£136,877.05	

Report from the Chair of Education sub committee
Michael Eyres (Essex Schools Union)

Section A CSU.

The Essex Schools union continued its progress of increasing participation in Rugby through its Competitions festivals structure. Though team numbers were slightly down at u16/u18 due to player release from educational establishments where headteachers/ principles were not allowing students out of timetabled lessons

There were seven festivals for boys in the ages U12 to U18, and due to the new age banding for girls there were three festivals

Boys	Girls
U12 festival : 34 teams 680 players.	U12 festival : 8 teams 120 players
U13 festival 1 : 20 teams 400 players.	
U13 festival 2 : 20 teams 400 players.	
U14 festival : 28 teams 480 players.	U14 festival : 9 teams 135 players
U15 festival : 24 teams 480 players.	
U16 festival : 16 teams 320 players.	U16 festival : 7 Teams 105 players
U18 festival : 10 teams 200 players	

- All 7s tournaments for boys and girls took place between 6th to 17th March (10 tournaments in total) 1700 players
- National schools 7s week was at the beginning 20th March.
- All knockout competitions were completed on time for both boys and girls and all finals were held by the end of March. Thanks are due to Barking RFU for hosting a great week and a first ever girls finals. These events attracted over 920 players.
- Coopers Coburn school and RGS reached the last 8 of their respective National competitions.
- In recognition of their girls development program Robert Clack u14 Girls have been chosen to represent the England Rugby Football Schools Union and Essex at a youth festival during the Rugby World Cup in France, truly a great honour.

ERFSU. Key Points

- There were six targets set for County Schools Unions focussing on rugby Development /Links and I am pleased to report that the Essex Schools Union do all of them.
- There are only six County Schools Unions in the country which are fully functional in activity and we do the most.
- This is done with no funding available for County Schools Unions from England Rugby Football Schools Union and this is a Key issue. We are therefore grateful for the financial support given to the Essex School Union by Essex County RFU which helps us to run the above festivals and help grow the game.
- We have grave concerns re playing up at u16 into u18 for girls this year and for the boys next year pending an ops meeting in December. We will offer festivals at u18 probably in a 10s format.
- Chris Sigworth RFU Education department visited the U12 festival and was impressed with the day.

CPD for teachers.

- A teachers course in September very successful thanks to Barking RFU for hosting and Matt Todd for organising.
- The next course will be in September 2023 re First contact/refereeing this will be run by Chris Sigworth of the RFU

Regional Activity.

- We have divided the County Union into five regions and there has been Increased activity in the Schools regions.
- Examples: Harlow schools-Harlow RFC, Redbridge Schools-Wanstead RFU, West Essex Schools- Woodford, NewHam Schools-East London, Thurrock Schools (Orsett Heath)- Thurrock RFU, Dagenham Schools- Dagenham RFU, Barking Schools-Barking RFU, Mid Essex Schools / Chelmsford RFU.

CONCERNS:

- As mentioned above a key issue is still funding as safeguarding/medical costs have doubled this season to a cost of £5824 (provision is for 14 age grade festivals/ 7 KO comps / 10 7s tournaments) our allocation from the CB is £3000 + £1500). In real terms we will need to reassess our programme.
- Staff cover and release from school/ reluctant headteachers to release students/ travel costs especially for state schools.

AWARDS:

- Both Will Castleman (Brentwood School) and Clare Bond (Robert Clack School) have been nominated by Essex CSU to receive ERFUSU Service Award which they will receive on 24th June. Clare becomes the first Female teacher in the country to receive an ERFUSU Award. Congratulations Clare.

Section B FE Colleges/University.

- Jack Daly has taken over from Danny Cleare as England Colleges Rugby Football Union representative.
- Colleges have progressed with their respective College cup competitions.
- Sadly Sigma, USP, Barking/Dagenham College / Writtle college unable to attend u18 festival due to Principals not releasing students from timetabled lessons.
- Hopefully they will attend the 7s in March at Barking RFU
- Universities are playing fixtures in their respective BUCS competitions.
- Links to Clubs is still on going and developing.

Mick Eyres

Chair of Education Essex CB

CSU committee member.

