



ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Founded 1897

Ground and Clubhouse: Gorton Street, Peel Green, Eccles, Manchester, M30 7LY
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Minutes of Eccles RFC Annual General Meeting – 10th June 2019

Welcome from the Club President – Paul Thorpe

Paul opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the 2019 AGM and thanking them for the attendance. He then handed the meeting over to Chairman Mark Greenhalgh.

Minutes from previous AGM

Due to an oversight, printed copies of the minutes were not brought to the meeting. In order that everyone had chance to review them, it was proposed by Mark Greenhalgh that they be published to the club website, and any questions be raised by email. If there were no outstanding issues by the next club committee meeting they would be considered accepted. This was seconded by Paul Thorpe and agreed by all attendees.

Treasurer's report – Mike Bateman

Mike reported that bar sales were the highest they had been for three years, and that gross margin on bar sales was high due to a credit being received from Heineken (for over overcharged prices in previous year).

We have had a very good year from a sponsorship perspective, particularly in the men's section where they were able to cover the costs of laundry and after match beers to make the club a more attractive place to play.

We incurred significant costs during the year due to the unscheduled replacement of the boiler and the clearance of outstanding invoices for electrical work. However we still finished the year in a very healthy financial position.

Hon. Secretary's report – Mark Baines

This has been my first year as Secretary and looking at it I think there are lots of positives. I have a few to cover in the following report.

The Ground & Pavilion Committee, or as they are now known, the award-winning fossils, have had another very busy year with keeping the club facilities updated and cleaning, painting, mowing, to name a few things. The tiling of the bar area/pot wash, with a new glass trolley. Organising the replacing of the roof above the toilets; the only part that was not updated previously.

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|---|-----------------|
| President: Mark Dutton | 07802 345380 | Fixtures Secretary: Don Edmondson | 07821 683516 |
| Chairman: Paul Thorpe | 07766 512552 | Sponsorship Secretary: Andy Brunt | 07743 825459 |
| Hon. Secretary: Mark Greenhalgh | 07525 434790 | Communications Officer: Chris Gaffey | 07971 817375 |
| Hon. Treasurer: Mike Bateman | 07843 756160 | Safeguarding Officer: Heather Thorpe | 07762 081105 |
| | | M&J Section Chair: Paul Fleming | 07889 601558 |
| Director of Rugby: Sam Simpson | 07935 403171 | D of E Award Chair: Mark Baines | 07850 082122 |



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We also had the uncertainty of the league structure which the RFU were trying to resolve this has now been resolved and it's looking like a strong division that we will be in next season:

LEVEL 7 Lancs/Chesh 1

LA Manchester Down
Ch Anselmians Down
LA De La Salle Down
CU Aspatria
CH Glossop
LA Rochdale
LA Bolton
CH Winnington Pk
LA Leigh
LA Tarleton
LA Southport
LA Sefton
LA Aspull Up
LA Eccles Up

As most of you know, the astro pitch failed its assessment last year meaning it would have to be replaced. We asked for a grant to help with this and have been successful. Work is due to start very soon.

As part of that grant application, the RFU reviewed and suggested changes to our club rules, to bring them up-to-speed with modern expectations. Therefore I would like to propose the following:

1. A new rule to be added stating that committee members should be "fit and proper people".
2. Rule 27 should be amended to explain how the club's assets would be disposed of in case of dissolution
3. All mentions of "International Rugby Board" should be replaced with "World Rugby"

The proposal was seconded by Mark Greenhalgh and unanimously approved.

There have been a few changes to committee structure and objective setting implemented this year. We have asked each sub-committee to think about what they are contributing to the club under a number of headings. It is early days yet, but we hope this will help people challenge themselves on improving the club, not just accepting the status quo.

The club continues to thrive on the work of volunteers, some doing more now than they've ever done before. Massive thanks to everyone who contributes. But as you can see by Facebook posts, we are always after more people to help out, to take the pressure off other volunteers who wear many hats.



ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Communications Officer's report – Chris Gaffey

This season, club communications have taken a significant step forward in the use of social media to promote the club's achievements, activities, events and share its news with its members and community. By improving the creativity, consistency and frequency of our messages we have:

- increased the visibility of the club within the region
- improved club engagement with our local community
- encouraged greater participation by making it easier to connect with the club
- increased the online conversation and support of the club
- attracted the attention of our rivals
- attracted attention for the club's success on the field

Presenting the club and its players with pride has made positive contributions to senior player recruitment, raising club morale and generating an image of forward momentum. In short, we've got Eccles RFC noticed and talked about.

