

COUNTY SECRETARY:- ANNUAL REPORT SEASON 2008/2009

I will reflect on my 6 years in the post of County Secretary as a conclusion to my annual report but initially I wish to report on what has been another extremely challenging season, due to the inclement weather, but countered by what I believe to be the most successful in my tenure in terms of County Cup success, a dramatic drop in player and Club misconduct, the adoption of the FA Respect Programme and finally a huge drop in both the number and amount of fines administered for on & off pitch misdemeanours.

Congratulations must go to AFC Cheshunt, winners of the Herts Intermediate Cup, Northaw winners of the Herts Junior Cup and to Shadwell, runners up in the Middlesex Junior Cup. In addition congratulations must go to all our Divisional Winners and our four successful Cup Winners, where this season finals were shared on the grounds of Cheshunt FC & Broxbourne Borough FC. All finals were extremely well attended, competitive and without doubt, the Intermediate Final was the pick of the four for excitement. As usual thanks to those Officers and Club Secretaries who gave up their evenings to ensure the finals were once again flawlessly arranged and a credit to this League.

This season was once again plagued by inclement weather with three weeks completely lost due to rain, frost & snow, with a number of others, severely decimated. Once again a vast number of double headers and mid week matches were needed to complete the programme and perhaps this compressed fixture programme led to 13 non-fulfilments in the last 4 weeks of the season. Thanks once again must go to all players, secretaries and referees alike who ensured that the fixture programme was completed in full. It goes without saying that once again the dedication shown by Dave Smith, in arranging the fixtures in what was another extremely difficult season, is to be applauded by all teams and Officers alike, with over 300 postponements due to the weather.

I am pleased to report that the number of matches conceded due to lack of players fell this season by 33% from 30 to 20, which is still too many, but definitely moving in the right direction. The additional pressures of weekend working, families and Premiership football on a Sunday, continues to reduce the numbers of available players and is the continued reason for the decline of adult 11-a-side football, although I am happy to say our total numbers of teams has increased by one next season. Last season saw Potters Bar Rovers resign from the Premier Division after just one game and sadly Spread Eagle are moving on to pastures new next season. Two new Clubs The Beehive & US ACLI join us next season in addition to a reserve team from Enfield Royals.

Providing a qualified referee for all games was again a challenge, but this season saw only 14 games called off due to this reason a 33% improvement on last season. Despite losing the services of at least 8 referees prior to and during this season, we gained a similar number of new recruits and with the reduced number of teams, managed to cope. Next season sees a new Referees Secretary when Gary Bailey takes over from Fred & I and we trust that all referees & secretaries will give him their complete support in his first season.

After so many annual reports highlighting the amount of money amassed through fines both administratively and on match days it is with much pleasure that in my final report I can confirm that at last the penny has finally dropped. The total amount of fines this year was down 35% to £2,600, with the number of fines dropping by 27% to 283. It is still a major concern that despite so much information being publicised by Denis Coventry & help guides on the website showing “How to complete a result card”, 30% of the fines income was still received due to incorrectly completed match report cards. Despite the humiliation of being highlighted in last years report, Uniques once again were the worst offenders, amassing over £200 in fines for the 2nd year running with Great Eastern just behind on £198. In actual number of fines Enfield Crusaders joined Great Eastern & Uniques in the most fines, 15 each, a total that all three clubs should be ashamed of.

As in previous years a number of secretaries once again showed that it isn't rocket science attending to business, and I wish to highlight that the secretaries of Broxbourne Rangers OB, Broxbourne Saints, Cheshunt Town, Churchbury (4th season in succession), Oakwood, Spenny Rangers, Sumners Athletic & Wormley Rovers were able to go through the whole season with no fines whatsoever.

As outlined in my opening paragraph the number of players sent off decreased significantly this season. The total number of suspensions reduced by 27 a drop of 23%. Significantly, dismissals for foul and abusive language dropped by 45%, from 22 to 12, also those dismissed for two cautions dropped by 63% from 38 to 14. Those dismissed for kicking/striking and serious foul play also dropped by 43%. Whilst this is indeed an excellent effort from all players it is tempered by the fact that there was unfortunately a dramatic increase in dismissals for violent conduct of 71% from 14 throughout last season to 24 in this. Perhaps this is indicative of society today, but certainly this is a trend that we cannot & must not let continue.

Finally I now wish to briefly reflect on my years as County Secretary. Despite this League being held in such high esteem both within Hertfordshire & the FA on the way it is administered and the quality of football we play, I have regretfully seen the number of divisions drop from 7 to 5, with teams dropping from 80 to 60 during my term in Office.

Discipline has always been high on my and the Management Committee's agenda every season and I am particularly pleased that those tough decisions taken in previous seasons to expel teams and players alike, has at last seen a dramatic improvement, this must continue to be the trend in seasons to come. I was pleased that this League was the first in Hertfordshire to sign up to the Respect Programme and I hope that the publicity that went with that programme was in some way responsible for the improved on pitch discipline.

On line technology within the League has improved dramatically during my time as County Secretary and my initiative to push for all Referees & Secretaries to receive League information by email was a big step forward, both in cost and efficiency, despite a number of Officers not being keen on the idea at the time. I am sure that in seasons to come this will develop much more, with the increased use of the FA's Full-Time software. It is therefore an absolute requirement that all Clubs, Referees & indeed Officers have at least one email account that can be used to receive League information in the future.

Finally I must, in these difficult financial times, raise the subject of League funds. Malcolm Miller has continued to balance the books, however with increased financial constraints on us all, that job will get increasingly difficult in seasons to come. Reduced income from fines and player registrations, plus possibly less Sponsorship money from The Essex/Herts Newspaper Group leaves the League with a potential shortfall of £5,000 to £6,000 next season, compared to this. Officers must work together to address this imbalance and seek additional income from other sources whilst investigating radical ways to reduce expenditure.

Finally I wish to thank all Officers for their support during my stay in Office and trust that Denis Coventry receives similar support as he takes over this most challenging role. It has indeed been a most enjoyable few years, which I trust has taken this League forward. In seasons to come we must have more people stepping forward to help keep this League at the same level.

Many thanks & I commend to you my final report for Season 2008/2009.