

Special 87th FIRA-AER AGM Paris

EDITO



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A. FERRASSE B. LAPASSET - REMEMBERING THE PAST WHILE LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The 87th General Assembly symbolically reflected the philosophy of our Association by remembering the past while looking to the future.

Remembering the past : The tribute paid by Jean-Claude Baqué to his "great" predecessor Albert Ferrasse, a great man, a great Chairman and a great leader whose tough exterior masked a heart of gold. A man who once his gave you his trust, he gave you everything. A visionary who along with Vernon Pugh and Antonio Samaranch, was prepared to sacrifice FIRA on the altar of the Regional Associations in order that rugby might become a universal sport. He has brought us such a long way and as Pierre Camou so eloquently put it in his welcoming address, "working together, despite our cultural differences, remember that we cannot build our future if we forget our past".

The future was clearly taken into consideration at the plenary Assembly (44 nations out of 43 in attendance) with those present opting for the candidate who appeared to be more focused on openness and development, namely Bernard Lapasset instead of Bill Beaumont, as the choice for the next Chairman of the IRB.

In the chapters which follow the extent and quality of the work carried out will be outlined. This work ethic was described perfectly at the preliminary meeting of nations on the Black Sea initiative by Jean-Claude Baqué when he stated the need to "always strive further in our ambitions and achievements. Make proposals to the IRB regarding the World Cup. Improve our level in all areas. Attract, train and develop. Move beyond our European vision. Avoid inter-breeding by taking on continental opposition".

Advance, advance further and continue to advance. For this to happen we need to begin speaking with one European voice when dealing with both sporting and political bodies. We need to strive to achieve at European level what the Pugh-Ferrasse duo achieved on a global scale. (according to Jean-Claude Baqué.)

All of these achievements and future prospects prompted Mike Miller, Secretary General of the IRB, in the introduction to his address, to pay us this most eloquent of compliments "Thank you for your work. Without you rugby would not exist"

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Black Sea Tournament

As the curtain opener to the 87th General Assembly two work shops were organised in rue de Liège. The first was dedicated to the Women's Committee, which we will come back to later, the second one to cross border tournaments. This particular initiative fits in to FIRA-AER's overall development plan.

The idea is to hold a high-level competition in the Black Sea area. This will be at a higher level than current domestic competitions and will be aimed at attracting young players, the media and TV. It will be organised through the rugby academies which have already opened in certain countries, will involve representative teams at national level and should also attract interest from smaller neighbouring countries. The current level of development is insufficient and a stronger competition will help to improve exposure. A proposal has therefore been put to Romania, Russia, Georgia and the Ukraine to "drive the initiative with the objective of improving levels across all sectors" (Michel Arpaillange.) From comprehensive round table discussions at which suggestions and constraints were discussed, the idea emerged of a tournament involving the four capital cities. FIRA-AER will provide the required staff (referees, and possibly training courses) and funding will be sought from the IRB. The possibility of securing a sponsor was also discussed. Once the plan has been finalised, Jean-Claude Baqué has agreed to present it to the Board in the company of the four Chairmen concerned.

Women's calendars

With regard to competitions, Douglas LANGLEY gave an account of the work carried out by the FIRA-AER Women's Development Committee, presided over by Jean-Claude Baqué and assisted by Pierre Villepreux, to which Malcolm Gillies (Six Nations), Ruben Duque (Spain) and Akos Harmat (Hungary) were invited.

The meeting provided an opportunity to review, complete and approve the work carried out at the previous meeting as well as to draw up a calendar for tournaments and matches. It also served to remind everyone of the FIRA-AER strategic plan, the means of qualification for the Olympics, the IRB Elite programme and other current issues. It was a very amiable meeting according to Pierre Villepreux. The next meeting will take place in April or May 2012.