Eccles Rugby Football Club defines its identity through its navy and white hooped shirts and historic club crest. This season the club has refined the appearance of its crest and implemented a consistent visual expression of its colours and communications. Identity guidelines now exist to ensure the club can maintain its future identity to leave a bold, distinct, lasting impression on all who experience it.

Followers of Eccles RFC are typically aged 25-34, 35% Ladies / 65% Men, living in Manchester/Salford (although we do have followers outside the region and overseas!) In the main, club followers appear to enjoy and engage with social stories about success and youth. In the main, parents of junior players appear to be more engaged with our activity than senior players. Anything visual, video, or photographic generally gets attention and response. Match action images are popular. Response to written items, team line ups, live scores and results is low. Response to requests for help or volunteers is zero!

TWITTER - 1,444 followers - Achieved our end of season target. Almost 200 new followers since last June!

INSTAGRAM - 454 followers - Achieved our end of season target, 30+ followers a month, only launched last June!

FACEBOOK - 1,282 followers / 1,277 likes - Slow growth - We did not hit our end of season target of 1,400 followers/likes.

Our activity levels are far higher than rival clubs but a lack of 'Page Likes' is restricting exposure of our message.

This season, the club has enjoyed increased fame and notoriety from its recruitment video (2,000+ views) and men's post match interviews (200-700 weekly views). • To increase the capacity of the Vimeo site that hosts the videos needs funds to continue. As a consequence, the club may move to hosting videos on You Tube.

The match day programme has seen a new design this season, which has made it consistent with club's identity & social media. Proposals for a digital (pdf) version of the programme are being investigated and may be launched with the new season.

This season, the club's website has struggled along with limited functionality due to an operational virus. Improved Social Media activity helped the club to continue to share its news



ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

whilst a solution was investigated. Work has now commenced on designing and building a brand new club website. We hope to launch this before the start of the new season.

Next Season, we intend to merge our Ladies section communications with the Men's, Colts and Junior Section communications to establish a 'One Club' voice. To continue to attract the attention of prospective new sponsors and players, and continue to increase our online community, we must recruit more volunteers to assist with club communications. We need match reporters, photographers, programme editors, social media assistants and web designers.

If we can increase our Facebook followers/likes by 200 we'll move above Bolton and Waterloo to be the 3rd most followed rugby club in the North West! The likes of Sedgley Park, Fylde, Manchester and Sale are well behind us, at least in terms of social media! To increase our influence, we can of course pay Facebook to promote Eccles RFC. Next season's target is 2,000 social media followers/likes.

Rugby Reports

Men – Mark Greenhalgh

The men's section has had a very successful season. The 1XV achieved promotion after finishing second in the league, pushing Aspull hard in all confrontations. We also made it to the Lancashire Trophy final before, unfortunately, again missing out to Aspull. The 2XV have had good numbers throughout the year and been able to complete all their fixtures. We've also managed to raise a 3XV and/or Vets & Casuals teams for a number of games, to continue in our goal of providing rugby for everyone.

Much of that success must be attributed to our Director of Rugby and Head Coach, Sam Simpson, whose enthusiasm in his first year returning to us has driven much positive change. We have changed the ethos of the section, and to an extent the club, into how we can make it attractive to play here. Initiatives such as removal of match fees, "stash" for players and free after match drinks has resulted in a thriving squad, usually with smiles on their faces, and a regular busy bar on a Saturday evening. This has been achieved at no cost to the club; sponsors, both new and existing, have been utilised to pay for all these initiatives. There are more plans brewing for the future but these will follow the same model, and will only be enacted if the sponsors can be found to facilitate them. I believe this is a key part of the club's future if we are to be successful.

On that note, I would also like to offer a huge thank you to Chris Gaffey for all the work he has done this year, for the club overall but particular for the men, in increasing and improving our online presence. I believe we are now well known and respected in the rugby community, and this is having a significant positive affect, including recruitment of players and attraction of sponsors.

As Mark Baines said earlier, the league we have earned the right to play in next year looks like a tough challenge but one we will look forward to. I hope to see many of you there supporting us as we take it on.



ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Women & Girls – Katie Houghton, James Wright

The ladies season has definitely been a difficult one and has ended in relegation. The main reason for this difficulty has been a lack of consistent numbers on match days due to losing players to either injury, other clubs or relocation. We have retained a core group of players through the season but obviously these players were then put under added pressure on match days, having to play with depleted numbers or out of position. Nonetheless these players have been outstanding and put in some amazing performances that really should not have been possible given the circumstances.

