



All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting Minutes

4 December 2018, Committee Room 6

Meeting commenced 18

In Attendance

Members: Lord Hoyle (in the Chair); Lord Caine; Lord Smith of Leigh; John Grogan MP; Judith Cummins MP

Honorary Life Members: Andrew Cudbertson; Neville Smith

Organisational Associate Members: Andy Wilson, Mark Foster, Chris Hurst (The RFL); Ash Lucas (Bramley Buffaloes); Andrew Jackson (London Skolars)

Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation): Ron Knox; Judi Knox; James Chespy; Michael O'Hare; Tracy Rodger; John Connell; Gavin Willacy; David Ballheimer; Kevin Rudd; Chris Ashton

Other: Barbara Slater, Alastair McIntyre, Dave Woods (BBC Sport)

Secretariat: Jack Baker

Welcome

The Chair welcomed all in attendance to the meeting, in particular:

New Honorary Life Members: Steve Ball; Emma Rosewarne; Shaun Wane; Adam Hills

New Individual Associate Member: Graham McManus

Apologies

Members: Lisa Nandy MP; Sir David Amess MP; Yvonne Fovargue MP; Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle

Honorary Life Members (all, no affiliation): David Hinchliffe; Ray French; Sir Ian McCartney; Sir Rodney Walker; Mike Denning; Spen Allison; Adam Hills

Organisational Associate Members: Nicola Hudson (Supporters Direct); John Holden, Shaun Currie, Geoff Parker, Tim Powell (RLGSOA); Sarah-Jane Gray (The RFL); Chris Noble MBE (Sheffield Eagles RLFC); Jon Dutton (RLWC2021); Ian Wilson (Rugby Oldham)

Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation): Simon Moat; Ian Ackley; Pippa Deacon; Graham McManus; Mathew Lancaster

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Group's previous meeting were agreed to be an accurate account.

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Matters Arising

None

Correspondence

- The Chair wrote a further letter to The Times regarding their decision to dispense of Chris Irvine as dedicated rugby league correspondent.
- The Chair wrote to new Super League Chief Executive Robert Elstone, congratulating him on his appointment and offering to meet. A further letter was sent encouraging Super League to join the Group as a supporter.
- The Chair wrote to the Leader of Sheffield City Council, Cllr Julie Dore, regarding concerns escalating costs for Sheffield Eagles associated with use of the Olympic Legacy Park. A response was received from Cllr Dore, summarising the council's position on the situation. Further correspondence has been exchanged between the club and council, setting out financial difficulties arising from additional costs incurred by the club to make the facility fit for purpose.
- The Chair wrote to new Honorary Life Members with congratulations.
- Vice-Chair Tracy Brabin MP wrote to Batley Bulldogs, encouraging them to join the Group.
- A number of briefing notes were received from the RFL and circulated to Members including on the role of the RFL following recent changes with relation to Super League; on major events in 2019; and on current broadcast relationships.
- An email was received from Masters Rugby League, offering to make a presentation at a future Group meeting. **Action: Secretariat to organise.**
- An email was received suggesting a BBC Sports Personality nomination for Adam Hills role in the development of Physical Disability Rugby League.
- A suggestion was received that the Group look to introduce an International Volunteer Award, in recognition of someone who has done great things in expanding the game internationally.
- A note was received regarding Featherstone Academy, who had been reported as phasing out all rugby league teams. This was passed to the RFL, who were engaged and noted that intervention from the Group at this stage would be unhelpful, but that they would keep the Group updated.

Group Activity Report

Parliamentary

The Secretariat provided references to rugby league in Parliament since the last meeting.

At Business Questions the Chair raised Bradford Bulls success in gaining promotion to the Championship. The Leader of the House joined her in congratulating the Bulls on their achievement.

At DCMS Questions, the Chair raised the projected economic and social impact of the 2021 Rugby League World Cup, and asked the Secretary of State to welcome the significant economic benefit that the tournament would deliver to the north of England, as well as recognising the legacy programme which would have a lasting impact on communities across the north. The Secretary of State welcomed the programme and also noted the £15million of Exchequer funding that would go to support event delivery.