Honorary Life Member ERFUSU

Competitions:

Craig Morgan

This season has been fairly successful in relation to the completion of matches. Sadly both Rochford Hundred and Westcliff finished bottom of their National 2 East League and will therefore play in Regional 1 South East next season. On the bright side they are both in the same league to guarantee two really good local derby's, The move will also cut down some of the travelling distances with visits to the likes of Colchester, Shelford, Herford and Sudbury in that league

With Harlow and Dagenham both gaining promotion to Regional 2 Anglia they will be joining Brentwood, Eton Manor, Chelmsford, Thurrock, Woodford and Southend with Saffron Walden, Holt, Norwich and Stowmarket being the Eastern Counties clubs in this league.

The remaining clubs will form Counties 1 Essex with the others being split between Counties 2 North and South.

Group One Automotive Essex Merit Leagues.

The County is grateful to the sponsorship of Group One Automotive for its merit leagues this season. With an over 84% completion rate of matches played it is probably one of the best supported merit tables in the Country.

Following the completion of the league the teams played off in semi finals with the Winners playing off for the Cup and runners up taking part in the plate competition. This season the finals were successfully hosted at Bancroft RFC.

Group 1 Automotive Essex Merit league Finals Day:

Div 6 Plate	Pegasus II
Div 6 Cup	Wanstead III
Div 5 Plate	Thurrock III
Div 5 Cup	Ilford Wanderers
Div 4 Plate	Eton Manor IV
Div 4 Cup	Dagenham II
Div 3 Plate	Southend III
Div 3 Cup	Kelvedon & Feering
Div 2 Plate	Wanstead II
Div 2 Cup	Burnham
Premier Plate	Woodford II
Premier Cup	Old Albanians II

Safeguarding

With all Essex clubs with Age Grade sections having had at least two deep dive audits we are well on top of the required 3% of clubs per season that should be audited as per RFU regulations.

The Safeguarding team of Jo, Len and Nicky have:

- Assisted clubs with specific and general safeguarding advice & GMS help.
- Put a pre season SG presentation in place for CSO's to deliver
- visited several clubs, on request, to deliver a pre season SG presentation.
- Had a successful CB CSO conference with over 80 attendees November 2021.
- Annual CB CSO conference for 2022 at Braintree RFC 1st October.
- All three of us attended RFU National SG conference
- Continue to promote best practice to help clubs be in the best place they can be from a SG perspective.
- Len and Jo are now part of the RFU Safeguarding Training team.

With Jo and Len standing down at the end of this season from their County Safeguarding Role, we are pleased to welcome Nicky Worthington of Romford and Gidea Park, who has been the Assistant Safeguarding Manger, to the full role. With the amount of work that is done with regards to safeguarding we appreciate that this is not just a one person role and Nicky will be looking for other club safeguarding officers to join her.

**Joanna Rasor BA (Hons) Dip CS, Cert Hum.
Essex CB Safeguarding Manager**

A big thankyou to Jo and Len for all their hard work across the County over a number of years.
Thank you.

Player Development

Saracens Essex DPP/PDG Update 2022/23 – Jamie Howard

What is Saracens DPP?

Saracens DPP is one of the England Rugby Developing Player Pathways (ER DPP). Broadly speaking, these are operated under license from the RFU by Premiership Rugby Clubs in England and cover the U14s to U16s age grades, school years 9 to 11.

It is a rugby talent development pathway which can see several young rugby players move into Premiership Rugby Academies at U17s/U18s.

Saracens DPP has various layers built into it which are introduced in the second half of the players' U15s/Year 10 season. Players who are displaying greater skill, work rate and/or ability levels will be moved to another smaller group with the aim of developing and expanding their rugby skills further.

In the players' U16s/Year 11 season we introduce Saracens PDG which is a further layer. Throughout the DPP journey in all age grades the aim is to develop players, extolling the benefits of Saracens Values – Work Rate, Honesty, Discipline, Humility.

Rugby is recognised as a late maturation sport and in recognition of this there is fluid movement of players between these groups. This three-year period is when many will go through growth spurts and will develop their rugby abilities at different rates. This fluid movement of players recognises this. Whilst we aim to have approximately 10% of the rugby playing population of the area in each age grade, this does fluctuate as players will develop at different rates and are nominated by their rugby clubs and schools when those coaches consider the players are displaying the right ability and skill levels to be part of a DPP.

During the journey, players may move through the pathway, school/club, DPP, and PDG in both directions, ensuring the most appropriate level for optimum development, with relevant feedback.