The ladies have been very much supported this year by u18 players who have provided the backbone to the team for many weeks. It is very much the hope moving forward that these players will make the full transition into the ladies section. The link between the ladies and girls sections will continue to get stronger with the coaching structure that is planned for next season. I would like to thank Declan for all the work he has put into the girls section over the years.

The ladies have continued to recruit throughout the season using social media, socials, RFU links and word of mouth. This has been particularly effective in the last couple of months and we have already got some new, experienced players joining ready for next season.

The ladies are also trying to secure their position in the local area by creating links with newly formed Sale 1861 ladies section (an amalgamation of Sale Sharks and Sale FC). This team have a lot of money behind them and a famous name. So instead of wanting this team to be our local rivals the aim is to help each other build up our ladies sections.

Going into next season the ladies will, most probably, be playing in North Champ 2. Still a competitive league of decent rugby but an easier place from which to build players from (especially those who have maybe not been quite ready for Championship rugby). Being in this lower league means more local fixtures and hopefully more competitive score lines. Our aim will be to build the squad back together next season, and ultimately work for promotion.

The ladies have a new committee (subject to ratification tonight). This committee brings some new and old faces together to give the ladies experience but also fresh ideas. They have already proved successful, leading the ladies to victory at Scovic 7s on Saturday. The ladies are also excited about tour this weekend with the men. Our positivity and strong mixture of high level rugby and fun social atmosphere will always stand us in good stead moving forward.

The ladies would like to officially request that wherever possible the club continues to support the ladies in the same ways as they have done for the last few seasons. Having access to the first team pitch, the physio, coaches and other facilities are crucial parts of maintaining our status as an ambitious, serious yet social rugby team.

Thanks as always to everyone in the club for all they do. Especially James, Shelley, Nina, and Brogan.

Colts – Chris Gaffey

This season the Senior Colts were a combined squad of 22 U17 & U18 players. Ultimately the colts enjoyed a very successful season, winning a League and Plate double, but this amalgamation of two teams naturally took time to find its feet in a very competitive preliminary colts league competition.

The colts lost 5 of their opening 8 league games. But the character and determination of a team that would ultimately lift silverware at the end of the season, was forged in those early defeats and positive signs of progress were evident in victories over Fylde and Preston Grasshoppers.

Despite the inconsistent start, a committed, dependable squad stuck together. Possessing enthusiastic players in reserve on our bench proved to be the difference between us and our



ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

rivals as the season progressed. Other than two concussions there were no serious injuries suffered during colts games this season. Injuries sustained by two U18 colts in Saturday senior rugby games early in the season did result in lengthy recovery periods, this however was not in detriment to the team as it provided opportunities for U17 colts to step up and develop their skills, creating a healthy competition for places.

The colts' commitment and hard work through the winter saw them storm on to win 10 from 12 League games. Their consistent form and a strong finish to the season would bring them a divisional Colts League D Championship title, secured in their final game with a 17-18 away win at Clitheroe. The colts scored 437 League points with a points difference of +276. Not only the best record of all 4 colts divisions but double the tally of any other team! We fulfilled every fixture. We played more rugby than our rivals and would have improved our final score if our victory points against opponents who failed to complete the season were not removed from the records.

Discipline within the colts squad was good with only 8 yellow cards awarded (1 red card was awarded but rescinded on appeal). The Colts also competed in two cup competitions, making the final of both. In the Lancashire U18 Colts Trophy, Eccles beat Ormskirk 30-29 in a closely fought Semi Final battle, decided by a last minute penalty, but were unfortunately defeated 34-17 in the Final at Widnes by a combined Manchester/Stockport team (it took two clubs to beat them!). To progress to the Colts League Senior Plate Final Eccles beat Preston Grasshoppers 17-19 in a nail-biting contest in Preston, decided by a never-say-die Eccles try with 6 minutes of play remaining. In the Final, Eccles came out all guns blazing, tearing Ormskirk apart in the first half and ultimately lifting the silverware with a 32-7 victory. The last time Eccles held the Lancashire and Cheshire Colts League Plate was 2004.

Winning cups isn't the only measure of success. The aim of Colts Rugby is to provide the club with its future senior players and Eccles is proud of its reputation in producing Home Grown players. This season 11 Colts made their Senior Debut for the club (half of the squad).