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The following early day motions were tabled:

- SUPER LEAGUE GRAND FINALS (Faisal Rashid MP) – Congratulating all those teams who had reached the men’s and women’s Super League Grand Finals and wishing them well.
- ENGLAND RUGBY LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL FIXTURES (Marie Rimmer MP) – Welcoming the autumn’s England men’s, women’s and Knights international fixtures, and also welcoming the touring New Zealand side to the country.
- RUGBY LEAGUE EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP (Gavin Newlands MP) – Wishing Scotland, Wales and Ireland well for the tournament, which acted as qualifier for the 2021 Rugby League World Cup.

Public

The Chair met with Julia Lee to discuss her work in the sport and the play, REF! The Secretariat noted that the Group was looking to arrange a performance in Parliament in the new year.

Group Members met with RFL Chief Executive, Ralph Rimmer.

Group Members met with new Super League Chief Executive, Robert Elstone.

The Secretariat met with Head of Rugby League Cares, Chris Rostron, to discuss their work, and was scheduling a meeting for Members in early 2019.

The Group held its annual dinner in the House of Lords, and raised just under £2000 for charity partner Rugby League Cares.

The Group sent press releases on:

- The presentation to the Group on the England Performance Unit;
- Wishing teams well for the men’s and women’s Super League Grand Finals;
- Wishing all home nations well for the autumn’s international fixtures;
- The exchange between the Chair and Secretary of State regarding the 2021 Rugby League World Cup at DCMS Questions;
- The Group’s annual charity dinner.

At the time of the meeting, the Group had 2,324 followers on Twitter. The Group’s twitter name: @UKParliamentRL

Political Animals Report

The Secretariat thanked Cheney Payroll Services, for their continued support for the club.

The Secretariat noted that the Animals were looking to hold the annual Politicians v Journalists match around the World Club Challenge, with at least one prominent journalist who has also played the Masters format of the game in the room....

It was noted that the Animals played a modified version of rugby league that allowed those of any age, gender or ability to take part and enjoy their on-field experience.

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AOB

There being no other business, the Chair brought the main business of the meeting to a close.

Main business concluded at 1809

Presentation: BBC Sport

The Chair welcomed Barbara Slater, Alastair McIntyre and Dave Woods from BBC Sport.

Slater opened by discussing BBC Sport's commitment to rugby league, and the success of Dave Woods' establishment as a dedicated rugby league correspondent over the past few years.

A short video was shown outlining the BBC's coverage in 2018.

McIntyre made a presentation focusing on the BBC's audience figures for the Challenge Cup and international matches.

A downwards trend in Challenge Cup audiences was highlighted, whilst figures were more positive for international games. The importance of filling stadiums in creating a positive perception from viewers was emphasised.

Positive trends in those consuming BBC Sport's coverage through online and iPlayer platforms were discussed. Audience demographics were discussed, including reasonably positive figures for young and female audiences, and in terms of quality, the BBC's coverage scored highly with viewers.

McIntyre outlined the BBC's coverage of rugby league in 2019, and also discussed Rugby League World Cup 2021. It was noted that there would be 16 live men's matches on network television, with the remaining games on red button and online platforms. There was further discussion around the women's tournament, and a programme in the new year that would launch host venues.

McIntyre closed the presentation by discussing engagement and audience targets, and BBC Sport's creative vision for rugby league, with particular focus on innovation and extra opportunities across platforms and programmes.

Opening to questions, the timing of the Challenge Cup was discussed, and it was noted that the BBC had wanted to change the date for many years, and were open minded about finding a better place in the sporting calendar. Difficulty in keeping momentum in the current format was raised.

Coverage of rugby league on different news outlets was also raised, and Dave Woods' role was highlighted as important in raising the profile of the game across the organisation. Woods discussed his experience of working across the BBC and highlighted that there was no negative feeling against rugby league, but that rugby league was often not in the conversation in a very crowded sporting market, and the challenge was to change that.

The two rugby league documentaries aired on the BBC in 2018, Watersplash and Codebreakers were raised.

On screen talent was discussed, specifically around introducing more female pundits. McIntyre discussed opportunities to bring in fresh talent in the future.

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There was discussion around filming and use of camera shots.

Opportunities to tell interesting stories around the nations taking part at RLWC2021 were raised, and it was noted that stories around Lebanon and Papua New Guinea related to RLWC2017 had been told across online platforms.

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking Slater, McIntyre and Woods for their presentation.

Meeting closed at 1902

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