



**MINUTES OF THE ARMY RUGBY UNION ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING HELD AT 1600 HRS ON THURSDAY 23 MAY 2024 VIA MICOROSOFT TEAMS**

Item

The Army Rugby Union – Annual General Meeting – 23 May 24
Intro – COO

Brigadier James Cook – Chair of the Army Rugby Union

Welcome and I wish to give you a reminder all in attendance why we have the AGM –

The AGM is held annually as directed by the Management Board. Each club within the Union may send one representative to such meetings, exclusive of any member of their club serving on the Council, who is also entitled to vote.

The Management Board, also known as the Board of Trustees, for which I am the Chairman, is accountable to a variety of different organisations in varying degrees and areas including the Charity Commission, Companies House, the Rugby Football Union, Army Sport and to you, our members. The purpose of this AGM is to brief you on our plans so that you can endorse them where appropriate and question where appropriate in order for the ARU to deliver them on your behalf.

Therefore, as we finish each section please do ask any relevant questions you may have.

A reminder of what the Aim of the ARU is:

The aim of the ARU is to promote and foster the game of Rugby Union in the Army and its local communities in accordance with the Laws of the Game. The Management board executes this task on your behalf. Our Mission is to:

‘promote and govern Rugby Union in the Army through the maintenance of stable structures for the game that enable its successful development at all levels for the benefit of all its participants’.

We remain in a sound financial position and the DoF will expand later in the meeting. I can confirm that the Board remain transparent and financially compliant as a registered charity; that the Trustees and directors remain accountable, that the ARU have once again been subject to an independent audit, and that the Board deliver the best possible value for money as one of the National Constituent Bodies of the Rugby Football Union, importantly focused in every respect on our Charitable objects.

With regard to maximising rugby for all, I do have some significant concerns. While I believe our representative teams and the men’s Corps sides are in a reasonably good state, I get the very strong sense that we are facing significant challenges with

availability of players and teams in our Community Rugby and therefore the rugby being played at Premiership, Championship, and women's Corps levels.

This season has been taxing however I remain delighted about the rugby that I see – I just wished we had more to watch!

The revised ARU strategy and associated plans for the next 5 years remains fit for purpose and I am pleased with how it leads into direction to our various partners and volunteers to deliver rugby on your behalf.

The Strategy is based on the following 6 building blocks, which align with those of the RFU: Maintain, Sustain, Develop, Grow, Evolve and Succeed.

I believe we have the best people working within the representative game; coaches, match officials, medical staff, and administrators, however we are always after people to fill numerous positions as individuals step down from the supporting and management roles. Brigadier Andy Geary has made a huge difference in our representative rugby as have all four of our DoRs, Tim Osman, Ann O'Flynn, Jon Lord and James Harris.

Regarding the Inter-Service matches – we are obviously delighted with regaining the Men's championship and sustaining the women's cup. The Masters played well, but were sunk eventually by the Navy.

The Inter Services are doing well – the appointment of Brian Facer to manage the IS has worked well – Gloucester was fantastic and the rugby at Twickenham amazing. We will work hard to increase attendance at both matches but we must be careful not to confuse attendance with success. Success is about spectator behaviours and an inclusive experience as well as generating cash for the ARU and RNRU.

I think the Corps bars will quickly be forgotten – although it was a decision that was made for us by the RFU due to their prohibitive costs.

I am delighted we are committed to Gloucester for the foreseeable future and that we are focused on staying at Twickenham for the foreseeable future as well.

From an RFU point of view – this coming season ALL rugby players will need to be Registered to Play rugby in England and the Army on the RFUs GMS. It is an administrative burden but long overdue and needed to understand the rugby landscape.

My final note is one of thanks to all of you that makes rugby happen – be it match official, coach, player, manager, kit person etc – you all make a difference to allow the Army's Sport to be as good as it is.

Thank you – I will now hand over to Danny McDermitt our Finance Director

Ladies and Gents, good afternoon I am Danny McDermid the Army Rugby Union Finance Director.