Maintaining momentum and retaining players was the key to delivering a successful colts season. The colts season is arduous, often involving long journeys to opposition teams, and many lads lose interest or are forced to abandon playing due to employment and education commitments. The Eccles Senior Colts regularly had replacements this season. There were only two games when we were not able to field a full team of 15. This required commitment and effort from a lot of people, not just the players. Coaches Kevin Walker and Chris Gaffey would like to thank all the parents and all those who travelled to support the colts this season, with special thanks and recognition to Leeann Aspinall for her assistance with team management and administration, John for washing the kit, Don for arranging the referees, and Mark Skillicorn, Chris Lee and Martin Parkinson for their touchline assistance every week. We'd also like to thank Sam Simpson and all the Senior players for all their support in coaching the lads over the season and welcoming them into the club's senior section.

We believe continued colts success at Eccles is in safe hands next season with John Christey's U16s stepping up to combine with the remaining U17s to form a new U18 Senior Colts Squad. Estimated to be 26 players - 8 x U18s and 18 x U17s.



ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Mini & Juniors – Paul Fleming

The Mini and Junior section continues to grow in most age groups but we remain low on numbers in the lower age ranges from U7s – U10s (mini section).

At recent committee meetings we discussed this at length to try to understand the reasons behind this. Actions were taken to speak with the Lancs development officer (Dave Westhead) after identifying funding from which the RFU could concentrate on a nominated age group by attending a number of local schools to hold rugby sessions. These are set to be held over the summer period and I will hopefully let you know the results after the beginning of 2019/20 season.

Our upper age ranges have enjoyed varied successes:

The U13s enjoyed a wonderful season with some fantastic victories over more illustrious opponents such as Preston GH. We finally laid a few demons to rest with back-to-back victories over Bolton, scoring 13 tries and conceding just 2 (at home) in two games, with the sweetest moment being the acquisition of their best player who appeared at our training session the following Wednesday! We also had a total of 7 players put forward for the Sale Sharks Developing Player Programme (DPP) all of whom have been invited back for the October sessions.

The biggest compliment for me as a coach came as the boys made their way onto the training area and, off their own backs, got a game of touch rugby going as a warm up. The Sale coaches commented on this adding that it shows the level of responsibility and decision making they are looking for. There was a number of local clubs represented yet it was a proud moment to see our lads take the lead. Following the session, again, it was our lads who queued to shake hands and offer their thanks to the Sale coaches for their time. No other club/players did this.

The affiliation with some of the local RL clubs paid dividends and the performances (particularly from the U13s, 15s and 16s) saw an increased intensity in their style of play and ball handling skills and their defensive play benefited from their inclusion. However, on the flip-side to this, it is shame that both codes can't align their season so that either game doesn't suffer from players having to return to their respective clubs. We had to cancel a number of games towards the back end of the season due to low numbers.

Our U12s have had a bit of an erratic season again due to their low numbers, but with Oggie's continued efforts the boys that have remained, consistently dug deep to ensure their fixtures going ahead, regardless of the results at times.

The U14s began their season in similar fashion after struggling with numbers, but latterly have turned a corner to recruit a few additional new players to finish strongly under Fin Cox's coaching.

U15s season was similar in performance levels to that of the U14s after a shaky start to the season, again due to low numbers. Their season ended well with a wonderful away win at PGH in the last game of the season and at least one player has gone onto Lancs representation (Sam). Thanks to Wade.

U16s have had a tremendous campaign under the guidance of Jon Christey and Matt Nombelo. These boys are well set for Colts rugby and the future of this club retains a positive outlook. They had 6 players nominated for Sale Sharks DPP, 2 players selected for Lancs, 1 player nominated for Welsh Exiles, 1 selected for Salford Reds U19s.

All in all, a successful season but the efforts need to be increased in order just to maintain this level of achievement. The need for coaches for ALL age groups is vital, whether this comes from



ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

ex-players, current parents or current players, it does not and will not thrive without this dedication.

The continued need for Referees is more important now than ever, however the level of abuse aimed at match day officials concerns me, as does the level of intervention and mediocre punitive measures from the RFU when offering protection for Refs. It's small wonder that there remains a greater need than ever for referees.

Rather than finish on a sour note, for me to remain as chair of the M&J is an honour. When young players comment on the facilities they enjoy on match days and after training compared to that of most of our opponents, it is testimony to the fact that we are doing something right. But we can't be complacent and following the superb season the seniors have enjoyed with Mark Greenhalgh, Sam Simpson, Chris Gaffey and Paul Thorpe all pushing the ethos of this club forward, the junior section can take comfort that we are in good hands.

