**WRU STATUS UPDATE 22/04/2020**

We are entering the next phase of our planning to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus on Welsh rugby and beginning to think in earnest about how our game and society - and therefore business in general - will be changed not only as a result of the current lockdown, but also by any lasting regulations which may follow its release.

Our chief executive Martyn Phillips goes into greater detail later in this update about what this means on a practical level for individual staff, players, coaches, supporters and general rugby personnel whilst also allowing for those potential repercussions we can plan for on a more macro level. And speaking of ‘the bigger picture’, I was delighted to be nominated last week for one of the seven positions on World Rugby’s executive committee. This is the key decision-making body at the heart of developing strategy for the world game at every level and I have served two years on this committee already.

It would be a privilege to be re-appointed at this time of great change and opportunity for the game on a global scale, with five key areas to be addressed.

The first such opportunity is to re-examine the structure of our global calendar, now is the time to create an international fixture list with no log jams and remove any cross-over or scheduling interference in the professional game around the world. It sounds like a simple ambition and it is absolutely true that there has never been a better opportunity to do this, but it will not happen without the hard work and diligence of World Rugby’s executive committee.

A proper governance review of the world game is another key priority, as will be a review of the financial structures which underpin our game. We will focus on the women’s game with renewed vigour and, finally, player welfare will remain an integral part of all thinking in terms of future strategy.

If I am successfully elected for a new term on this committee it is a responsibility I will take great pride in and I would hope that member clubs and our many other stakeholders will be reassured in the knowledge that Welsh rugby’s voice will continue to be heard, loudly and clearly, at this most senior of tables.

Yours in rugby,

**Gareth Davies**

**WRU chairman**

**U19, Mini, Junior and Youth rugby**

Please find below the official WRU position relating to U19 Mini, Junior & Youth Rugby player movement regulations in Wales as a result of the cancellation of the 2019-20 season.

**TRANSFERS**

Whilst the Youth transfer deadline has now passed and is not due to open again until June 1st 2020, it has been decided that we will not accept or process any Mini or Junior transfer requests until further notice.

The WRU will continue to monitor the situation and, when in position to recommence, will notify all clubs of when they will be able to begin the transfer administration process.

**FOUR MONTH NON-PLAY PERIOD**

Due to the 2019-20 season being cancelled, the WRU Competitions Management Committee has determined that the ruling which gives players "free agent" status after four months’ absence (described below) will be temporarily suspended as of Friday 20th March 2020 until we are in a position to determine when play can re-commence.

Please also be aware that whenever return-to-play occurs, the usual timeframe in which the four-month period does not count (i.e. June 1st – July 31st) will still remain in operation.

For information please see below for the excerpt from the Mini, Junior & Youth Player Eligibility Regulations which has now been temporarily suspended:

‘If a player has not played for the Club with which he/she is registered for at least 4 months he/she will be deemed to be a "free agent" and will not be counted as one of the three allowed transfers into a Club if he/she registers with another Club. This is on the provision that the elapsed time will be during the playing season which is August 1st to May 31st. Before he/she may register with a new Club the player must show to the satisfaction of the WRU’s Rugby Competitions Manager that he/she has not played for his/her previous Club for at least 4 months. Should a club look to transfer players in after reaching their 3-player limit they will have to have received confirmation from the club who the player is transferring from as well as notify them that they will be exceeding the transfer limit. Should this be agreed and the Rugby Competitions Manager be made aware then the transfer will be granted.’

**SELF-REGISTRATIONS**

Whilst transfers have been suspended, if clubs wish to self-register brand new and non-other-club-affiliated players they remain free to do so. However please note that registrations completed now would be for the cancelled 2019-20 season and all players will be required to renew their active registration ahead of the 2020-21 season, whenever that should commence.