U18 - Justin Bridou Trophy in Spain well on track



Before the Spanish technical officer Ruben Duque outlined the details of the organisation of the event, Jean-Claude Baqué welcomed two "strangers" to FIRA-AER, namely Jon Davis from the UK and Jacques Laurans (Six Nations) and stated that FIRA-AER and the Six Nations were totally united in their efforts and were working hand in hand in all areas including youth rugby policy, training of staff and the development of women's rugby.

Michel Arpaillange outlined how the under 18s European Championship (Justin Bridou Cup) would function and also explained the process of qualification to the participants. This will take place from 29 March to 8 April in Madrid. The technical and financial details of the event were then explained by the organiser. José Maria Epalza pointed out that all nations will spend the same amount on accommodation (four star hotel) as they did for the previous event in Tarbes and that the bigger nations, as a gesture of solidarity, will help out the less well-off ones. Everything, from the opening conference to the closing dinner will take place in the one location. Jean-Claude Baqué, Jon Davis and Jacques Laurans congratulated the Spanish Union on their excellent preparation for this event.



U18 European Championship 2013 in France

To conclude on competitions, Jean-Claude Baqué welcomed the addition of Spain to the list of organisers. Up until now this role has been fulfilled by Italy and France with one event taking place in Wales . He went on to announce that the 2013 competition will take place in France.

Michel Arpaillange and José Maria Epalza shared the podium. Michel Arpaillange reviewed the various calendars in each category, talked about the play-offs for ENC and the promotions and relegations which have resulted in eliminating the soft underbelly of the competition and thereby ensuring a more sustainable level of interest. José Maria Epalza outlined the new qualification cycle for the RWC and the entry system through the playoffs. In Odense, the calendar will be established over two seasons and according to Jean-Claude Baqué this should result in action plans being spread over two years. The Chairman suggested that FIRA-AER and the IRB should collaborate with regard to training courses for Educators and Trainers.

Healthy finances despite economic crisis

José Maria Epalza and his assistant Ole Nielsen presented a table of the current financial situation which despite the economic crisis and a policy to support increased numbers of competitions, remains reassuringly healthy. A surplus of €43,000 is recorded, while expenditure amounted to €2 436 000. 74% of income came from the IRB, 14% from sponsorship and the remainder from various other sources.

The 2011-2012 budget must take into consideration the increase in the organisational cost of competitions and training courses as well as the salaries and expenses of head office staff and the organisation of the Sevens tournaments. An increase in resources involving better funding for the less well-off nations, more competitions, and sometimes expenses for refereeing in groups of three will be required (ENC1B). The help of our sponsors (Société Générale, Justin Bridou, GMF, and also Fédération Française) is appreciated and we envisage hiring a sales person to assist in this area. José Maria Epalza pointed out that "in June 2011 the results of the commercial company set up to manage incomes generated by competitions could not be taken into account as it is not fully up and running".

Once the accounts had been audited and certified by Commissioner Pierre Goguet, the financial report was unanimously approved.

2010-2011 strategic plan 95% complete

Chairman Jean-Claude Baqué expressed his satisfaction that "we have realised 95% of the strategic plan which we presented to the IRB". He emphasised the effectiveness of the logbook created by the IRB. He went on to talk about the 2011-2015 plan, the fruit of collective labours which involved taking the previous plan and reviewing all areas in need of improvement. He spoke of the work carried out at the General Assembly in Las Palmas, then by the Executive Committee and then by the twelve or so participating unions. In January 2012 a final draft will be submitted with the help of the IRB and forwarded, in French and English, to all member nations.

The Executive Director, Gilles BIZOT highlighted the "important contribution unions had to make in areas of policy, administration and sport". He spoke of the integration of new countries, the need for closer relations with the IRB and with the Six Nations more close as well as the presence of FIRA-AER on national Olympic Committees of the European Union countries. He also spoke of the precious tool for the future which is the new Commercial company as well as the development of Sevens Rugby and contacts with other regional associations. He also discussed the importance of competitions in which women were on a par with men in the Sevens tournaments and equally the desire of unions to see the calendar for the next two years as soon as possible. He mentioned films of competitions which are available on the Internet and spoke of the creation of an Ethics Committee to be expected into the bylaws.

