

WRU STATUS UPDATE 31/03/2021



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1. Chair comment

I was delighted last week to welcome Steve Phillips, on behalf of the WRU Board, to the position of Group CEO on a permanent basis. In an extremely strong field Steve has shown he has the expertise, an unrivalled in-depth knowledge of Welsh rugby and the insight to find the right solutions to the challenges ahead. We are delighted that he has accepted the challenge of securing the future of Welsh rugby.

After revealing our Pathway to Participation plans last week it has been a great delight to see clubs up and down the country return to rugby pitches with their young teams. We know that the desire to return to rugby clubs in all capacities is as strong as ever in Wales and that, in many quarters, participants will be flooding back as soon as they are able. But we are also conscious that clubs will need help and support throughout this process, and this will continue to be provided by our community department. We have published a detailed plan, with an initial focus on a summer of fun formats of the game to help ease players of all ages back into contact rugby and to ensure the community game bounces back to full health and strength.

*Kind regards,
Rob Butcher
WRU chair*

2. CEO Comment

Wayne Pivac has the 2023 Rugby World Cup firmly in his sights and a comprehensive plan for Wales to arrive there at the peak of our powers. with the full backing of the Welsh Rugby Union to achieve that aim.

We meet after every campaign to discuss how we are tracking against any plan. We met after the Autumn Nations Cup. That campaign, as stated publicly by management at the time, was about giving players the opportunity to experience Test rugby and to give management the opportunity to see how they fared. Wayne was equally unambiguous about his distinction between the autumn and the Guinness Six Nations Championship, where we would be playing tournament rugby and results mattered. If silverware was the only measure, then, of course, winning both the Triple Crown and the tournament itself can be viewed as 'mission accomplished'.

It is vitally important that we assess our progress in a considered way. In professional sport it is possible to go from hero to zero and back again in a fortnight. To avoid 'knee-jerk' reactions we measure progress against short and long term goals. Wayne, the management and the players are, by any measure, progressing extremely well.

Winning the Championship this year was an obvious short-term goal, but we have been equally impressed by what was achieved this autumn when the stall was set to blood new players, improve strength in depth and bed in a new and varied approach to tactics and game plans.

Wayne and his management team and players have delivered. I know I speak on behalf of the Board and everyone at the WRU in congratulating them on their achievements and we look forward to following their continued progress on the road to France 2023.

Our focus now moves away from Wayne and his team to Warren Abrahams and his team, who leads Wales Women into his first Six Nations Championship next month after being appointed at the helm in November.

The Wales Women's game is now our priority. I had the privilege of spending some time with Warren and his squad on Monday evening as I briefly interrupted their training session; it was something I enjoyed doing and plan to repeat during this current campaign.

First up we face France at Stade de la Rabine, in Vannes, this weekend after having returned to training at WRU headquarters at the Vale resort. The squad was temporarily training at the University of South Wales' Sport Park, with Covid-19 restrictions dictating that our two senior sides trained in separate locations, but they now have the full resources of the WRU at their disposal. We are grateful for USW's support to date but it is important to us that Wales Women have full access to all of our resources both on and off the field as they go into this important tournament.

Just like the men's squad, Wales Women have made significant sacrifices in terms of their families, work and personal efforts to wear the jersey and represent our country and – though once again we will all regret that we can't be present - we are looking forward to the opportunity to watch all of their games on the BBC.

Finally, my personal thanks to all the well-wishers, both within the WRU and beyond, who have taken the time to write to me and post comments concerning my formal appointment to the position of CEO for the WRU Group. As I have said this is an extremely proud moment for me, but also a time when I am made acutely aware of the responsibility I bear for the future of our national game.

I know I am equal to the task and I am ready for the many challenges ahead, but, as I settle into the role in a full time basis, I would make one plea to you the member clubs and districts of the WRU from the community to the

professional game: you are all Welsh rugby and with your support, dedication and enthusiasm the game can emerge from this period and go from strength to strength in the years to come.

I invite you to entrust your Board, its chairman and the professional staff at the WRU to lead the way, to act with your best interests at heart and to leave no stone unturned in our mission to protect, project, promote and push our game to achieve its full potential.

Yours in rugby,

Steve Phillips

WRU CEO

More from both chairman Rob Butcher and Steve Phillips, on his permanent appointment to the WRU Group CEO role, here: www.wru.wales/2021/03/phillips-confirmed-as-permanent-wru-ceo/

3. Pathway to Participation

Last week we published our Pathway to Participation for community rugby.

This is a detailed plan with an initial focus on a summer of fun formats of the game to help ease players of all ages back into contact rugby.

The plan is set to give the national game a much-needed boost following the understandable impact of the COVID pandemic, and to ensure the community game bounces back to full health and strength.

Some rugby has already started at U18s level and below, and providing the public health conditions remain favourable, tag and touch rugby fixtures for those players (u18s) could be sanctioned from April 1 within their own districts.