Any queries relating to the above, should please be directed to your respective WRU Regional Rugby Manager or via participation@wru.wales

**WRU Club Impact Survey**

To date, 180 clubs have completed the Club Impact Survey. Clubs that have now completed the survey will receive communication from WRU Community Staff to confirm any outstanding information from the survey, including eligibility for Small Business Rate Relief and if clubs are VAT registered. We would still please encourage clubs to respond if they haven’t already done so. This will enable us to confirm eligibility to either of the schemes outlined below and identify those clubs that are not able to receive financial support. We are now beginning to analyse the data received so it is vitally important that clubs complete the Impact Survey by the deadline of this Friday 24th April.

**WRU Club Impact Survey Link** – [https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/Qgk4CW69Eu52OMBS6vygk](https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/HDKV2WD)

**Welsh Government Business Support Scheme**

Clubs are now receiving payments from Local Authorities across Wales. Staff from the WRU Community Department are again in the process of contacting clubs to clarify the status of applications.

**Welsh Government Economic Resilience Fund**

The latest package of Welsh Government grant aid support is now live. The Economic Resilience Fund will provide additional financial support during the coronavirus pandemic and will help organisations to manage cash flow pressures. It will help to address gaps not met by schemes already announced by the UK Government, Welsh Government and Development Bank of Wales. Due to the popularity of the grant, the full £300m of funding has been released, and is targeted at microbusinesses, SMEs and large businesses of critical social or economic importance to Wales. Micro businesses employing up to nine employees could be eligible for up to £10k support. Eligibility for the £10k support asks that the organisation in question:

- Has experienced in excess of a 40% reduction in turnover since 1 March 2020

- Is VAT registered

- Can demonstrate that efforts have been made to sustain business activity

- Is not pursuing other forms of Welsh Government non-repayable grant funding

- Is not be entitled to business rate relief grants

**Coaching**

The ‘Coaches Corner’ page on the WRU Game Locker website is now live: http://bit.ly/WRUCoachesCorner

The Coaches Corner will provide pre-recorded webinar interviews with coaches from across the community and professional game in order to share knowledge and best practice.

The WRU’s performance department continues to host online seminars which are designed to maximise the availability of coaches during the current lockdown period and continue their professional development.

The most resent webinar held this week featured Lachland Penfold, the director of performance at Melbourne Storm and further guest speakers in the pipeline include: the licensed performance and clinical psychologist Dr. Jonathan Fader, who is based in USA and has worked with both the New York Jets and the New York Giants; Shaun Wane, the England Rugby League head coach; and professor Stephen Rollnick of Cardiff University School of Medicine, who recently wrote the book Motivational Interviewing in Sports, which contains detailed guidelines on things like how to give advice to players, how to rapidly connect with them, and how to help them resolve doubt about challenges inside and outside of sport.

These conference calls target coaches working in the professional end of the game and are regularly attended by over 50 coaches in each case. Coaches on the live sessions are mainly from our regions and the WRU pathway, but we also have Welsh coaches in attendance that are currently working outside of Wales in the Gallagher Premiership in an effort to continue to support Welsh coaching. Content (recordings) will be disseminated online at the WRU Game Locker website ( www.wrugamelocker.wales/ ) in the near future so that the wider coaching world (e.g. coaches who may want to progress into that level of coaching) can benefit from the information sharing.

As an integral part of our elite coach development programme, the premise is to continue to provide world class learning opportunities while we are all currently at home and we proactively sought some of the leading minds in sport.

We definitely adhere to the thinking that the potential for learning from other sports and sectors is huge, and the current down time in playing is giving us the flexibility and opportunity to connect with some great people across the World.

Subjects range from high performing cultures through to planning and periodisation but the opportunity for our coaches to speak and connect with leading individuals has led to a number of great debates.

Elsewhere we have been running virtual round table discussions for Talent Coaches within Wales, those coaches working with RAG, College & Academy etc, with the WRU’s Gareth Williams this week presenting on coaching transitional players and this will continue with weekly sessions.

