



2023/24



ANNUAL REPORT

Clockwise from top left: Bank of Ireland Connacht Rugby Women's Cup Final: Galwegians captain Aoife Williams and her team celebrate with the cup. 2023 Rugby World Cup: Ireland's Jonathan Sexton. United Rugby Championship: Half time mini rugby. Vodafone Rugby Women's Interprovincial Championship: Leinster's Lisa Mullen, Ulster's Rachael McIlroy and Ella Durkan. Aldi Play Rugby National Festival: Linda Djougang. 2023 Rugby World Cup: Ireland's Joe McCarthy with his family. Ireland's Bundee Aki. 2022 Bank of Ireland Nations Series: Ireland's Joe McCarthy with his family.



03 President's
Report

49 Medical

08 Chief Executive's
Report

58 HR

14 High Performance
Report

59 Charitable
Trust

30 Rugby
Development
Report

60 Obituaries

42 Spirit
Report

61 Office Bearers
and Committee

45 Commercial
and Marketing

62 Standing
Committees

47 Communications



Ireland players celebrate after winning the 2024 Guinness Men's Six Nations

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

GREG BARRETT

IT GIVES ME GREAT PRIDE TO WRITE TO YOU AS THE 134TH PRESIDENT OF THE IRISH RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION (IRFU).

It was an enormous privilege to represent the IRFU across Ireland and beyond and every meeting, match, event or ceremony reiterated the positive influence of Rugby Union across Ireland and overseas.

I have been honoured to lead such a diverse and welcoming organisation.

My thanks to the IRFU staff across the High Performance, Rugby Development and Administrative sections of the organisation for their hard work in helping the Game grow.

To my colleagues and friends on the various Committees who work tirelessly for the advancement of the Game, thank you for your efforts.

Highlights? There were many.

The obvious peaks included the performance of the Men's team at the Rugby World Cup in France. While we departed from the competition earlier than we had planned, I will never forget the support that the team received across France and especially on those warm nights under the lights in Paris.

Fast forward a few months and a famous Guinness Six Nations title after victory over Scotland on St. Patrick's weekend. I grew up and played in an era where success on the international stage was sporadic, and we should never take our on-field successes for granted.



We are privileged to have such outstanding players and coaches representing the country at such a consistently high level and my congratulations to Head Coach Andy Farrell, Captain Peter O'Mahony and all the players and backroom team on a job well done.

The Women's National Team has made significant strides forward and the third-place finish in the Guinness Women's Six Nations, coming only a few months after winning the WXV 3 title in Dubai, was an incredible upturn. By securing qualification for the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup, this will enable Head Coach Scott Bemand, co-captains Edel McMahon and Sam Monaghan and the team to plan with confidence.

With greater pathways offering more opportunities for players to emerge at Under-20 and University levels, and with the Celtic Challenge bridging the gap between Club and International rugby, the future is bright for the Women's game.

The Under-20 Men's team, sponsored by PwC, continues to provide talented young players with the opportunity to progress and we have enjoyed a rich run of form over the last number of years under the stewardship of Richie Murphy who has recently joined Ulster Rugby as its Head Coach. In wishing Richie well, we thank him for his service and look forward to watching more players emerge from the thriving Schools and Club game and push forward for Provincial and National honours in the years to come.

We return to Paris this summer for the Olympic Games and it is a great tribute to the Men's and Women's sides that they have qualified for this prestigious competition. The eyes of the world will descend on France and we are proud to compete at the top table of Sevens rugby. In wishing both teams well, I am confident that their efforts will inspire more youngsters to play Rugby.

The top Divisions of the Energia All-Ireland Leagues concluded in an exciting crescendo at Aviva Stadium in late April where an historic double-header saw UL Bohemian (Women) and my own club Cork Constitution (Men) deserving winners in two competitive finals.

It was a fitting conclusion to what has been an enthralling season in the Club calendar. Club rugby in Ireland is on a positive path and the IRFU is committed to encouraging the highest standards, both on and off the field of play, in the months and years to come.

To Chief Executive Kevin Potts, who oversees the professional arm of the IRFU, and my colleagues Senior Vice President Declan Madden, Junior Vice President John O'Driscoll, Chair of the Management Committee Niall Rynne, Honorary Treasurer Patrick Kennedy and all those who sit on committees on a voluntary basis, thank you for your support. I am grateful to the leadership of the IRFU for their hard work in driving the Game forward at all levels.

