

# Rugby and Eton Fives Coaching Agency

Many of our Eton Fives readers will know Howard Wiseman well as a player, manager of Westway, an EFA Board member and of course, through the coaching of Eton Fives. The agency currently looks after 25 Eton Fives Schools which will rise to 28 for the 2006/2007 Season. Rugby Fives readers, however, know Howard less well, although the Agency's activities in Rugby Fives are growing steadily. Currently 9 schools are looked after by the Agency – Bedford, Fettes, Whitgift, Alleyns, St.Dunstan's, Stoke Newington, Marlborough, Oundle and Radley and it is expected that this number will rise to 11 next Season.

Howard started coaching when he was in the 6th form at St Olave's and the Fives Team did not have a Master to coach them. They became self sufficient in this area and when he left, Howard was asked by the school to continue his coaching whilst he was attending Music College. Success lead to the Headmaster giving Howard a contract for coaching and he became Master in Charge of Fives. From then on the work mushroomed with other schools being pointed in his direction and Howard himself became proactive in promoting the service to a number of schools where the Eton Fives courts were not being fully utilised or not utilised at all. He soon became an expert in prising open courts used as store rooms or propping up the game in schools where there was no Master in Charge. He found that schools were very willing to pay for a professional service particularly as schools increasingly took the view that all their

facilities should be used rather than having some laying idle as a "wasted asset".

Howard's entry into the Rugby Fives world started with the discovery of courts at Stoke Newington School where, although the courts were not in the best of condition, the school was keen to incorporate Fives onto their timetable. Howard made sure he learnt the game before embarking on the coaching role at the school. Work at St Dunstan's and Whitgift soon followed.

There is no doubt that the Agency can now be regarded as a fully fledged business and Howard currently has 3 full time individuals supporting him.

Howard finds that schools are happy to buy in a service and also the enthusiasm generated by the coaches. Issues such as pay and attendance are taken away from the school and are looked after by the Agency which is a far cry away from the days when maybe a lot of schools were relying on the goodwill of old boys to come and support the game at their school.

Many of you also know that Howard is involved with the Handball Supplies Company, although this is very much run by his partner, Jo. In his early days of coaching Howard found that pupils and parents would request equipment and he very much acted as the middle man in this area. He then began making a few gloves because he was unhappy with the standard of those that he was buying and it began to occur to him how convenient it would be for pupils and schools to go to one supplier offering all the equipment and with a big stock of

everything available, not just gloves but goggles, trainers etc. The professional image could be enhanced through the production of a catalogue giving full details of the products and their prices.

Having generated the idea Howard then took a back seat as Jo began developing the business. Her objective was to make it as easy as possible for schools and parents to buy the equipment needed without having to be reliant on school shops. She has also made it increasingly easy for schools to order equipment by phone and by offering as flexible a service as possible.

Jo now has a part-time helper to support her work with the company which has now been running for about 8 years.

Whilst, as mentioned before, Howard is not directly involved with the business, he does take an interest in orders, particularly from schools, as he finds that this is a good indication of what is going on there.

Other initiatives that have come out of this work have been the provision of equipment for squash court fives with the Handball Supplies Company being able to help raise the profile through displaying the equipment in its catalogue and the coaching agency has been involved with the staffing of coaches for one-wall fives.

Not surprisingly, Howard feels that he is pretty much at full capacity at the time which is not only good for him but also a sign that fives, particularly in schools, is alive and well, thanks to the great efforts of Howard, Jo and their teams.