At the close of the U16 season, the DPP pathway will cease, with a small number moved into the Saracens U17 development group and the majority of players will be signposted to Essex Rugby for U17 County assessment/trials and U18 graded matches for London and South East selection along the aspirational development pathway.

Saracens license covers three counties, Essex, Hertfordshire and Kent. Of the three, Essex is the only County which has split territory, with South Essex coming under the Saracens DPP and North Essex under Northampton Saints DPP.

The players are only permitted to be with one ER DPP. For a player to be nominated for Saracens DPP they must fall into one of the following categories:

1. Be a registered member of a Rugby Club which falls into Saracens area;
2. Be registered at a school which falls into Saracens area;

3. Have their home address in Saracens area; Player Numbers and their Rugby Clubs
Please see the table below for Saracens DPP player numbers and the Rugby Clubs represented in the Pathway.

This represents a snapshot in time and details where Essex players were in the Pathway at the close of the 22/23 season.

U14 DPP	U15 DPP	U16 DPP	U16 PDG	U16 SPDG
153	131	94	38	8

Mid-Season Progress and Festivals

The U16s DPP for 2022/23 finished in January 2023, which allows these players time to focus on their GCSE studies, as per the RFU guidelines for this age grade. All players in the U14s & U15s DPP, Saracens U16s County PDG and Saracens PDG were invited to attend Festivals held over 20th, 21st & 22nd December 2022 respectively.

The U14s and U15s played at StoneX Stadium in intra County games of 10 aside and 12 a-side respectively. These Festivals differ from the training sessions held by Saracens DPP as they are games and not training sessions. The aim of such Festivals is to give as many players as possible an opportunity to play in game scenarios at the home of Saracens.

Overall, the players/parents/family and coaches in attendance enjoyed their experience and we were lucky enough to have all the games on all three days videoed, with recordings distributed to all players.

Whilst some were not able to attend due to injuries/illness/being on holiday we anticipate those players will have similar opportunities in the future. U15s DPP moved onto "Forwards" and "Backs" dedicated sessions with these being held at Brentwood School on Wednesday evenings. During the six-week period up to and including Wednesday 03 May 2023 there were three "Forwards" and three "Backs" training sessions.

From these approximately 50 players were invited to form the County PDG for this age grade and went on to play in inter Festivals against Essex & Hertfordshire on Sunday 14 & 21 May at Dartford Valley RFC, with a final round of inter games for this season being played at StoneX Stadium on Monday 29 May 2023.

Further details from these games will form the basis of another report. U16s County PDG games were held on 22 December 2022 at Harpenden Rugby Club. This saw all three counties, Essex, Herts & Kent play 15 a-side games against each other. Again, all were videoed, and recordings provided to all players. This saw some competitive rugby played by all three counties. The U16s County PDG finished in mid-March 2023. The U14s and U15s DPP and U15s County PDG block finished by end of May 2023.

The 22/23 season saw Essex as the most competitive it has been in these sets of fixtures, which is backed-up by a higher number of players retained for 23/24 season in the Saracens Development Group. Essex/Kent/Herts will undertake three U16 PDG training sessions in August 23, which will be followed by a three County PDG festival, following which an U15 Player Development group will be selected.

Coaching Resource

15 DPP Coaches, including Lead Jamie Howard and Saracens Henry Birch 3 Physios who attend in rotation. 8 PDG Coaches, including Lead Jamie Howard and Saracens Henry Birch and the expectation is to retain all coaches, with two additional coaches recruited for 23- 24 season.

Representatives from Essex in Saracens moving into 23-24 season Pre-season to commence 1/7/23

Senior Squad

Toby Knight

Senior Academy

Obinna Nkwocha – who has been released and has signed for Coventry

***Nathan Michelow who was selected for England U20s in the 2023 World Rugby**

Championships in South Africa

Barney Merrett

Junior Academy (U18 Academy League squad)

William Howard, Rohan Burke, Owen Gillett, Jack Marshall

Saracens Development Squad (U17)

Gabriel Registe, Lennie Saunders, James Bonner, Marlon Farouk, Thomas Langley, Tai Alleyne, Harry Courts, Finn Bannister.

