

July 1, 2011

An Open Letter from the President

We are now into all parts of the season, with all the age-grades running and the senior sides well and truly immersed into playing. That is the great part of being in this position: seeing all the members out doing what they enjoy. This is not just the players but the coaches, therapists and, yes, the referees.

With that in mind there are some items I want to bring to the attention of everyone involved in rugby in Ontario. They are both involving conduct, on and off the field.

I will deal with one that concerns me for many reasons first: the use of foul language by players and spectators alike.

If you look back on one of the big selling points when each of you took up this game, it was the respect that was evident throughout. I have personally witnessed this deteriorating and am asking you all to exercise better judgment before you open your mouths to let loose with a salvo of expletives: 60 % of our membership is under the age of 16 currently. What kind of example are we projecting for them from on the field? Worse still, what kind of image are we projecting for spectators? Even worse again, if you are spectator doing this, what are we telling new or recent fans of our sport?

The second one is very disconcerting and must stop. If the clubs and their members cannot do this themselves, then RO will be forced to step in and apply the sanctions that are in place. If these sanctions are not working, we will modify them to ensure that they are severe enough to force the change. What am I referring to you ask? **Referee abuse.**

This should already have a zero tolerance. There is no place in our sport for the constant barrage that one can witness during matches from the players and the fans alike, directed towards the game officials. It amazes me to think that it is deemed acceptable to verbally abuse them.

Here are a few things to think about before you think of doing it again.

First, why would anyone want to take up the whistle with this type of abuse becoming more rampant?

Second, how will they learn if not from doing games? Did each of you rise to the level you are at now without having made a mistake?

Third, we are all not the international level players we believe ourselves to be so why do we expect that from our officials? They are out on game day to enjoy themselves too: the only difference is they feel that being that person who allows 44 others to play is an important and

enjoyable way to spend 80 minutes. Remember that referees spend many hours alone training and educating themselves for the game that they love and take enjoyment from. Many this season are having the enjoyment driven out of sacrificing their Saturdays.

Fourth, can you imagine how we would all feel if the officials thought it was perfectly within their right to tell you how poorly you are playing? Perhaps being chastised openly during a few games by the referee for the horrid pass, poor kick, bad technique, lack of fitness or missed tackle that allowed the opposition to score the winning points might bring some understanding back into our game that respect is THE key to what this sport is. We all talk proudly of that when asked by outsiders to describe rugby and it is time to walk the talk again.

In closing I would like to tell you that I had the opportunity recently to meet with two of the survivors from the plane crash in the Andes in 1972, documented in the book “Alive!” and the movie of the same name (if you have never read it, you should). It was a very humbling experience. I was able to ask any question about anything and I asked them how they kept the strength to go on, day after day. The answer was ‘Rugby’: the discipline and respect for your teammates, for your opposition, for the referees, for the sport itself was what kept them going. This is what we need to bring back into rugby in Ontario.

Enjoy your game. Win or lose allow the others to do the same. Don’t tolerate it from other players or other fans. Be the person show steps up first and says ‘Enough’. You will be amazed at how many others want to do the same.

As ever, please contact me if there is anything you would like to talk about (president@rugbyontario.com) on this or anything else that is on your mind and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible this season.

Best of Luck,

David Nelson
President