

Notes of meeting held at Principality Stadium 24th August 2023 6.30pm

Attendance

WRU - Richard Collier-Keywood, Nigel Walker, Malcolm Wall, Simon Rimmer

Joint Supporters Group Cymru (JSG Cymru) – Barrie Jones, Ian Lewis, Ryan Price, Dan Hallett, Cathy Green, Keith Collins, Simon Harrington, Hugh Campbell, Lynn Glaister

Introductions – Nigel Walker (NW) started the meeting. Everyone introduced themselves and their organisations. Richard Collier-Keywood (RCK) suggested going straight into our questions

As this was a first meeting Barrie (BJ) started the meeting by asking what the strategy was for the 5 pro-teams (Wales, Cardiff, Ospreys, Scarlets, and Dragons)

Malcolm Wall (MW) outlined the strategy – Under the umbrella of One Wales

1. 3 pillars
1. Player pathways – improve and convert talent available in Wales
2. Commercial – improve commercial prospects of all the clubs for example currently looking at a Telesales process for all professional clubs
3. Narrative – improving the image of the game in Wales including improving the social media output
2. He stressed this was an outline strategy which needed populating with specific actions and would be built on over next few years

Other points made by WRU reps in meeting

1. Academy template – there is a minimum spend and obligations. These would be audited to ensure compliance
2. Greater link between National team and regions regarding fitness – example given that 15 players returned to regions, other than the injured the players have gone back fitter than they were. Work will be done spread those improvements across regions too.
3. There would be a new elite league below regions – clubs will have to apply.
4. Commitment to transparency
5. Committed to properly plan for the future
6. The stadium is an asset and must be used to raise money for the professional game.
7. Supporters are an asset – there is a commitment to listen to wide range of views
8. Imperative WRU works closely with the regions

Questions

JSG Cymru- What will the criteria be for new league –

Answer

Explanation given of reason for the new league. It was confirmed full details of that will be out in next few days, some aspects have already hit the media.

JSG Cymru - Regarding narrative – how does the way regions have been treated fit into the narrative. Little respect shown when scheduling matches that undermine derbies i.e.: Wales v Barbarians clashing with Scarlets v Cardiff, proposal to host Bristol v Gloucester on same day as Cardiff v Scarlets.

Answer

An error was made regarding the clash with the Barbarians. WRU had representative in URC scheduling meeting and a mistake was made. Steps will be taken to avoid such mistakes in future, but it was stressed regions had a rep in those scheduling meetings too. Regarding need for the match – it was explained that there are normally 4 home internationals at the Principality (outside of 6N) but this year because of World Cup there are only 3 - money is needed and it is one less than normal. There had been an attempt to move the derby, but URC had refused due to the commitment to broadcasters.

JSG Cymru How can the regions field teams safely when we would still be without our Internationals and presumably the 15 recently released back, plus more, would be called into camp. It was mentioned that teams could be left with young, inexperienced teams going up against the Sharks, Munster (both who have enough depth to field big teams without their internationals) and of course for the derby. This may also affect previous games if the players are in camp.

Is it possibility that we would lose players to the Barbarians also.

They stated player safety was paramount but did not expand on how this could be managed.

JSG Cymru– how are clubs meant to make money when the WRU is working against them with issues such as the above clashes.

They stated that money made by WRU goes into the game, so it is important.

JSG Cymru– Is it true there is an issue with judgment day clashing with a concert.

They said there are issues that are currently being worked on. JSG Cymru pointed out that we had been told there was £1 million raised by judgment day so it would be an issue if this money was lost.

JSG Cymru– What is the situation with Viaplay

There is a contract for next 2 seasons. There will then be a new contract which will be out to tender

JSG Cymru– Is the WRU aware of how tired the supporters are. All the issues over the last few years and the reduction in budgets means we are in danger of losing supporters and more importantly not gaining new supporters

Clubs are driving the season ticket sales and sharing the information with each other. It was suggested by MW the sales are on a par with last year.

JSG Cymru– Why don't the WRU media team promote the regions. There was a lack of support that could be given. The WRU could be more positive in promoting games and good news.

There was a commitment from RCK and NW to improve on this.

JSG Cymru– Rumours of mergers (mainly involving Ospreys) were brought up. Media speculation is damaging, and it was asked if WRU could help with dispelling those rumours by speaking to media. Also not helped by Steve Hanson interview

It was pointed out that media independence was important, but they did agree that taking the views of someone who hasn't worked for WRU in last 20 years was not helpful.

Media will inevitably fill void where there is a lack of news. JSG Cymru member pointed out the good work being done by the community foundations and wondered why the WRU did not help make more of this given the lack of comms staff in regions due to budget restrictions.

JSG Cymru– women's rugby – Why is this not aligned to regions and clubs. Surely this would result in more people being aware of games etc....

It was explained that tenders were put out for player development centre. These are crucial but it was recognised that there should be greater alignment in the future. Concentration is currently on increasing the player base from 5000 to at least 10000. They are committed to raising profile of game and ensuring there are pathways. Much good work has taken place over the past couple of years but more remains to be done.

JSG Cymru– Any chance of negotiations for a British and Irish League. Given the environmental concerns surely playing closer games (rather than flying to places such as South Africa) should be the way forward.

It was confirmed that are committed to the URC and there are no negotiations. NW doubted that the English teams would want it anyway

JSG Cymru– WE should be grateful to the women who were brave enough to challenge the culture of the WRU. It is probably only because of them we have seen changes.

When will the report on misogyny be out?

A date had not been set but there was a restating of the aim to implement all the recommendations.

JSG Cymru re- the new CEO – it was reported that her vision presented to the interview panel blew them away. Can we see it?

When new CEO is in place she will be able to expand on views. She will want to listen to people. When questions were asked about her commercial background it was pointed out her background did have the required commercial mix but was balanced.

JSG Cymru– a cautious welcome was given to the new regime. Would the Chair give a commitment to meetings with JSG Cymru now that they had been reinstated by the interim CEO.

This was confirmed – there will be quarterly meetings. Date will be set shortly following liaison with JSG Cymru.