**WRU STATUS UPDATE 3/02/21**

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**1.**     **CEO comment**

***I would like to repeat my comments that we are hugely grateful for the support Welsh Government has provided to both the community and professional game in Wales to date; From the outset, which began last May, during negotiations for a funding package which would bring our game through this coronavirus pandemic intact, discussions have been positive, but also rigorous and detailed.***

***In consultation with Welsh Government, we acted quickly and found a solution –- with a £20m CLBILS loan from NatWest providing the Cardiff Blues, Dragons, Ospreys and Scarlets security in the immediate term.  This was at a time when government had other priorities, a direct focus on containment and saving lives around the country. Of course, subsequent to that, the £13.5m grant for the professional game has been both welcome and timely.*** ***We of course know we will need more help and continue our constructive conversations about addressing the challenges, with our current loans in particular, but we will continue to work together with Welsh Government to achieve our stated aim of ensuring Welsh rugby survives the pandemic intact. We can now clearly see the way ahead.*** ***I would like to stress we have taken the approach throughout the pandemic to be good citizens, to help ourselves wherever possible and to support both Welsh Government, and the communities around Wales which our club structure supports, in all measures to combat the virus. We have utilised and benefitted from a variety of government schemes, including the furlough scheme and a range of grants and other financial packages which have been available to help clubs in the community game to survive.***

***A much-publicised Welsh Rugby Union strategy ringfences funding for the community game and this approach has been fundamental to maintaining community clubs to this stage. This meant, due to damage done by the pandemic, there was an adverse impact on funding for our professional game.***

***Welsh rugby joined the national campaign launched against the virus.  Determined to help, not to burden, and to play whatever part we could in any solution. We provided premises with the Dragon’s Heart Hospital to be hosted at Principality Stadium, our National Squad training base at the Vale Resort was utilised in a similar way as were facilities at the Dragons, Cardiff Blues and the Scarlets. Our community clubs rallied round too, not content with addressing their own struggles to survive they galvanised communities and embarked on fundraising activities and initiatives to support the NHS which made our game proud.***

***A final piece in the jigsaw for our professional game will now be to re-address the terms contained within the CLBILS loan. More favourable terms will allow our Regions the opportunity to not only consolidate but remain competitive when the current pandemic leaves us and create the necessary resources to ensure – our stated aim – that Welsh rugby at all levels, survives intact, is competitive and sustainable.***

***As to other topical matters, I have committed to keeping member clubs up to speed with all issues as and when matters progress and will attempt to address each in turn here:***

* ***BRITISH & IRISH LIONS: we continue to explore the options available to the Lions given the obvious challenges presented by the pandemic and we hope to conclude those discussions later this month.***

* ***SIX NATIONS: we continue to discuss with CVC the opportunity of them becoming our partners in the Six Nations and we are confident of a positive conclusion to this activity soon.***

* ***RWC 2031: you may have read media speculation on the subject and we did explore with our colleagues in the IRFU, RFU and SRU the opportunity of a joint bid to host Rugby World Cup 2031, but this matter is not being presently progressed.***

* ***RAINBOW CUP: the Guinness PRO14 Rainbow Cup is an exciting prospect and will provide a ground-breaking spectacle for fans who will see international star players from north and south establish new rivalries in their bid for the ultimate Test selection; and we look forward to its arrival of South Africa’s four ‘Super’ teams.***

* ***PROFESSIONAL RUGBY IN WALES: Together with our professional clubs, we are revisiting our current professional Rugby Strategy with a view to ensuring we are best placed when we emerge from the pandemic. More news on this will follow in the coming weeks.***

* ***RECRUITMENT: we have commenced the process to fill the current vacancy for the role of Performance Director and we exploring all the options available to us***

 ***Meanwhile, I know the nation will find comfort in what they see before them this weekend – Wales kicking off their 2021 Guinness Six Nations campaign against Ireland at Principality Stadium – but of course there is still something wrong with this picture. We had hoped our return to Principality Stadium would coincide with an improvement in circumstances on a national level in terms of the pandemic; that the transformation from Dragon’s Heart hospital back to rugby citadel would herald the return of our beloved Welsh rugby fans.
It seems we must wait longer than we had wanted or hoped, but we are thankful for what we have – the opportunity to play on. A lot of hard work has gone into ensuring we can do just that, and Wayne Pivac’s side can continue to represent the nation in this most historic of annual contests, and we are grateful to all who have contributed to putting on this spectacle.*** ***I thank the players, coaches and staff from both sides for the dedication they have shown and the sacrifices they have made to ensure today’s match can go ahead safely.  Our own staff at the WRU have of course also contributed significantly to ensuring normal service – as much as possible – can resume at Principality Stadium and I thank them too.***