Saracens Development Squad (U16)

Nathaniel Smith, Kaden Woolsink, Frank O'Donohue, Leo McCarthy

Summary:

Since September 2021:

- We have managed the best part of 500 Essex players.
- Delivered 10 festivals.
- 48 training sessions.
- 4 specific performance Centre sessions.
- 2 residentials – 3 day and 6 day [U16 and U15] – Essex had the highest take-up of any County.
- The players [at U15 as sample group], represent 50% of Essex Rugby Clubs. They also cover 25% of Essex Schools [excluding independent schools].
- We have supported 3x coaches on their Level 3 pathway including 3x coaches successfully completing the RFU Mentorship programme in April. Both full year/season programmes.
- We have Essex players represented at not only the Saracens Academy at every age grade but also in the England age grades.
- We continue to support the ongoing development of 9-12 coaches through our sessions and give them access to various CPD's.
- We will have 2x coaches on their Level 3 [ERACA] for the 2022/23 season and have already looked at how we can support them.
- We offer an environment for trainee physios and sport therapists to also learn and develop through on field involvement. 1 [as per September report] is now a regular at our training and festival sessions.
- We have continued to support our S&C coach with development and academy CPD's – delivered at residential as well.

UNDER 17S and UNDER 18S PROGRAM 22/23

Manager Ken Laybourne,
Essex EAP Program

This year the program has been successful. We managed to start the under 18s program and the under 17s program earlier than previous years picking up many players from the DPP.

The under 18s program went well but there was a bit of confusion this year with the process as it seemed to have changed from previous years and we were not notified. Hopefully this years program we will have all the information from the start. We had approximately 90 boys trailed for the under 18s inviting all the Essex colleges and schools with a maximum of two players from each we also invited the DPP from last year which was around 30 boys. Three of the boys went forward to London with two of them playing in the games.

The budget did run over this year for the programs partly because we did have more sessions than previous years which were required to mould the squad for the games. the booking of extra facilities and physio cover was required. The cost of food has increased

The kit situation was another reason the budget ran over the decision for the new kit going forward was decided after the 18s program had started the boys did need kit for the games therefore the old shorts and tops were purchased and then the new kit when it was available so technically the 18s did get two lots of kit. This year we also purchased a new playing kit as we had not changed that for at least 6 years .

In the under 17s we had around 100 boys trial reducing the squad to around 30 going into the games. We did manage to get them the new kit as the match program started later in the season and we started the selection and training program earlier which enabled us to put together a stronger squad than in previous years. The progress for next season is looking good.

Ken Laybourn
EAP U17/U18 manager

ESSEX County RFU U20 2022-2023

Once again our County U20's took part in the RFU U20 County Championship for the Jason Leonard Trophy.

Winning both our pool matches we were drawn against Hampshire in the regional final held at Ealing Trailfinders RFC having beaten both Hertfordshire (29 – 12) and Middlesex (0 – 50). Though playing some great Rugby we were beaten in the Regional playoff by Hampshire (17-42) at Eton Manor. Hampshire went on to beat Dorset and Wilts in the Semi final but lost to Durham U20's in the final.

In Summary the were some high points and lows that need work on if the County is to take part in the competition again next season.

Strengths:

Abiding by and working around the new RFU regulations. Not all CBs taking part did this to the letter of the regulation.

Continuation of pride in the county badge from the 21-22 campaign. The squad amply displayed this through their Squad unity from last season. We shall carry quite a few of the present squad through to next season.

Young players stepping up to the higher level. We had a number of 18 year olds in the Squad which is a good basis for developing the players and the squad for next season.

Work ons

Key stakeholder roles agreed and confirmed early

Early comms about the programme and key dates

Clubs buying into the programme, too many not informing players

Even better flow from U18s programme to 20s programme

Player successes

8 players selected for initial L&SE trial

3 players were then selected for L&SE u20s. Joe Siaw, Joe Brades, Ollie Jordan.

County support suggestions-

More social media and formal promotion of the programme. More interactions and importance of the programme from senior county officials. Manager role must be set up early

Have positive working relationships with level 5 club players and coaches to ensure best players are involved in the programme.

A big thank you to Ivor Smith for his support and for stepping in at the last minute as the team manager.

Alex Lee

Essex U20 Head Coach.