In welcoming incoming Performance Director David Humphreys, who formally begins his role this summer, I would like to thank David Nucifora for his service to Irish rugby and wish him and his family well in the future.

As the 2023/24 season concludes, I would like to pay tribute to all those who have passed over the course of the season. Though some lights fade, they never burn out and we remember the families and friends of those who dedicated their lives to rugby in Ireland.

There is a team of volunteers who work tirelessly across the country to enable the smooth and safe running of our Clubs and the competitions they play in. Our thanks to all those unsung heroes, whose influence in each Club often transcends the fields of play, but whose impact for those across the grounds cannot be overestimated.

The Game is thriving at underage levels in every Club, School and University, and while there is a lot done, as the old saying goes, there is more to do.

We are grateful to Vodafone for their outstanding support of Irish rugby. Their backing, together with the long-standing support of our kit partner Canterbury, alongside the entire family of Irish Rugby sponsors, helps grow the game in Ireland.



TOP: 2024 Guinness Women's Six Nations Championship: England vs Ireland, Ireland's Neve Jones
BOTTOM: 2024 Four Nations Tournament: Ireland vs England, Cora Kelleher (centre), cheers on the Ireland team with her cousin Layla McCarthy



2024 Guinness Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Italy, Ireland's Iain Henderson

My thanks go to the players, coaches, club members, media and others who promote and work so hard to deliver the game of rugby football in Ireland throughout the year. We also thank our dedicated match officials at all levels, without whom there would be no Game.

As the IRFU approaches its 150th celebrations in the 2024/25 season, and with a new Strategy for the promotion and development of the sport across all 32 counties set to kick off later this year, it is my belief that the sport has never been in ruder health.

Are we where we want to be across all areas?
No.

Can we do more? Yes, of course we can.

It is that resolute determination to keep driving forward which will help accelerate the growth of Rugby in all towns and counties in the years to come. The growth of Irish rugby is synonymous with the success of the Schools, Youths and Universities sections and it is vital that we continue to invest in personnel and facilities to maintain our upward trajectory.

In December 2023, the IRFU announced that following the final Union Committee meeting of the year, a gender balance of 40% was reached with the addition of three co-opted delegates. This was a seismic step forward for Rugby in Ireland and the IRFU Committee has been enriched by the addition of three new co-opted delegates – Maeve Carton, Fiona Sweeney, and Joanne Geary – who are each making positive impressions alongside all the other Committee members.

Energia All-Ireland League: Terenure vs Cork Constitution,
The Cork Constitution team celebrate with the Division 1A trophy



To Declan Madden, I wish you the very best of luck as President of the IRFU next season. I know that the IRFU has a number of exciting plans and initiatives to help celebrate the last 150 years of Rugby in Ireland and we will approach the years ahead with high hopes. We have a proud history and look forward with confidence to an even brighter future.

I would like to thank Cork Constitution FC and Munster Rugby for nominating me to this prestigious position. It has been an honour to serve my Club and Province over the last 11 years on the IRFU Committee and I will endeavour to assist in the growth of the Game in the future.

Finally, to my wife Lorna, our children Ross, Lisa, and Mark, our two grandchildren, and my brothers, and all their families, thanks for your unwavering love and support over the years.



2023 Rugby World Cup: South Africa vs Ireland, Ireland's Robbie Henshaw

Rugby has been a huge part of my life since first starting off in CBC Cork, and when I was appointed President, I had a sense of the scale of undertaking that this role would involve. In truth I probably underestimated the breadth of meetings and commitments involved!

But at every corner I have felt the warmth and dedication of the Rugby community, and for that I am truly indebted.

I have been lucky to experience some incredible moments and to make and rekindle old friendships and associations.

In closing, it has truly been the experience of a lifetime...

GREG BARRETT
President, IRFU 2023/24



Aviva Minis Rugby Festival at Aviva Stadium, April 2024

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT



KEVIN POTTS

AS WE PREPARE TO CELEBRATE 150 YEARS OF IRISH RUGBY, I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT RUGBY IN IRELAND IS IN A GOOD PLACE; MORE PEOPLE IN IRELAND ARE PLAYING RUGBY THAN EVER BEFORE, AND MORE FANS ARE SUPPORTING OUR TEAMS THAN EVER BEFORE.

