

# Stourbridge Rugby Football Club Ltd

## Committee Report to Annual General Meeting

### Season 2006/7



#### 1. The Game

Performance at World Cup 2007 dominated the agenda of international rugby for the entire season, and indeed has recently manifested itself in a some rather disappointing 'phoney wars' in the Southern hemisphere winter where international caps are being devalued and the paying public short-changed. What price England retaining the Webb Ellis trophy ? Until just a week ago few would have predicted any winners other than the New Zealanders, and yet it was the same Australians as had struggled against a second-string Welsh team that demolished the carefully constructed aura of All Black invincibility.

Back in September Andy Robinson survived an operational review that saw his entire coaching team replaced, but the November internationals brought consecutive losses to New Zealand and Argentina followed by a narrow win and finally defeat against South Africa. Robinson duly fell on his sword and was replaced in December by Brian Ashton, whose England 6 Nations selection managed victories against Scotland, Italy and France but were decisively beaten in Dublin and Cardiff.

The ongoing dispute between the Premiership clubs and RFU went unresolved, although recent developments seem positive and the agreement of the clubs to participate in next season's Heineken Cup is to be welcomed. In response to stalled negotiations over a successor to the Long Form Agreement, the RFU started a game-wide consultation exercise in May entitled 'The Way Forward', we were honoured to be invited to host the first of the roadshow events that took place. Recently-appointed Elite Rugby Director Rob Andrew led the event, offering insight and a passion for the game at all levels.

Addressing issues this document outlined 12 months ago, on January 1<sup>st</sup> the IRB introduced a modified scrum engagement procedure ('crouch', 'touch', 'pause', 'engage') intended to reduce the risk of serious neck injuries arising from the heavy collisions that are now the norm in this phase of the game. First impressions in England are fairly positive, though even a casual spectator will have noticed that the ever-innovative Australians have found new ways to deny the intention of the law-makers, scrum re-sets and collapses littering their recent international matches.

Further law-changes can be anticipated post-World Cup, with some of the recently tested proposals from the 'Stellenbosch laws laboratory' likely to become experimental law variations as early as January 2008. No need for equal numbers at the lineout ? Collapsing the maul legal again ? They'll be allowing handling in the ruck next !

#### 2. Football

##### 2.1 First Team

(League)	Pos	P	W	D	L	For	Against	Diff	BL	BT	Pts
	7th	26	13	0	13	661	537	+124	6	13	71

BL : Bonus points for losing a game by 7 points or less

BT : Bonus points for scoring four or more tries in a game

Stourbridge undoubtedly made progress in 2006/7 and an eventual seventh position, and a 50% win record did not do justice to the entertainment served up. Stourbridge's backs scored 70 tries in the season – the highest in the league - which reflected the excellent work by backs coach Marcus Cook. Three players – Ally Bressington, Tom Richardson and Matt Williams all featured in the league's top 10 try scorers.

Inevitably the faster grounds at the beginning and end of the season suited this style of expansive play. After 11 games Stourbridge had won 8 games and were handily placed in third position. Then the defining moment of the season occurred – influential fly-half Sam Robinson was injured at Cambridge and didn't play for the rest of the season. The grounds also got heavier and the next 12 games saw only 3 wins against the bottom three teams in the league. The season ended with a couple of home wins but any chance of a sustained promotion challenge had already gone.

Team spirit was excellent largely due to the astute recruitment of Jim Jenner and Nick Baxter from Pertemps Bees in the close season. Jim and Nick's influence was immense and all the younger players identified with their balance between work and play – Stourbridge played to win but never forgot how to enjoy themselves. Unfortunately Baxter's appearances on the field were limited by a knee injury which eventually saw him announce his retirement with a career record of 152 tries – the highest in National League rugby.

Director of Rugby, Neil Mitchell made huge strides in bringing all parts of the club together. The Second XV won the Midlands Merit Table for the first time and the Colts only lost three times all season. A number of players are challenging for first team places and with judicious recruitment Stourbridge will be looking to mount a more sustained promotion challenge next season.

## 2.2 Development Squad

(NCA Midlands Merit Table)

Pos.	Matches				Cancellations				Points Scored			Bonus		Overall		
	P	W	D	L	No.	Aw.	Pen.	Pts	F	A	Diff	BL	Away	Pts	Max.	%
1st	14	11	0	0	3	3	0	12	431	108	323	0	7	63	63	100%

(Overall)                      P      W      D      L      For      Against  
                                          29    19      1      9      878      497

In reflection of the role it plays within the club, the team previously known as the 'Extras' is now known as the 'Development Squad'. Not only training with the 1<sup>st</sup> XV, but adopting a 'mirror' style of play, it provides junior players an environment in which to develop skills and experience, ready for either the big step up to National Leagues rugby or to competitive Midlands league rugby with the Lions.