Essex Senior Men 2022 – 23

Essex County rugby season [2023] was marked by significant advancements, successful recruitment, and a fair competition level. This report highlights the team's campaign success, emphasizes the positive recruitment outcomes, and explores avenues for future growth, specifically focusing on teams from Colchester, Rochford, and Westcliff. Additionally, the report acknowledges the effectiveness of training, proposes a training schedule for the upcoming year, and acknowledges the appropriate competition level.

Essex County experienced a highly successful recruitment phase during the season, bolstering the squad with talented new players and experienced players that were not involved in the previous campaign. The recruitment efforts resulted in a strengthened squad with adequate cover in most positions, providing increased depth and diverse skill sets to the squad. The new additions seamlessly integrated into the existing squad, contributing significantly to the squad's success. This positive recruitment outcome bodes well for the future development and competitiveness of the squad. Alongside this the management team were able to transition some players from the U20's squad that will feature in future campaigns.

Looking ahead, it is important to identify further avenues for growth and competition. In particular, teams from Colchester, Rochford, and Westcliff present promising opportunities for enhanced standard of players now they are placed at the appropriate level for the tier Essex County rugby is placed (Tier 3). Engaging with these teams can help elevate the level of competition, providing valuable learning experiences for all players and promoting the sport in the local area.

The management, coaches and squad demonstrated the effectiveness of their training and it was evident as each performance brought significant gains. The consistent working of systems during the training sessions honed the players' skills, maintained their physical condition, and developed a strong team bond. It is recommended that the team continues with their training sessions next year, allocating one night a week for focused practice. This dedicated training time will ensure ongoing improvement and cohesion within the squad.

To optimize preparations and allow players to be in good condition, it is suggested that the start date of training be slightly delayed in the upcoming season. This adjustment will provide all county teams the opportunity to focus on any cup competitions they may be involved with. By commencing training with a refreshed and energized squad, the Essex County squad can set a solid foundation for a successful campaign.

The level of competition faced by Essex County during the season was considered fair and appropriate. The matches provided a suitable challenge for the team, allowing them to showcase their abilities and grow as players. Striking the right balance in competition level ensures that the team is both tested and motivated, fostering an environment of continuous improvement and player development.

The county campaign season [2023] witnessed significant progress and achievements. The success of recruitment efforts, coupled with the identification of future avenues for growth, ensures a positive trajectory for the squad. Continued training, with an adjusted schedule, will maintain upward momentum and strengthen the collective understanding of systems to be used during the campaign. The fair and appropriate competition level faced by the team served as a valuable learning experience, encouraging growth and player development.

The provision of adequate kit/Stash to the squad played a vital role in enhancing team morale, unity, and professionalism. Essex County Rugby ensured that each player had access to playing shirts, shorts, socks, and other necessary training gear throughout the campaign. The kits were of excellent quality, providing comfort, durability, and a distinct identity for the team. Adequate kit supply not only instilled a sense of pride among the players but also projected a cohesive and formidable image to opponents and supporters. Alongside this the budget was sufficient to run the campaign from start to finish.

In my opinion Essex County rugby is poised for future success and is well-positioned to tackle the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead during next year's campaign.

Coaches 22/23 were:

Dave Stevens – Thurrock, Steve Killington – Brentwood, Aaron Lowe – Eton Manor, Stuart Whatling – Southend. Medical Alex Evans.

Tony Woods
Men's First Team Manager

Coach Development

A coaches conference led by Jon Bates of Coach Centered, was held in September and was well attended by coaches from clubs around the County. In addition Laura Wakefield also gave an important presentation on discipline.

With the RFU Coach Developer Matt Rozier taking a sabbatical, we are pleased to welcome Adrian Boyce into that role and look forward to working with him on a coach development

program and CPD's. The role is even more important as we move into coaching the new tackle height laws of the game.

During the season we had 70 new candidates take part in the day 1 and day 2 courses for the Rugby coaching award held at Champion School, Harlow and Colchester RFC and three candidates successfully competed their level three advanced coaching award. Congratulations to Ian Rundell of Harlow, Paul Lovewell from Billericay, Andy Yarrow of Dagenham on achieving the Advance Coaching aware (Level 3)

Martin Jones
Chair – Player and Coach Development

Match Officials Development



On behalf of the London Society of Rugby Union Referees Matt Todd, a LSRFU trainer has run 4 courses throughout Essex with a total of 96 participants. As a result some 18 have gone on to join the society so a nearly 20% up take.