To give a sense of Ireland's current international standing there are some statistics which are worth highlighting. Since 2020, our Men's National Team has won almost 90% of their matches, unprecedented in the history of Irish rugby. This is an incredible indicator of the progress our Men's team have made on the international stage, where they are currently ranked second in the world. Another telling statistic is that four of the five most-watched television programmes in Ireland in 2023, were Irish Men's international rugby matches, including a massive 78 % audience share with 1.378 million viewers when we played New Zealand in the Rugby World Cup.

In December, we lost Dr Syd Millar, a titan of our game as a player and administrator, both in Ireland and globally. As I attended Syd's memorial service, I was reminded of the huge number of people who have given so much time, effort and expertise to making Irish Rugby the success it is today, and so, at the outset of

this report, I want to recognise and thank them for all they have contributed to our game. This includes clubs, schools, sponsors, patrons, volunteers, coaches, referees, fans, mums, dads, brothers, and sisters who support the players from minis to seniors, who make sure players are on time for training, who organise lifts and busses, and who contribute hugely to the player experience- you truly are the unsung heroes of rugby in Ireland.

This year we have laid some important foundations for our future, including; a new Collective Bargaining Agreement with our players; a more equitable and transparent funding model for our Provinces; a 40% gender balance on the Union Committee; the release of a new Strategic Plan for Rugby in Ireland 2024-2028; and the appointment of David Humphreys as our new Performance Director. David was capped 72 times for Ireland and post playing career has developed an internationally recognised reputation in the High Performance arena. He replaces David Nucifora, whom I would like to take this opportunity to thank for his contribution to Irish Rugby over the last 10 years.



2024 Guinness Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Scotland, Ireland team huddle



2023 Rugby World Cup Quarter-Final: Ireland vs New Zealand, Ireland's Jonathan Sexton



Irish Rugby Women's Seven's Squad Training, Beibhinn Parsons

On the pitch, following a disappointing end to our 2023 World Cup campaign, our Men's team won the Guinness Six Nations Championship for the second consecutive year; our Women's XV qualified for WXV1 in September and for Rugby World Cup 2025 in England; our Men's Under 20s were just pipped at the post for what would have been their 3rd Grand Slam in a row; and our Sevens Teams –men and women-qualified for the Olympic Games in Paris, where I believe they are genuine medal contenders.

The Energia Men's and Women's All Ireland Leagues finished with the first double-header of finals at Aviva Stadium with Cork Constitution winning the men's final (much to the delight of our current IRFU President, Greg Barrett!) and UL Boh's winning the Women's final.

More detail on all of these matters can be found later in this report.

While each area of this report goes into depth on the incredible work being delivered across Irish Rugby, there are a number which I would particularly like to highlight.

NATIONS CUP

After years of discussion and negotiation with World Rugby, our Six Nations partners and SANZAAR, the plan to create a new two tiered Nations Cup Championship from 2026, was announced in October. This new global tournament will see Ireland competing against each of the SANZAAR teams and two invitational Teams every two years and will result in meaningful fixtures in the summer and autumn international windows, culminating in a 'finals weekend' in November. Players have been part of these discussions and I believe this competition will add a huge amount to both the fan and player experience.

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RUGBY IN IRELAND 2024-2028 – INSPIRE, CONNECT & THRIVE

The plan, released in June and developed with the inputs of so many people, expresses the vision, ambition, and values of Irish Rugby and how they will form the basis for the development of the Game over this coming cycle.

Our vision is simple - Inspire, Connect and Thrive; Inspiring more people to play, support and volunteer in rugby; Connecting more people and communities through Rugby; and ensuring Thriving environments for players and volunteers through Rugby.

A key cornerstone of this plan is our ongoing and steadfast commitment to player welfare, which remains central to everything we do.

In our strategy we clearly set out our ambitions, and articulate the main initiatives aimed at delivering them while committing to delivering the plan in a manner which is consistent with our values of Respect, Integrity, Inclusivity, Fun and Excellence.

The main pillars of the strategy – which is available on irishrugby.ie are: Delivering Great Rugby Experiences; Driving our High-Performance Ambition; Accelerating the Women's Game; Inspiring our fans.