The squad were set the target of not only winning the NCA 2<sup>nd</sup> XV Merit Table Team, but doing so undefeated, an unprecedented feat in the Merit Table's 7 year existence. Other challenging games against National Leagues clubs' 'A' XV's were taken in order to give fringe 1<sup>st</sup> XV players the opportunity to perform against stiff opposition and keep themselves in the selection mix.

The Merit Table was duly won undefeated, whereas the 'A' games fixtures only yielded victories against Blackheath and Rosslyn Park, leaving us still some room for improvement.

Of the 66 players used, 12 went on to play for the 1<sup>st</sup> XV while another 11 were 1<sup>st</sup> XV 'regulars' on the way back from injury. Over 100 tries were scored by the threequarters.

Next season's goal is to continue to build the squad, and as already indicated to produce a pool of players for both the 1<sup>st</sup> XV and also the Lions to enable them to achieve their long term goal of level 6 Midlands 2 league rugby.

Thanks to Andy Verlander for his efforts in running the Development squad in 2006/7.

## 2.3 Youth Development

	P	W	D	L	For	Against
Colts u19	27	22	2	3		
YDS u17	3	3	0	0	65	40 (post Christmas NMids League 3).

A stimulating season, successful on the field and promising for the club's future. The big win:loss ratio accurately reflects the quality of our performances, involving players from as far as Argentina and Australia to strengthen the local playing resource - don't say that we fail to search the world for talent !

Captain Scott Munkley demonstrated considerable leadership qualities, and was supported by players embarking on what will surely be distinguished playing careers. To mention a few, we had :

- Mossin Yafai, a hooker from Northampton Academy.
- Tom Mullen, centre, a student at Cardiff University who missed not a single game.
- Jodie Pasquelin a scrum half from Gloucester Academy who incidentally played against Alan Dickens when playing for the Academy.

Despite the disappointment of losing to Worcester in the North Mids cup final, this season we finally we secured Walsall's Fred Rowley memorial floodlit cup with a victory over Lichfield in the final – the cup will be resident behind the Stourton Park bar through 2007/8.

Thanks to Andy Whitfield for his support for the senior YDS squad throughout 2006/7.

The under 17's had their first experience of league Rugby which was tough pre Christmas but the boys went up a gear in the New Year to finish runners-up in division 3 and reach the final of the North Midlands plate competition.

A squad of 28 boys were successfully coached by Ian Strangward and managed by Trevor Gallop for the 12th consecutive year. Many thank to Ian who retired at the end of the season. Trevor will be taking the nucleus of the squad up to the senior YDS.

## 2.4 Stourbridge Lions

(League)	Pos	P	W	D	L	For	Against	Diff	Pts	Adj
	7 <sup>th</sup>	22	11	0	11	419	406	+13	20	-2

In 2006/7 the Lions moved up to level 7 in Midlands 3 West (North), pitting themselves against such local rivals as Wolverhampton, Sutton Coldfield, Kidderminster Ludlow and .... level transfer victims Sandbach. It proved to be the most competitive rugby the Lions have played.

They started the season in fine form, winning their first few games, but the promotion die was cast when they suffered reverses at Sandbach (the eventual league winners) and to Sutton Coldfield.

The season drifted away towards the end, an aging side suffering from injuries and lack of availability failing to put away sides they previously beaten. The final league position, albeit their highest ever, was disappointing given the early season optimism and the sheer potential this squad has.

In 2007/8 the Lions have moved league again, albeit sideways this time as they have been level-transferred to balance league numbers. They will be operating in Midlands 3 West (South) against clubs predominantly from the Warwickshire and Worcester & Hereford areas, with just Kidderminster and Sutton Coldfield remaining from last year's fixture list. To that add two fairly familiar sides in Edwardians and newly promoted Droitwich (led by Duncan Hughes), after that it is numerous trips East to play in Warwickshire.

It will again be their toughest challenge to date. After a challenging season it is evident that the Lions need to increase the size of the 'pride' to allow them to compete consistently at this level. Promotion to Midlands 2 is not beyond them, but they must look to attract talented younger players who want to 'learn their trade' before progressing to a higher level.

