

## **WEST AREA DEVELOPMENT LEAD REPORT TO AGM 2023/24**

After the difficulties of the 2023 close season which saw Rod Cook and Alison Cook leaving their positions on the Officiating Committee, and the angst this caused particularly amongst the Level 2 and Level 3 umpiring community, it is little short of a miracle that we managed to get through the 2023/24 season as well as we did.

Out of the discussions that took place between the Area Selection Panel and the West Board came an undertaking that we would cover all Women's Premiership matches, supplementing the small number of umpires on the Women's Panels with Men's Panel umpires who were willing to umpire an occasional Women's match. This we achieved, but whether it is sustainable long term remains to be seen.

It was also agreed that we would attempt to run a pilot scheme with Women's Division 1 North. All Clubs were asked to put umpires forward who were willing to take appointments away from their own Club, but only within that division thus giving them a taste of umpiring away from their own clubs and allowing matches in that division to have neutral appointments. Unfortunately only a couple of Clubs responded positively to this initiative, whilst several were positively hostile to it and a couple did not even bother responding! This collective negativity would suggest that Women's Clubs playing below Premiership level have no real wish for neutral appointments, despite the noises coming from one or two individuals.

### **Area Men's Panel**

#### **The good**

- 1 umpire gained their Level 3.
- 6 umpires gained their Level 2.
- 2 umpires joined the Panel having gained their Level 2 elsewhere.
- 3 umpires were upgraded from B Panel to A Panel with several more are likely to be given the opportunity next season.
- We already know of 1 additional Level 2 candidate for next season.

#### **The not so good**

- 2 umpires failed their initial Level 2 assessment and will be looked at again next season.
- 1 umpire failed a second Level 2 assessment and was returned to their Sector for further development.
- Several umpires withdrew from taking appointments for a variety of reasons, although the most common reason given was dissatisfaction with the behaviour of teams.

### **Area Women's Panel**

Pleasingly the number of Women's Panel umpires is showing signs of improving, 2 umpires gained their Level 2 towards the end of the season and there are potentially another 4 to be assessed next season.

### **Assessments/Coaching**

A total of 80 assessment or coaching appointments were made to Area appointed League matches during the season. Compared to the figures reported at the last AGM this would appear to be a significant reduction, but last year's figures were based on the number of reports produced which is not always a true reflection as sometimes only one report is produced.

In all a total of 14 assessors or coaches, many of whom are still active umpires thus restricting their availability, took appointments and almost half of the 80 appointments were undertaken by just 3 of us. Pleasingly I have had two approaches recently from people who would like to become assessors and I will work with them next season.

Below Area level, both North and South Sectors undertook some assessment and coaching but the number of umpires taking appointments below Area level remains disappointingly small.

### **Development Events**

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, we were not able to hold any significant Development Events during the season. However, I am pleased to say that over the weekend of 18/19 May the West are hosting the Women's O65 Masters Tournament and this will be umpired predominantly by Club Level 1 umpires, with a small number of NPUA umpires and a number of West Coaches to hopefully aid their development. The response to the email that went out offering the opportunity to take part in this Tournament was excellent with about 30 umpires wanting to come to the Tournament and a similar number saying that they would have liked to come but were already committed to other things. Unfortunately this meant that a number had to be disappointed, something that I was not expecting!

We are actively looking for other such opportunities and hopefully those that had to be disappointed this time round will get another opportunity shortly.

### **Indoors**

Not such a problematic season as the last couple of seasons, although disappointingly we were unable to cover all the Schools Tournaments as on 2 occasions 2 tournaments were arranged on the same day and we just did not have sufficient numbers to cover both. The situation was not helped by these being days on which the outdoor National League was playing and some umpires opted to umpire outdoors.

We urgently need a few more indoor umpires with our dedicated but too small Panel getting ever older! We are actively looking for opportunities for umpires new to indoors to have a go on something a little less competitive than the West Finals and if anyone would like to get involved they should let me know please.

### **Pre Season Meeting**

It is hoped that it will be possible to arrange a meeting for Level 2 (including candidates) and Level 3 umpires in the first half of September, probably in Taunton. I already have a speaker arranged and am hopeful that a date can be set quite soon so you can all get it in your diaries.

And so to finish, a big thank you to everyone who has taken appointments this season, assessors, coaches and umpires. Many of you have been available most weeks, and I hope that will be the same next season. I also hope that those who were only available occasionally will be more regularly available next season.

And absolutely finally, a special thank you to Graham for his efforts with the appointments.

David Lillywhite  
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