



WRU PRESIDENT, CHAIRMAN AND C.E.O THANK THE CLUBS

4 April 2014

During the last few months we have had the pleasure of visiting all our districts across Wales which represent the 320 clubs of the WRU.

We met the people who need to be congratulated for helping Welsh rugby flourish on the world stage and sustain its position as the national sport of Wales.

At those meetings we enjoyed levels of debate which reminded us that the future of Welsh rugby is being safeguarded by a body of individuals with passion for the game and true insight into the direction in which we need to travel together.

The feedback we received also reminded us that it is important for us to ensure we are all up to date on matters of operational strategy.

It is no exaggeration to state that the Welsh Rugby Union is one of the most successful in the world game and the foundation of that strength is the unity of purpose we share.

For a nation of three million people to boast an international team which thrives in the top ten nations in the game is quite remarkable.

But as we stated at our last Annual General Meeting our clear priority is to ensure the community game is a sustainable force capable for the future.

Our strategy is based on the clear knowledge that international success provides the income which in turn fuels the sustainability of the vital grassroots game. To deliver this strategy the WRU has to be efficient and effective.

So here are some reminders of how we link our strategy to actions and initiatives which help our sport.

Last year the WRU approved and organised some 8,000 games which were all controlled by our own trained and appointed match officials.

That is one of the reasons why, over the past five years, the WRU has identified, either directly or indirectly, funding streams which have funnelled more than £27m into the community game.

Aside from that our direct annual funding structures have ensured a constant level of criteria-based funding which last year saw the community game draw down £4m in WRU support.

An extra £1.3million was distributed directly into the community game at the end of the last year on the back of a strong financial performance by the WRU. This was in the form of £800,000 for club facilities grants, £300,000 for new club websites and £200,000 for schools projects.

We have set up a five strong Club Operation Support Group within our staff and to further support the army of volunteers in the amateur game we have 46 Rugby Development Officers and Rugby Participation Officers working across Wales.

To ensure those 8,000 games are refereed appropriately we have a full time staff of seven men and women focused on training and organising match officials.

The regional academies are safeguarded by the WRU with 22 of our full time staff in the WRU Regional Performance Development Department and a further five in the National Academy Management team.

Initiatives aimed at boosting junior and mini engagement in rugby have also borne fruit in recent years with participation numbers growing strongly. Over 2,000 new juniors played the game in Wales last year and 6,500 youngsters aged between 12 and 16 attended player development events. Our statistics show that we now have more than 30,400 youngsters aged from U7 to U16 playing rugby in Wales in some 1,600 teams from U7 to U19.

To engage the very young we have projects such as Junior Stars and Little Stars camps for kids, Street Rugby or Cage Rugby and a plethora of other training and activity courses managed by our own staff. These are primarily aimed at introducing more youngsters to rugby.

We focus on the needs of you, our clubs, with projects such the Participation Points Scheme which distributed an extra £1m from the WRU directly into equipment and facilities.

Much of our work has secured the entry point for youngsters into our sport and more children are now using rugby as a tool to achieve the activity they need to build into their lives.

Our new Head of Rugby, Josh Lewsey, has just completed a review of the entire game in Wales and come up with proposals to tackle the issues which can really make a difference at the grassroots level. This body of work could lead to some realignment of our activities but we will keep you informed and engaged with this.

The review has confirmed our determination to engage with our secondary schools to improve the league playing structure below our U18 league which is screened by S4C in our joint Rugby Pawb project.

We will work to encourage these youngsters to move into the club structure in a way which will actively address the known fall-off in club activity from around age 14. There has been an immense amount of work on this issue and the results will be shared soon.

We are also working with you all to revise the league structure and our current budget discussions will look at ways of addressing the cost of travel which can be such a burden for some clubs.

To support our club structures we are hosting workshops at the Millennium Stadium to train volunteers and a new pro bono legal advice initiative in partnership with Cardiff University and two Welsh law firms is in place.

We have also widened the scope of engagement in our sport through initiatives such as the control of touch rugby leagues. Again this will encourage a wider engagement with rugby in general.

In north Wales we have transferred the representative team, RGC 1404, into our league structure and worked closely with the Conwy County Borough Council to develop Parc Eirias. That improvement has allowed us to make it the home of our U20 team for international fixtures in a move which will surely build wider support for rugby at all levels in the north.