On a positive note, all but one of the Lions' home league fixtures falls on a day when there is no home 1<sup>st</sup> XV game, meaning 23 home league Saturdays in the 2007/8 Stourton Park calendar. If you are not traveling with the 1<sup>st</sup> XV please come and provide the Lions with the support they deserve.

## 2.5 Greyhounds XV

(Merit Table)	Pos.	P	W	D	L	For	Against	Diff	Pts
	5 <sup>th</sup>	18	7	1	10	250	320	-70	15

A tough 2006/7 season for the Greyhounds in the Worcester and Herefordshire Merit Table 1. Opposition were mainly club 2<sup>nd</sup> teams who benefited from good coach and physio support. The Greyhounds final standing of 5th place, from 10, was a good result for the social team.

Over 80 players, from all corners of the club, donned a Greyhounds shirt throughout the campaign with many of the regular faces providing good support for the Lions league side.

Success came easier to the side in the friendly fixtures outside the Merit structure. Mike Dyson and Will Till are set to take the Greyhounds through 2007/8.

Duncan Faulkner, Greyhounds captain 2006/7

## 2.6 Grasshoppers XV

P	W	D	L	For	Against
23	13	0	10	510	432

plus a 20-7 victory v The Greyhounds.

Top try scorer : *Jason Sykes* (8 in 10 games before Christmas!).

Runner-up : *Dave Hughes* (7 in 10 games).

Top points scorer : *Doug 'The Squire' Read* (56pts in 13 games, 2T, 2P, 20C).

Most appearances : *Aubrey (yawn) Grosvenor* (19). Shock horror - he also scored 2 tries.

90 players appeared, including 9 colts, 9 opposition and (most importantly) 9 new players

Early in the season we somehow got a society appointed ref for the first time in two years, though for the remainder of the season we relied on our usual suspects of Dippy Jones, Alan McCreddie, Jason Sykes, Mark Atkins and John Storer, thanks guys. Notable victories included 3 in a row in November (Stourport 2<sup>nd</sup> XV away 24-15, Whitchurch 4<sup>th</sup> XV away 37-0 then DK 5<sup>th</sup> V at home 69-5.

The highlight of the season had to be the annual grudge game or 'clash of the titans' against our 'friends' in the Greyhounds. I would like to pay tribute to all 28 players used as every last one of them played their hearts out in a committed display of team rugby.

John Slim, Grasshoppers captain 2006/7.

## 2.7 Minis & Juniors

The section for the past season has been in 'good health' and the popularity of the game and the club is evident by the number of players turning out every week throughout the age ranges. The section has in the region of 350 players registered with the RFU. Training sessions, matches and tournaments have all taken place throughout the season, thanks to the commitment of not only the players, but their parents and especially the expertise of the managers and the coaching staff.

During the course of the season the section has 'brought on' a number of additional coaches across the age range, the vast majority of these are parents and ex-players. It is an aim of the section to continue to constantly improve the quality and the quantity of the coaching at Stourton Park and thanks must go to Mitch and the first team for their input on Sunday mornings.

Continuing their good work of last year the 'Micro' section (players 5 or 6 years of age) is going from strength to strength thanks to the efforts of Richard Simmonds and Pete Bate

In the u7's, u8's u9's and u10's the squads are large but well drilled, all age groups reached the finals which were held at Harlequins' Stoop ground with the u8's coming 2<sup>nd</sup>. The u10's won the North Midlands Festival beating Worcester in the final.

The u11's had a good season but were disrupted half way through with head coach Clive Freeman moving to Dubai. Dave Archer has taken over as head coach.

The u12's have had an excellent season boasting the largest squad of all the age groups (41 registered players). All looks good for next season under the coaching of Mark Hopkin.

The u13 age group made the transition to 15-a-side rugby with some good successes. Thanks to the parents for their efforts in pulling the end of season North Midlands tournament together, it was most successful and the standard of rugby was outstanding. Stourbridge made it to the quarter-finals playing some of their best rugby of the season. The 'player of the season' award went to Joel Burgess for his outstanding commitment and example, the 'new player of the season' award went to Will Harris, who added an extra dimension to the side's threequarter play.

The u14's continue to improve during the season under the coaching of Mark Hogan.

The u15's toured the South coast and reached their tournament semi final, losing narrowly to a strong Bridgend side.

The u16's have had another good season under new head coach Jon Dews, but tragedy again struck this group with the sad news of Martyn Phillips' death in December. The lads 'rallied round' again though and there was a good end to the season with the Robert Bick memorial 10-a-side tournament.