Measures around training and matches will remain subject to Welsh Government guidelines but all levels of the game, including youth and senior teams (male and female) can look forward to a phased return of modified, limited contact training from May 1.

From mid-June, players of all ages can look forward to a month of summer sevens and tens rugby – under modified laws

Further details of the seven step Pathway to Participation can be found here:

<https://community.wru.wales/2021/03/24/pathway-to-participation/>

4. Community Strategy

Our Community Rugby Strategy, which will be officially launched this summer, has produced three current key workstreams: a competitions review; a review of the WRU Hub programme and an increased commitment to 'volunteer recognition' in the community game.

These are key areas for growth that clubs and stakeholders throughout the game have highlighted to us during extensive consultation over the last 12-18 months and which have been sanctioned at Community Board level. Our Competitions Review will look at the domestic and national leagues of the WRU. As part of the process we will be consulting with member clubs in due course and there will be workshops, meetings and surveys for interested parties to attend over the next few months.

The Hub Review, as mentioned in your last WRU Status Update, aims to deliver clear guidance for the next potential phase of the Hub Programme, to ensure that this next phase aligns with the WRU Community Strategy and the needs of Educational and Community landscape in Wales.

We believe that since its inception, the innovative Hub Programme has made a huge difference to the lives of the young people in educational settings and in the wider community throughout Wales.

The current contractual phase of the Hub Programme is coming to an end, but our ambition remains to grow, develop and enhance the Hub Programme whilst future proofing rugby union participation in Wales and supporting the health of our young people and further updates will follow.

We are working hard on volunteer recognition. We know we have so many fantastic people giving up their time to support the club game in many different capacities throughout the country. These individuals are the lifeblood of our game and it is our aim to offer support and engage with all areas of community rugby to best recognise and reward their continuous efforts. This planned support is a particularly important aspect of the Community Strategy which will allow us to continue to grow our game and improve sustainability at this level.

5. Wales Women back in the game

Wales Women's head coach Warren Abrahams is excited to get the Six Nations campaign underway after 12 months in lockdown.

He says it has been a tough 12 months, but the squad 'is ready to go.'

They face France in Vannes on Saturday (Sat 3 April, 8pm BST) before hosting Ireland at Cardiff Arms Park on Saturday 10 April (5pm).

The 32-strong squad features four uncapped players – Wasps fly-half Flo Williams, Saracens prop Donna Rose, Exeter scrum-half Megan Davies and Sale Sharks scrum-half Jess Roberts; while Army duo Gemma Rowland and Bethan Dainton return along with Saracens scrum half Jade Knight.

Sale Sharks second row Teleri Wyn Davies, who gained one cap against Scotland in 2018 has also been called up, along with Exeter full-back Niamh Terry and prop Gwenllian Jenkins, who won two caps in November 2019. Caryl Thomas and Shona Powell-Hughes are also back again – they were first recalled in the squad for the cancelled Scotland game.

The France Test will be the first for Wales Women since they played England in March last year and the excitement within the squad is palpable.

Video: <https://www.wru.wales/video/wales-women-announce-six-nations-squad/>

Full story: <https://www.wru.wales/2021/03/wales-women-six-nations-squad/>

6. Wales spoil for choice on Six Nations shortlist

After Wales were crowned 2021 Guinness Six Nations title winners on Saturday and Wayne Pivac's side has not finished with the accolades yet.

Wing Louis Rees-Zammit and No 8 Taulupe Faletau are on the six-man shortlist for the player of the Championship award.

At just 20 years old, Rees-Zammit's first Six Nations finished with four tries, a player of the round award, and a Six Nations title as the Gloucester back had a tournament to remember.

Bath No 8 and two-time British & Irish Lion Faletau has now won three Six Nations titles including a Grand Slam in 2012. He put in 19 tackles in a superb defensive effort against Scotland, was player of the match following a supreme display against England in round three and ended the tournament with 66 carries (third on the list) and 77 successful tackles (again third on the list)

Competition for the Welsh duo on the shortlist comes from Ireland pair Robbie Henshaw and Tadhg Beirne, France scrum-half Antoine Dupont, and Scotland flanker Hamish Watson.

More here: <https://www.wru.wales/2021/03/rees-zammit-and-faletau-up-for-coveted-six-nations-award/>

7. Rugby news

RAINBOW CUP

The Guinness PRO14 Rainbow Cup will kick-off on the weekend of April 24 with fixtures for the first three rounds now confirmed.

Three weekends of derby action will be followed by cross-hemisphere fixtures where the existing Guinness PRO14 teams will face the Vodacom Bulls, the Emirates Lions, Cell C Sharks and DHL Stormers for the very first time.

Full details and schedule here: <https://www.wru.wales/2021/03/rainbow-cup-details-confirmed/>

WELSH REFS MAKE MARK

In what has been a difficult season for all rugby supporters, players and referees, three Welsh officials have made significant progress in their quest to be the next Test match referee in place of Nigel Owens.

Craig Evans, Adam Jones and Ben Whitehouse have all been appointed by World Rugby to officiate in a number of competitions.

