

**THE RUGBY FIVES ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT 2010-11

In my own mind, this – my last report as General Secretary – is perhaps something of an end of an era, but the beauty of the situation is that I know the Rugby Fives Association will continue – and continue in better health than before.

This last year (well, 15 months, but when have journalists let facts get in the way of a good story?) is a perfect example of why I think the game and the Association are in such good health.

Since I last sat down to pen a report for an AGM, I can report on huge progress: new courts at Rugby as well as refurbished ones at Oswestry, Blundell's and Alleyn's; charitable status for the Association; and a fine crop of young players coming into the adult game.

For me – and, I suspect, many others, not least the incoming President – the highlight of the last year must have been the opening of the new courts at Rugby School. To have the game resurrected at its spiritual home means a huge amount not just to all of us within the RFA but also to those from all over the world whose generosity allowed the courts to be built in the first place.

The unbridled joy on the faces of the guests at the celebration dinner will live with me for many years, and I'm particularly delighted that the school has wasted no time in winning its first titles in its new era. It's a sure sign that times have changed, given that the two championship winners were girls – something that was probably unimaginable when Rugby last had courts.

In the last 12 months, I've also been delighted to play on the refurbished courts at Blundell's, Alleyn's and Oswestry, and it's the same story at each venue. Dedication from a few keen souls – plus occasional donations from RFA members – has led to greater enjoyment of the game among existing and new players.

As these new eras start, though, it's only fair to mark the ends of some eras – and mark them with great gratitude. For me, Peter Dunscombe and David Goodwin have become synonymous with the events they have so skilfully run – the West of England and National Schools' Championships, respectively – so it was almost a shock to see them end their 30-year-plus associations with them. Still, everyone has to move on, and they move on with our profound thanks ringing in their ears.

Mind you, it's typical of the game and the people within it that there has been no trouble recruiting willing volunteers to take on these daunting mantles.

As ever, I make no apology for repeating myself. Rugby Fives succeeds thanks to the efforts of so many people and I must thank all the many and various people who so selflessly give of their time to further our beloved game: the organisers who smoothly run such successful events and send me reports so quickly for the website; all those who contribute words and pictures to all our various publications; all our match managers and, well, everyone. We – and every player of the game – are profoundly grateful.

All of which brings me to one genuine moment of sadness, as this was the year we lost one of the game's greatest friends, Ian Roberts. There is a full tribute to Ian in the Annual Review, to which I can add nothing of great moment, but all I will say is that it was a pleasure and a privilege to work alongside Ian in the RFA. His capacity for work – and work of the highest

quality – was a lesson and an inspiration to me, and his efforts in securing charitable status for the RFA will have benefits for the game and its players far into the future.

Ian was a great character on- and off-court, and it was touching to see so many of his fellow players and board members at his funeral in February. It was particularly fitting that among the bearers were Ian's three team-mates from the White Rose Club, who together won the National Club Championship in 1991.

I hope David Barnes will excuse me for quoting him, but his words say more – and say it more eloquently – than I can hope to. “Ian's untimely death is a great loss to the [Rugby Fives] Association after all his devoted work on the Review, Charitable Status, Incorporation and so on – not to mention the Yorkshire Doubles, White Rose Club and many other Fives matters. The RFA will not be able to replace such a man.”

Indeed, it says all you need to know about Ian that it has effectively taken two of us to assume just his RFA responsibilities. I have taken on the role of Editor of the Annual Review as part of my new responsibilities as Communications Officer, while the ongoing work with the Charities Commission now falls within the remit of Ian Fuller, the new General Secretary. I have enjoyed the challenge and many rewards of being Gen Sec, and the sadness at leaving the role is tempered by the sure knowledge that Ian will do a superb job – not least because I know how good a job he did as my predecessor.

I remain on the RFA board, and I am delighted to report that we have had a very productive year. Two important sub-committees have recently concluded their work – one under David Gardner revised the rules of our beloved game, and a second under David Barnes looked at ways to improve the National Schools' Championship. And, as they finish, a third, chaired by National Doubles champion Hamish Buchanan, is starting to look at how we can improve the adult game.

Beyond that, we continue our work as part of the Fives Federation, and its work I hope will reap great rewards for our game in the future. Some of you may bridle at the thought of co-operation with ‘the other’ Fives, but I can assure you that they share our aims.

We want to see a growth of this great game – or perhaps I should say these great games, for (and forgive me!) I will confess to an occasional masochistic enjoyment of Eton Fives. By working together – and with our colleagues in England Handball, who have achieved such success in such a short period of time – I believe we can work more effectively; and that is something that I – and, I hope, all of you – very much look forward to.

Andy Pringle
August 2011