It goes without saying that the delivery of these ambitions will require significant investment over the term of this strategic plan.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

As this is a Rugby World Cup year, we will – as forecast- report a significant deficit in our annual accounts later this year. This deficit arises from the increased costs associated with preparing for, and participating in the Rugby World Cup, as well as the loss of our home Autumn Nations Series match revenues. The IRFU plans for this scenario as part of each 4-year cycle, and thereby ensures that we continue to deliver our various programmes on an annual basis. Financial sustainability is vital for the long term wellbeing of the IRFU and our Provinces, and it will continue to remain central in our decision making.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT

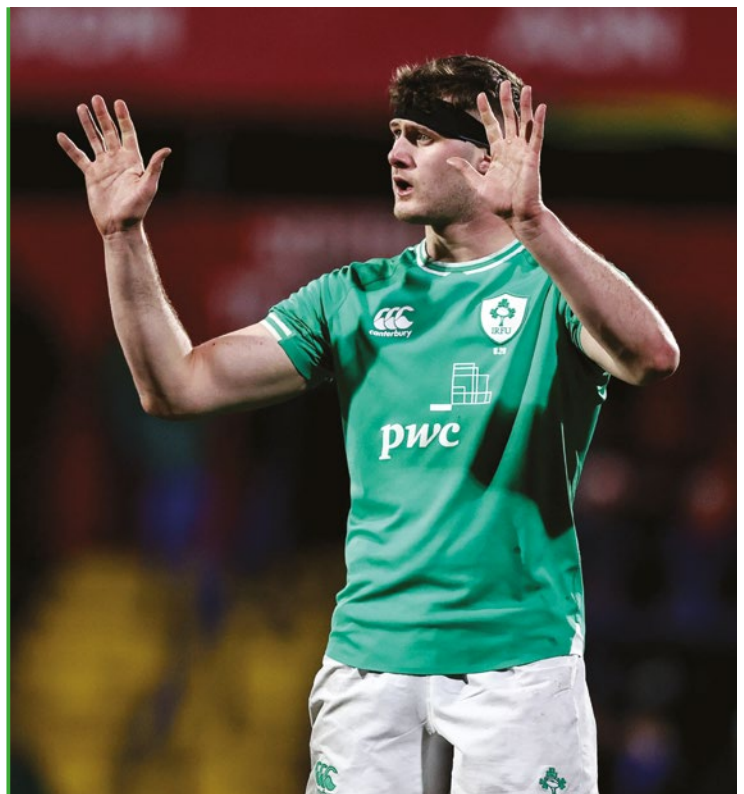
Players continually tell us that Ireland is a great place for them to play rugby, owing to our exceptionally high player welfare standards and game time management. That is something of which we are immensely proud. In November, we agreed a new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with Rugby Players Ireland (RPI), which will cover the period through to 2027. This agreement contains many features including an enhanced Player Development Programme, highlighting our commitment to developing players on and off the pitch. The CBA was the result of a collaborative and constructive process with RPI, and I believe that this strong relationship will continue long beyond the existing agreement. I would like to thank Rugby Players Ireland and our Players for all they do for our game and for the positive and collaborative relationship we share.

FUNDING MODEL

At the heart of our success is the central control and management of player contracting, which- along with our player welfare model- is world class. The strength of rugby in Ireland is aligned to having four healthy, competitive provinces and the IRFU remains committed to delivering this in a financially sustainable manner. A key change to funding model which we announced earlier this year, will see provinces contribute up to 30% of the cost of a national contract for their players, with this level to be reviewed annually. The new model is simpler, more transparent, more equitable and delivers better incentivisation and alignment across Irish rugby. We thank the Provinces for their support of the review process.



Energia All-Ireland League: Terenure vs Cork Constitution, Cork Con's Eoin Quilter



2024 Under 20 Six Nations Championship: Ireland U20 vs Italy U20, Ireland's Evan O'Connell



2024 Guinness Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Scotland, Ireland's Jack Crowley



A view of the action at the Aviva Minis National Rugby Festival

MEN'S SENIOR XV TEAM

Heading into Rugby World Cup 2023, we always knew that big games would be decided on tight margins. The fantastic 'sea of green' scenes of tens of thousands of Irish fans packing out stadia in Nantes, Bordeaux and Paris will live long in the memory of anyone lucky enough to have been there; and indeed, for those who were part of the record-breaking TV viewing audiences. When Andy Farrell and the team talk about wanting to 'inspire the nation,' there is no doubt that they achieved that objective. The agonising defeat to New Zealand in Paris was hard for all of us to take; but that's sport, and on such tight margins are games won and lost. Throughout the tournament, the Irish fans were a credit to Ireland, and I want to thank them again for their incredible support.