***Also to the NHS staff, who spent more than six months on site at Principality Stadium before returning it to us as they had found it, the doctors, nurses, construction staff, administrators and, of course, the patients you will always be a part of the history of our great stadium and we like to think we may have helped to bring at least some light to some of the darkest of days.***

 ***Finally, from a CEO viewpoint, it is currently a fine balancing act between dealing with the here and now of the pandemic and looking ahead to our medium and long term objectives as a business.  I would like to re-assure clubs and all stakeholders in our national game, that we are firmly focussed on both.  We intend to ensure that Welsh rugby not only survives this pandemic intact, but is in a position to flourish both internationally and domestically once it is over.***

***Enjoy the weekend of rugby ahead,***

 ***Steve Phillips***

***WRU CEO***

**2.**     **OPRO mouthguards sign up with WRU**The Welsh Rugby Union has signed a new partnership with world leading mouthguard brand, OPRO, to fit and supply all of its elite teams until 2024. Starting with the 2021 Guinness Six Nations opener for Wayne Pivac’s senior men’s side against Ireland, on Sunday 7th February, all elite Wales teams – Men’s, Women’s, 7s, U20s and U18s – will be supplied with OPRO’s award winning range of mouthguards for the next three years. In addition to providing each player with a bespoke, custom-fit mouthguard, OPRO will also produce officially licensed WRU branded mouthguards, from their patented Self-Fit range, for sale to the general public. OPRO are dedicated to bringing leading technology and safety to athletes at all levels and have twice received the Queen's Award for Innovation, in recognition of their ground-breaking work in improving children’s and athletes’ protection. OPRO are the official mouthguard partner of more than 85 teams and associations around the world, including the Cardiff Blues, Scarlets and Dragons as well as England Rugby, the Argentine Rugby Union, Rugby Australia and New Zealand Rugby.
***“OPRO are a world leader in their field and we are delighted to welcome them on board as our official and exclusive mouthguard supplier,”*** said WRU CEO Steve Phillips.
***“Player safety is of course a primary concern, not just for our performance teams but for everyone involved in Welsh rugby at all levels and OPRO’s products are recognised globally as being of the very highest of standards and supplying the very best protection. With technological advancement improving products all the time we now know that, with OPRO, our players will have access to the very best in mouthguard protection as they compete for honours in a host of international competitions and tournaments in the years ahead.”***
OPRO Sports Marketing Director, Daniel Lovat said: ***“It’s a real privilege to be partnered with the WRU and to supply their players with our custom-fit mouthguards. Mouthguards are essential for protecting players at all levels of the game and we’ve over 20 years of experience and expertise in providing mouthguards that provide the highest level of comfort and protection. The WRU are one of the most iconic and respected Unions around the world and to have their trust to protect the players across their talent pathway is a huge honour and a testament to all the hard work and innovation within the OPRO Group.”***
Wales’ stars, like captain Alun Wyn Jones, George North and Ken Owens (pictures available) will wear OPRO’s elite range of custom-fit mouthguards as they take on Ireland in Cardiff on Sunday.
For more information visit [www.opromouthguards.com](https://wru.lt.acemlnb.com/Prod/link-tracker?notrack=1&redirectUrl=aHR0cCUzQSUyRiUyRnd3dy5vcHJvbW91dGhndWFyZHMuY29t&a=609884826&account=wru%2Eactivehosted%2Ecom&email=7PTxNIlvqJSwZ6fGTduqoHwFoqDlMHNmyq65fGLdufk%3D&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=586A592A1A1726)

**3.**     **Statement on the World Rugby U20 Championship 2021**
The World Rugby U20 Championship 2021 will not take place this year due to the ongoing impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The decision was made by World Rugby in consultation with potential hosts and participating unions.
World Rugby is now working with regions and unions to identify regional competition opportunities in a safe environment, reflecting the international federation’s ambition to support meaningful high performance competition pathways for the future stars of rugby.