My thanks go to the following people and I apologise if I have missed anybody unintentionally:

- Paul Thorpe for his President's role and coaching skills... and Heather Thorpe for keeping us legal and up to standard!
- Leeann Aspinall for the standard of fixtures this season and her organisational skills.
- All the shirt sponsors.
- All the ground and pavilion staff (including the DoE people) for match day preparations.
- All the Referees we have hosted over the season (including James Hooker from U16s) and Danny Taylor.
- All the coaches who do this voluntarily.
- Andy Brunt for his continued advice which never waned and always supports Eccles!
- Trev Parrott for his training intervention during the depths of winter.
- Marie and the kitchen staff for feeding 200 starving kids on a Sunday!

As always, your involvement is vital, no matter how trivial you may consider this.... You may even like it!

Walking rugby – Alan Bent

Alan informed us that walking rugby had started this year, aimed at older or less physically able players, but open to everyone, and had great success. He would like to thank Sale Sharks Community for originally setting it up, and to all those who have turned up regularly throughout the season, and stayed for a pint afterwards. He would like to encourage anyone to come down and give it a go.



ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Duke of Edinburgh – Mark Baines

As always, I would like to firstly say thank you to the extremely dedicated leaders and volunteers, without them it would not be possible to run the award at the club.

From the start in 2011 to date, the D of E at Eccles is growing year on year, the total now over 220 medals including 48 Gold awards.

Approximate numbers of completed awards are: Bronze – 116, Silver – 62, Gold – 48

This year 13 youngsters completed their Gold awards and were invited to receive their certificates at Buckingham Palace, almost 12 months to the day since our last Golds went to the palace.

We have an over 92% pass rate, which is fantastic, well above the national average, with an even split between males and females.

We currently have 30 young people at different stages in their award, 14 at Bronze and 16 at Silver.

This year I was asked by the North West DofE to talk to some international representatives who are looking at starting the DofE award in their country in a similar way to which we run our award, but using football. This shows that they hold our club, and the way we run the award, in high regard.

Each year brings its challenges and even after 10 year we are still learning.

We have a few volunteers who help out when required on walks and expeditions, but as always, we do require people to help out in any way they can. If you know anyone or wish to volunteer, please come forward.

Chairman's comments – Mark Greenhalgh

I think it's fair to say that this season has been a positive one for the club, and something of a turnaround after a tough couple of years. It has been particularly pleasing to see the club return to busyness on a Saturday evening, as well as remaining busy on a Sunday. There are many reasons for this that have been spoken about already, so all I can add is a summary; that this is only possible due to a relatively small number of people, who care about this club deeply and go out of their way to help it on a regular basis. My thanks goes to all of them. And I will leave you with a simple question to ponder over the interval: based on everything we've achieved so far, what would be possible if a few more people were willing to get involved? The door for new volunteers is always open. Please come and speak to me or any of the other committee members if you'd like to be involved.

INTERVAL



ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Election of officers

The proposal from 2018, which would see only Club Officers and Captains formally elected to the committee and other sections sending representatives to the monthly meetings, was proposed to continue by Mark Greenhalgh, seconded by Paul Thorpe and approved unanimously. Further to that, Mark Greenhalgh proposed, based on conversation with Director of Rugby, Sam Simpson, that a Men's 2XV Captain not be appointed on the night, and allow the appropriate candidate to emerge through preseason. This was seconded by Paul Thorpe and unanimously approved, following assurances that the 2XV would be well looked after.

None of the roles were contested. The floor was opened for objections or questions, but as none were raised all nominations were duly elected.

| Position | Nomination | Proposer | Seconder |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| President | Mark Dutton | Mark Greenhalgh | Paul Thorpe |
| Chairman | Paul Thorpe | Glen Cahill | Paul Fleming |
| Secretary | Mark Greenhalgh | Chris Gaffey | Mark Baines |
| Asst. Secretary | Heather Thorpe | Mark Greenhalgh | Mark Baines |
| Treasurer | Mike Bateman | Andy Brunt | Dave Nicholls |
| Senior Fixture Sec. | Don Edmondson | Nick Spooner | Mark Dutton |
| 1 st XV Captain | James Wright | Mark Greenhalgh | Nick Spooner |
| Ladies 1 st XV Captain | Siobhan Mullen | Shelley Maddocks | Rowanne Smalley |
| Ladies 1 st XV Vice | Rowanne Smalley | Siobhan Mullen | Shelley Maddocks |

Closing comments from President – Paul Thorpe

Paul thanked Bar Manager Marie Wilson for her patience and effort throughout the year, and presented her with a bunch of flowers. He also thanked again all the volunteers that contribute to the club's ongoing success.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was closed at 22:12.