

**THE RUGBY FIVES ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT 2009-10

Probably the most difficult thing about looking back on the last 12 months is that some of the most exciting things are just about to happen: the new courts at Rugby School, and the RFA taking on charitable status, for instance.

Nevertheless, I'm delighted to report that much of note has happened in the last year, and I'll turn to one remarkable anniversary first.

Many people run a tournament for a while, but for one man to run a tournament for 50 years is something quite special; and, when a large group of current and former players gathered in Sherborne to salute David Gardner's 50th running of the National Student Championships, no standing ovation has ever been more richly deserved.

As well as this golden anniversary, Sherborne was also the venue for one of this year's firsts. Last year, my report sadly had to include the passing of Charlie Colquhoun, but I am delighted that his name is to live on in a new annual competition.

The first Colquhoun Trophy took place in March, and boys from six schools from the South West took part. The keen competition, skill and sportsmanlike conduct on- and off-court would surely have bought a smile to Charlie's lips. Our only hope is that his old school, Clifton College, will be able to send some competitors next year.

This year's second first was another very close to my heart: the first RFA National School Girls' Championships, run by RFA board member Alex Smith in May.

Four schools took part, across four age groups, and both singles and doubles titles were up for grabs. Again, I was delighted to witness the high standard of competition, and am pleased that plans are already afoot for next year's tournament to be bigger and better. From tiny acorns...

As ever, schools remain the most important route into the game for majority of players, so we are delighted that both boys and girls are actively playing the game – and that they have national championships to aim for at the end of their season. Our challenge, as ever, is to maintain contact with them, so I am pleased that the RFA has appointed Ady Lee to be our 'Membership Tsar', and he will work with teachers, tournament organisers and match managers to recruit as many players as possible to RFA membership.

That said, one of the RFA's concerns is a decline in the number of boys in the schools' championships. Is it because of the date of the competition, the venue, the format, or perhaps even changing attitudes within schools? The answer is that we don't know, but a new sub-committee chaired by David Barnes will seek the views of everyone involved, and report back to the board with recommendations to improve matters in the future.

Another sub-committee, under Hamish Buchanan, will look into adult Fives – again, we are concerned at a lower number of players in championships this season – while another under Dick Warner is to develop a strategy to develop the game in the future.

In the meantime, David Gardner is continuing his work looking at the rules of game, while we have already seen the fruits of our work into 'Health and Safety'. For the first time, this year's Pocket Book included advice on sensible play, and we distributed a condensed version of this for display at courts. Last, but not least, we are also seeking from schools and

tournament organisers details of any injuries suffered during play, giving us figures on which to base any future recommendations.

At the same time, we continue to work with our colleagues from the Eton Fives Association and England Handball as part of the Fives Federation. The Newsletter and Annual Review are the most obvious products of this, but 2010 will also bring a new Fives website. I have no doubt that such co-operation between the codes can only be for the good of Fives in general in the future.

We are also discussing how the Federation can improve its communications. Technology and people's habits are changing at a frightening rate, so we need to make sure that our money is spent in the right place and in the right quantity.

To do so, we welcome any input on what our members do and don't like, as well as suggestions of other possible means of communication. We already have a group on social networking website Facebook, but we could also consider email newsletters, online magazines, Twitter...

One thing that is already in development is a booklet by Radley schoolteacher Ed Brooke. This is aimed at encouraging young players of the game, giving them advice and tips. We are currently working on both the content and the design, and hope to publish the booklet during the course of next season.

As is often the case, of course, much of this work is carried out after hours and with little prospect of reward beyond a pint or two. So, my conclusion must pay tribute to the sterling work done by so many people on our behalf.

In particular, special mention must go to Ian Roberts for his work on the RFA's charitable status. This has, quite literally, taken years! Plus, as we believe we are the first national sporting body to seek charitable status, many more people than Fives players may benefit from his efforts.

Beyond that, I make no apology for repeating my final paragraph from last year. I must thank all the many and various people who so selflessly give of their time to further our beloved game: the organisers who smoothly run such successful events and send me reports so quickly for the website; all those who contribute words and pictures to all our various publications; all our match managers and, well, everyone. We – and every player of the game – are profoundly grateful.

Andy Pringle
May 2010