Increasing number of members. Why? How ?



The major debate of this General Assembly focused on the fascinating subject of increasing member numbers. In his opening address Michel Arpaillange stated that " comparison between 2003 and 2010 shows that certain countries have not increased their number of players. Over the next four years let us use the 2015 World Cup as the impetus for new initiatives to develop Rugby"

Following responses from Georgia and Russia, on this topic a discussion ensued concerning player membership and those who were not members but who play rugby. The Development Officer concluded by urging those present to "check your numbers in carefully and forward to IRB your results, however make sure the number of licences is valid"

Three working groups have been set up (English, French, Russian) based on the theme "What are you doing to increase participant number in your country and have you any ideas for improvements in this area?" In the summary of the discussions and analysis and on foot of what Michel Arpaillange described as "very interesting" suggestions, the consensus was that the concept of statistics needs to be reviewed, more clearly defined. It was agreed that all reliable statistics should be collated in a document which can be used for reference by national technical officers, using the Rugby World Cup 2015 as an incentive to increase numbers. The slogan for the initiative is to be "act fast". This problem has actually been on the agenda for two years now. Under no circumstances should quality be sacrificed for the sake of quantity. In conclusion to this intense, varied and discursive overview which threw up various constraints, suggestions and solutions, Jean-Claude Baqué stated that "we need to agree on a definition. Why ? How? Then we need to draw up a road map which will act as a basis for our actions"



FIRA-AER ready to promote the RWC 2015

Paul Vaughan, representing the Organising Committee of the Rugby World Cup 2015, following a video presentation of the event, announced a programme which involves the participation of all IRB nations and in particular the European nations.

IRB funding over the next four years will depend on the success of the 2015 competition. In England, Regional Committees will be established and put in place and a specified dedicated Company will be created to handle the event over the next three years. Three million tickets will be on sale. Six thousands volunteers will be recruited and the most efficient will be recompensed in the form of invitations to attend the next RWC in Japan. Travel companies in England will be recommended in collaboration with the English clubs. An information office will be opened at Twickenham. Paul Vaughan concluded by saying that FIRA-AER will have an important role to play in this event.

Europe must speak as one voice

This objective has been pursued relentlessly by Jean-Claude Baqué : "Speak and be heard" he stated, "In total harmony. For this to happen it is necessary to find a way of combining the FIRA-AER bylaws with the Commercial Company which is made up of the Six Nations" he continued.

One work shop (five representatives from each body) will meet in January 2012 in Paris. Its task is to draft a text which will be circulated to all nations to propose two working groups. One to deal with the Elite, the other to deal with the development. In this way Rugby will speak with one voice in Europe and this will lead to greater success from both a financial and marketing point of view. "Everyone stands to benefit" suggested Mike Miller, Secretary General of the IRB. All of the Six Nation countries agreed in principle. Pierre Camou, who spoke at the end of the debate said he was "ready to start the journey on condition that it is a genuine proposal and not just a smokescreen". David Carrigy, Head of External and Member Relations at the IRB, thanked FIRA-AER for its contribution to this important project. "This framework will allow us to be more involved in European decisions", he said. Jean-Claude Baqué reminded the British members of the audience that "we are already working together at U18 level, in Women's Rugby and with regard to coaches. Real issues on the ground will filter up naturally to policy level". The working groups of the European rugby community should collaborate in the implementation of all initiatives in order to "achieve on a European level what the A. Ferrasse/V. Pugh duo achieved on a global scale" This is the express wish of the Chairman of FIRA-AER.

Mike Miller's Olympic tool box!



As we mentioned earlier, the Chief Executive of the IRB Mike MILLER, in his opening address had great praise for FIRA-AER : "Thank you for your work. Without you rugby would not exist." He then went on to deliver his analysis of a rather less than positive situation.

