

## Minutes of FIRA-AER AGM

### EDITO



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### THE RUGBY FAMILY'S DOUBLE RECOGNITION

Bernard Lapasset, the IRB Chairman, could not attend FIRA-AER's 85th General Assembly for minor health reasons, but had two representatives: an Irish man and a French man.

The former, David Carrigy, expressed the general message, which will feature later in this "Special GA issue" and concluded his presentation with a heart warming statement for the participants: "Europe is the most important region in the world of Rugby. You have the support of the IRB. The IRB's strategic plan is also yours as your considerations and proposals have been fully taken into account. FIRA-AER deserves all our recognition."

This general recognition was to be expressed in a different way with Jacques Laurans. It was to be an individual recognition as he handed to Jean-Claude Baqué the IRB's highest reward for "distinguished services": the exceptional Vernon Pugh Award for Development, named after the official who promoted a cultural revolution and led to the current organisation of the Game in the world (creation of geographical Regions, initiation of the campaign to return to the Olympic Games).

A chapter is dedicated in this issue to this recognition from the Rugby world to the European institution and its current leader, a real Rugby person, who was moved by this distinction - which he was quick to dedicate to all the members of his team - even more so "because of his greatest respect and friendship for Vernon Pugh, a visionary and a missionary" with whom he shared his "philosophy of life".

**HENRI GATINEAU**



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## The JUSTIN BRIDOU » European U18 Rugby Union championship on Eurosport



Following a working session held at its new offices in rue Liège at which Jean-Claude BAQUÉ and his staff had a final look at the agenda, the 85th three-part General Assembly got under way in the fine surrounding of the Société Générale which was made available to FIRA-AER. Thanks once again.

Proceedings opened with a meeting of the nations participating in the Justin Bridou European U18 Championship followed by the Executive Board meeting and the General Assembly.

Two new departures were announced for this authentic European competition in which all British teams are taking part on this occasion. First up was the publication of a handbook similar to the one published for the World Cup followed by the news of the likely television broadcasting of the event

by the EUROSPORT channel. As announced by Jean-Claude BAQUE the handbook will include a glossary of definitions and specialised vocabulary along with a wealth of other information. The general programme, contacts, information on each team (instruction leaflet), tournament rules, tournament organisation, medical organisation, rules regarding media and businesses, anti-doping controls, disciplinary procedures, the refereeing disputes committee, financial sanctions and even documents to be submitted by the team manager (remarks and criticism) for next year's competition, will all be included. This vital tool, accompanied by a slide show presented on the big screen by Michel ARPAILLANGE, Jacques LAURANS and John DAVIS (6 Nations), with further explanations given by the Bigourdan duo, BARRERE and GAUTE and also our "Minister for Finance" José Maria EPALZA proved those who thought it couldn't be done wrong - everything was prepared down to the last detail! With the exception of England and Ireland who fell victim to transport disruption caused by the bad weather conditions, the Six Nations countries managed to wrap up all issues including accommodation, transport and other practical considerations. The VI Nations senior teams are exempt from relegation and have given a commitment to play for the next three years. In his conclusion Jean-Claude BAQUÉ heralded the start of "a new era". The next three years, as pointed out by John DAVIS, will involve a lot of intense discussion. This will require the managers of the Six Nations to travel to Lourdes for their Council meeting. "They will come to participate in the event and hopefully suggest improvements for future competitions (JC BAQUÉ). Jacques LAURANS expressed his optimism for the future of the competition which took two years to negotiate and he also congratulated Jean-Claude BAQUÉ on his determination to make the project a reality.

## Competitions : more evenly matched / new handbook



A general review of the competitions (men and women's) was preceded by a report given by Bernard JARGEAC concerning improvements to the internet site (praised by José Maria EPALZA) and also the introduction of the bonus system which he remarked had lead to more dynamic and more evenly-matched games. His report focused on the first 25 matches (55 in total) played in divisions 1B, 2 and 3. On the financial front the IRB will provide the same assistance for 2012 as last year

The overall conclusion from the group meetings (reports per division) was satisfactory both in terms of organisation and quality of play however it was reported that :

- Countries travelling to Armenia are experiencing financial problems. The situation will be reviewed by José Maria EPALZA with a view to providing assistance.