The stand out candidates have been a number of ladies who have already reached the dizzy heights of level 8 rugby. The aim next season is to repeat across region once more.

Also if any clubs are requiring and tackle safe updates please (Matt Todd) know as to date I he has not received any requests.

His team from London and NorthEast led by Callum Howard remain on hand to assist where they can.

Matt Todd (London Society)

Women and Girls Development.

Fran Claydon-Brown (Chair Women and Girls Development

I am pleased to report that all the Senior ladies teams playing league rugby completed their fixtures this season. In the RFU Championship South the Thurrock t-birds came third this year just 1 point behind their close rivals Old Albanians. We do not have any ladies team in Championship 2

In the other Ladies Leagues, Chelmsford came second in NC 1 (East) with East London 5th and Romford & Gidea Park 8th. Eton Manor topped their NC2 (Central) league with 12 out of 12 wins this season and Millwall coming 4th.

In Women's NC2 South East (East) Westcliff came second with Southend close behind in 3rd place. In 6th place was Thurrock development squad. NC2 South East (North saw Epping Upper Clapton in 2nd place with Harlow close behind in 3rd. Stanford came third in NC3 SE (East) with Rochford 5th and Witham 6th

To the North of the County Braintree Ladies played their matches in Midlands NC3 (South) and came a credible 2nd place.

There are now fifteen (15) ladies sides from fourteen Essex clubs (Thurrock Development squad is now taking shape as its second team) taking part in the RFU Women's competitions.

Though travel outside the County to fulfil matches is still an issue there have been some credible performances throughout the County. Next seasons fixtures are now out and there will be many more local matches to encourage the support for ladies rugby in the County.

We now have Chelmsford, East London and Eton Manor in NC1 South East (North); Epping Upper Clapton, Millwall, Harlow and Romford in NC 2 SE (Central); Southend, Rochford and Thurrock II in NC2 SE (East) and Braintree, Stanford le Hope, Rochford and Witham in NC 3 South East (East).

The development of women's rugby has led to the RFU now funding a Developing Player Pathway for the girls U16 age band. Led by Jennifer Mugglestone, Simon Beadle and Andy Collings the development pathway leads to the Saracens Centre of Excellence as well as developing players for their clubs.

This season Keira Muir who hails from Chelmsford ladies before joining Basildon Girls Rugby and being selected for the Saracens Centre of Excellence has been selected for the England U18s squad. Not to be outdone, May Goulding of Eton Manor earned her first U18 Ireland Cap.



Of the girls already in the Saracens CoE Ava Borragiero, Keira Ryan, Amya Edwards, Sophie Edwards, Beau Stephens, Maddie Smith, they will be joined by Bella Jackson, Ella Barnes and Izzy Van der Staaten who will be trialling and assessed during the summer break, and there is hope that more Essex Girls will be in contention in the future for England honours.

The U16 DPP girls also form the foundations of the County squad and produced some great winning rugby in their county festivals against Hertfordshire and Eastern Counties (The two other Counties forming the Saracens Centre of Excellence region.) .

This season also saw Basildon u18 girls reached the final of the National Cup but it wasn't to be their year, up against a strong Cheltenham Tigers in the final. A good effort..

With the growth of girls rugby, the county next season will be introducing a competitive element to the program for U16 and U18 to help develop those age grade teams across the County. Though not all clubs have a full complement of players, teams will be encouraged to

cluster where they can. Hopefully this will enable more teams to emerge in the County and develop the women and girls game.

With RFU providing funding for female coaches and referees , we have a number of ladies registered on the courses for next season, another initiative to help grow Women and girls sport in Essex.

Ladies Senior Rugby

The Essex Ladies played 3 fixtures losing 2 , winning 1 but a new squad of ladies has been formed from clubs throughout the whole county and the ambition and potential is there for future seasons .

So overall a good season for the county with all teams looking good for 2023/24

Fran Claydon-Brown Chair of Woman and Girls Development

Discipline



The Discipline Committee have had a challenging season which was dominated by poor behaviour of spectators and coaches, rather than players. This was seen at both youth and adult games and has caused consternation both within the County and at National level. We are not the only CB to have experienced this, but we seem to have experienced more of it than most.

These cases are of great concern as they completely undermine the Core Values and make it hard for us to portray rugby as a safe environment for families to come to and enjoy our sport, whether as players or supporters.

