



All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting Minutes

27th November 2012 Committee Room Seven

Lord Lofthouse

Before commencing the meeting, Members held a minute's silence for Group President Lord Lofthouse of Pontefract who passed away on 1st November.

The Chairman represented the Group at Lord Lofthouse's funeral with other Members and offered the Group's condolences and thanks to Lord Lofthouse's family.

Letters of condolence had been received by the Group and would be sent to Lord Lofthouse's family.

Meeting Commenced 1815

Present

Greg Mulholland (in the Chair); James Clappison MP; Lord Hoyle; Lindsay Hoyle MP; Lord Grantchester; Lisa Nandy MP; Jason McCartney MP

In attendance

Group Secretariat: Mark Ramsdale

Organisational Associate Members: Spen Allison (BARLA)

Individual Associate Members (no affiliation): Anton Muszanksyj; Gary Brook; Paul Cypher; Daniel Bunney; Maurice Oldroyd

Non-Members (all presenting): Ernie Benbow (1eagu3); Tim Roache (RLPA, GMB); Bill Chard (RLPA, GMB); Neil Derrick (RLPA, GMB)

Apologies

Dave Watts MP; Steve Rotherham MP; Jim Dobbin MP; Yvonne Fovargue MP; David Hincliffe; Nigel Wood; Dan Steel; Jason Talbot; David Wilson; Phil Hodgson; Eric Czweronkia; Chris Byron; Michael MacDonald; Barrie Smith; Ikram Butt; Paul Kenny

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were considered an accurate record.

Group Welcomes

The Chairman welcomed new Members: Lord Martin Thomas; Lord Grantchester; Tommy Docherty MP; Jim Dobbin MP; Simon Danczuk MP; Jon Trickett MP

The Chairman welcomed Lord Grantchester to his first meeting. It was agreed that the continued growth of the Group was very positive and was now at its largest, reflecting the work of the Group and its importance as a voice in sport and in Westminster. Lord Grantchester explained how pleased he was to be a member of the Group and was keen to support RLWC13, particularly in the north west of England.



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Matters Arising

The Secretariat raised continued dialogue with:

- The RFL regarding an event on inclusivity;
- South Africa Rugby League and DCMS regarding the South African Government position on rugby league;
- Women & Girls in Sport Parliamentary Group joint event.
- The RFL regarding a memorial at the National Arboretum honouring rugby league playing and supporting servicemen and servicewomen.

Action: Secretariat to continue and report back to the Group.

Correspondence

Geoff Lofthouse Condolences

Condolences were offered to the family of Lord Lofthouse from:

- David Hinchliffe (Honourary Group Member)
- Mark Beetson
- Barrie Smith
- Mike Stephenson

Honourary Group Member Peter Horsfal and former Australian High Commissioner to the UK Doug McClelland AC wrote to the Group.

All condolences, letters and cards will be forwarded to Lord Lofthouse's family.

Sent

Letters were sent to:

- Lord Lofthouse's daughter offering the Group's condolences and thanks for Geoff's work in the sport.
- The London Marathon executive regarding their decision to not allow Matt King MBE to take part in the event.
- The headmaster of Howard of Effingham school on their success in becoming Schools Champions after only one year of playing rugby league, and being the first school from the South of England to become Champions. An invitation to speak to the Group was extended.
- The Moroccan Ambassador regarding the position of the Moroccan government to not recognise rugby league as a sport.

Received

Letters were received by the Group from:

- RFL Chief Executive Nigel Wood regarding the upcoming round of Sport England Funding.
- Honourary Life Member David Hinchliffe welcoming the work of the Group and that he was "very proud" to be an old boy.
- 1eagu3 Chairman Jon Wilkin extending his apologies to the Group for not being able to attend the Group meeting due to a change in training schedule



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Annual Dinner

The Secretariat reminded Members that the Group Annual Dinner was taking place on 22nd January 2013 and that all places needed to be secured by the 11th December 2012.

Group Awards

The Chairman reminded members that each year the Group recognises an individual who has provided long-standing service to the sport of rugby league. Given the support of the game at all levels in Parliament and outside, it was moved and agreed that the Group would rename the award after Lord Lofthouse.

Action: The Chairman will write to Lord Lofthouse's family and invite them to present the award at the Annual Dinner.

SL Player of the Year

The Secretariat reminded Members to submit their thoughts on the Super League Player of Year 2012, to be announced at the Annual Dinner.

Action: The Secretariat to investigate who has won previously.

Group Activity

The Secretariat provided a synopsis of Questions, Debates, Motions and all mentions of rugby league in both Houses of Parliament as well as the visit to Parliament of the World Cup with which Members had their picture taken in front of Elizabeth Tower for use with their local media.

