**WRU STATUS UPDATE 17/06/2020**

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**1.**     **CEO comment:**

**In directly addressing a variety of topics which have received extensive public focus recently, our financial situation is a good place to start.**

**The problem has been well documented, so I’d like to focus on where the solution will lie.**

**Given the financial shock of this pandemic the only solution is to increase our borrowing. We are in discussions with a range of institutions to assess our options. We are working hard to secure a loan and, importantly, on terms that allows for repayment over a number of years. So, whilst the current financial hit is extreme and focused, we will look to smooth and dampen its ongoing impact through a manageable repayment profile and interest rate.**

**In terms of specifics, funding for our community game is ringfenced which means that we hope all of our clubs will survive this crisis. I would also point out that the Professional Rugby Board (PRB) is, rightly, united in its support of this approach to the community game, to safeguard the long-term future of Welsh rugby. Likewise, I was a participant in a video conference last week with representatives from the Indigo Premiership where we discussed options at length for how the league can restart, at some point, and explored scenarios and contingency plans to navigate our way through what is an evolving situation.**

**Much of the loan will be onward lent, to Welsh rugby’s four professional regions. Again, this is only right, as the international and professional game is the financial powerhouse of Welsh rugby. Without it we would have little income or funding to re-invest. The professional game will bear the responsibility for servicing the loan, but will also benefit from any bounce back of any financial revenue over performance in future years. Meaning, in that regard, the professional game bears both the risk and the reward. Our goal, like with our semi-professional and community clubs, is to ensure all four regions survive this crisis.**

**We have also approved plans to grow the women’s game and to strengthen its performance side in particular. Clearly COVID-19 has impacted those plans like all areas in our organisation, but we have taken the conscious decision to continue with planned investments. It’s very possible that continued investment will allow us to more rapidly close the gap with other nations, which has always been at the core of our strategy.**

**We are at an advanced stage of planning for how we manage our costs over the next two years in particular. I would like to thank the staff within the WRU Group for their understanding, as we have extended salary reductions for a further three months to the end of September, which is when we will review the situation again.**

**We are also exploring synergies with our regions to find cost benefits. In reality, between the WRU and each region, we have five of many things. Sometimes that is wholly appropriate and sometimes it isn’t. There are opportunities to combine our efforts and we need to be thoughtful in how we do this. Some things make sense to do together, whilst other things need to be done independently particularly to preserve identity, culture and competition on the pitch.**

**There has been a lot of commentary about players wages. Back in April the players agreed to temporary wage cuts to help us through the crisis, again for which we are grateful. We are now in further discussion, the first step of which is a responsibility of the PRB to, as transparently as possible, set out the financial situation and then work together with the players to find options that both safeguard the game and also deliver to the players’ personal situations. There is a requirement for continued dialogue over the next few weeks to explore options and land on a way forward that works for all parties. I’m sure we can achieve this together.**

**There has also been a lot of discussion about international fixtures and the potential to improve the global season. There is a backlog of professional club and country fixtures to schedule for the remainder of this calendar year. All parties are around the table and working hard to find a compromise that works for all.**

**In that vein, the global season will also require compromise. I have been involved on the small working group tasked with consulting with players, other unions and tournaments to help find a long-term solution. Nobody will get everything that they want, but the opportunity is there for everyone to have a season structure which is better going forwards.**

**In my experience, when you consult as widely as we have, the challenge can be that you create a situation where people interpret consultation as an indication that they will get exactly what they want. Clearly, that is rarely the case but I very much hope that, whilst at individual level there will be compromises required, the end result - based on continuing consultation - will be infinitely better for rugby as a sport and in particular for players, supporters and commercial partners.**

**Finally, I was heartened to find almost 300 individuals, many having recently taken up the role of Club Operations Managers and representing our member clubs, participated in a video conference with our community rugby department on Monday evening. Well done to the team for organising the event and thanks, in particular, to those who participated. As we have said all along we are working hard to communicate as regularly and transparently as possible, in addition to listening hard to understand the day-to-day reality at club level.**

**The optimist in me hopes that we have seen the worst of this crisis and that any future spikes can be dealt with quickly and locally where possible. Whilst we don’t know everything we need to yet, we know a lot more than even a few weeks ago.**

**We have a plan, we can see the other side and we will calmly go about our business to ensure the game is better coming out of this crisis than it was going in.**