"It seems Europe is collapsing economically. Things are difficult the world over. We are paying the price of the past greed of some. But life must go on. One man's crisis may provide an opportunity for another. In the case of rugby we can play our trump card, namely the World Cup. The World Cup which has just finished was a fantastic event .. that is in every aspect apart from finance. The final balance showed a surplus of 80 million pounds as against the 124 million at the previous event in France. Despite this, the IRB has not decreased its funding. We are at the start of a four-year cycle.

2012 will be an important year in terms of investment. You need to look towards the Olympic Games. You should already be preparing and submitting your requests for funding to your national OD. In January the IRB will provide you with an Olympic "tool box", which, coupled with the advice provided for you by FIRA-AER, will allow you to prepare your development plans. The next five years provides a fantastic opportunity for both 7s and XV's rugby. 2012 will see the start of Olympic Games qualifiers. In 2013 we will have the Seven's World Cup, in 2014 the Women's World Cup and in 2015 the XV's World Cup, the profits of which will benefit all of Europe. In 2016 we will return to the Olympic programme.

The Olympic Games provide a great opportunity to increase the exposure of rugby. Rio will be a fantastic springboard. Governments are ready to invest in the sport. Sponsors will need us as we have increased from 55 members to 115. We have five exciting years ahead of us!"

FIRA-AER vote Bernard Lapasset as IRB Chairman

Raul Martins, FIRA-AER representative on the IRB Council, had earlier explained why the election of the IRB Chairman was postponed to Los Angeles due to the late application of Bill Beaumont. The General Assembly therefore included the vote to appoint a candidate in its agenda. Bill Beaumont followed by Bernard Lapasset were given half an hour each to state their case. This involved a twenty minute address followed by ten minutes to respond to questions from the floor.

The current Vice Chairman of the IRB was first up. Following a reminder of his sporting credentials (Captain of the English XV, 34 international caps) he declared himself to be "pure rugby in all shapes and sizes". "I love basic rugby, University rugby, Elite rugby. I know its strengths and weaknesses. I want to pay back to rugby what it has given me in experience and knowledge. We must invest at school and university level by using Sevens Rugby as a stepping stone to XV's.. The IRB must revise its governance. It must make it universal.

I have come to make promises and to keep them. Sport and Rugby are my passions. I have knowledge and contacts. I can create the difference. While I live on an Island, I travel regularly to Europe on business. Contrary to what is said, I am a supporter of Sevens Rugby. I



want to make contact with governments, persuade countries in the top tier to play with those in the second tier. I would like the voting system to be reformed so that everyone has a voice. We need to find other financial sources other than the World Cup. I admire what you are doing in Europe. I will support you ..."

Below are some of the objectives outlined by Bernard Lapasset's in his strong address which he gave in French, calling it "the official language of FIRA": 1. To help the top 10 nations. 2. To support emerging nations to ensure the expansion of rugby. 3. To continue universal development "which I have been doing for the past four years and which will allow us to increase resources. We need to expand in Asia and been present on its markets. Develop sporting and economic infrastructure. The Olympic games will be an exceptional opportunity. We need to secure diverse sources of finance. Europe must not rely solely on the IRB. There is no rivalry between Sevens and XV's rugby. The approach to both games is identical, the pitches and referees are born of the same discipline. What about governance ? Who can we learn from? Voting rules are not clear enough. My code of behaviour involves transparency, democratic participation and clarification. These elements are essential for positive evolution. We are on an upward trend and we should work together. FIRA has a wealth of real-life experience. We need to play together more in order to progress and create competitions. I am in favour of a World Cup with twenty participants. The Barbarians must be part of the tournament programme. The World Cup coupled with the Olympic Games will provide a launch pad which no other sport enjoys. With regard to the Olympic Games qualifiers, I am in favour of men's and women's regional tournaments. Finally, to come back to the governance of the IRB, it needs, in my opinion, to adopt a universal model".

Having expressed his delight at meeting the FIRA-AER members again and referring to the Association as the "IRB's number 1 region", Bernard Lapasset then left to allow the vote to take place.