It is remarkable that we saw 26 cases involving this behaviour across the game in Essex, compared with less than a dozen cases involving players punching another player. Indeed player behaviour has generated less cases this season than previously, which we should be pleased with.

Cases of racist or homophobic abuse are not dealt with by us as the CB, but are referred up to the RFU team to deal with. These therefore do not count in our figures. We sent several incidents to them, some were followed through to hearings, some were discontinued for lack of evidence or those reporting incidents chose to halt them before a hearing was reached. It is hard to determine whether incidents are more prevalent than in the past, or whether greater awareness of issues has led to more reporting. Either way I would urge all clubs to ensure that all involved at any level in the game, including spectators, are aware that rugby will not tolerate such abuse and that it will have serious consequences not only for that offending individual, but potentially for the Club also.

The general feeling of the Discipline Committee is that we are now spending less time dealing with physical issues between players that arise from playing incidents arising on the pitch. We appear to be spending more time dealing with various form of abuse both verbal and physical. Unlike on pitch, between player incidents, these often cause bad-feeling between clubs and also result in the loss of individuals prepared to pick up the whistle and referee. In particular in youth games, where many are now having to be officiated by non-society referees, we have

seen a worrying growth of incidents where coaches and parents have decided to take matters into their own hands, rather than leave it to the match official.

My thanks must also go to those clubs who kept a clean record and did not have any cases before us.

Despite all her hard work as Secretary and Chair of Discipline it was sad to see Laura Wakefield stand down from her role. In her resignation letter, she described how despite all the best effort of discipline she was extremely disappointed not to see any improvement in the cases reported to Discipline. Not least on the day of her resignation, two citings and three red cards. The County is extremely grateful to Laura for the work and effort she put into her role and the way in which she approached discipline hearings and the huge amount of correspondence that has to be carried out in relation to each and every Discipline matter reported to the committee. **Thank you Laura.**

With an RFU Discipline conference coming up at the beginning of September the committee are seeking to increase the number of members on the Panel which will help to lighten the burden of convening a panel to suit dates and venues. If you would like to become a panel member please get in touch.

Our thanks go to Ivor Smith for stepping in to help deal with the discipline administration and to Keith Hill for stepping in as Chair of Discipline.

Keith Hill

Chair Essex Discipline Committee

The Road Ahead

Ivor Smith Hon Secretary

A big thank you to all our contributors to this years County Annual report.

Our Management Committee have had a busy season and although we have continued to meet virtually as well as face to face. Our agendas have been full. In particular our playing, schools, facilities, safeguarding, Discipline (see Laura's report for some concerns here), and youth competitions sub-committees have been busy and really focussed upon getting as much rugby played as possible. We've also had a lot of ad hoc meetings focused upon facilities at individual clubs. The committee will be busy during the summer not only with planning for next season but also organising coaching, safeguarding and a discipline conference.

The game has some serious issues to deal with especially with regard to adult male participation and how the RFU's professional staff manage their new roles in CBs largely virtually but I think that Council is realistic about these challenges and the exchange of ideas and best practise to address this has been very positive. The amount of work being undertaken by Council Members to support the game is remarkable – the "pre-reading" alone for the June 2023 Council Meeting was 254 pages.

So looking ahead to next season, we are going to have to address these problems as a CB and as clubs. We have a league structure specifically designed to improve participation through less travel, more local derbies, enhanced player welfare and experience, and help club sustainability. There have been some hiccups with the implementation of this and we need to monitor how the new structure works especially with regard to Lower XV's participation and

the impact upon our Merit Tables. We all need to do as much as we can to promote the game so adopting Game On principles to manage games with reduced numbers of players, playing fixtures on non-traditional days and times, Fridays evenings under lights, on different times on Saturdays, even on Sundays: anything to get more games played. Lots of our clubs have developed great ideas to support what their players want in terms of playing, training, facilities, socialising etc. so please share these as widely as possible so that we can all benefit.

Women and girls rugby is a growth area with quite a number of clubs now providing rugby for girls. Though numbers are increasing it is still difficult for some clubs to arrange playing time, but it is encouraging to see that clubs are getting together and combining teams.

A big thank you to our County Committee which was led by our Chairman Simon Wakefield and now our **President Nick Bracken**, who has also become our RFU Council Representative.