The team rebounded to become the 2024 Guinness Six Nations Champions again, starting with a record-breaking win against France in Marseille, and, after a last-minute loss to England in Twickenham, the campaign ended with a home win over Scotland and the Guinness Six Nations Championship Trophy remaining in Ireland.

WOMEN'S SENIOR XV TEAM

Scott Bemand joined as our new Head Coach in August and went straight into preparations for the inaugural WXV3 Tournament in Dubai in September. Winning this tournament was no more than the squad expected of itself and no less than they deserved.

The Guinness Women's Six Nations was a tough campaign which ultimately saw the team finish 3rd with an outstanding victory over Scotland in Belfast, and therefore automatically qualify for WXV 1 later this year, and Rugby World Cup 2025. The team are undoubtedly growing, as is their support base.

We believe that the biggest opportunity for growth in rugby lies in the growing support and participation of Women's rugby and Women in rugby, which is why this is again, one of the key pillars of our vision for the next cycle. Everyone can help by attending Women's matches- whether at Club, the Celtic Challenge or national level; everyone can help inspire more girls to get involved in the game, deepen our player pool, and grow the commercial proposition of the Women's game.



2024 Guinness Women's Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Scotland, Ireland's Edel McMahon

OLYMPIC GAMES

This summer marks the first time that we will have both our Men and Women's Sevens teams competing at an Olympic games. Qualification for the Olympics is hard-won and our performances over the last two years leads me to believe that both our Sevens teams can be in the hunt for a place on the podium. On behalf of everyone in Irish Rugby, I wish the players and management of both squads the very best in their Olympic campaign.

As 2023/24 draws to a close, preparations are already well under way for a truly special year ahead as we enter our 150th anniversary season. We kick-off the celebrations with a Women's International against Australia in Kingspan Stadium, and there are events and activities planned throughout the season, including a special men's celebratory international against Australia in November, a sold-out gala celebratory dinner, a Rugby in

Ireland day, and much more. The celebrations will conclude with a truly historic occasion, when the British & Irish Lions play Argentina in the Aviva Stadium in June. This will be the first time that the Lions will have played on Irish soil and – as an enthusiastic fan of the Lions - I am immensely looking forward to the occasion and delighted that we have been able to secure this fixture for Irish rugby fans.

In conclusion, it is my privilege to serve as Chief Executive of the IRFU, especially during what are exciting times for rugby in Ireland. There have been many ups (and some 'downs') across what has been a long season, but Irish Rugby is in a good place, and we should take pride in that.

Yours in rugby,

KEVIN POTTS
Chief Executive

HIGH PERFORMANCE REPORT

AS ALWAYS IN HIGH PERFORMANCE, IT HAS BEEN A HUGE YET SUCCESSFUL SEASON FOR OUR NATIONAL TEAMS AND IN THE FOLLOWING REPORT WE OUTLINED THE SUCCESS AND DEVELOPMENTS OVER THIS PERIOD.



2024 Guinness Women's Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Wales, Eve Higgins celebrates with her teammates



2024 Guinness Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Wales, Ireland's Tadhg Furlong

MEN'S NATIONAL TEAM

AUGUST BANK OF IRELAND NATIONS SERIES: RWC WARM UP GAMES

Following an eight-week pre-season period primarily spent at the IRFU High Performance Centre, with additional warm-weather training in Portugal's Quinta do Lago, Ireland moved on to the Nations Series. Notable in this preparation was the inclusion of several new caps providing valuable international exposure and game-time to the squad's less experienced players. Included in the 42-man training squad were Jamie Osborne, Tom Stewart, Ciaran Frawley, and Calvin Nash, with the latter three earning their first caps at home to Italy. Ireland triumphed in their warm-up games against Italy, England, and Samoa, facing their sternest challenge in a rain-soaked match in Bayonne. Here, they overcame Samoa 17-13 after a strong second-half performance.