- Pitches and stadia have been judged to be below standard. From now on all facilities will be required to be fully certified.
- A request for the appointment of three referees (neutral touch judges) was made. José Maria EPALZA has decided to review this issue at the end of the season with a view to deciding how best to absorb the cost. A decision on the matter will be taken at the Summer General Assembly.

It was decided that the creation of a handbook to assist with the organisation of matches was urgently required. Michel ARPAILLANGE expressed his desire to move fast on this issue once the High Performance Committee and the Sevens Committees had completed their ongoing discussions with the next TV partner.

The Women's European Trophy 2011 is to take place in Spain (Corogne) from 29 April to 7 May and will be played in two pools : Spain, Sweden, France, Finland (A) and Italy, Netherlands, England, Russia (B).





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## Le creed according to JC BAQUÉ : «Bring, share, exchange, discuss, receive, ...»

The Executive Board opened its meeting with a impassioned call for solidarity by Jean-Claude BAQUÉ in the presence of Raphaël NIEMI, who was representing Société Générale's Head of Sponsorship, Ms Hafida GUENFOUD-DUVAL. Mr. NIEMI was sincerely thanked for his current hospitality and was invited to attend next year's General Assembly!

Having welcomed all countries and in particular the new Chairmen, he went on to congratulate the nine European countries who have qualified for the RWC and in particular the Eastern European countries who are achieving at both senior and junior level. He also congratulated the English Women's team for its performance on the global stage. The Chairman of FIRA-AER spoke of its new organisation both in terms of its new offices and its administrative governance (Gilles BIZOT, Executive Officer and Amandine GUICHARD, Secretarial & Communication's Assistant). He expressed his satisfaction that they were now working in "ideal conditions". Thanks to the work of the two RDMs from the IRB FIRA-AER's action plan, implemented over the past three years, has been accomplished. This has been achieved, of course, in conjunction with the work of the various committees, in particular the High-Performance Committee, the Sevens Committee and the Communications Committee (Internet site). He noted just one down side : "I am concerned by the bad results from the Northern hemisphere compared with those of the South ... this is across the board, Seniors, U20 and Women's competitions. We need to address this collectively and take action . On the other hand, congratulations to Georgia, Russia and Romania who exemplify the progress being made on the pitch. Thank you to the teams from across the Channel who are now taking part in the U18 competitions. With regard to financial matters, the devaluation of sterling and the freeze on IRB grants have resulted in an overall decrease in funding forcing us to try to achieve more with less. There is only one way we can do this and that is if we bring, share, exchange, discuss, receive and give, connect and unite in order to make progress. From a global perspective we are a restricted sport in terms of numbers of participants. We need to open up to the masses and to train top-class Educators. The bigger nations need to assist the smaller ones in their development by creating competitions for young players. We need to focus our efforts on the RWC 2015. In the words of the poet Alfred de Musset, Let us join hands ""All men are not capable of great things but all men are sensitive to great things"".

The new governance structure comprises; a Political department composed of a Chairman, an Executive Committee (which we will introduce later) and Executive Board, an Administration department and a Sports department (RDM) all of which will be linked by the Secretary's office. The three departments will of course work in collaboration with the IRB.

Following a second roll call of nations and board members by Jean-Louis BARTHES England, Armenia and Ireland were found to be absent due to transport difficulties caused by the deteriorating weather conditions.

RDMs Michel ARPAILLANGE and Douglas LANGLEY presented the 2010/2011 action plan, which includes the U16 and U17 camps (35 unions), the Seniors, the U17 tournaments (12 Unions) who are preparing for the U18s (31 Unions), U19s (8 Unions) U20s (4 tournaments of 4 nations, culminating in a final tournament), and finally the pinnacle: the seniors from all nations. We won't go into the detail of the competitions, nor that of the training courses for coaches and officials (all of which have increased in numbers) as the final figures for these will be compiled at the end-of-season conference. The member's (full or associate) bylaws to be modelled on those of the IRB will also be drawn up on that occasion.

