



Ambassador's Activities

2013

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58 Knightsbridge, SW1X 7JT London
E-Mail: press@ambafrance-uk.org
Web: www.ambafrance-uk.org

Speech by HE Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the reception for
the French and British parliamentary rugby teams

French Residence, 23 February 2013

M. Jérôme Cahuzac, Minister Delegate for the Budget,

Mr Stephen Crabb, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State,

Members of the British parliament,

Members of the French parliament,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the French Residence. I'd like to say what a great pleasure it is for me this evening to be hosting the British and French parliamentary rugby teams. The Residence played host to many sports people during the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and I'm delighted to have more here this evening!

I should also like to congratulate the winners of this afternoon's match, which saw two fine teams go head to head.

Finally, even though the British parliamentary team isn't made up solely of English people – and I pay tribute to Stephen Crabb, who proudly represents Wales –, I want to congratulate the winners of this evening's match between France and England. As with every sporting contest between the two nations, both teams valiantly defended their colours and delighted sports enthusiasts – especially rugby enthusiasts.

There's always a touch of legend – and a lot of action – in England-France matches. The “crunches” fill our two nations with hope, expectation and, occasionally, fear. Every year, they are followed with unfailing enthusiasm and passion. Honourable members of the British and French parliamentary teams, I hope that during your friendly match you had as much fun as the France and England players – and not too many knocks!

Rather than using the word “contest”, maybe I should have said “meeting”, which is closer to the spirit of this evening's reception, and the spirit which prevails between the parliamentary teams.

Rugby, which began life in England – initially the preserve of pupils at Rugby School – spread far and wide and became more “democratic”, so much so that it is now one of the most popular and emblematic sports in countless French villages of central and southern France – and the south west in particular – just as it is throughout England, Wales and Scotland. I mention south-west France's passion for rugby, and I'm sure M. Cahuzac won't contradict me on this.

It shows just how much rugby is a vehicle for shared enthusiasm and mutual passion. I think everyone in France and the UK appreciates its aesthetics, its beauty and its subtleties.

Of course, rugby has also been the subject of a longstanding rivalry between France and England. But it's a friendly rivalry, one between two great nations which hold each other in high esteem and deep respect. I also believe that, out of a total 76 crunches organized since 1945, France and England have each won 35.

This evening, I want to pay special tribute to what the two parliamentary rugby teams do. They make an effective contribution to these friendly ties, in an excellent spirit. Indeed, the Franco-British rugby meetings, with the first one dating back to 1991, are an example of the close cooperation which exists between the parliaments of France and the United Kingdom.

We in London have the good fortune to receive French members of parliament very frequently on study visits, firstly because Paris isn't far away, but also because in terms of benchmarking, or *parangonnage* as we say, it's always extremely interesting for us French to look at what's being done in the UK, and vice versa.

I'd like this "parliamentary diplomacy" – which is also expressed in sport – to be developed and strengthened in the coming years, thus providing an opportunity to reveal our common interests and dispel any misunderstandings that may exist between us.

Finally, I'm happy that we're joined this evening by the sports and media professionals, players' agents and events organizers who work on a daily basis to ensure this sector of the economy develops and prospers. Thanks also to the sponsors and partners who support our federations.

As you know, France's sporting ambitions are not confined to her athletes' and teams' results, even though they're often outstanding.

In fact, our country would like to assert its role as a great organizer of international sporting events. So it will be hosting the World Equestrian Games in 2014, the European Football Championship in 2016, and golf's Ryder Cup in 2018. The success of these events and their impact on the public will owe a great deal to the organizers' professionalism and commitment.

France's future success in any bids she presents will depend on you and our work together. Thank you once again for joining us tonight, and I wish you an excellent evening.