NLDRFU Presidents Report 2025–26

In July 2025 I took an unexpected telephone call from the acting CB Honorary Secretary, asking me if I would accept the Presidency of the CB. Taken by surprise, I played for time and asked for a day or two to consider and discuss it with my wife. It's not often that a referee gets asked to do such a thing, but I felt honoured and gladly accepted.

The President's Role

The role of NLD President is largely ambassadorial, but comes with a seat on the NLD Board, which meets regularly to administer the game in the 3 Counties. The position rotates annually around the 3 Partner Unions, and in the 4th year is awarded to someone un-associated with a Partner Union.

Having attended all but two of these meetings in the 2025–26 Season - and several other online meetings, I have learnt much about the work of the CB and its two Council Members that goes on behind the scenes. There's still a lot to learn, but your CB is run by a dedicated and talented group of volunteers who give freely of their time and energy to better our wonderful game. There are many challenges facing the game nationally, and your CB is very much part of the effort confronting these challenges.

Club Visits

Life isn't all about meetings, though: I have used my time to get around many of the clubs in the CB, and have had some very enjoyable visits as the guest of our clubs. On a couple of occasions I was able to combine a President's Visit with refereeing a game on the same day, most notably to Grimsby who were playing a local derby against Cleethorpes on the 140th Anniversary of the club. It was a tense and exciting game, and I can honestly say that I've never been in such a crowded clubhouse in my long career as a referee: standing room only! Thanks to Matt Hood and Andy Picking for asking me to come along to such a special day.

Another great occasion was the NLD Girls Tournament at Nottingham University, early in the season, the whole event run by the NLDRFU Youth Council.

Back to Lincolnshire in early December, I was invited to Bourne Rugby Club by Melvyn Ashton and Alan Thomas for their annual Christmas Dinner, held before their game against Southwell: on the dinner table I was sat with several old friends from Southwell, and won a bottle of champagne in the raffle! The game itself was very entertaining, with Bourne running out winners.

Closer to home I was invited to my former club, Derby RFC for their Christmas Dinner before the bottom of the table clash against Rochdale. I was really impressed by the quality of skills shown by the players from both sides, belying their lowly positions in the league. Rochdale ran out winners (just) with a great fightback from Derby in the second half. Thanks to Martyn Murney and Gordon Roulinson for your wonderful hospitality.

Come the New Year I was back over in Lincolnshire following an invitation from Malcolm Yates to attend their lunch before the game against Rossendale. The game wasn't a classic, but the hospitality shown by Scunthorpe was wonderful, and I was hugely impressed by the upgrade to their clubhouse. Thanks to Graham Migdalski and Liam Waldron for a great day out.

Long Eaton hosted the NLD Girl's Conference Finals in March, where I refereed one of the games and then presented the trophies afterwards: Long Eaton has a number of very capable volunteers who ensured the day went without a hitch. After this I took a short break to Tenerife to improve my Spanish skills, but was back in time to be invited to Mellish RFC for a committee lunch before their final game of the season against Ashby, which they won by a cricket score. Syd, Bob and Roger looked after me really well, and I thoroughly enjoyed the day.

My final club Presidential visit was to Chesterfield RFC in mid-May for their 1st Team's game against their Vets on President's Day: President Ronald Kayser is certainly a larger then life character there, and (perhaps unsurprisingly) the Vets won the game.

Twickenham Visit

My wife and I were invited to the Presidents Day at Twickenham Stadium (still can't bring myself to call it Allianz ….) and we had a wonderful day there. For the pre-match dinner each CB had a table, and we were lucky to sit next to my old friend and fellow referee Paul Teager on the NLD table. I managed to knock over my pint of guinness, but the waiting staff soon cleared it up, much to my embarrassment!

England played well in the first half of the game against Argentina, but almost let them in during the second half. A really memorable day out, and my thanks to our Council Members for looking after us so well.

Volunteers

The RFU has a well-organised Volunteer Recognition system, and every year rewards the Unsung Heroes, the people who keep others In the Game and those who make it a Game for All. This year I was privileged to be on the NLD panel selecting our Volunteers for both CB and National awards.

Sifting through the nominations was a daunting task, due to the sheer quality of the volunteers nominated: it felt right to give them all an award. However, we had to make a shortlist and did so with remarkably little disagreement.

The Senior NLD Finals Day at Nottingham RFC on May 23rd was preceded by a Volunteer's Awards morning, where I was privileged to both meet the award winners and present them with their awards. These people are the glue that holds together the game in our area, and we would be much the poorer without them. I suspect for them that it's a labour of love, but we should not underestimate their contribution to the game in NLD. Well done and thanks to you all.

Senior Finals Day

The four finals played on the day were won by **Leesbrook** (Bowl vs Ollerton), **Mansfield** (Plate vs Sleaford), **Stamford** (Women's Cup vs West Bridgford) and **Stamford** (Men's Cup vs Melbourne), played on a hot day and well contested. It was a long day, but well managed, and very enjoyable. Well done to all the teams playing that day.

I'll sign off this report by thanking the CB for the honour of serving as your President: it's been a hugely enjoyable experience, and I hope to be able to serve you well in a future responsible role.

Paul Carroll

NLDRFU President 2025–26