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## High-performance Committee gets go-ahead

Two years after its creation, the High-Performance Committee, presided over by Octavian MORARIU, is about to achieve its objective: to provide the top teams with the exposure they deserve by launching an invitation to tender (media and commercial rights) which has resulted in negotiations with Eurosport and Sportfive. The arguments and views put forward by Eurosport would appear to be the most convincing.

The Committee is about to suggest the creation of a FIRA-AER company which will own the centralised rights. Eurosport will guarantee to broadcast a minimum of 3 matches per weekend (live and recorded) as well as highlights of other ENC 1B matches. Eurosport 2, Asia Pacific and Eurosport Player will provide maximum exposure on an intercontinental level. The deal will include Sevens Rugby and the live broadcasting of the final of the U18 European Championship as well as highlights of the match. A headquarters for the new company will be established from where the financial revenue will be distributed to participating countries and others. This increased exposure (European Nations Cup, 7's, U18) will attract new commercial partners and according to Jean-Claude BAQUÉ, we should not hold back on investment. The new company will be based in Europe, will remain in constant contact with the different countries and will be presided over by the Chairman of FIRA-AER who will be the sole shareholder.

Bolstered by this positive and necessary progress Octavian Morariu requested that power be given to the Executive Committee in order to proceed quickly in this matter. His wish has been granted as the General Assembly gave unanimous authorization for the High-Performance Committee to proceed with its plan of action.



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## Sevens Rugby: Action on all fronts

The important section of the meeting devoted to Sevens Rugby opened with a presentation by Howard THOMAS, head of the Sevens Committee. The original format has been reviewed in order to ensure that European countries progress to world class standard.

The new system will be rolled out during the qualifications for the Olympic Games. Efforts are currently being focused on securing host towns to organise the event and also on the sporting and commercial programmes. Negotiations with Eurosport are underway to secure sponsors. Any revenue generated will be shared between FIRA-AER and the participating countries. All stages of the Seven's Grand Prix Series (Tournament format : 12 teams of 12 players according to the IRB's statistics) will be televised and will act as qualifiers for the 2013 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. This is a logical decision according to Jean-Claude BAQUÉ who suggested that "For the Sevens World Cup the IRB will delegate responsibility for the qualification of five countries to FIRA-AER. We should delegate this responsibility for Olympic Games also, shouldn't we?"

David CARRIGY was next up with the IRB's Sevens Strategic Plan which is to run over a decade and which will put key people in place to ensure global development. FIRA-AER is central to the IRB's plan to promote and manage this growth. FIRA-AER has made progress in this area and needs to continue to follow the IRB model. The most important objective is 2016. Octavian MORARIU and Michel ARPAILLANGE fully support the IRB plan (compliance with qualification criteria, participation criteria and standards) which is also FIRA-AER's plan and are confident that the common will exists to do whatever it takes to ensure that Sevens Rugby gets the recognition it deserves.

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## 150 referees on file

Refereeing must remain central to the development of rugby. The work of the committee presided over by René HOURQUET is therefore focusing its efforts on ensuring that a maximum number of nations is represented on the FIRA-AER refereeing panel.

According to Patrick ROBIN the panel currently consists of 150 individuals. The process for discovering and honing talent is to firstly observe the referees at games and then to invite them to take part in three-day courses involving training, refereeing of one or two matches followed by analysis and conclusions. The starting point will be the U17 workshops. All of this will take place in close collaboration with the IRB and will involve a robust exchange of information. A good example of this in action is the Women's Sevens Rugby course which took place in Lisbon and was attended by Scotland and England. An illustration of the solidarity among the European nations is demonstrated by Finland's proposal to provide assistance to Estonia in this area. Estonia is to benefit from the visit of referees and trainers to assist in its training courses. René HOURQUET recommended that a special effort be made at lower levels (youth rugby), congratulated Romania on its excellent policies in this area and announced the creation of a referee centre.

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## Communication : much-needed upgrade of Internet site

Webmaster Bernard JARGEAC discussed the modernisation of the internet site which is now much clearer and more detailed.