Representative honours were achieved by 2 players - Dan Scott and Matt Willets were both selected to represent North Midlands' u15 10-a-side team - well done to both.

To conclude, an interesting season and one on which we can continue to build, the aim being to achieve even greater professionalism and success.

The Mini & Junior section continue to perform gate duties for home league game, each age-group taken responsibility for one Saturday.

Two longstanding officers stood down at the end of the 2006/7 season – having served several seasons as Secretary, Steve Orford had taken over as Chairman during the season as Clive Freeman left for pastures new. Particular thanks go to Mandie Denham, who has served for many years as Child Protection Officer. Many thanks to both for all their efforts.

The new section chairman in 2007/8 is Jim Thompson, Child Protection Officer will be Richard Simmonds and Simon Trimmer steps in as Coaching Co-ordinator. We wish all the committee well for the new season.

Steve Orford  
Chairman, Mini & Junior Section 2006/7.

## **2.8 Girls' rugby**

In 2004, under pressure from her daughters and other girls, Lesley Medley set about forming a girls' rugby team. During those formative years we had a squad of approximately 12 who were coached by an assortment of senior club players and parents. Over the initial 2 seasons the squad played against Worcester RFC home and away each season; winning twice, drawing 1 and losing 1.

During the course of the 2005/6 season a number of people volunteered to coach, at the end of the season we established a management/coaching team and won WRFU affiliation.

2006/7 started with pre season training in July, our first match played against Woodrush in September, however despite scoring five tries – all by Sophie Medley; we lost this match 27 – 25. Other matches were played against Old Coventrians and Worcester in which we were also defeated.

In November we entered the National Cup, with an U17 squad, playing 4 games, narrowly losing to Mid Warwick Comets, Worcester and Kettering, and drawing with Thomas Beckett.

The highlight of the season was a home match in which we combined forces with Old Coventrians to play the highly regarded Tamworth & Burton squad, a hard fought match saw them thrashed 12-10

As with any new venture we needed to raise funds in order to equip the squad with match and training equipment. This has been achieved through the Christmas party where we were privileged to have the Rat Pack play, we have also been fortunate to secure other sources of funding from local companies and organisations.

We are indebted to the club for allowing the girls to use the 1<sup>st</sup> XV changing room not only on match days but also when we train. Following a few teething problems with the logistics when all the minis and juniors are at home, the system now seems to work well.

During February we took a coach to Twickenham to watch England women play Italy, a good day was had by all and the girls managed to keep the adults in order. We subsequently took the squad to Taffs Wells to see the England Ladies thrash Wales and win the Six Nations.

Women's Rugby is developing at a cracking pace and we want the Stourbridge RFC girls' squad to be a major force within it.

Tim Knott, Manager Girls' Rugby.

## **2.9 Representative Honours**

### **International**

*Ally Bressington, Sam Robinson & James Tideswell* were all selected to represent the England Counties team. James toured Russia with the squad in June 2007 and played in the fixture against the Russian national side.

*Scott Morris* represented England u18 group against Italy and Portugal.

### **Divisional**

*Stuart Doolittle* was selected for the Midlands Divisional u20 squad.

### **County**

*Jon Hall, Cameron Mitchell, Adam Sturdy, Rob Merritt, James Tideswell, Jon Taylor, Greg Summers, Bruce Thomas, Geoff Gregory, Simon Homer & Lachlan Porteus* were selected to represent North Midlands in their 2007 County Championship matches.

*Ally Muldowney* was selected to represent Staffordshire.

*Duncan Kelly, Jon Ford & Stuart Doolittle* were selected to represent North Midlands at u20 agegroup.

*Jack Jeavons-Fellows* represented North Midlands at u16 agegroup.

*Dan Scott* and *Matt Willets* were selected for the North Midlands u15 10-a-side squad.

### **Constituent Union**

*Rob Merritt, Jon Taylor, Manny Samra & Tim Breakwell* all represented Worcestershire & Herefordshire.

*Duncan Kelly* represented Shropshire.

*Jan Capewell, Luke Withers, Sam Booth, Moshen Yafai, Tom Noott & Richard Wythes* all represented Worcestershire & Herefordshire at u19 agegroup.

### **Girls**

*Lizzie Smith & Lydia Thompson* were selected to play for a West Midlands Regional u17 side.

*Anna Dyson & Charlie Rowbottom* were selected to play for a West Midlands Regional u14 side.