It was vote which turned out in his favour. Out of a total of 290 possible votes, 287 of which were cast, Bernard Lapasset received 197 with 90 votes going to Bill Beaumont.

INFO SUMMARY



1 Next Winter meeting. Thanks again to the hospitality of Société Générale, next winter's meeting will take place on 30 November/1 December 2012 in Paris. Sweden and Bulgaria have submitted applications for the 2013 Summer Congress.

2 Condolences. Jean-Claude Baqué expressed his condolences to the Bulgarian union on the death of its Development Officer and passed on its sympathies and thoughts to the Marinkin family.

3 Training course for General Secretaries and OD in Hungary from 19 to 22 April next.

4 Honour shared between Société Générale and FIRA-AER. In response to the thanks expressed by Jean-Claude Baqué, Société Générale's Head of Sport Sponsorship, Raphaël Niemi assured us that it was an honour for his company, which will be the main sponsor of the RWC 2015 and also for

Seven's Rugby (Olympic Games) to welcome FIRA-AER and he paid tribute to its current Chairman.

5 The France-FIRA-AER love affair. In his welcoming speech, his tenth to-date, Pierre Camou spoke of the true love affair which exists between France and FIRA, which he said from a personal point of view was two-fold given his role as Head of Finance at FIRA-AER for many years. He went on to pay a moving tribute to Albert Ferrasse.

6 Record level of participation. Jean-Claude Baqué congratulated everyone on the level of participation : 43 nations out of 44 and also on the number of participants (110) who took part. Lithuania was the only absent nation.

7 Tri-lingual. Once again work was facilitated by the translation of the speakers' addresses into to French, English and Russian.

8 New Chairmen. A warm welcome was extended to the following new Chairmen: William Wildash (England), John Hussey (Ireland), Ralph Goetz (Germany), Willem de Jong (Netherlands), Lavrentios Vasillades (Cyprus), Rosen Cholov (Bulgaria).

9 Unanimity for the minutes of previous meetings. Jean-Louis Barthes recorded unanimous consent for the Board of Director sessions, the Las Palmas General Assembly, the Executive Committee in Paris, having taken the observations concerning Gibraltar into consideration

10 Membership of LIECHSTENSTEIN and ICELAND. This will be on a provisional basis for one year, in accordance with the bylaws. Both were voted in unanimously following presentations by their Chairmen. This brings the number of member countries to 46 (37 IRB members, 9 non-members). Future candidates : Albania, Montenegro, Turkey and Gibraltar.

11 General Assembly in ODENSE (6 to 7 July 2012) : Contract has been signed. Ole Nielsen and Jean-Claude Baqué signed the document to make the event official. Everything is in place to welcome the participants and those involved in the final GPS Seven's tournament (stadium with 15 000 seats + 9 000 VIP.) Prices to be sent out before Christmas.

12 Olympic Games of the Small States of Europe . Eight nations to participate in Luxembourg on 1 and 2 June 2013. Bernard Jargeac highlighted the difficulties (lack of support for the Olympic Committees) facing the countries involved, namely: Andorra, Cyprus, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco and San Marino. He will need to keep working on these issues in conjunction with the Luxembourg Olympic Committee.

13 AZERBAÏDJAN sanctioned for withdrawal The Legal Affairs Committee presided over by Jean-Jacques Zander order Azerbaijan to compensate Slovakia for their withdrawal. An appeal to the decision has been lodged.

14 Changes to the Administrative Board. Vladyslav Bulgakov (Ukraine) replaces Georgiy Dzhangiryan and Ben Calveley (England) Terry Burwell until December 2012.

15 Raise your shield ! The General Assembly finished with the highlight of the day, namely the awarding of the shields to the champions: Georgia, Belgium, Sweden, Suisse, Israel, Cyprus, Bosnia. There was a mock awarding of shields to the last two nations as the actual shields had not been returned by the previous holders.