This is just a glimpse at a body of work which is championed by yourselves through our district directors and funded through the WRU's five year rolling strategic and financial plan which basically forms our working roadmap.

The development of an executive board structure within the WRU has helped push forward our financial success with turnover rising some 40 per cent since 2007.

That success is clearly reflected in our international performances which have been supported by proper and strategic investment in the elite level of our sport.

Over recent years the WRU has focused on sustaining that success by employing the best coaches and backroom staff, creating a National Centre of Excellence for all our international training and pushing our financial and commercial performances forward.

The unashamed focus on getting our international structure right is based on the incontrovertible fact that a successful Wales team is the financial engine which drives our sport forward.

Of course it is also the symbol of Welsh rugby which proclaims our rugby heritage and engenders the pride of a nation.

To bolster our international strength further we have worked to sustainable agreements with our Regions which include multi million pound levels of direct funding annually, financially supported all our academies in full, developed the age grade structure and boosted our sevens squad through a central contract system. By the end of the Participation Agreement in December 2013 the financial support for our Regions, in simple terms, amounted to £9m annually from competition income and £6.7m a year in direct WRU funding. That direct funding total had risen from £3.2m a year before the PA was signed in 2009 and the new Rugby Services Agreement will deliver even greater support.

We have also reviewed and strengthened the Principality Premiership Division which now has twelve instead of fourteen teams and formed a new Championship division to further strengthen our player pool. Agreements have been struck to manage participation and cooperation between the WRU and the teams at these levels.

Since 2007 we have won three RBS 6 Nations championships including two Grand Slams, reached the semi-finals of the Rugby World Cup in New Zealand and delivered the bulk of players, coaches and backroom staff to a successful British and Irish Lions tour of Australia. Not bad going.

Our sevens squad has won the world championship, our U20 team has beaten South Africa en route to a Junior World Championship semi final and our developing women's team continues to contend strongly in the northern hemisphere game qualifying for the Rugby World Cup this year.

For the future our work moves on apace.

The Millennium Stadium will host eight games in the 2015 Rugby World Cup which will guarantee an income for Welsh Rugby of several million pounds.

We have already indicated our desire to host the 2018 Rugby World Cup Sevens competition here in Wales.

These are the sort of endeavours which have helped us build the Millennium Stadium into a venue which hosts events that annually boost the Welsh economy by £130m and sustain more than 2,500 full time jobs.

Some of you wanted to discuss international match ticketing issues with us during our recent meetings. Your views have been taken on board and we are restructuring our ticketing department and introducing some practical changes which will have been highlighted to you in a separate letter.

We have just completed a governance review of the constitutional structure of the WRU which was started in August 2012 and headed by the eminent High Court judge, Sir Robert Owen. The findings of that review have already been placed before the WRU Board and some of the main points will therefore be put before you shortly by your district directors.

New protocols on the identification of and care for players suffering from concussion are now being drawn up by the WRU. We intend to follow up the structures and protocols in place for the elite game with new guidelines for community rugby. You will hear more on this soon.

We have also been working on preparing our Welsh Language Policy which will shortly be unveiled in tandem with a revamp of our website with a Welsh language option which we began working on last year.

We believe it is important we constantly share and update this information with you in order to ensure we can continue a dialogue of informed debate.

Of course there have been problems and issues which deserve to be scrutinized and talked through. The remit of the governing body is so wide that there will inevitably be matters to address.

Your role in that debate is crucial because our constitution places the ownership of Welsh rugby in the hands of our clubs.

Within our constitution the pathway for more formal debate exists from your, our clubs, through the districts and on to the board directors who oversee the WRU's executive on all operational matters.

You know we have a history of robust debate and we must use that as a positive force to drive forward policies and practices which will truly make a difference.

Our visits to your districts helped remind us of the passion, commitment and rugby knowledge which exists across our sport.

We look forward to meeting you all again soon to update you with a progress report and listen to your views and opinions. In the meantime please let us know of any specific issues you may want to discuss.

Yours sincerely



Dennis Gethin

President



David Pickering

Chairman



Roger Lewis

Group Chief Executive