It is available in two languages and can be browsed live on all Smart phones. The internet site, considered by the RDMs to be a very useful tool, gets an average of 1,500 hits per day. The new "Flash info" will be sent directly to electronic in-boxes. Image rights are to be set up. A musical theme to accompany entrance onto the pitches (1'14") has been created and national anthems in mp3 format are available on the site along with lots of other information.

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## Medical : efforts being made / noticable improvements

Doctor Jacques MOMBET, Chairman of the Medical Committee, announced the new anti-doping regulations and explained how they will work, in particular the withdrawal of the declaration of use; players will now be required to be in possession of a doctor's prescription at all times for banned products which they might be receiving for treatment.

The list of banned products has been issued to all concerned. Very few accidents occurred during the 73 senior matches and those which occurred in youth and women's games were very minor. A small improvement has been noted in relation to the declaration of accidents but there is still room for improvement in this area. Well done to Moldova and Poland who provided documentation containing before and after x-rays of injuries with their submissions.

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## Legal Committee

The Legal Committee (Jean-Jacques ZANDER, Jean-Louis BARTHES, Henri KUSZCO) studied the comprehensive application submitted by Estonia (130 members, 4 clubs) and is very much in favour of its admission.

On the administrative front, the dispute between Sweden and Croatia, regarding the refund of tickets for travel to a location other than that which was planned, has been settled. It was decided, however, that in the future Unions should protect themselves from similar situations by requesting a postponement.



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## IRB recommends caution regarding economic plans

In the absence of Raul MARTINS who was ill and who communicated via email, Jacques LAURANS and David PICKERING acted as spokespersons for the IRB announcing an economic conference which will examine ideas for starting afresh and will encourage unions to examine their expenditure and increased charges in the current economic climate and to assess the financial implications arising from the current situation.

The Board focused on leisure rugby. It noted the statement by the New Zealand Minister concerning the efficient organisation and running of the RWC. The decision has been taken to lengthen the half-time interval to a maximum of 15 minutes. The admission of Iran as an associate member was announced. The strategic plan will be reviewed to take into consideration the qualifications for 12 countries for the 2016 Olympic Games.

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## Financial situation satisfactory, however ...



José Maria EPALZA and Ole NIELSEN presented in detail the financial situation which was deemed to be "satisfactory" by the auditors and was certified to be accurate and above board. However this good news comes at a cost.

The fixed exchange rate has resulted in a 13% decrease in IRB financial assistance which accounts for 75% of the overall budget (subscriptions 12% and sponsorship from Société Générale and Justin Bridou). Total revenue is down by 0.80%. The €323 000 positive balance has been achieved by applying a 2% decrease to union grants and introducing a 28% saving on running costs. This amounts to a 7% overall saving on costs compared with last year. The €160,000 revenue from non-incorporated investment funds (SICAV) over the past 15 years also played a positive role. As IRB funding is to remain unchanged at 1.7 million euro, FIRA-AER will need to invest €100,000 from

its own funds next season. The Fédération Française de Rugby will also provide up to €30,000 for premises and staff.

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## Unanimous approval of new Executive Committee

Once the minutes of all the previous meeting of the bodies had been approved, Jean-Claude BAQUÉ submitted a proposal for an amendment to the Executive Committee to the Extraordinary General Assembly as is permitted by the bylaws every two years.

He reported on the political and technical assessment which recommended : "retaining those who had completed their contracts as well as to admitting new members". The Assembly gave authorisation for the Chairmen of certain committees to be called on to assist in the Executive Committee in its work should the need arise. The fourteen members who were unanimously approved were: Claus-Peter BACH, Jean-Louis BARTHES, Drazen COLNAGO, Gordon COX, Jonathan DANCE (replacing Terry Burwell), José Maria EPALZA, Stephen HILDITCH, Bernard JARGEAC (new), Viatcheslav KOPIEV, Jan KOZLOWSKI (replacing Henri KUSZKO), Raul MARTINS, Octavian MORARIU, Tullio ROSOLEN

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## DAVID CARRIGY : « FIRA-AER is constantly improving »



Having apologised for the absence of the Chairman of the IRB Bernard LAPASSET ( "who I am standing in for due to illness but who I cannot replace.) David CARRIGY, spokesperson for the IRB congratulated FIRA-AER : "For its constant progress and the work you have accomplished both in terms of competitions and development".