**4.**     **Update on Women’s and Under 20’s Six Nations**
The Women’s Six Nations will take place in April in a new and condensed format, while the Under 20’s Six Nations will take place in June and July in the same format as planned but over a condensed, three week period, the Six Nations announced today.
The Women’s Six Nations will be similar to the Autumn Nations Cup in format, with two pools of three and a Grand Final weekend. Wales Women have been placed in Pool A with France and Ireland, travelling to France on the weekend of April 3 before hosting Ireland on the weekend of April 10. Every nation will play a play-off match on April 24 against the opposing ranked team from the other Pool – 1 v 1, 2 v 2 and 3 v 3. The detailed fixture dates, venues and kick off times will be announced in due course. Wales Women head coach Warren Abrahams welcomed the announcement of fixtures. ***“We’re really grateful to the work everyone has done to get us to this position and have some competitive fixtures to look forward to. We’ve all overcome different challenges to get here and the uncertainty has been the toughest part so this news is pretty exciting. France and Ireland are great fixtures to work towards and will provide an opportunity to measure ourselves with the Rugby World Cup coming up in September. It’s very welcome news for women’s rugby in the northern hemisphere.”***
Wales U20 head coach Gareth Williams added,***“It's great to learn the rearranged dates for our Six Nations campaign.
“The disruption over the last 12 months is well documented, therefore having these fixtures to look forward to as a development tool for us is exciting and critical. We are now able to adapt our key work with developing players in partnership with the regions, and the summer will give an invaluable period of competition to test that development.”***
Ben Morel, CEO of Six Nations Rugby commented, ***“We are delighted to make this announcement today and confirm new plans for our Women’s and U20s championships. The promotion and development of rugby at all levels is a key strategic priority for Six Nations. We see huge opportunity for growth in the women’s game in particular and feel it will benefit hugely from having its own specific window and being firmly placed in the limelight. Our priority has always been to deliver two outstanding tournaments but equally ensuring both competitions can be played safely, taking every consideration for player welfare. A significant challenge we faced in rescheduling the Women’s tournament was the limited available window due to World Cup Qualifiers, domestic leagues, rest periods and World Cup preparations for qualified teams. Following consultation with our unions and federations as well as other key stakeholders, it was agreed that April would be the best window in which to stage the championship. The U20 Six Nations Championship is also a hugely important competition in terms of player development and for those representing their country at this level it is a major milestone in any career. We look forward to announcing fixture details for the U20’s in due course.”***

**5.**     **A picture for our time**
The Wales national team are using their profile to support key Welsh Government and NHS COVID-19 messaging during the upcoming 2021 Guinness Six Nations. A number of PR opportunities are planned throughout the campaign to help re-enforce the key message to 'Keep Wales Safe' and to 'Stay Home. Protect NHS. Save Lives' This began with the squad donning face masks in a unique socially distanced squad photo last week and further PR opportunities will follow later in the campaign.
See the Wales men 2021 Guinness Six Nations squad photo at [www.wru.co.uk](https://wru.lt.acemlnb.com/Prod/link-tracker?notrack=1&redirectUrl=aHR0cCUzQSUyRiUyRnd3dy53cnUuY28udWs=&a=609884826&account=wru%2Eactivehosted%2Ecom&email=7PTxNIlvqJSwZ6fGTduqoHwFoqDlMHNmyq65fGLdufk%3D&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=586A592A1A1727)

**6.**     **Rugby news**

**PONTYCLUN INSPIRED**
More than 70 Pontyclun RFC players, coaches and volunteers have embarked on an epic challenge to give one club member the chance to watch his young son play rugby. Former player Jonathan Hobbs suffered a life-changing injury while on holiday and is now confined to a wheelchair. However, the wheelchair is not suitable for rugby pitches so the club is hoping to raise enough money to purchase a new, off-road chair to enable him to watch his son play from a much closer distance. Pontyclun youth coach Keith Ruggles said, ***“I always read the WRU status update and it’s been inspiring to learn of the huge efforts by other clubs to get active and raise money for various charities and to help club members. Rhiwbina’s recent exploits were particularly inspiring and we spurred us on to do something ourselves. Jonathan played for us from juniors through to youth and senior rugby and the aim is to walk, jog or run at least 2,500 miles between us during February. The cost of the chair is £10 000 and we’ve raised around £2.5k already so we’re hopeful of smashing that target. Many of our senior players are taking part, around 15 youth players, plus coaches, former players, first aiders and volunteers. Some are in their 60s, I’m recovering from a hip operation, but the challenge is also helping us to get out and stay active while staying connected as a club.”***
A go fund me page has been set up for the fundraising [www.gofundme.com/f/help-jonathan-hobbs-get-his-off-wheelchair?](https://wru.lt.acemlnb.com/Prod/link-tracker?notrack=1&redirectUrl=aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZwcm90ZWN0LWV1Lm1pbWVjYXN0LmNvbSUyRnMlMkZqYlh3Q0w5VnBUUnlXb0pTQjNoOXM=&a=609884826&account=wru%2Eactivehosted%2Ecom&email=7PTxNIlvqJSwZ6fGTduqoHwFoqDlMHNmyq65fGLdufk%3D&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=586A592A1A1728)