## **2.10 Fixtures & administration**

Alan McCreadie continues to master the dark art that is the role of the fixture secretary, an activity that has become considerably more complex with the arrival of Lions' league fixtures and Merit table games for both Development squad and Greyhounds.

The NCA Midlands Merit Table in which the Development Squad compete is expertly administrated by volunteers Peter Thompson and Vernon Davies, for whose efforts we as a club are most grateful.

Thanks also to Pam and Tim Downing who look after the mini & junior section's fixture schedule.

## **2.11 Refereeing**

The club continues to provide refereeing resource to the amateur game. Trevor Webster and Dave Nichols turn out regularly for the North Midlands Society, while Richard Hackett and Huw Jenkins represented the West Midlands Federation in exchange games around the country. Even Alan McCreadie has been spotted in occasional action on a Sunday morning.

Congratulations to Richard who was awarded the 'DLT cup' for the North Mids' society's most promising referee in 2006/7.

## **2.12 Coaching**

At the time of compiling the club's annual RFU questionnaire data in September 2006, the mini & junior section alone had over 50 RFU trained and accredited coaches. Coaching staff picking up responsibility for the youngest teams each September are now systematically put through RFU courses, indeed all but one agegroup now has at least one RFU qualified coach.

The RFU is proposing to impose a coach licensing scheme in 2008 and it is expected that possession of an RFU license will eventually become mandatory for head coaches at all agegroups. The club is in a strong position to accommodate such an initiative.

## **3. Commercial**

The 2006/7 season saw some major developments in the commercial area :

Early in the season a working party was established with the remit to consider what structures the club would need to put in place to both achieve and then sustain National League One status whilst remaining a financially viable members' club. The result was a 3 year development plan which was presented to and unanimously supported by Executive and General Committees in December. Details were published in the Summer 2007 issue of 'In Touch' under the title 'The Forward Vision'.

A key facet of the Development plan was recruitment of a full-time club Commercial Manager. Congratulations to Robin Eaves who was appointed to this key role in May 2007.

The role of Bar Steward has been somewhat volatile during the season, but it should be recorded that Caroline Kendrick and her staff performed very well in the 'baptism of fire' that is the May Ball weekend. It is appropriate to record the club's thanks to both Richard Patching and Isabel Stanier who left us during 2006/7.

The May Ball weekend was again an outstanding success, breaking previous records for attendance and turnover. Full details and thanks to all concerned are recorded in 'In Touch'.

In April the club acted as host venue for two u16 4-Nations games. The day saw the entire club pulling together to provide first-rate hospitality, feedback was very positive and we are optimistic the club will be favourably considered when time comes to reallocation of those school and youth representative fixtures which were previously hosted at the RFU's closing Castlecroft facility.

Three more of the outstanding loan notes from the clubhouse improvements were repaid.

With the increased workload now falling on the club's administrative structure, there were two other developments of note late in the season – the extension of the club office and the recruitment of a part-time assistant for club administrator Sarah Field, for whose key contribution to the club's commercial and administrative functions the committee is most grateful.

It is appropriate to also record thanks here to all the club's hardworking staff, particular mention goes to catering supervisor Sue Rubery and to Ade & Karen Collier, who perform a multitude of tasks.

AGM 2007 will see General Manager John Jeavons-Fellows stand down from Executive Committee. It is not possible in this report to even begin to list the countless ways in which John and Jackie have supported the club, but the outgoing committee's deep gratitude to them is acknowledged here.

## 4. Membership

Despite a much better home league performance from the 1<sup>st</sup> XV it is disappointing to record that income from VP and season ticket membership was again down on the previous season, despite the best efforts of Membership Secretary Malcolm Fazey.

Please note that from 2007/8 subscriptions will become due August 31<sup>st</sup>. Membership and gate charges have been reviewed, gate charges remaining fixed at 2004/5 levels.

## 5. House

The 2006/7 season could be considered to have been quiet in terms of visual impact, but in fact a major development will occur during July & August 2007 when the old pre-1960's vintage floodlights and towers will be removed and new 1<sup>st</sup> XV pitch lighting installed. Thanks to the efforts of Norman Robertson and the support of North Midlands county officials, the club successfully applied for a 50% RFU capital funding grant on the project.

Problems were experienced with the training pitch floodlighting during the season, thanks go to Norman Glover, Jeff Davies and Tim Goodwin who have made the preparations necessary to re-cable these lights at the same time as the 1<sup>st</sup> XV floodlights are installed.

The work in June to extend the commercial office is reported elsewhere.