**Stay safe,**

**Martyn Phillips**

**WRU CEO**

**2.**     **National Council Member election**
The election to find a new National Council Member has re-opened, with Nigel Davies, Ieuan Evans and John Manders each competing for the votes of member clubs.
The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted proceedings in March after final nominations for the position, vacated by Mark Taylor, were received but the WRU Board has now been able to re-instate the process. Clubs will have received detailed letters from each candidate offering statements of intent and both describing and illustrating, in impressive terms, just why each is most suitable for the role – and to say the field is a strong one is an understatement:
Evans is the former Wales and British & Irish Lions and Scarlets wing who has 79 international caps, captained his country 28-times and has more recently worked as a television pundit for Sky, BBC and ITV whilst also holding Board positions with the likes of Welsh Tourist Board and VisitBritain.
He says, in his letter to clubs:
*“The constitutional changes introduced under the chairmanship of Gareth Davies have given the professional game the chance to flourish, but have also presented the community game with huge opportunities that, as yet, have been largely unexplored.*
*“I’d really like to be a part of pushing the boundaries at that level in order to make our competitions more enticing and exciting… You ignore the base of any pyramid at your peril.”*

Nigel Davies is also a former Wales and Scarlets player, with 29 caps, who went on to coach both the region and his country.  He is currently chief executive at Merthyr and is a former head coach at Ebbw Vale but has also worked for the WRU’s rugby department and served as director of rugby at Gloucester.
He writes:
*“I truly and wholeheartedly respect and understand the vital part that rugby plays in all communities in Wales, with clubs at the core of our game, with rugby part of the nation’s sense of pride and identity and its leading role in uniting people and communities.*
*“I want to be part of a representative governing body that, not only leads and helps develop the game, but also serves its diverse communities and its clubs fully, visibly and effectively…”*

Jim Manders was a Welsh Youth international who played for Newport, Cardiff and Pontypridd and is a stalwart of Old Illtydians rugby club, having served multiple roles including chairman and team manager, and is described as the *“heartbeat of the club”.*  He is a former sergeant with South Wales Police. After retiring from the Police service he has continued to work as an assessor, lectures in law at the University of South Wales, is also artistic director at Tickledom Theatrical Productions and a director of learning at Credwch Ltd.
He comments:
*“I am an experienced practitioner and strategist regarding issues associated with equality, diversity and good governance in sport and I have a passion and commitment to fulfilling these principles.*
*“I have more than 30 years of experience professionally and as a club volunteer regarding community engagement… I can assure you that I will work tirelessly for your club and all clubs in Wales and be the ‘voice’ for the Community game, in all its aspects from mini & juniors, youth, seniors and, of course, the expanding women’s game in Wales.”*
This is just a snapshot of the submissions from each candidate which cannot do justice to the strength of each applications and clubs are strongly encouraged to consult the comprehensive profiles already supplied before voting.
Each candidate has also provided contact details, welcoming further enquiries and the WRU is in the process of setting up a number of online ‘drop in’ sessions (one per candidate) to help clubs decide where to lend their support, which must be submitted electronically via ballot form before the 3pm, Friday 10th July deadline.

3.     **Community game planning:**
Around 82% of clubs have already nominated a Club Operations Manager, who will help manage all protocols for returning to play locally as advice from Welsh Government and the Public Health Board evolves, and we are grateful for the swift response in each case. Clubs who have not yet made the required appointment should contact Jeremy Rogers, WRU Policy and Integrity Manager, at jrogers@wru.wales as soon as possible.
The first webinar open to all member clubs, to explain the Club Operations Manager role and talk through plans to return to train and play was hosted by the WRU Return to Rugby Working Group on Monday night, with nearly 300 individuals tuning in, including Club Operations Managers representing their clubs and a host of other stakeholders.
As stated in this webinar, it is now clear that the community season won’t start in September, but all options remain in consideration, whether that is October, December or January starts for the game.  We also know the season will look different when it returns and that there will be an emphasis on returning safely and staying local when fixtures are drawn up. We will continue to work very closely with the Welsh Government and other sports governing bodies and will update clubs each time the Welsh Government issues a new three-week plan to describe how this affects rugby in Wales. A key ambition for the community game in Wales is that we want to be part of the solution and not part of the problem in spreading the disease and will therefore not do anything to compromise public health.
There are four clear caveats to the resumption of rugby in Wales:
-           *Public Health and Government authorities allow a return*
-           Public health services aren’t compromised
-           Clubs have time to educate & prepare facilities
-           Players have an appropriate re-conditioning period
-           Contact tracing
Contact tracing will be key – it will be vital to complete an online World Rugby module before returning to play AND symptom checks will need to be completed even before leaving the house to train on EACH occasion.
It is also clear that, after the longest time away from rugby in their lives, for many players there will need to be a period of conditioning before resumption and the WRU’s strength and conditioning leads will supply training plans for the community game at the appropriate time. There will be other measures and we will help clubs to be prepared in each eventuality, such as if elements of rugby allowed before club houses are allowed to open.
We will run through every step of the facilities process and we are also working closely with our insurers so that when rugby does resume, clubs have full cover. Detailed Community Return to Rugby Guidelines will be issued in the coming weeks as advice changes, but please continue to follow Welsh Government guidelines closely in all instances.