The current breakdown of income and expenditure is at Annex A to this report.

- The current cash in bank is - **£1,553,948.44 with an overall working capital of £1,609,548.44** before any income from both IS matches. So we are in a healthy situation going forward.
- Audited accounts TBC due to still being externally audited by DJH Mitten & Clarke
- Investments - £320k. These investments at have not been audited (M&G) since 1997 (28 years ago) and have now been audited by St James Palace with there findings in two folders that should be presented to the management board with recommendations. CCLA still have trustees from 8 years ago on their accounts so getting access has been an issue so these need to be altered (doing this at present) then they will also be audited. Once both files are completed I would suggest the MB decide on a sum to invest for the future. With interest rates due to come down in the summer already our bank interest RBS has been cut from 4.2% to 3.75% and Santander from 5.2% to 5% I foresee my recommendation to invest more with the appropriate investors.
- Sponsorship – Most of this years sponsorship money has arrived IPRO (£15,000) has been removed by the Army as a sponsor.
- Representative Teams - Financial Overview: £135k to date has been spent using the Revolute cards I have only closed the U23 Accounts so far (Mens submitted for audit but not completed yet). Big difference in how the teams have budgeted from some that have been very conscious to spending to others who have had it burning in their pocket to spend and dare I say wasted money. Cloathing has been a massive spend this year with over £150k spent on it including the Raging Bull outfits I would suggest this should be reviewed for next year.
- Army v Navy – Twickenham – revenue potential difficult to estimate due to the introduction of the IS manager and being 5,000 tickets down on last year. We received £435k last year and would anticipate around £200k - £250k this year. Substantial savings this year on Accommodation £22k and hospitality £30k so should help with the overall profits.
- Army v RAF – Gloucester – last year we received 20K; I would hope this increases this year to at least £25K.
- Oxen (Elite Pro Sport-retail element)–Hold all the risk with stock and the ARU has a 50:50 split of Sale of Goods minus Cost of Goods. For the first 6 months we received £5934. Disappointing they ran out of stock at Twickenham to sell around an hour before KO.
- Sponsorship revenue - £240k plus the £148k from Babcock.
- IMS and Affiliation Income - £5.9K. IMS Numbers are down this year to under 100 members.

Op Grant bid this year had 40% of it rejected compared with 100% acceptance last year. £15k has been allocated to the training budget and we are doing well with courses to get this spent. It is hoped that all ARU courses will be funded free of charge this season.

I will hopefully answer any questions on the above figures?

Representative Rugby Update.

My name is Brigadier Andy Geary and I am Chair of Representative Rugby, responsible to the ARU Bd for the outputs of 'Red Shirt' Rugby. This report comes at the conclusion of my second season in the role. Before focussing on the various teams, it is worth highlighting that the Red Shirt teams have collectively contributed to a number of wider Army initiatives such as the Engage to Recruit campaign through the provision of players and management teams to key stakeholder events and through increased co-operation with HQ Regional Command. The latter saw the attendance of clubs and schools from the Hampshire area attending the U23 home inter service match and similar for the Women's fixture against Wales U20s. We have also sought to improve our links into both the Academy network and more broadly into the Welsh Rugby Union, both with the aim of attracting quality rugby players into the Army.

But now to the teams and I will start with the Army Men's U23s.

The U23's regained the Inter Service championship from the Royal Navy after an extremely competitive competition was eventually won on points difference. Six players were capped at UKAF U23 level, with further representation within Army 7s and development squads.

The season started with an open trial attended by over 80 players with almost every cap badge represented. The implementation of a 'QR code' sign up process and increased engagement with Phase 1 and 2 training establishments paid significant dividends and is an approach which is being replicated for next season. We currently have 200 applications for the season which commences in 9 weeks with another open trial in Winchester; these include a number of International age group and academy players. The team undertook the standard warm up fixtures against REME & RA Corps development XV's, RMAS, Camberley & Berkshire U20s, going unbeaten throughout. The standard of opposition is something being addressed for next season, with fixtures against Sidmouth in the South West and Cardiff Met University already confirmed for later this year.

