



Essex County RFU – Statement from our Chair re Rugby in our East London Boroughs and Essex.

As you are no doubt aware the Government has introduced a national lockdown to curb the increase in Covid-19 cases in England. During this time no community team sports can take place, so the RFU has decided that we must return to Stage A on the Return to Community Rugby Roadmap. This means that no competitive or formal rugby activities can be undertaken until at least Wednesday 2nd December. Group training sessions are banned, but a maximum of two players can participate in socially distanced (two metres plus), individual training sessions outside provided that no equipment is shared. Clubhouses can only remain open to provide take away, click and collect and food delivery services up until 10pm and certain other limited circumstances.

The RFU had already announced the cancellation of the Adult Competitive Leagues (Level 3 and below for men, Level 2 and below for women) for the 2020/21 season. They took the view that even if a return to full contact rugby becomes possible, playing a meaningful competitive league season resulting in promotion and relegation was no longer feasible.

However the RFU Competitions Team is working to put alternative competition models in place which will be entirely optional for clubs and will have no impact on promotion/relegation. Our Essex competitions team has been involved in this process through the Divisional Organising Committee and we hope to be able to announce the outcome on Friday 13th November. It is likely that the focus will be on friendly fixtures played more locally to reduce travel, possibly in a “waterfall” format with all clubs remaining engaged throughout the remainder of the season so that you can organise lunches, social events and other fundraisers with confidence.

The other important job that Essex is doing is conducting another financial health check with all our clubs. With a national lockdown and a return to Stage A, clubs are facing even sterner challenges and we now need to look again at how we ensure that our clubs get through this longer period without income. Both the RFU and Essex have limited funds available to assist clubs and we need to target this as effectively and fairly as possible.

Speaking in a personal capacity, the lack of grassroots rugby both nationally and in Essex is something I never thought I would see, and it pains me that this is the situation we are in. The touch and Ready4Rugby tournaments that I have seen, although not the full-contact game we would ideally be playing, show how important our clubs are and how much we all love this game. That gives me a lot of hope for the future. We will scrum again, or do some fancy passing and running, if you’re in the backs.

In the meantime please stay safe and continue to support your club as best you can and hopefully we will be able to return to rugby before very much longer.

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