



All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting Minutes

29th October 2013 Committee Room 13

Meeting commenced 1803

In Attendance

Members: Lord Smith of Leigh (in the Chair); Lord Hoyle; Lord Thomas; James Clappison MP; Derek Twigg MP; Gerry Sutcliffe MP; Jason McCartney MP; Greg Mulholland MP

Honorary Life Members: Maurice Oldroyd (No affiliation); Spen Allison (No affiliation);

Organisational Associate Members: Jason Talbot (Combined Service Rugby League); Sue Taylor (BARLA)

Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation): Chris Byron; Dave Rammage; Eric Czerwonkia; Jeff Charlton; Barrie J Smith

Secretariat: Mark Ramsdale

Welcome

On behalf of the Group, the Chairman welcomed new Associate Members:

- Adam Greaves
- Eric Czerwonkia

Apologies

Members: Lord Prescott; Nigel Adams MP; Yvonne Fovargue MP

Honorary Life Members: David Hinchliffe (Hon Life Member, no affiliation); Ian McCartney (Hon Life Member, no affiliation)

Organisational Associate Members: Nigel Wood (RFL); Tony Colquitt (Oxford Rugby League);

Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation): Iain McIlwee; Paul Cypher; Gavin Willacy; Anton Muszanskyj; Alex Mitchell; David Ballheimer; Andy Haddershaw

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

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

Matters Arising

The Secretariat raised the on-going activities:

- Compilation of the complete list of the Super League Player of the year.
- Preparation of the process for contacting local politicians regarding Associate Membership of the Group.

Correspondence

Sent

- Letter to RFL encouraging moving Challenge Cup semi-final between Wigan Warriors and London Broncos to a venue that would help develop the game and was more equidistant for both clubs.

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- Correspondence to all Members of both Houses at RLWC2013 100-days-to-go point with details of reception and Animals v World XIII game.
- Letters to all Members of the House of Commons promoting the World Cup, and including fixture lists to all.
- Letter to High Commissioners and Ambassadors inviting all to take part in the Political Animals v World XIII game.
- Various re: South Africa Rugby League and ongoing issues faced.
- Letter to Virgin Media CEO and other senior executives regarding showing Premier Sports in time for RLWC2013 (made public).
- Invitation to join the meeting sent to Parliamentary Groups for Australia & NZ; France; Lebanon; Serbia; South Africa; South Pacific; America; Italy.
- Correspondence to all the tour managers for the World Cup nations inviting them to: play for World XIII against the Political Animals (if not in the World Cup final); to visit Parliament; and join the Group at its meeting on 26 November

Received

- Various correspondence regarding the location of the Challenge Cup semi-final between Wigan Warriors and London Broncos.
- Invitation from BARLA to Members for 40th Anniversary Awards Presentation Evening (circulated)
- Various correspondence regarding Virgin Media not showing Premier Sports, encouraging the Group to take action, thanking the Group for its support, and congratulating the Group on its success.
- Response from BARLA regarding support for the Group.
- Letter from Ray Girdwood, Life Member of the Brisbane Rugby League Referees Association regarding the letter of sympathy sent to the widow of the Association's Chairman Tony McGrath after his murder. A great comfort to those who knew him and letter resides in pride of place in Tony's local club.
- Letter from Ian McCartney regarding recognition for his role in forming the Group and tackling the challenges faced (to be circulated)

Pending

- None were presented

Group Activity Report

Parliamentary Questions

The Secretariat presented references to rugby league in Parliament since the previous meeting:

- After Andy Murray's victory at Wimbledon, PMQ from Greg Mulholland on history being made in 1954 by another Scotsman, Dave Valentine, as the first man to lift the Rugby League World Cup; and garnering support from the PM.
- During Business Questions On the 100 days-to-go to RLWC2013, Greg Mulholland recognised the Australian and French victories in the Festival of World Cups and asked if the Prime Minister would agree to adopt Jerusalem as the English National Anthem.
- Jason McCartney mentioned various constituency activities during the Summer Adjournment debate, including a catwalk for the Laura Crane Youth Cancer Trust involving Wakefield Trinity Wildcats star Andy Raleigh.

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- In the final DCMS Questions before RLWC2013, David Mowat raised the tournament with the Sports Minister, Warrington's hosting a game and sought confirmation that the event is one of the Department's main priorities this for the year and for details, which were provided.
- At the 50-days-to-go point, Jason McCartney suggested a World Cup rugby ball would make an ideal christening present on the floor of the House.
- During a Question in the Lords in early October, Lord Addington asked if the Government agree that the Rugby League World Cup provides a "golden opportunity" to bring different tourism bodies together in a coherent structure.
- Jonathan Edwards asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he had with Network Rail on the postponement of planned engineering works taking place on 26-27 October 2013 that will have a negative effect on the Rugby League World Cup opening ceremony.
- Greg Mulholland asked a final question before RLWC2013 kicked off, calling for a debate on how the UK can build on the Olympics, specifically referencing the opening games and seeking reassurance of government support.

Early Day Motions

Four Early Day Motions had been tabled since the previous meeting:

- 391 - English National Anthem for the Rugby League World Cup
- 427 - Rugby League Festival of World Cups
- 605 - Rugby League World Cup 2013
- 621 - Anthem at the Rugby League World Cup

Public

The Group sent out press releases on the following public activities

- A visit by representatives of the Serbian Armed Forces to the Palace
- The Prime Minister's response to a Question from the Chairman, supporting RLWC2013
- Early Day Motion in support of the Festival of World Cups
- Call for relocation of Challenge Cup semi-final between Wigan Warriors and London Broncos
- RLWC2013 Reception in Parliament
- RLIF Chairman to speak at Parliamentary Group meeting
- Virgin Media/Premier Sports
- Good luck message to all nations
- Premier Sport Message

The Group received over 3000 visits since the previous meeting and now has over 1000 followers on Twitter.

