

MINUTES

RFL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Location RFL HQ, House of Sport, Gate 13, Rowsley Street, Manchester, M11 3FF **Date & Time** Tuesday 5th September 2023, 10.00-14.00

Present	Simon Johnson, Sandy Lindsay MBE, Rimla Akhtar OBE, Dr Cherrie Daley, Tony Sutton, Robert Hicks – Company Secretary	Chair	Simon Johnson
In attendance	Ed Mallaburn – IMG Observer Jamie Jones Buchanan – RFL Board Observer Michelle Maple – Secretariat (minutes) Rob Graham – RFL (Item 4) Dave Rotheram – RFL (Item 5) Stuart Barrow – RFL (Item 5)		Prof. Ben Jones – RFL (Item 6) Marc Lovering – RFL (Item 7) Ashleigh Seddon – RFL (Item 7) Richard Munson – Solutions Through Sport (Item 7) Ben Abberstein – RFL (Item 8) Rhodri Jones – RL Commercial (Item 9)

Item No	Agenda Item	Who
1.0	WELCOME AND APOLOGIES The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. No apologies for absence were received.	
2.0	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST Declarations of interest were noted as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SJ – director of RL Commercial Ltd, director of RFL Investments 2020 Ltd and director of IRL Ltd. Chair of SIS, who has Betfred as a shareholder. EM – director of RL Commercial Ltd. TS – director of RFL Investments 2020 Ltd and of RLWC2021 Ltd. JJB – director of Leeds Cricket, Football & Athletics Ltd, trustee of Leeds Rhinos Foundation, trustee of Leeds 2023, patron of Inspire North, pundit at Sky TV. 	
3.0	MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING & ACTION TRACKER 3.1 Minutes The minutes from the meeting held on 27 th July 2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record, subject to the following amendments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item 7 – Paragraph 3 to read: “It was anticipated that the subcommittee would meet before the end of the year. Membership would include CD, TS, JJB, DR plus a number of specialist members”. Item 10 – Paragraph 5 to read: “CD also felt that the RFL should work closely with the RL Commercial communications team to ensure compliance with the UKAD assurance framework”. 	

	3.2	<p>Matters Arising Progress against the action tracker was noted, with the following points discussed in further detail:</p> <p><u>Item 1 – Long Form Agreement</u> It was anticipated that the agreement with IMG would be finalised soon now that the broadcast position was known.</p>	
4.0		FINANCIAL MATTERS	
	4.1	<p>2023 Management Accounts and Outturn The meeting was joined by Rob Graham (RG), who summarised the management accounts for the period to 31st July 2023</p> <p>A discussion took place on performance against budget with variations noted and understood.</p>	
	4.2	<p>2024 Budget The Board reviewed some of the initial 2024 budget principles. This would be subject to receipt of a final budget from RL Commercial. This work was underway with the Finance team and relevant budget holders before it could be approved by the RL Commercial Board.</p> <p>Key principles were outlined.</p> <p>It was recognised that the 2024 budget priorities required a detailed discussion at the next Board meeting.</p> <p>RA felt the Board required further clarity on the vision for women's and wheelchair Rugby League, to establish what budget was realistically required. Further professionalisation of the women's game would also require discussion with RL Commercial to capitalise on any opportunities to promote women's sport.</p> <p>RA stated that, given the financial significance of the broadcast deal for the sport as a whole, it would be beneficial for the RL Commercial and RFL Boards to have greater communication and transparency on all elements of the broadcast package.</p> <p>The Chair felt the RFL's Executive should explore additional funding sources. .</p> <p>RA noted that a decision had been taken by RL Commercial to have a video referee at each Super League match, thus potentially impacting the current Match Officials budget. The Chair stated that RL Commercial intended for every Super League match to be covered by Sky, with Sky covering the production therefore enabling RL Commercial to explore the possibility of streaming. This would require a video referee at every game, but ultimately improve the value of the Super League product.</p> <p>The Chair felt a strategic budget discussion at the next meeting would help to clarify which areas required additional funding, and whether external grants would be pursued or discussions were required with RL Commercial on increasing focus on certain areas.</p>	
5.0		INTERNATIONAL CALENDAR	
		<p>The meeting was joined by Dave Rotheram (DR) and Stuart Barrow (SB).</p> <p>Following the recent IRL meeting in Singapore, an international calendar for the sport had been confirmed up to 2030, enabling performance planning to take place for the three England teams in the years up to the World Cup in 2026.</p>	