Of note, the team benefitted from excellent engagement with the Army Sergeant Major who was incredibly generous with his time and was a huge advocate for what the team achieved in both the professional and personal development of young soldiers and officers.

All of the coaching staff will be retained from last season with former Army Senior Men's player Will Reeve joining the team as Skills coach following his recent retirement. Spencer Sutton will combine his Masters responsibilities with the U23 Team manager role.

There is much to be excited about with the U23s and I am incredibly grateful for the efforts of Maj Sam Richardson and Capt Gareth Slade-Jones who have created the energy around this team.

Moving to the other end of the age bracket, the Army Masters had a mixed IS campaign; a narrow defeat to the Navy, who claimed the IS trophy, before a pleasing 24 nil win over the RAF at Kingsholm. Both games pulled in very good crowds and the Friday night fixtures at Richmond and Gloucester respectively are now firm fixtures of the Inter Service weekends. As reported previously, the ever increasing standard of Service 'Veterans' rugby makes finding the right level of opposition throughout the season a challenge. Too good for equivalent civilian 'age bracketed' teams, the Masters have to rely on other sources of competition which can vary from year to year. This season, fixtures against the Pacific Islanders, GB Prison Service, English Fire Service, North Petherton and Rugby for Heroes provided good preparation, but more work is to be done to ensure we face the right opposition at the right time. This season saw the retirement of Lt Col James Harris as DoR and Capt Mark Eastley as

Head Coach; both are thanked for their multiple years of service to Red Shirt Rugby. Maj Rob Mitchell (DoR), and Sgt Carl Adams (Head Coach), ably assisted by the ever-dependable Capt Spencer Sutton (AsDoR), will now spearhead the task of regaining the IS trophy. The Masters' squad is strong, but this season will see increased engagement with the various Corps 1st XV's and Masters' sides to ensure that players from outside the system are identified. Normalising the pathway from the Senior XV to the Masters, as proven recently by Cpl Joe Brown and Sgt Paul Taura, is a high priority this season.

Turning to the 2 Senior teams and starting with the Army Women.

Having won successive Inter-Service Championships, the Women's Senior team focused on retaining their position and continuing to improve. Despite the speed at which the civilian Women's game is developing, the Women remain the only team with regular scheduled 'international' fixtures, providing increasingly tough opposition with them winning 1 out of 3 fixtures this year. This included a loss against a very robust, full-strength Sweden who were heading to European Championships straight after the match and an outstanding England U20s team made up of the very best age group players in the country. A hard fought win over Wales U20 provided some balance and demonstrated that the Army can truly compete at this level – all 3 fixtures have already been confirmed for next season. Fixtures against the Pacific Islanders, Brunel University and the British Police completed the warm-up fixtures and while attendance at the training camp was lower than previous seasons, a reflection on how busy the Army is more broadly, the coaching team did an outstanding job in galvanising senior and new players into a cohesive and competitive unit. This included the employment of a performance psychologist for the first time, an initiative the team will develop further next season.

As ever, the proof is in the pudding and the Senior Women beat both the Navy and RAF to retain the inter-service championships. Of note, this included beating an RAF team which fielded 3 full internationals including a Red Roses World Cup finalist. What shone through was the attitude and camaraderie amongst our women – they wanted it more.