Visits

The Chairman, Vice-Chairman (Lindsay Hoyle) and Secretariat hosted a visit from the Cook Islands Sports Minister and the Cook Islands Ambassador to the UK.

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Political Animals Report

The Secretariat (also Political Animals club Secretary) discussed:

- William Hill agreeing to maintain support for the club, providing two new kits
- The traditional game against a London Select XIII on the eve of the Challenge Cup Final
- Upcoming game against a World XIII on the ahead of the World Cup Final
- Future game at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst to celebrate the creation of the British Army Rugby League

RLWC2013

Members of the Group hailed the Rugby League World Cup a great success; recognising the opening ceremony as very well put together, with good games and a very good crowd.

Lord Hoyle praised Warrington's hosting of New Zealand vs Samoa, which saw an almost capacity crowd and good coverage in New Zealand.

The Fiji v Ireland game at Rochdale was noted as the largest crowd seen in the town for some time.

The following raised their attendance at upcoming games:

Jason McCartney at the England v Ireland game on November 2 at sold-out Huddersfield Stadium; Greg Mulholland at the USA v Cook Islands in Bristol; Lord Thomas at Wales v USA in Wrexham; Lord Smith at Tonga v Cook Islands at Leigh Sports Village.

Fixture lists were made available to all attendees.

AOB

Declaring an interest, the Secretariat raised a charity dinner is to be held in honour of the Great Britain 1972 Rugby League World Cup Winners on 28 November at Langtree Park St Helens.

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Presentation

From the Chair, the Treasurer welcomed Scott Carter and Tas Baitieri from the RLIF.

Carter outlined his background, particularly in sports governance, before presenting a short history of the RLIF and recent changes to body's constitution, its growth and administrative momentum after the 2008 Rugby League World Cup.

A Chief Executive Officer will be appointed and a structure formed to enable the growth of the game, including developing the tier of countries below the big three playing nations up to that top level.

There are now 40 countries recognised as playing the game; up from five in 1985. This is exciting and challenging, particularly as new markets are in developing countries. For Pacific Island countries, the collision and power elements of the game appeal. In these countries, there is relatively little required to play the sport but there is a need for good administration.

South America and South Africa were also recognised as developing markets with great potential and there was constant interest from India and China, where an exhibition game will be held.

It was felt that the sport is on a positive path; with reforms put in place to support. It was now a question of ensuring the financial resourcing was in place to accelerate the process of developing the game. It would therefore take time but it would deliver.

The World Cup was to play a part in development by creating resources. The RLIF board decided on four year cycle for the World Cup starting in 2013 to slot between other major international sports tournaments. Only a few days after the start of the 2013 tournament, it was known that it would be successful; the question to be answered was by how much.

The Treasurer thanked Carter for his words and opened the floor to questions by asking about strategic development. Baitieri outlined the development of the game internationally, including within the Commonwealth Games, where rugby league has a category three status. There would be a rugby league nines tournament in Glasgow ahead of the Commonwealth Games in 2014, then in the Gold Coast in 2018 en route to becoming a medal sport. On which British team would be selected to play, it was noted as a matter for the RLEF from which an invitation would be sent out to the RFL.

On national eligibility rules for national teams, there was a battle between tradition and modernisation. Rules had been strengthened and would continue to be reviewed and tightened as needed but it was noted that they should not be overly restrictive to the point where it would prohibit developing nations' growth in the sport. The example was given of Pacific Island nations, where it is not uncommon to have dual or triple nationality.

Within the current rules for national selection, RLWC2013 would be the most competitive to date, but there was a need to avoid nations creating purely tournament teams. There was a lot of work on performance criteria as well as a review of local infrastructure undertaken beforehand to avoid forming tournament teams. Currently, Italy and USA are not qualifying nations but had put together a tournament team for 2013. Without full membership of the RLIF, they will likely find it very difficult to take part in 2017. The RLIF focuses on countries with genuine passion, administration and logistics. As the sport grows, this will result in increasingly home grown national talent taking part in national teams.

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The examples of a French side playing in Super League and a New Zealand side playing in the NRL were raised and a question put about stifling development in those countries, particularly as both France and New Zealand are lobbying to have second sides in the respective leagues. It was felt that much came down to the level of competition within the leagues and the ability of both to sustain a market of players. If the level of competition were diluted, players would potentially decide to play another code of football.

The Chairman made clear that the Group sees itself as a hub for international rugby league in London and that the Group had extended an invitation to all nations playing in RLWC2013 to visit Parliament. The Group was now in its 25th year and, having dealt with many challenges and negative matters in the game, was focusing on the positives. The offer was made to build links on behalf of the sport with other Parliaments.

It was noted that the Group had challenged some governments that are genuinely hostile or won't do much to help and that the Group would be supportive. The example of working with the UK Parliament's Rugby Union Group on challenging the South African Government's position on the sport was given.

Australia is fortunate in terms of senior political support; John Howard had initiated the Prime Minister's XIII that plays an annual fixture against Papua New Guinea and the Premier of New South Wales is the number one ticket holder of Wests Tigers.

The Treasurer thanked Carter and Baitieri for their visit on behalf of the Group and wished their respective countries well in the tournament.

Meeting concluded 1932

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