	<p>The women's game was considered to present a significant opportunity for growth, and a detailed strategy for the women's game was being produced. RA requested information as to what could potentially be achieved with different levels of funding, particularly as UK Sport had been identified as an organisation that could provide support to develop elements of the women's performance programme.</p> <p>CD requested further data on the minimum requirements to enable each team to perform at the optimum level. It was felt this would inform the Board's decision making, and establish which areas of funding would generate the most return for the sport.</p> <p>SB stated that the objectives were different for each England team. The women's players required more development, exposure to the best playing opportunities and a more professional environment, with high performance residentials being scheduled for the England players. CD recommended that the Executive consider a maternity and pregnancy policy around allowing the female players to bring children to residentials to encourage participation.</p> <p>Discussion also took place on the future strategy for the wheelchair team following their World Cup win in 2022. TS reported that participation had almost doubled following the tournament to 900 players, and significant development activity was underway at each individual club. A documentary would also be released in the autumn covering the England team, which would present PR opportunities.</p> <p>RA requested that the number of participants be broken down further to detail the number of actual wheelchair users.</p>	<p>DR/SB</p> <p>DR/SB</p> <p>DR/SB</p> <p>DR</p>
6.0	CONCUSSIVE AND SUB-CONCUSSIVE IMPACTS	
	<p>The meeting was joined by Professor Ben Jones (BJ), who presented a detailed summary of the initial findings from the academy trials on rule changes to reduce concussive and sub-concussive injuries.</p> <p>A number of key highlights were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to the trial, 5% of tackles in a made contact with the ball carrier's head, with only 8% of these tackles being sanctioned by the Match Official. During the trial, 18% of tackles were above the new trialled legal tackle height, with 3% making contact with the head of the ball carrier and a sanctioning rate of 40%, thereby indicating a positive impact in player behaviour during the trial and a rigorous application of the laws by Match Officials, resulting in an overall reduction in head contact. • Pre-trial the percentage of tackles where the ball carrier and tackler were upright was 42% and 36% respectively. The percentage of tackles where the tackler was upright reduced to 20%, and the figures where the ball carrier was bent at the waist increased from 43% pre-trial to 56% during the trial. Whilst the number of times ball carriers dipping in to contact increased, it was felt the tacklers could avoid the ball carriers head and neck. • Initial contact to the ball carrier reduced during the trials from 4.7% to 2.7% in zone 1 (head/neck), 43.4% to 15.2% in zone 2 (shoulders) and increased from 7.4% to 13.2% in zone 5 (shorts). • The pre-trial concussion rate was 25 per 1000 hrs and this reduced to 22 per 1000 hrs during the trial. • Head accelerations events (HAEs) per player per match, measured using instrumented mouthguards, decreased pre-trial to during trial from ten to eight HAEs up to 10g, and from two to one HAE between 20-30g. The numbers of HAEs between 10-20g, 30-40g and over 40g remained unchanged. 	

		<p>CD queried whether players and coaches differed in their viewpoints during the trials. BJ confirmed that views were largely consistent, but reducing tackle height to armpit height was considered the highest importance to all parties.</p> <p>It was also recognised that some academy clubs had struggled to adapt to the new tackle height, and some clubs may require additional coaching should this be rolled out to the rest of the game. JJB felt this would improve with increased repetition and improve overall safety levels for players.</p> <p>In terms of the next steps, a meeting of the Brain Health Sub-Committee was scheduled on 18th September 2023 to discuss recommendations on the legal height of the tackle across all areas of the sport, and the tackle height sanctioning framework across all areas of the sport. Recommendations would then be presented to the RFL Board at its meeting in November, and any law changes would be presented to the RFL Council in December.</p>	RH
7.0	RL FOUNDATION		
		<p>The meeting was joined by Marc Lovering (ML), Ashleigh Seddon (AS), and Richard Munson (RM), who presented a detailed business plan for the OurLeague Life Foundation, a collaborative charitable entity between the RFL and the sport's Charitable Community Organisations (CCOs) to secure funding for the delivery of rugby league inspired community programmes.</p> <p>The Board was advised that the Foundation intended to secure new income into the sport in its first year of operation, increasing in year two and further in year three. ML added that the Foundation would only work with CCOs that had a proven track record of positive delivery.</p> <p>CD enquired whether any other sports had two charities operating alongside each other. RM confirmed that football, cricket, and the NFL had similar operations. CD added that it would be helpful to obtain some best practice examples of how this worked in other sports, and also suggested that it would be helpful to ensure that the strategies of each charity were aligned and complemented one another.</p> <p>RA reported that Charity Commission applications had become more challenging recently, and this needed to be factored into the timescales for establishing the Foundation. In addition, RA requested that further consideration be given to adhering to the Code for Sports Governance and ensuring appropriate independence and diversity on the Board. The Chair suggested that conflicts of interest when distributing funding needed to be considered when constructing the Board. It was also suggested that a member of the RFL Board act as a Trustee, to ensure a reporting line was in place to the RFL Board.</p> <p>RA also stated that appropriate targets should be included within funding agreements requiring CCOs to commit to the Tackle It Plan objectives around participation levels and diversity, with CCOs to be held accountable to these agreements. There was general agreement that Tackle It should be an integral part of the initial Foundation documents and all applications for funding must specify how they will contribute to achieving these targets.</p> <p>Subject to the inclusion of the above points, the Board approved the business plan and the initial setup of the of the OurLeague Life Foundation, with a view to the new charitable entity being launched in 2024.</p>	<p>ML</p> <p>ML</p> <p>ML</p> <p>ML</p>