Also a big thank you to those behind the scenes on the committee,

Beiron Rees our Treasurer. After 35 years involvement with the County as a volunteer involved with finance, including a spell as President of the County Beiron Rees has decided to hang up his accounting ledger, though keeping on the role of International Tickets coordinator for the County. Beiron has determined that it is now time for him to stand down and allow new blood onto the Committee. Thank you Beiron for all the work and effort you have put in over the years. It is certainly appreciated.

Keith Hill took over from Laura Wakefield as Chair of Discipline and has successfully seen us through to the end of the season especially with some difficult citing and red cards. Thank you Keith and the members of the Discipline Panel

Alan Brooking our Chair of finance, as well as being our Facilities and Funding coordinator has taken over as Chair of Finance and is working hard on ensuring that the County management is fit for purpose as we enter the next 20 years.

Craig Morgan for getting us through a very busy program of league, and cup fixtures, as well as the Group one Auto merit league. A tremendous job this year and a very busy person.

Jo Razor has stood down as safeguarding manager as she faces a new job and role at her schools. However, as one of the few "Play it Safe" tutors she will still have an important role to play in delivering courses. Thank you to Jo, Len and Nicky Worthington for all the work you have done to bring us all into line with Regulation 21, and we welcome Nicky to the Manger Role.

As the Essex County Schools Union representative a big thank you to **Michael Eyres** for all the hard work he has done to bring rugby back to our schools, Colleges and Universities. His report above shows that rugby in our schools is an important stepping stone to keep rugby alive in our schools and clubs.

Thank you to **Martin Jones** for all his work in relation to the development of Players and Coaches. Player and coach development programs are important to help ensure that players are properly taught the fundamentals of the game in order for them to achieve their ambitions and true potential as rugby players.

Thank you to **Fran Claydon-Brown** for chairing the Women and Girls development section and for her input into the County representative team for the County Championship and Girls DPP.

Chris McFerran taking up the Role of Player Safety Manager Regulation 9 has brought upon it great pressure on our clubs and County teams. Chris's amazing amount of work in this role is developing and growing in importance.

Ian Hollingworth for being our Age Grade Lead and liaising with the Age Grade Competitions administrators through **Marc Grange**. A new role in the County which Ian and Marc have approached with tenacity, innovation and encouragement.

Some changes:

The sudden departure of Simon Wakefield and Laura together with Simon Brooks the U20's manager has lead to a decision that after 20 years the County should review its structure, purpose and support to our member clubs.

As with any restructure, things change and with the RFU reshaping their support to CB's in the loss of our CRC's and RDO's we, as a CB must ensure that how we engage with our clubs and schools is appropriate and timely. From an RFU support perspective we now have **Adam Cottingham** as our CB relationship manager. We have been fortunate to retain **Sally Russo** in her new married name to the role of Club Developer for Essex and Herts. We have also been able to keep **Rick Bruin** as our facilities manager, **Matt Watts** as the training manager and recruited **Matt Rozier** as the Coach development Officer. However, Matt is taking a years sabbatical but his role is being overseen by **Adrian Boyce**. As the CB relationship manager Adam Cottingham will be overseeing our RFU support. Their first year in these new roles has gone smoothly and we are grateful for their support.

Our Sponsors

Finally but not least the County is grateful for the sponsorship and opportunities offered by our sponsors **Group One Automotive and Group One Audi**. Our thanks go to Steve Doble and Helen Keys for their continued support for County Rugby in the Community. Group One Auto support has enabled us to maintain the Merit Leagues, the Youth Competitions, as well providing their logo on the County Representative sides team wear. **Thank you**.

We are also grateful to **Alliance Shipping**, and **Bursted Building Projects** for their support of the County activities. **Doveton Law**, **Commander Building Services**, **Golden Thread Fire Delay** and the **Essex Womens Institute** have this year supported the development of our Ladies and Girls teams and once again we appreciate the support that they have given to women and girls Rugby.

Finally may I wish you all a successful 2023-24 season with all fixtures fulfilled, loads of happy people playing rugby every week, and bar takings at a record high. If you think that there is anything that I, or any of the RFU staff or our Management Committee can do to help with this please do not hesitate to get in touch. We are here to support our clubs and increase participation in our great game of Rugby Union.

Ivor Smith
Hon Secretary
Essex County RFU