**HOOK-ED ON WELSH**
Over an eventful few days, James Hook has been mucking out on a farm, showing sheep, picking seaweed, and visiting a haunted hotel. It may sound like the activities of a mini-gap year – albeit confined to a 60-mile stretch of Wales – and, in a way, the former fly-half has ‘found himself’. It’s all been for the sake of learning the Welsh language.
The last series of S4C’s Iaith ar Daith (‘Language on Tour’) saw big names like Scott Quinnell, Adrian Chiles, Colin Jackson and Ruth Jones challenge themselves to learn Welsh. Series two will see the likes of Hook, wildlife expert Steve Backshall and actors Joanna Scanlan and Mark Lewis Jones all doing the same.
More here: [https://www.wru.wales/2021/01/hook-i-would-encourage-anyone-to-start-learning-welsh](https://wru.lt.acemlnb.com/Prod/link-tracker?notrack=1&redirectUrl=aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZ3d3cud3J1LndhbGVzJTJGMjAyMSUyRjAxJTJGaG9vay1pLXdvdWxkLWVuY291cmFnZS1hbnlvbmUtdG8tc3RhcnQtbGVhcm5pbmctd2Vsc2g=&a=609884826&account=wru%2Eactivehosted%2Ecom&email=7PTxNIlvqJSwZ6fGTduqoHwFoqDlMHNmyq65fGLdufk%3D&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=586A592A1A1729)

**BACK WHERE THEY BELONG**
Wales head coach Wayne Pivac and captain Alun Wyn Jones are relishing the chance to return to Principality Stadium for the 2021 Guinness Six Nations. At the end of 2020, Wales faced Scotland in their last game of the 2020 Six Nations and then England, Georgia and Italy in the Autumn Nations Cup at Parc y Scarlets. Those matches were held in Llanelli because Principality Stadium was being used as the Dragon’s Heart Hospital to help fight the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic.
Now the home of Welsh rugby is back in use and will host Pivac’s men for home games against Ireland and England in this year’s Championship. Jones – world rugby’s most capped player – said:***“It is slightly strange because on the bus ride in we won’t have the fans. It is hard to replicate a match-day because they are special days, but just to be able to go back and play at the Principality is very special in current times.***
***More:***[https://www.wru.wales/2021/02/wales-relish-principality-stadium-return/](https://wru.lt.acemlnb.com/Prod/link-tracker?notrack=1&redirectUrl=aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZ3d3cud3J1LndhbGVzJTJGMjAyMSUyRjAyJTJGd2FsZXMtcmVsaXNoLXByaW5jaXBhbGl0eS1zdGFkaXVtLXJldHVybiUyRg==&a=609884826&account=wru%2Eactivehosted%2Ecom&email=7PTxNIlvqJSwZ6fGTduqoHwFoqDlMHNmyq65fGLdufk%3D&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=586A592A1A1730)

**SO WHAT’S IT LIKE - AN INSIGHT DIRECT FROM NEW BOY JOSH**
*The first week in Wales camp has been excellent, writes Scarlets flanker Josh Macleod. It’s a week longer than I managed in the autumn [when injury robbed him of his place in Wales’ squad], so I’m delighted to get another shot this time around.
You’ve probably heard about the strict Covid compliance we’re adhering to at the Vale, and the rigorous testing we’re undergoing. I don’t see that as a burden; it’s more of a privilege in a way. I’m loving every minute of being here with a great bunch of boys. All the older guys in camp are helping me adapt and settle in, so I’m just trying to learn off them as best I can.*
More here: [https://www.wru.wales/article/the-josh-macleod-column/](https://wru.lt.acemlnb.com/Prod/link-tracker?notrack=1&redirectUrl=aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZ3d3cud3J1LndhbGVzJTJGYXJ0aWNsZSUyRnRoZS1qb3NoLW1hY2xlb2QtY29sdW1uJTJG&a=609884826&account=wru%2Eactivehosted%2Ecom&email=7PTxNIlvqJSwZ6fGTduqoHwFoqDlMHNmyq65fGLdufk%3D&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=586A592A1A1731)

**LOYAL KING CALLS TIME**
Ospreys back rower James King has announced his retirement from professional rugby with immediate effect.
The 11-times Welsh capped international made his Ospreys debut in 2009 and is sixth on the all-time appearance list for the regional franchise. King, 30, played all his rugby at the Ospreys and made 203 appearances, scoring seven tries during his career at the Liberty Stadium.
More: [https://www.wru.wales/2021/02/ospreys-stalwart-king-retires-from-rugby/](https://wru.lt.acemlnb.com/Prod/link-tracker?notrack=1&redirectUrl=aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZ3d3cud3J1LndhbGVzJTJGMjAyMSUyRjAyJTJGb3NwcmV5cy1zdGFsd2FydC1raW5nLXJldGlyZXMtZnJvbS1ydWdieSUyRg==&a=609884826&account=wru%2Eactivehosted%2Ecom&email=7PTxNIlvqJSwZ6fGTduqoHwFoqDlMHNmyq65fGLdufk%3D&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=586A592A1A1732)