**4.**     **Fundraising news**
**DOLGELLAU U14s TV STARS**
(supplied by the club)
Clwb Rygbi Dolgellau's U14 side understood that Cefn Rodyn Care home in Dolgellau needed a new TV.
The strain of not being able to see our loved ones and family during the current Covid-19 lockdown is felt by us all, but is a particular stress for the residents of care homes and hospitals. It came to the club's attention that installing a Smart TV would enable residents of Cefn Rodyn to see and hear their loved ones on a big screen (which will be absolutely brilliant especially for those with visual and hearing problems) and therefore wanted to help. A fundraising challenge was therefore sought and the U14s came up with the idea of a virtual tour of Wales by bike, running and walking. Initially the target was for the team members, their families and friends to complete the equivalent distance to the Wales coastal path during the week of half term, which at 870 miles seemed a big ask. However, being a tough lot, the target was hit by Wednesday lunchtime so a bigger challenge was sought. Offa's Dyke Path and an additional 177 miles seemed the natural choice to complete the route around Wales and, again, this was soon completed.
So, next the team ‘virtually’ set off for home completing the journey from the end of the path (Chepstow) back to Dolgellau, a further 120 miles, all by lunchtime on Friday. Every participant clocked up some impressive miles by bike, running or walking and the challenge was complete, with the initial fundraising target of £500 also smashed and a current total of over £750 securing a huge UHD TV for Cefn Rodyn residents which the U14s squad have now presented. The team would like to thank all who donated to this very worthy cause, the team coaches are extremely proud of the dedication to the task shown by their charges and would like to thank all the participants in this mammoth journey for the huge effort which was put in.

**MORGAN’S BIG MONEY RIDE!**(We brought you this story last week, but we had no idea just how much money was raised, definitely worth repeating:)
Morgan Stoddart is finally not feeling saddle-sore any more after his inspirational 1,000 mile charity ride in May raised almost £150,000 for Velindre Cancer Centre and Royal Glamorgan hospital. The former Scarlets and Wales full back thought he would rope in a few friends and raise “a couple of thousand pounds” for a charity that is very close to his own heart. In the end, up to 130 people joined in the virtual ride and raised an incredible amount of money.
“I wanted to get a few of my mates involved and see what might be possible. In the end, it just snowballed and we are getting close to £150,000 – it’s incredible,” said Stoddart. Welsh internationals Rhys Webb and Tom James, Welsh signing star Sophie Evans, former Cardiff City player Scott Young and Swansea UFC fighter Brett Johns were some of the big names who backed Stoddart on the month-long, 1,000 mile epic.
Read more here: [community.wru.wales/2020/06/11/stoddart-ignores-vicious-cycle-to-raise-vast-funds-for-velindre/](https://wru.acemlnb.com/lt.php?notrack=1&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=478A486A1A1285)

**EBBW VALE PARTNERS WITH HOSPICE OF THE VALLEYS**
Wales defence coach Byron Hayward and his former club Ebbw Vale have rallied to support the National Health Service as the coronavirus lockdown continues. Hayward – who played and coached the Steelmen – is backing Ebbw’s move to partner with Hospice of the Valleys and raise much-needed funds. *“As a former Ebbw player, it’s a privilege to be supporting a genuine community club with a rich history in Welsh rugby and strong cultural values,”* says Hayward. *“These unprecedented times are certainly a challenge for us all but I believe it’s also a time that brings out the best in people and an opportunity for us as individuals to shine by giving back to our community.”*
To support Ebbw Vale and Hospice of the Valleys go to

 [https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/support-the-steelmen-hospice-of-the-valleys](https://wru.acemlnb.com/lt.php?notrack=1&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=478A486A1A1286)

**5.**     **More rugby news:**

**BENNETT IS THE BEST**This week we speak to Phil Bennett on the Welsh Rugby Union Podcast, whose try against Scotland in 1977 has just been voted by Welsh Rugby fans as the best Wales try ever. Quite an accolade, and an opportunity to hear about that game and more 70s memories as we ask Bennett to pick out a player who might have improved even that great team, pushing him to make comparisons with the modern era.
Listen here: [www.wru.wales/audio/welsh-rugby-union-podcast-24-2020/](https://wru.acemlnb.com/lt.php?notrack=1&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=478A486A1A1287)