**Rugby**

A hit story on the WRU website and social channels this week saw our webmaster ask four of the regular watchers of the top league in the Welsh club system, the Indigo Group Premiership, to give us their views on the best players, coaches and referees from the 2019/20 campaign. Between them the chosen pundits, stats men and rugby writers watched dozens of games each throughout the truncated six month season and saw every club in action. The handpicked quartet of ‘experts’ have each picked their team of the season and best players coaches and referees, you can see their choices here

https://community.wru.wales/2020/04/17/the-best-players-in-the-premiership-the-experts-view/

But - for absolute balance – here’s the published ‘best team’ of ‘The Welsh Premiership Podcast’ team, run by the Sports Journalism students at University of South Wales, who asked fans to name their Best Premiership XV:

15 Edd Howley (Cardiff); 14 Dewi Cross (Bridgend), 13 Callum Carson (Swansea), 12 Rhodri Jones (Llandovery), 11 Elliot Frewen (Newport); 10 Aled Thomas (Aberavon), 9 Lee Rees (Llandovery); 1 Rowan Jenkins (Aberavon), 2 Gareth Harvey (Bridgend), 3 Ben Leung (Carmarthen Quins), 4 Ashley Sweet (Ebbw Vale), 5 Haydn Pugh (Carmarthen Quins), 6 Joe Powell Llandovery), 7 Callum Bowden (Swansea), 8 Richard Brooks (Llandovery)

Elsewhere, WRU board member and the first elected female to take a seat at Welsh rugby’s top table, Liza Burgess, has been reminiscing about the first ever Wales international match for a Welsh women’s side. The game was played in Pontypool 33 years ago this month, April 5, 1987, it was not only a milestone date for women’s rugby in Wales, but also a big day for Burgess and her family you can read more – and see pictures and video footage of the match! – here:

https://www.wru.wales/article/liza-burgess-my-first-wales-squad/

**Clubs at the heart of their communities**

Clubs all over Wales have not only sprung to action to help the vulnerable and key workers within their communities, but have often co-ordinated relief efforts or been first to answer the requests for help from bodies such as the NHS and local authorities. Clubs like Hartridge, very close to the Royal Gwent Hospital in Newport, have played a key role in a huge fundraising effort which has provided i-pads to the hospital, so that families can communicate with loved ones, and also in providing meals to key workers and the vulnerable in the locality.

Many clubs have raised money for NHS charities. Rhydyfelin, Newcastle Emlyn, Caldicot, Magor and Morriston Under 12s – where one of the players’ fathers has had to shave his beloved beard in order to wear the correct facial mask whilst working on a respiratory ward at Morriston hospital - are just a few of those who have ‘braved the shave’ to show their support for NHS staff in particular, those clubs alone raising more than £6k.

In Aberavon, local Indigo Premiership side Aberavon RFC have teamed up with Age Connects, Neath Port Talbot which has seen members of the side do shopping runs and daily tasks for those who are currently unable to do so in the current climate. The good work done by the side known locally as ‘The Wizards’ has been praised by local boy and Hollywood star Michael Sheen which you can watch here https://welshrugby.wales/t/4CXD-TFR4-URT5U-N1OWM-1/c.aspx

Other clubs are rallying around to deliver food, prescriptions and other key supplies to elderly and vulnerable people in their area.

Nant Conwy, Bethesda, many clubs in the Scarlets region, coordinated by the Scarlets Foundation, are just a few examples of those, while others, such as Penallta and CRICC are delivering hands-on supplies to hospitals and NHS staff and there are even examples of clubs producing medical equipment to support the NHS at this time. Felinfoel were another to answer the call of the Scarlets community group - to assist in distributing vital care packages to people in isolation. With nearly 60 packs delivered in the first batch more are planned for this week and volunteers have included coaches, first team players, parents and committee members with everyone rallying round.

Dolgellau RFC have donated all perishable stock to the local police and ambulance stations and senior players are on the local register of volunteers for shopping and delivering provisions, a service which is being co-ordinated locally by volunteers who are also club committee members.