Having provided those present with a clarification of regulation 9 (insurance) and 16 (approval for international matches) he reminded all nations that the IRB was available to provide help with the implementation of their strategic plans and to be part of their Olympic Committees. He invited them to submit suggestions for the agenda of the next IRB meeting to be held on 17 October 2011 in New Zealand and encouraged them, if at all possible, to attend this meeting. Having complimented the countries on their performances in the various tournaments and global competitions and praised

their efforts in Sevens rugby he extended a more general thank you "It is thanks to you that sport and rugby have achieved widespread recognition throughout Europe".



## An emotional moment as Jean-Claude BAQUÉ is honoured



As we stated at the opening of this issue, Bernard LAPASSET appointed two representatives to relay his message and it was Jacques LAURANS who had the enviable task of presenting Jean-Claude BAQUÉ, head of FIRA with his award:

"Captain of the French Junior team, Educator of Morocco's national teams and the French A team before becoming a regional, national and finally international rugby administrator. This man has contributed to the growth of the game in all its forms especially that of youth rugby and in particular the U18 European Championship which owes everything to his efforts. If Russia, Georgia, and Romania are in the World Cup, it is thanks to FIRA-AER. If Rugby has gained popularity throughout Europe, it is to a large extent thanks to the efforts of the unstoppable Jean-Claude. The French

nation has already honoured this man by awarding him the Légion d'Honneur, today the IRB is awarding you its highest distinction, the Vernon PUGH Trophy in honour of your distinguished service."

Trying to control the emotion in his voice, BAQUÉ explained "how much I am touched by this award. It is a most beautiful and significant award as it carries the name of a man who is a great friend of mine and for whom I have the utmost respect. A visionary, a missionary, who, along with Albert FERRASSE was responsible for the unification of the rugby at a time when FIRA sacrificed itself on the altar of the International Federation. A man who held sacred and indeed loved the Rugby community"

Jean-Claude BAQUÉ expressed his wish that his two families, his own family and FIRA-AER, his professional family should share in his joy.

"I owe this Trophy to you, to all of you. I would be nothing without you. A man alone is helpless. Without the loving, brotherly relationship we have I would not have had the strength to do anything"

Following an emotional reference to his wife, he went on to list one by one the names of all of his colleagues since day one. Jean-Claude BAQUÉ'S struggled to suppress a sob as he delivered:

"LIFE GOES ON AND I AM A HAPPY MAN TODAY!" It was an extraordinary moment of genuine emotion. Rare indeed !

## Headlines



Below the last items discussed during the 2010' PARIS AGM. The English version has been realised by Gilles Fabre (IRB). Crédit Photos: Christelle GLEMET