**CORY ALLEN’S BROTHER’S A KEEPER**
Following in the footsteps of an older brother who has represented his country could be an intimidating prospect for some players, but Mason Grady appears to be taking it in his - rather large - stride.
The Cardiff Blues academy utility back could be forgiven for feeling intimidated with the exploits of elder sibling Cory Allen, but the 18-year-old has already made headlines of his own in his fledgling career to suggest continuing the family legacy is a distinct possibility. The Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morganwg pupil made the rugby world sit up and take note last year with a stunning solo try for Wales U18s against South Africa Schools A in Paarl. Picking up a bouncing ball on the halfway mark, the right wing ran sideways before exploiting a defensive gap. One hapless defender clutched thin air instead of the legs of Grady who then carved open the remnants of a desperate defence to score under the crossbar with a simply brilliant solo try which led to Wales securing a 31-31 draw.
More here: [www.wru.wales/article/high-flying-grady-keeping-his-feet-on-the-ground/](https://wru.acemlnb.com/lt.php?notrack=1&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=478A486A1A1288)

**NOT SO SILLY GILLY**
Wales and Cardiff Blues prop Rhys Gill hasn’t had a chance to miss the green, green artificial grass at Cardiff Arms Park during lockdown. The loose head expert has been using his furlough period to lend an extra pair of hands to his off-field business partner Ross Johnston in their flooring company. Among their leading products is artificial grass and they have experienced a huge demand in recent weeks. Looking after his future after rugby has always been important for the 33-year-old Gill, who made more than 100 appearances for Saracens after leaving the Blues in 2009. He was in the first Sarries side to win the English Premiership title and won seven caps for Wales from the wrong side of the bridge. He then returned to the Blues in 2016 and started in their second European Challenge Cup triumph in Bilbao in 2018. With more than 200 professional games for Saracens and the Blues there are still no signs of him slowing down on the field, but he is also looking to keep up with his business partner off it.
Read more here: [www.wru.wales/2020/06/gill-longing-for-green-green-grass-of-arms-park/](https://wru.acemlnb.com/lt.php?notrack=1&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=478A486A1A1289)

**ROACH STUCK IN A HARD PLACE**These are uncertain times for people from all walks of life, and as Ben Roach can well attest, that includes rugby sevens players. Long-haul travel is one of the cornerstones of life on the sevens circuit, which means a return to World Series action is some way off. Roach and the team are waiting with bated breath to hear what World Rugby will say on the matter of resumption, in any form. As the world saw over the weekend with the commencement of New Zealand’s Super Rugby Aoteoroa, it is domestic leagues that will be up and running before any global competitions.
With the Olympic Games in Tokyo a carrot at the end of a stick that has been indefinitely lengthened, it could mean a number of players seek opportunities at rugby union clubs in the meantime. Roach is no different. If there has been a plus side to the lockdown for the former Llanishen High pupil – Roach was a few years below Team Ineos cyclist Luke Rowe – it is that he hasn’t missed any rugby. He underwent shoulder surgery just before the restrictions were put in place, and is now fighting fit, ready and raring to go.
More here: [www.wru.wales/2020/06/roach-anxious-for-sevens-future/](https://wru.acemlnb.com/lt.php?notrack=1&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=478A486A1A1290)

**AND FINALLY… LAKE RELIVES BABY BLACKS WIN***“I guess it will always stick with you but it still feels like is just happened yesterday,”* is how Dewi Lake looks back on the day he led a courageous Wales U20 side to a shock 8-7 victory against the mighty New Zealand in storm-ravaged Rosario in last year’s World Rugby U20 Championship. Not only was history not on Wales’ side, the gods weren’t either. The teams arrived at the ground amidst an electrical storm. Thunder and lightning cackled throughout the first half with torrential rain adding to the mayhem. After 28 minutes of action, with Wales fortuitously ahead thanks to a Tiaan Thomas-Wheeler touchdown, the referee ordered the teams off the field as the players safety became a major concern. For over an hour, Lake and his teammates were crammed inside a small changing room waiting for the storm to pass, not knowing when, or even if, the game would restart. But it did – and how Wales came away with just their second win against the Baby Blacks still remains a minor miracle. Starved of any possession, unable to gain a foothold in territory and constantly back pedalling in defence, Lake and his heroes defied all the odds to send New Zealand to their lowest ranking (7th) in the 12-year history of the competition. Twelve months on the Ospreys hooker looks back on the great escape with pride.
Read all about it here: [www.wru.wales/article/dewi-lake-relives-wales-u20s-great-escape/](https://wru.acemlnb.com/lt.php?notrack=1&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=478A486A1A1291)