Also raised was the visit of the World Cup, coaching staff and players from the English and Welsh teams and London youth players to Downing Street to meet the Prime Minister.

On behalf of the Group, the Chairman congratulated all involved in the visit of the World Cup to Westminster and Whitehall.

Political Animals Report

The Secretariat updated the Group on the visit to Parliament of former Great Britain and England Captain Jamie Peacock MBE and former Australian Captain Darren Lockyer to Parliament and the training session held in front of Elizabeth Tower.

In addition, the Group were informed of the plans for games in 2013.

AOB

Salford City Reds

Concerns were raised over the financial status of Salford City Reds. It was agreed that the Group would write to Super League asking for information.

Action: Secretariat to contact Super League.

BARLA Position on RFL Council

BARLA Vice-President Lindsay Hoyle raised concerns that at a meeting of the RFL Council taking place at 11 o'clock on 28th November, BARLA's three places on the RFL Council was to reduce to one. He felt that there was the



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danger of dividing the rugby league family and there was a need to discuss issues surrounding the situation and therefore he had written in a personal capacity to RFL CEO Nigel Wood.

Hoyle noted there had been correspondence with Richard Lewis and explained that an agreement had been made as part of BARLA becoming part of the RFL that it would retain three places on the Council.

BARLA Chairman Spen Allison said BARLA were disappointed that collectively the sport was not moving forward together, and the RFL want to remove BARLA altogether. He noted that some of the teams taking part in the RLWC2013 were created via the support of BARLA.

Associate Member Maurice Oldroyd felt the dissolution of BARLA would be a tragedy as the body would celebrate its 40th anniversary on 4th March 2013.

Action: Chairman to write to Nigel Wood asking for clarification on the situation and, if BARLA had not been consulted, that the RFL consider withdraw the decision until such time as adequate consultation had taken place.

Action: Group to request private meeting with Nigel Wood and Spen Allison to discuss.

Business Concluded at 1839



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Presentation: Player Representation

The Chairman thanked representatives of the Rugby League Players Association from the GMB Union and Ernie Benbow of 1eagu3 to the Group.

Player representation represented a very important part of the game and was important to the Group as many Members of the Group themselves represented and engage with players and clubs as their constituents.

Rugby League Players Association, GMB: Tim Roache, Bill Chard, Neil Derrick

On behalf of the GMB, Tim Roache thanked the Group for the opportunity to speak before it and offered its condolences to the Group and Lorthouse's family, noting that Lord Lofthouse was a longstanding member of the GMB.

Speaking to a prepared presentation, the history of the GMB and the Rugby League Players Association therein was outlined. The RLPA had previously spoken to the Group in 1995 and had always found it very helpful.

As well as rugby league, the GMB supported other sportsmen and women at different levels. Recently within rugby league, the GMB had begun to represent officials and club staff offering a range of services including legal representation, conflict resolution, education and career planning, and apprenticeships. Given the nature of the members within the section, the most popular areas of education and career planning were to seek gym instruction and personal training qualifications.

The GMB's work on apprenticeships was discussed and the list of clubs with which the GMB had worked with on apprenticeships and with young people in the 2012 season, noting after questioning that the whilst clubs listed were based in Yorkshire and a number of larger Super League Clubs were not included, this was a those in 2012 and there had been engagement with clubs not listed.

It was now possible for union officials to become licensed as agents, but unlike traditional agents, GMB-affiliated agents would not seek payment from the game.

The presentation then focussed on services provided to players, with specific examples in recent years provided, including Bradford Bulls. Additionally the role of the GMB within the wider game was presented as well as the benefits of scale afforded to those who might be part of the RLPA by being part of a large trade union.

After opening to questions, it was made clear that the RLPA was funded by monthly member contributions from 820 members, of which 585 were playing members. Full-time professional members paid £11 per month with a sliding scale to apprentices who paid 50p per month.

The GMB itself provided a baseline of £80,000 per annum to the sport, with more coming through requests for sponsorship as agreed by the GMB executive.

On the geographical coverage and focus on Yorkshire, the structure of the GMB meant that the Yorkshire region lead the RLPA and on rugby league matters. Other areas were enthusiastic and supportive but were not required to be as involved.

On working with Super League player association 1eagu3, there was concern that two distinct player associations may not be practical. The RLPA had made approaches to 1eagu3 chair and GMB member, Jon Wilkin to discuss, but so far a meeting has not taken place.



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When questioned about why players in Super League created a separate body, it was suggested that people were seeking to take something out of the sport but that when it came to support, there remained the reliance on the GMB due to its resources which have remained consistent and holistic.