8.0	<p>TACKLE IT</p> <p>The meeting was joined by Ben Abberstein, who presented a revised version of the Tackle It Action Plan for approval. The Action Plan had been endorsed by both the Executive Board and Inclusion Board members.</p> <p>Key changes were highlighted as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The four strategic goals remained unchanged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Widen the reach and impact of Rugby League ○ Diversify Rugby League's Talent Pool and Workforce ○ Improve the culture of Rugby League ○ Clarify processes, instil confidence in, and encourage the reporting of discrimination. • No specific actions had been set against the first goal, given the totality of the plan was considered to relate to widening the impact and reach of the sport. • Actions relating to the remaining three goals had been streamlined to avoid duplication, and included a clearer alignment to the RFL's departmental plans and reference to RL Commercial following the organisation's restructure. • Targets around increasing the diversity of players had been made more specific. • Reference would be added to improving accessibility as part of the professional club audits and facilities standards. <p>CD suggested that further thought be given to defining the optimum talent pool and workforce, and to considering dual roles. BA stated that this would form part of the next stage of the communications plan around Tackle It. The object to diversify would be to engage those people that were not currently engaging with the sport.</p> <p>BA felt it would be helpful to offer mentoring opportunities to provide more coaching experience to people from underrepresented backgrounds. It was also felt that players would be better supported by a member of staff that had experienced discrimination. All these points would be taken into account as part of the rollout of the new Plan.</p> <p>The Board was supportive of the revised Action Plan and approved the document. It was noted that this would be reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Executive Board, and could be reviewed by the Board on a quarterly or six-monthly basis as required.</p>	
9.0	<p>RL COMMERCIAL MD REPORT</p> <p>The meeting was joined by Rhodri Jones (RJ), who presented an update on key RL Commercial issues:</p> <p>Broadcast</p> <p>Super League shareholders had supported the RL Commercial Board's recommendation to proceed with the Sky Sports improved offer and to enter into an exclusive period to commence the legal documentation. Whilst the signed agreement was not expected to be finalised within the two-week period, it was anticipated that the principles of the contract would be agreed.</p> <p>The Chair enquired how this would affect the sport's position with free-to-air broadcasters. RJ provided an update on the next steps of this particular package.</p> <p>Viaplay were leaving the UK broadcast market, therefore requiring a different solution for the Championship. The Board were informed of options being considered.</p>	

		<p>Finance In addition to the broadcast elements, work was ongoing to source betting and data rights, the title partner renewal, obtaining new commercial partner income.</p> <p>Calendar A proposed calendar had been discussed with Super League shareholders, comprising a 25 round season and a revised Challenge Cup schedule to commence earlier in the year, with the Final being held in June. The Chair stated that the Board would support this structure only for 2024, on the basis that the baseline for a new calendar from 2025 would have to be in line with IMG's recommendations.</p> <p>RJ thanked SL for her support in obtaining a partner for the England Wheelchair international on 5th November at the FD Arena in Leeds. This would be broadcast on BBC2.</p>	
10.0		<p>CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT</p> <p>The report from TS was taken as read.</p>	
11.0		<p>OPERATIONS & LEGAL REPORT</p> <p>The report from RH was taken as read. CD felt it would be useful to consider awareness training around tramadol following its addition to the banned substances list in 2024.</p>	RH
12.0		<p>OPERATIONAL PLAN & INSIGHT REPORT</p> <p>The report from AOB was noted. The Board was pleased to note the increased participation levels.</p>	
13.0		<p>FINANCE & CENTRAL SERVICES REPORT</p> <p>The report from RG was noted.</p>	
14.0		<p>PERFORMANCE, DEVELOPMENT & MATCH OFFICIALS REPORT</p> <p>The report from DR and ML was noted.</p>	
15.0		<p>PEOPLE & CULTURE REPORT</p> <p>The paper by VS was noted.</p>	
16.0		<p>LITIGATION</p> <p>The paper was noted.</p>	
17.0		<p>RISKS</p> <p>No risks arising from the meeting were noted.</p>	
18.0		<p>AOB</p> <p>TS acknowledged the excellent work undertaken by the Executive team during his leave, particularly relating to the Marcus Griffiths discrimination issue.</p>	
19.0		<p>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</p>	

		<p>The date of the next meeting was noted as 21st November 2023. The Chair suggested that a specific session be set up in the interim period to address any significant issues if required.</p> <p>It was noted that a list of Board dates for 2024 would be circulated in the coming weeks, to include a joint dinner with the RL Commercial Board.</p> <p>There being no further business, the meeting closed at 3pm.</p>	NL