RUGBY WORLD CUP 2023

Ireland's 33-man squad for the World Cup featured veterans like Jonny Sexton, Conor Murray and Keith Earls, heading for their fourth Rugby World Cup, alongside 18 tournament debutants.

Ireland excelled early in Pool B, securing comprehensive victories over Romania (82-8) and Tonga (59-16). In Bordeaux, Ireland recorded their largest ever World Cup win both by points scored and winning margin, with 12 tries against Romania. Jonny Sexton finished with a handsome 24-point haul, including two tries. Sexton also became Ireland's all-time record points scorer during the Tonga game, reaching a career total of 1090 points. Bundee Aki shone throughout the pool stages, scoring four tries in the first two games. His lung-busting break was a highlight of the rousing 13-8 defeat of eventual champions South Africa, putting Ireland in a strong position to top the pool. The team continued their impressive form against Scotland, with a dynamic six try performance to win 36-14. Peter O'Mahony became the 10th member of Irish Rugby's 100-cap club.

However, Ireland's journey ended in the quarterfinals, with a close 28-24 defeat to New Zealand, marking the end of a 17-game winning streak. The emotional and physical toll of the quarter-final loss was significant, reflecting the intense investment and expectations placed on this Rugby World Cup journey. The aftermath was a time of reflection for the team and coaching staff, focusing on the lessons learned and the paths forward for Irish rugby on the international stage.

GUINNESS MEN'S SIX NATIONS

The 2024 Men's Six Nations Championship marked a successful campaign for Ireland, culminating in a victory against Scotland that sealed their back-to-back championship titles. Peter O'Mahony, serving as captain, celebrated his 50th Six Nations appearance in the game against Wales.

NEW CAPS

4 players earned their first cap with the Ireland Senior team in the 2023/2024 season – Tom Stewart, Calvin Nash, Ciaran Frawley and Oli Jager.

SUMMER TOUR 2024

Ireland is set for a summer tour in South Africa in July 2024. They are scheduled to play two matches against the World Champions South Africa. The first Test will take place at Loftus Versfeld in Pretoria on Saturday, July 6th, with the second Test following thereafter on Saturday, July 13th, 2024, at the Hollywoodbets Kings Park in Durban. This tour marks an exciting challenge for the team as they face the Springboks on their home turf for the first time after their RWC win in Paris.

WOMEN'S NATIONAL TEAM

GLOBAL WXV3

In September 2023, as part of the preparations for the Global WXV3 tournament, the Women's XV squad travelled to Scotland for a warm-up game followed by a home game at the HPC against the USA. The squad of 30 departed for Dubai at the start of October for the Global XV tournament. Ireland won their first two games in the tournament, beating Kazakhstan 109-0 and Colombia 64-3. The final game took place against Spain which Ireland won 15-13. As winners of WXV 3, Ireland's success granted the Six Nations an additional position in WXV2 for the next season.

Following a third-place finish in the Guinness Women's Six Nations, Ireland qualified for the WXV1 tournament, set to be held in Canada. The WXV1 will include the top three teams from the Six Nations (England, France, Ireland) and three teams from the Pacific Fours (New Zealand, Australia, Canada, USA). The WXV1 tournament is set to take place from Friday the 27th of September to Sunday the 13th of October 2024.

GUINNESS WOMEN'S SIX NATIONS

A squad of 35 players, including 8 uncapped, was announced in February for the Guinness Women's Six Nations. Ruth Campbell and Katie Whelan, who were part of the WXV3 panel, as well as Chisom Ugwuweru, Katie Corrigan, Katie Heffernan and Clare Gorman, all impressed in this year's Celtic Challenge campaign to earn their first Six Nations call-ups. Uncapped IQ Rugby duo Andrea Stock and Shannon Ikahihifo were also called up to the squad. There were five players included who featured on the HSBC SVNS Series for Ireland this season, including Béibhinn Parsons, Eve Higgins, and Aoibheann Reilly who were all part of Ireland's historic first title success in Perth in January. In addition to the 35 players chosen, 7 players were named in a wider training panel that assembled in the HPC when camp commenced on the 26th of February.