As previously mentioned Dinbych whose motto is Heart of the Community were only too pleased to help when asked to become a GP Fever Assessment Centre and Treharris, who also take pride in their place within the community, are providing meals to key workers and the vulnerable in the area, delivered by club volunteers.

We’d love to hear how your club has been helping your community to cope during this difficult period, so please email clubdevelopment@wru.wales if you’d like your story to be heard.

**CEO comment**

We have now largely completed a demanding phase for the team at the WRU where we have taken the necessary actions to close down or suspend rugby activities.

We have taken as many cost reduction measures as possible, changed our working practices to adapt to the lockdown and, where required, have supported the conversions to the hospitals that are now operational in our Stadium in Cardiff and at our high performance base in the Vale Resort in Hensol.

We are now moving to the next phase which requires us to keep operations running, but with a significantly scaled back team, along with turning our attention to how we manage the transition back to what a ‘new normal’ might look like for Welsh rugby. This is, of course, currently an unknown quantity but we are working through trying to predict and forecast what the future may look like, as well as taking the very real opportunity to introduce changes that would be good for the game generally. We are scenario planning to try to predict in which cases habits and behaviours will return to what they were before the pandemic, but also try to predict where changes brought on by the COVID-19 crisis might become the ‘new normal’. Our stakeholders, supporters, partners, players and all who engage in Welsh rugby at every level, may form new and permanent habits and come back to us with different expectations, needs or demands.

For example, some of the questions we are working through are:

- When our community clubs open again how will we make sure they are safe, welcoming and that our communities want to return. It’s possible that people will return in larger numbers as society ‘goes local’, so how can we make sure we a ready?

- How do we engage with clubs to shape the most suitable return to play scheduling of games, leagues and competitions based on medical advice and possible restrictions?

- How do we give confidence that returning to play remains an attractive proposition and that rugby remains a form of physical activity which provides an accessible offer for all in our communities?

- How will we cater for elements of our society who may remain vulnerable to the virus and continue to allow them to be engaged and part of the rugby family?

- How do we stage events, both large and small, within the restrictions that might still be in place as we transition through the period beyond lockdown?

- How will our business model need to change as we recover from the financial stresses we have been placed under?

- How should we engage positively in the various reviews that are underway to reshape the professional season both in the short and long term. To, where possible, remove issues that have historically held the game back?

- What is the ‘new normal’ for revenue, costs and investment in Welsh rugby and how do we live within our means in that "new normal"?

- How will we continue – as we know we must – to fund areas where we had earmarked significant new investment, such as women’s and girls rugby, in a changing financial landscape?

- How should we adapt our working practices so that we take advantage of changes that have occurred, maximising the opportunities created to travel less, continue with best practice communication online and continue to further enhance our digital offerings?

- How do we work with all of our partners to understand how they have been affected and adapt our own new ways of working to meet their changing needs?

- Lastly, and importantly, we are energised to play our part in both supporting the national and international response to this virus and also in helping Wales to adapt. We will continue to do the right thing where each new opportunities presents itself?

Whilst this is a daunting list of issues to be addressed, we are already a significant way down the line to finding solutions to many.

What remains unclear is timing. We don’t know when we will be able to move towards those solutions as the course of the virus remains uncertain, but what is certain is that we have specific plans in place to be utilised as and when required.

Our exit from lockdown will be both an opportunity for us as a business and also a threat to our established way of working, surviving and thriving. Our mindset must be exclusively on taking the opportunity presented to bring about lasting change and long-term benefit to Welsh rugby and its extended and loyal family.

To our own team here at the WRU we are beginning to shape an approach to getting ourselves back up and running at full steam and to defining individual and department strategies to address the ‘new normal’ once the way ahead becomes clear.

Whatever the role you have taken in helping Welsh rugby to survive during this time of great stress, whether that be accepting necessary furloughing with good grace or rising to the challenges of enhanced responsibilities and uniquely different working practices, we have always been in this together and will continue long into the future with togetherness as our key strength.

Stay safe,

Martyn Phillips

WRU CEO