Members dropping in during the summer months will have noticed that the club has adopted the national smoking ban which came into effect from July 1<sup>st</sup>. Members should note that the ban extends to all interior areas of the clubhouse building and includes the 1<sup>st</sup> floor balcony, as instructed by an enthusiastic representative of South Staffs council who visited the site to check compliance less than 24hr after the ban became effective.

Thanks, as ever, go to Jeff Bishop and Lynne Jenkins, by whose efforts all things mechanical are kept in working order.

## 6. Ground

Despite some of the most bizarre weather patterns on record, it is much to the credit of Bill Harris and his evergreen crew of volunteers that just one weekend's fixtures were lost to the elements in 2006/7.

As ever, there are too many individuals involved to do justice to here, but reputedly the 4<sup>th</sup> most famous front-rower to come out of Pontypool, stalwart Ray Greenway, justifies a mention even if only to give him one less thing to have a go at me about.

## 7. Press & Programme

'Stourview' bears favourable comparison to the offerings of any club in National 2, consistently informative, occasionally tongue-in-cheek but always immaculately prepared.

Dedicated amateur hacks Vernon & Ceri Davies and Ian Cole maintain Stourview to these professional standards. New to the ranks in 2007/8 will be Dave Garratt, who has kindly agreed to cover the Press Officer role during Ian's Presidential year.

## 8. NCA (National Clubs Association)

The NCA is the body representing clubs in National Leagues 2, 3(N) & 3(S). Its most significant interactions are with the RFU, notably on funding and competitions. The club is well represented on the NCA executive by Peter Thompson (treasurer) and Norman Robertson (Midlands representative). Our thanks to these guys for their considerable efforts on our behalf.

Below is a summary of pertinent items as reported to the NCA's AGM in June 2007.

**RFU Funding.** There is a proposal to end the revenue funding paid by the RFU to NCA clubs, and in addition to levy charges for the services of RFU referees and touch judges. Only a very small part of this would be offset by eligibility for travel cost subsidy, in effect it is estimated that Stourbridge, as most National League 2 clubs, would stand to lose well in excess of £60K annually. Having been approved by the RFU Management Board, only a vote in Council now stands between proposal and implementation, which would take effect from the end of 2008/9 or possibly earlier if an agreement with the Premiership is hammered out, although we would expect to get a minimum clear 12 months notice of termination of funding.

**RFU Constitutional Review.** The RFU's consultation document 'The Way Forward' outlines a role in the professional game for FDR (National League 1) clubs. By contrast the first draft of the constitutional review under Judge Blackett offered the view that level 4 clubs (National Leagues 3 North and 3 South) belong within the 'Community Rugby' structures.

The future of level 3 (National League 2) remains undefined, and there are influences within the RFU that continue to propose a restructuring of the National Leagues, a not improbable outcome of which would be a dilution of playing standards highly detrimental to level 3 clubs needing to attract commercial sponsors by offering a quality product on the pitch. This would also increase the gap in playing standards between levels 2 & 3, making it even more difficult to sustain promotion once achieved and putting even greater leverage into the hands of 'sugar daddy' benefactors. This Representation for NCA clubs on Council and committees is also under threat in this first draft.

These reviews, together with the negotiations between RFU and Premiership clubs, must be concluded before substantive discussion with the RFU regarding funding, structure and representation of NCA clubs can occur.

**Insurance.** From the start of the 2006/7 season the RFU replaced revenue funding of clubs below the National Leagues with extensive insurance cover, including death, disability and personal liability cover for players and club officers. Following work by the NCA to negotiate down the level of premiums, the NCA AGM unanimously agreed to adopt this cover with effect from the 2007/8 season, this in most cases represents at least a cost saving for clubs and offers protection in areas previously not covered.

**Ground Standards.** Negotiations are underway with the RFU to introduce graded league entry criteria from level 6 upwards.

**Playing Regulations.** Areas that have moved forward this season include a dual registration arrangement for National Academy players to allow them to play meaningful competitive rugby with National Leagues clubs; regulations controlling the activities of players' agents; and the requirement to lodge copies of all player contracts (or declarations of amateur status) with the RFU within 3 months of player registration. On this last point the hand of the RFU has been forced by the Inland Revenue, and there are many loose ends as still need tidying up, not least of which is the issue of contract confidentiality between club and player.

## **9. General**

Last but by no means least, it is appropriate to record here our thanks to Chris Cook and partner Sue for all their efforts during their Presidential Year, and again to Peter Trinham for his contributions in the role of Chairman of the Executive.

Stourbridge RFC General Committee  
July 2007