All three referees have benefitted from a new referee coaching structure, which has seen them being mentored by ex-Irish Test match referee Dave McHugh and former WRU Test match referees Robert Davies, Les Peard, Gareth Simmonds, Clayton Thomas and more recently Nigel Owens.

More: <https://www.wru.wales/2021/03/welsh-referees-make-their-mark/>

LIONS READY TO ROAR IN SA

The British & Irish Lions and South African Rugby have confirmed they are aligned on delivering the Castle Lager Lions Series in South Africa in the scheduled playing window this summer.

The Lions Board confirmed its preference to SA Rugby on Monday evening prior to follow-up meetings earlier on Tuesday.

More: <https://www.wru.wales/2021/03/lions-confirm-intention-to-tour-south-africa/>

50-UP FOR 70s SLAMMERS

Saturday, 27 March, 2021 will go down as a double celebration in Welsh rugby history – the day Alun Wyn Jones received the Guinness Six Nations title and the 50th anniversary of the 1971 Grand Slam.

There was no trophy for John Dawes' team of all the talents in 1971. They went to Paris to complete their clean sweep and triumphed 9-5 in an epic encounter at Stade Colombes.

Two years earlier they had drawn in Paris as they picked up a Triple Crown and won the title.

But on their return they were a different side, a team determined to make a statement to the rest of the rugby world.

If 1969 had been the dawn of a new Golden Era, 1971 was the start of it!

more: <https://www.wru.wales/2021/03/50-up-for-the-1971-grand-slamers/>

THANKYOU TREHARRIS

So many of our rugby clubs have been going above and beyond during the pandemic, catch-up here with the latest to be highlighted on 'thankyou Thursday'.

Nicola Garbett and her fellow helpers from Treharris distributed meals to those who were struggling while Clwb Rygbi Cymry Caerdydd and kept Wales connected during the lockdown by donating 100 Amazon Fire tablets from the proceeds of their £12,000 raised from a virtual run around Wales.

Video: <https://community.wru.wales/video/thankyou-thursday/>

APPRENTICE AMY

Meet Amy Rothero who has recently completed a Level 3 rugby development apprenticeship at the Welsh Rugby Union.

Following her experience, Amy decided to go on to study a degree in sport management at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Amy has recently been featured on the UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Services) website extolling the virtues of the WRU apprenticeships.

"I did sport from a young age and always had a passion for it. At college, I studied a Level 3 BTEC Extended Diploma in Sport. I had no idea what I wanted to do - I just knew the sporting route was the path I wanted to go down," she says.

"I didn't know what apprenticeships were. I didn't see them as a proper job at first. Now I realise I needed the apprenticeship to discover what I wanted to do in life."

Read on here; <https://www.ucas.com/alternatives/apprenticeships/how-i-got-my-apprenticeship/amy-level-3-rugby-development-apprentice>

MIXED ABILITY RUGBY VIRTUAL CLUBHOUSE

On the evening of March 19th, the night before the end of the men's Guinness Six Nations tournament, the Community Rugby Department held a Mixed Ability Rugby Virtual Clubhouse Event.

The aim of the evening was to engage and inspire the Mixed Ability rugby community and connect the Welsh sides with similar rugby clubs across Europe. Clubs from Wales, England, Scotland, Ireland, Italy, Spain and even far afield as Argentina. Phil Steele the popular rugby broadcaster hosted a fantastic evening with many special guests including ex internationals and mixed ability rugby players. Great insight and stories were shared and connections were made as nearly 200 plus people listened in - a great evening was had by all. #jerseyforall

WALES LIFT THE TITLE

Wales head coach Wayne Pivac admitted it took him until Wednesday to recover from the grand slam heartbreak they suffered in Paris, but now he is looking forward to a bright future after celebrating the Guinness Six Nations title triumph. The trophy was packed up at Stade de France and shipped off to Wales' Vale of Glamorgan base after Scotland's last gasp victory ensured a maiden Championship crown for the Wales head coach.

The last week of the tournament saw a rollercoaster of emotions for Pivac, his staff, players and the Welsh rugby public. But after finally getting their hands on the trophy, the head coach believes his exciting side are on the path to even more success. "We like to keep a lot of that emotional stuff to ourselves. It took me to about Wednesday to really want to come out of the house. We're going to be very proud when we look back," he says before his Wales team goes on to lift the Guinness Six Nations and Triple Crown following a dramatic conclusion to the 2021 edition of the Championship.

Video here: <https://www.wru.wales/video/wales-raise-the-guinness-six-nations-trophy/>

Reflections on Paris from Alun Wyn Jones and Josh Navidi, as well as WRU chairman Rob Butcher and chief executive Steve Phillips feature in the latest WRU Podcast here: <https://www.wru.wales/audio/welsh-rugby-union-podcast-12-2021/> We also hear about the Wales Women's Six Nations squad from coach Warren Abrahams and captain Siwan Lillicrap and look at the end of the Pro14 season.