Turning to the Senior Men. Having lost against the Navy in 2023 and with a number of changes in both management and senior players, the Army Senior Men embarked upon a process of rebuilding. At its heart, this saw a refreshed management and coaching set up with Col Graham Taylor appointed DoR; Lt Col Tim Osman formally appointed Head Coach; SSgt Gerhard Wessels and Cpl Junior Bulamakau recruited as coaches; and Capt Morgan-Scott brought in to bolster the day to day team management. The aims this season were to regain the Inter Services title; to identify and develop new talent; to improve relationships with U23s and Masters; to bring greater professionalism to the team; to be fitter and stronger than before and to foster a team spirit and culture beholden of Army Red Shirt Rugby. It was also important to continue to break down the myth that the Red Shirt teams are a 'closed shop'. Over the course of the season 55 players were used from 12 Corps and 22 different cap-badges, resulting in 13 new capped players, demonstrating a clear route to those aspiring to play representative rugby. At the start of the season, the Development XV set the tone with victories against the Oxford Greyhounds and the RAF Development XV. And in a results driven business, the Army Senior Men won all four of its 'capped' games against the French Army, the Irish Defence Force; the RN, where having been 29-5 down at half time, the team demonstrated the team spirit and resolve to win 43-42 with the last move of the game; and finally with a convincing 21-45 win against the RAF to regain the Inter-Service title. So, all in all, a very good season and one which can be built upon next year.

Finally, turning to the 7s. It was another strong season for both mens and women's programmes, as they continue to cement themselves amongst the highest performing

sports teams in the British Army. With both teams undergoing coaching leadership change, sustainment at the highest level is always tough; yet this was achieved with some outstanding displays of skill and fortitude. For the women, cup finalist or semi-finalists in 5 of 6 competitions; the cup victory remaining elusive for now. For the men, 2 titles at Richmond and London International Sevens, runners up at South Island, Heart of Wales, semi-finalists at Melrose and Bournemouth and quarter finalists in Leeds and Edinburgh.

The women kick off the current season this week in Bournemouth, and the men are already hitting their stride with a return to the Super Sevens Series to battle the best invitational, and some international teams from the UK, Europe and beyond. Round one already in the bag, with a notable 28 -5 win over Germany, we look forward to seeing the rest of the season unfold.

Of particular note is the steady growth of quality players from across the Army with little to choose between the Senior Men and development teams – there is genuine competition for places. The team had 1 further international honour on the HSBC series last year from LCpl Solo Radianirova, and with a UKAF offering this year, I am confident the Army will be very well represented in both men's and women's squads.

So, to conclude, Army Red-Shirt rugby remains in a strong position. Having re-cast certain aspects of our delivery over the last 12 months we won 6 of 8 inter service fixtures and are interservice champions in 3 out of the 4 competitions. We continue to offer a XV's and 7s pathway for our male and female soldiers and officers to compete on domestic and international stages, with the Twickenham fixtures in particular cementing us at the heart of the Army's institutional foundation.

Handing over to Chair of Community Rugby – Maj M Wilding

CORPS

Corps Festival. At Newbury RFC

League 1 Royal Logistic Corps

League 2 – The Infantry

League 3 – The Army Medical Services

Corps Finals at Aldershot

League Season Men.

Corps 1 – The Royal Engineers

Corps 2 – The Infantry

Corps 3 – The Royal Army Physical Corps

League Season Women. REME and a combined Team featuring layers from the RE's and Signals

UNIT

Premiership. Winners were 1 Bn the Royal Welsh.

Due to last years inability to for a competitive competition the Units below the Premiership were invited to enter knowout Cups, one pre Christmas and one post Christmas.

Winners were:

6 Dec 23 – Lyneham Knights 12 - 1 Bn Royal Welsh Dragons 46

6 Dec 23 – Abbey Wood 14 – Purvis Warriors 50

27 Mar 24 – 11 Bn Royal Signals 14 – The Irish Guards 8

27 Mar 24 – UAS Hawkes 28 – The Royal Welsh Dragons 12

Handing over to Chair of Army Rugby Union Referees – Brig G McDade

General

ARURS continues to grow as a Society, although development opportunities for newer referees are still inconsistent due to the relative low number of games at the unit level. In order to gain experience, all ARURS referees are encouraged to join their local societies as well. At the most recent ExCo, the mechanism of enabling members to officiate civilian games, particularly Wednesday university fixtures, was discussed. The benefits to wider Community Engagement efforts are clear.