**KRUGER PARKS HIS PLAYING CAREER**
At 36, Scarlets prop Werner Kruger has also announced he will retire from rugby - at the end of the season - bringing the curtain down on a remarkable 16-year career. The South African international prop has made more than a century of appearances for the Blue Bulls province, Bulls Super Rugby side and also the Scarlets, having been a key member of the squad since his arrival in west Wales five years ago. Capped four times by the Springboks, Kruger has made 122 appearances in a Scarlets jersey and was part of the squad that clinched the Guinness PRO12 title in stunning fashion in 2017.
More: [https://www.wru.wales/2021/02/kruger-to-retire-from-rugby/](https://wru.lt.acemlnb.com/Prod/link-tracker?notrack=1&redirectUrl=aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZ3d3cud3J1LndhbGVzJTJGMjAyMSUyRjAyJTJGa3J1Z2VyLXRvLXJldGlyZS1mcm9tLXJ1Z2J5JTJG&a=609884826&account=wru%2Eactivehosted%2Ecom&email=7PTxNIlvqJSwZ6fGTduqoHwFoqDlMHNmyq65fGLdufk%3D&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=586A592A1A1733)

**TUNE IN TO THE LATEST WRU PODCAST – SNEDDON’S JOURNEY**
We hear at length from one of the up-and-coming Welsh coaches – including details of his own international journey – in the latest Welsh Rugby Union Podcast. Former Cardiff and Glamorgan Wanderers player Scott Sneddon is currently coaching in Hong Kong, but about to return to the UK and he has been part of the WRU’s coaching development pathway.
Listen here: [https://www.wru.wales/audio/welsh-rugby-union-podcast-04-2021/](https://wru.lt.acemlnb.com/Prod/link-tracker?notrack=1&redirectUrl=aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZ3d3cud3J1LndhbGVzJTJGYXVkaW8lMkZ3ZWxzaC1ydWdieS11bmlvbi1wb2RjYXN0LTA0LTIwMjElMkY=&a=609884826&account=wru%2Eactivehosted%2Ecom&email=7PTxNIlvqJSwZ6fGTduqoHwFoqDlMHNmyq65fGLdufk%3D&s=7e1f6645b4724ab5c5295c3afd677ef7&i=586A592A1A1734)

**WHEN IN ROME**
Welsh schools are working together to promote physical and mental well-being. In a bid to keep pupils active and promote mental well-being during Children’s Mental Health Week, a number of schools across South Wales have got together to take part in a fitness challenge inspired by the Six Nations. Pupils – and staff – at Bryntirion, Cwmtawe, Monmouth and Chepstow Comprehensive Schools and Coleg Cymunedol y Dderwen (CCYD) have challenged themselves to ‘virtually’ run / walk / cycle / row to as many Six Nations stadia as possible by Round 2 of the Guinness Six Nations.
CCYD hub officer Chris Dicomidis said, ***“We tried to think of a way to encourage year 7 and 8 pupils to get out and stay active during lockdown and what better theme than the Six Nations? We thought we’d bring a competitive element to the idea so we are competing between schools to see which school can get the furthest by February half-term. Many of the pupils usually take part in sport, for school teams and outside school, so that’s something they are missing at the moment. It’s quite simply vital for us all to stay active for our physical and mental health. I know it’s helping to motivate me and I know the difference getting out and active has on my own children sat at home all day.”***
Perhaps other schools either in Wales or further afield will try to beat the final totals these school pupils clock up and travel all the way to Rome!

**FINALLY… IT’S BEEN A HECTIC LOCKDOWN FOR THE DROVERS**
Llandovery RFC has been keeping busy during lockdown. Before Christmas, the club was used to host five sessions of flu vaccination clinics with members of the Board acting as stewards and car park attendants. Over one thousand members of the local community were vaccinated and the whole operation went very smoothly. Following this success, the Club is now being used as a Covid-19 vaccination centre, with club members again acting as stewards. A number of local residents were pleasantly surprised to receive a special three-course Christmas lunch, delivered to their door. This was sponsored by Board and Club members. Catering Manager, Chris Reeve, continues to offer a weekend takeaway service, which is very popular with the local community.