1eagu3 Chief Executive: Ernie Benbow

[Secretariat's Note: Subsequent to the meeting, the following were submitted to the Group:

- Document: "What the Players Say";
- Document: 1eagu3 recommendations from LJM report on Bradford Bulls Report;
- Document: LJM 1eagu3 Bradford Bulls Evaluation Report;
- Correspondence: From Jon Wilkin regarding the challenges of meeting with the GMB; and
- Correspondence: From Ernie Benbow regarding information about 1eagu3.]

Benbow offered the apologies of 1eagu3 Chairman Jon Wilkin who was unable to attend the meeting due to a change in training schedule.

Benbow began by explaining the creation, initial steps and structure of 1eagu3, specifically that it was born of players' dissatisfaction with existing representation and that he had offered his experience and skillset to support if desired.

Initially in the 2011 season, the larger Super League clubs had been targeted with around 140 players joining initially. With that, a management committee was created with John Wilkin appointed Chairman and Ernie Benbow appointed Chief Executive and 1eagu3 was launched on 23rd January 2012. Thereafter, all clubs were subsequently approached and nearly 300 players were involved to date, representing 84% of Super League first team squads. Players paid £10 per month for full members; £4 per month for associate members and £2 a month for those in academies.

1eagu3 sought to work in collaboration and partnership with a range of bodies, some of which were presented and discussed and 1eagu3 had become a member of the Professional Players' Federation.

The association offers advice and support on a number of issues and areas, including disciplinary, grievance, health & safety, employment matters and conditions, careers and career transition, education and qualifications, player welfare and wellbeing. It also prepared and distributed information on doping & nutritional issues during its first year of operation.

A number of issues had been raised with the RFL, including artificial pitches, hepatitis B and blood borne diseases, cardiac screening, medical insurance, ticket allocations for players, career development and transition, procedure for abandonment of matches, the wearing of protective skins, rule changes and 1eagu3 representation on the Laws Committee, recognition and governance of RFL.

The specific case of Bradford Bulls was presented including the assistance provided to players individually and collectively during the transition to new ownership as well as representation of their views to the administrators and RFL. 1eagu3 ensured payment of wages through exerting pressure on the administrator and RFL and that support mechanisms were in place. Players were advised on the requirements of the Transfer of Undertakings Regulations including any impact on their contractual position on transfer to the new holding company.

1eagu3 conducted an evaluation exercise with Liverpool John Moores University Sports & Psychology Department to ascertain impact of administration on players and families.

Benefits of membership were displayed but not discussed due to time constraints.



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Once open to questions, Benbow reiterated that 1eagu3 was created as players didn't feel they received appropriate representation or say within the game and within the GMB, and that the creation of 1eagu3 was player-led. The strength of feelings amongst Super League players was tested through a ballot sent to all named 25 first team squad players in each of the 14 Super League clubs. Benbow reported that out of 350 ballot papers issued, 330 were returned with 329 in favour of forming their own player-led association, that is 94% of all Super League Players. 1eagu3's constitution was agreed on 30th June 2011 with management elected comprising Jon Wilkin (Chairman), Ernie Benbow (CEO), Jamie Peacock (Leeds and England captain), Lee Briers (Warrington and Wales captain), and Clint Newton (Hull KR). Benbow highlighted the enhancement of the democratic rights of each and every playing member as one of the primary differences between 1eagu3 and the GMB.

The biggest success of 1eagu3 over the course of its first year was to take the thoughts of players to create a body from inception to a point where, within eight months, it could work closely with players in a Super League club to support them during the very difficult time.

On financing, Benbow stressed that there was no paid executive within 1eagu3, which included his role and all those involved provided their time on a voluntary basis. Benbow confirmed that members had access to legal services through Hatton's Solicitors on a conditional fee basis, which he understood to be similar to the arrangement between GMB and Thompsons. He confirmed that 1eagu3 could not cover legal costs of cases as in the case of the GMB assertions.

On the perceived reluctance of the 1eagu3 chairman to meet with the RLPA, Benbow said this was not the case, that Wilkin had spoken on the telephone with representatives of the RLPA, and that he was happy to meet.

Focussing on the future, and the need for two bodies to representing players, Benbow has and was continuing to seek greater relationships with governing bodies. It was felt that 1eagu3 has momentum and that GMB has scale. It was noted that some players may retain membership of both organisations.

The Chairman thanked all speakers, feeling their comments were incredibly valuable to the Group. He noted that the Group has no fixed position on overarching matters raised and welcomes thoughts and perspectives on topics important to the game, such as this.

Members in the Group care about the game and the players who deliver it for all. All want the sport and players to be the best it and they can be and therefore the role of both bodies is important and the Group would welcome both working together.

An invitation to Jon Wilkin to supply his thoughts was extended.

Concluded 1947