ARURS is now in its third full season as a voting member of the RFU and the management of appointments on Who's the Ref (WTR) platform is routine in line with our civilian peer societies. There remain frictions with the system although, and the transient nature of lower level unit rugby officers will remain a key limitation. The key benefit for ARURS is the ability to monitor the progress of our officials in their non-Army fixtures so that we can provide the top ARU fixtures with our very best.

Referee feedback forms remain vital for official development and are available by QR code and on the ARURS web page. Only by getting routine feedback will we be able to develop robust development plans for all our officials. All clubs are strongly encouraged to submit feedback which whichever means.

Through ARU funding, ARURS sent 2Lt Michael Todd (6 SCOTS) on exchange to the 2024 Australian Defence Force Rugby Championships (26 Apr – 11 May 24) where he refereed a number of fixtures, including the Senior Men's Australian Army vs Navy final. This was an excellent deference engagement opportunity, as well as a rewarding, developmental experience for a young referee that is progressing fast (2Lt Todd officiated the 2022/23 Senior Men's RAF vs Navy fixture and was recently in the team of officials for the 2024 Women's Six Nations in an international capacity). It is very much hoped that an exchange of this nature becomes routine business, as an aspirational target for ARURS' up-and-coming officials.

Gary McDade is due to hand over as ARURS Chair at the end of the 2023/24 season, after 6 years at the helm. Although it requires ratification at the next ARURS AGM in Jul 24, it's anticipated that Ian Farrell will replace him.

Membership

ARURS currently has 225 members, up by nearly 15 from last year. Although a seemingly high number, fewer than 25% are actively refereeing, which is down on previous seasons. This is as a result of unavailability due to other commitments, and a paucity of fixtures at the lower levels of rugby.

Engagement with the wider ARU community is strong and we routinely welcome new members through support from the Corps and Clubs who regularly advertise refereeing opportunities.

Inter Service Championship

The IS championship, specifically the RN v RAF fixtures, remain the pinnacle of refereeing for the majority of ARURS members. The Society fielded three strong teams of five for this year's fixtures, all of whom delivered strong performances, really contributing to some competitive rugby matches. The off field 'wrap' around this year's IS was enhanced to include similar support to what representative teams receive in terms of accommodation, off-field gear etc, and was extremely well received. ARURS is very grateful to the ARU for their support in this endeavour.

Training

A successful training day in September was delivered with DLV dominating the day along with an Assistant Referee masterclass from Ian Farrell.

A successful ERRA cse was run in January with 12 military on it, including x9 Army x2 Navy and x1 RAF. Another course is running over the week of 20 May, with 15 participants signed up. The pipeline of new officials is steady. On top of training new officials, an additional training package was delivered at the Inter Service championship ensuring all were match fit, which helped lead to a successful tournament from an officials' point of view.

Several matches have been observed, and a number of Army officials have gained hard-earned promotions within their civilian societies. These include: Rob Hitch making Level 5 in London Society, new referees Ben Davey and Robin White being grade L9* and 9 respectively, Peter Middlemiss L8, Al Spaven 8*, Damien Thursby 8, Paul Gaskin L7 and Stephen Walley L7* (all Dorset & Wilts).

Appointing

Appointing remains an area of concern, despite being raised season after season.

Communication between Corps, clubs and officials remains a sticking point in some instances. Some are excellent with early, positive comms, whilst there are still too many reports of late notification of games, or no engagement from the sides. There have, once again, been some instances of games being called off without officials being informed. There have also been instance of Units messaging the Senior Appointer for details of the referee on the day of a game that had not previously been known about.

Poor communications have been a constant for several years now; units are requested to remind their officials of the requirement to engage with officials.

Some flexibility in Kick off times would assist ARURS in supporting all games that are due to be played. With a finite number of referees to share across Six Corps fixtures, it is unachievable to support a Corps fixture with four or more Match Officials. A normal Corps Day includes Masters, Women's, and Men's games. A team of three is appointed to those fixtures, AR1 for Men's will ref the Women's Game, AR2 will ref the Masters game, leaving the team of three to officiate the Men's game. To have the

same kick off time for Men's and Women's game is not achievable to support. Although this was supported once, a Match Official drove from York to Wiltshire to referee what turned out to be a 10s training game for the Women. ARURS will continue to work hard with Corps and clubs to ensure we make best and most efficient use of a finite pool of officials.