- Tarbais engineers offer help. The Armagnac Bigorre Committee (Gers and Hautes-Pyrénées, 56 clubs, 12,369 members, 728 players) has requested the help of the Tarbes School of Engineering which has agreed to provide guides who speak foreign languages to assist at U18 European Championship.
- Workshop for Commissioners and Tournament Managers in Montpellier. Justin Bridou
- A price to suit all pockets. Five categories of accommodation will be available to the participants in the U18 European Championship. Prices will be available at : 57, 65, 75, 85 and 105 Euro per person per day. The costs of 30 participants, of which 26 will be players, will be covered by FIRA-AER and the cost of any additional participants will be covered by their unions. .
- Thanks to Justin BRIDOU who, as well as sponsoring the competition, also provided a shield which will be awarded to the winners of the Elite competition
- Thank you also to Amandine GUICHARD, Michel ARPAILLANGE, Gilles BIZOT, Philippe BOURDARIAS (IRB) for their efforts in creating the handbook to accompany the U18 Championship.
- No alcohol allowed on participants tables. Speeches and presentation of gifts were transferred to the managers conference in order to free up time at the final banquet. The Committee clubs will make suggestions for activities to their hosts
- Committees: All committees have been elected: discipline, appeals, disputes. Equally two European technical staff, John DAVIS and Antoine MARIN and two legal experts will be solicited.
- Photo of Captains. A photograph of the captains in their national jerseys will be taken. It will be similar to the one taken at the World Cup.
- Mixed-level training sessions. As is tradition, the bigger nations will invite the smaller nations to their training sessions to help them improve.
- FIRA-AER to provide €79,000. With the IRB's contribution of €286,000 remaining unchanged and the number of participants increasing from 24 to 28 (40 matches) FIRA-AER will be required to provide €79,000 in funding.
- Sanctions. Sanctions concerning breach of deadlines and behaviour will range in severity from €100 to €5,000
- Azerbaijan and Slovakia have applied to host the ENC3D tournament which was last and most successfully hosted by Bosnia
- General Assembly 2011: 1st weekend of December. At the opening of the Executive Board meeting, Jean-Claude BAQUÉ invited the representative of Société Générale, Mr. Raphael NIEMI to attend the 2011 event.
- New logo: A new, more modern, more visually appealing logo which will be more suited to media and commercial use was submitted and approved by the General Assembly.
- Updating of directory. Amandine GUICHARD, the new Communications Assistant announced the updating of the directory in January 2011.
- Catalonia case dismissed. The trial resulted in the imposition of a €10,000 fine to be paid to FIRA-AER.
- FIRA-AER week in the Canaries. The Summer General Assembly from 24 to 26 June 2011, will bring together; the NTDs (from





Wednesday onwards), the General Secretaries (Thursday), the Chairmen (Friday and Saturday), in all between 150 and 160 individuals who will exchange and share information throughout "FIRA-AER week", The Spanish organisers have distributed application forms. The organisers of the 2012 congress in Denmark (Odense) will submit their application on this occasion.

- Estonia admitted ... Turkey and Iceland to follow. With its Men and Women's senior teams, its Juniors, the support of the Olympic Committee, the schools and university sector, the military academy ... Estonia has been admitted on a trial basis for one year. Turkey (byelaw problems), Iceland and Lichtenstein are still awaiting admission.
- The Games of the Small States of Europe to be held in Lichtenstein. Andorra, Cyprus, Luxembourg, San Marino, Malta, Monaco and Iceland wish to include rugby in the programme for the Games
- Two apply to join Executive Board. The two candidates, Peter SCHUPBACH (Switzerland) and Xavier VILASETRU (Andorra) were unanimously approved. The 45th member of the Board will be appointed in the Canaries.
- Cross-border initiative reintroduced : The reintroduction of this project is aimed at considerably increasing the number of players. As the figures for domestic competitions were inadequate due to a lack of numbers in certain countries we need to establish links between neighbouring countries in order to improve the quality of play. Five geographical zones will be identified based on the existing zones and a calendar for matches will be drawn up.
- Youth competitions formalised. All have been put in place.
- Honour Roll. Apart from Romanian, who had already received its award, the following champions were formally honoured: Belgium (2A), Croatia (2B), Lithuania (3A), Slovenia (3B), Israel (3C), Cyprus (3D), Spain (Women's 7s and XV's), Portugal 7s), France (U18), Georgia (U19), Lithuania (U20).
- Welcome to our new Chairmen. Dragan VUKSANOVIC (Serbia) Johny STAVRINO (Cyprus), Peer SCHUPBACH (Switzerland), Rolandas ALKSNIYS (Lithuania), Okis OLEKSANDR (Ukraine).
- The icing on the cake. For anyone who wished to prolong their work with a visit to the stadium, FIRA-AER provided tickets for the Racing Metro/Stade Français match and made a coach available to drive them to Colombes.
- Société Générale XV team. As a prelude to Friday evening's diner at the Société Générale, Ms Hafida GUENFOUD-DUVAL, head of Arts patronage and sponsorship, proposed a toast to the contracts agreed between her company and the Rugby community. Jean-Claude BAQUÉ took the opportunity to suggest the creation of a Société Générale XV's team comprised of a bank employee from each of the countries in which it is represented. This team will be invited by FIRA-AER to attend one of the matches played by the French XV team in Paris. The proposal was enthusiastically approved.