There have again been some instances where representative and unit sides are scheduling fixtures for Saturdays. Most ARURS referees have RFU or local society appointments at the weekend, so it is often difficult to get the correct level of match official to these games. Additionally forecasting Premiership games on the same day as a full Corps fixture calendar is very difficult and unachievable to support with the correct level of Match Official.

Developing communications relating to appointing is a 'whole ARU' endeavour, and it is very much hoped there will be a notable improvement over the 2024/25 season.

I will now hand over to Captain Stuart Morgan Scott

Discipline - Season 23/24 – Captain Stuart Scott

Ladies and Gents, the following are our Discipline Stats for the season.

13 cases, up from last season.

2x Match Official Abuse

4x 2 x Yellow Cards

2x reckless / dangerous to others

1x dangerous play ruck / maul

2x dangerous tackle

2x punch / strike

3 still to hear due to units being on exercise.

2 cases dismissed, following review of video evidence.

13 panel members used, and 4 panel chairs used during the season.

CB Self audit completed and green across the board.

New Disc Chair next season – Maj Matt Wray

New Disc Sec next Season – Capt Julie Simpson

Assistant Disc Sec next season – Maj Shaun Reeve

We now need you to vote the ARU Board and Council for the next 12 months.

Army Rugby Union – Board

MANAGEMENT BOARD

Chairman – Brig J Cook OBE
Vice Chairman - Brig G McDade
Director Marketing – Col G Malec
Chairman of Representative Rugby – Brig A Geary OBE
RFU Council Member – Brig J Cook OBE
Director of Community Rugby – Maj M Wilding
Director of Rugby Development – Maj Gemma Stonebridge Smith
Non-Executive Director – Mr J Eyre
Non-Executive Director – Maj M Coles RChD
Non-Executive Director –
Director of Finance – Mr D McDermitt
Chief Operations Officer – Mr C Fowke

COUNCIL

The Chairman and Members of the ARU Management Board
Director of Senior Rugby – Col G Taylor CBE
Director of Women's Rugby – Maj A O'Flynn
Director Academy – Maj S Richardson
Director Masters - Maj R Mitchell
Director of Sevens – Maj J Lord
Chairman Discipline – Maj S Scott
Chairman ARURS – Brig G McDade
Chairman Corps Rugby – Lt Col J Lowe
Chairman Premiership – Maj A Bennett
Chair of Community 7s – Capt J Howard
Senior Medical Advisor – Maj M Morgan
Chair of Diversity and Inclusion – Maj Paul Smithurst
Director of Communication – Ms K Fowke
Chair of Engagement – Col M Davies
USA Exchange Fixture Sec – Lt Col M Wade Smith

Any Other Business

To vote in :

As the Senior Vice President – Lieutenant General James Swift CBE OBE - Carried

As a HLVP – Mr John Joss - Carried

ARU Accounts as at 22 May 2024 – Aug 2024

Income

Expenditure - Paid

Accommodation				
Banks	Holts	£975949.17	Kit - teams	£137,000
	Santander	£257999.27	Raging Bull	£25,000
	Investments	£320,000	Teams Revolute	£135,000
Total Cash		£1,553948.44		
			Medical	£12,000
			IS Manager*	£40,000
Expected income			Dinner TOW & Women	£19,000
			Wages	£55,600
	Santander int	£3,000	Expected Expenditure	
	Holts Int	£14,000	Teams	£20,000
	Op Grant 24	£77,000	IS Manager*	£20,000
	Sponsors	£36,000	Wages	£34,000
Total		£130,000	Total	£74,400
Grand total income		£1.683948.44		
Minus Expected expenditure		£74,000		
Working capital until Sep 24		£ 1,609.548.44		