After last year's disappointments, Ireland ended this year's Six Nations on a high note, securing a 15-12 victory over Scotland. This win not only ensured Ireland's third-place finish in the Six Nations but also qualified them for the Rugby World Cup in England in 2025. Additionally, the victory secured Ireland's spot in the WXV1 tournament in Canada.

Aoife Wafer was among the four players shortlisted for the Women's Six Nations Player of the Tournament and was named in the Team of the Tournament alongside Neve Jones.

NEW CAPS

7 players earned their first cap with the Ireland Senior team in the 2023/2024 season - Katie Corrigan, Clara Barrett, Megan Collis, Fiona Tuite, Eimear Corri, Sarah Delaney and Shannon Ikahihifo.

CELTIC CHALLENGE

The Celtic Challenge took place over a 11-week period from the 18th of December 2023 to the 3rd of March 2024. The tournament featured two Irish, two Welsh and two Scottish teams. The Wolfhounds, representing Ulster and Leinster, were crowned champions in Belfast, winning six out of their seven games. The Clovers, comprising players mostly from Connacht and Munster, finished 4th with three wins, three losses and a draw. A total of 68 players, from the three participating unions in the Celtic Challenge were selected for Six Nations squads. The Celtic Challenge will return in December 2024 with an expanded 10-round format, featuring six teams each playing 5 home and 5 away fixtures. The season will conclude in March 2025 ahead of the 2025 Guinness Women's Six Nations. The overall winner will be determined based on league table standings at the end of the 30-game season.

CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE/PATHWAYS

In May 2023, the Centres of Excellence were established provincially. These centres are based in the universities within each province. An athletic performance coach and talent pathway coach has been appointed in each of the four provinces to cater for 16–23-year-old players. These athletes have been provided with technical coaching, athletic performance coaching and all the relevant service provisions to support our pathway structures. A two-day Women's National Talent Squad (WNTS) National Camp was held on the 2nd and 3rd of November, and this was followed up with a one-day camp on January 2nd. Approximately 70 Pathway Players and all the WNTS staff were in attendance.



2024 Guinness Women's Six Nations TOP: Ireland vs Italy.
Fiona Tuite celebrates BOTTOM: Ireland vs Scotland,
Dannah O'Brien with Mairi McDonald of Scotland

WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY 7'S

The inaugural University 7's tournament kicked off this season, utilising the WNTS university bases as venues for the four matchday rounds. The first round was held on February 28th at the University of Galway, with teams from each province participating. The second round occurred on March 6th at Queen's University, which also featured a team from IQ. The third round took place on March 13th at the University of Limerick, and the final round was on March 20th at SETU Carlow. Connacht emerged as the tournament winners. The event received positive feedback from players and offered coaches a valuable opportunity to scout talent.

- FISU World University Championship Rugby Sevens
- A women's Irish University 7's team competed at the FISU World University Championship in Aix-Marseille- Provence from the 10th -12th of June.
- This team was selected from the University 7's competition that ran over February and March this year.
- The squad had a camp at the HPC over the June Bank Holiday weekend and departed for France on Saturday the 8th of June.
- Ireland faced a challenging pool, experiencing losses against Australia, France and Canada. They secured a victory against India before ultimately defeating Poland in the 7th/8th place playoff.

IRELAND WOMEN'S AGE-GRADE PROGRAMMES

WOMEN'S U20/U23

Six Nations Rugby has introduced the Women's Summer Series, running from 4th to 14th July in Italy. This inaugural series will primarily focus on players under the age of 20, specifically graduates from the U18 Festivals. Additionally, the series will include a limited number of players up to the age of 23, targeting those who may not have participated in the U18 festivals in recent years. Each squad may include up to five U23 players, with up to three U23 players eligible for inclusion in each match day squad. The 2024 Series will act as a proof of concept, aligning with the strategic plans of the individual Unions to develop the Women's game locally and providing an international platform ahead of the 2025 Rugby World Cup, hosted in England. Each of the six teams will play three 80-minute matches during the tournament. The tournament will also feature a trial of the size 4.5 ball.

The Irish team assembled on April 19th and played against Wicklow RFC in Wicklow on April 20th. A training camp was held at the HPC over the May Bank Holiday weekend (4th- 5th May). The team travelled to England on June 10th to train with the English U20 team on June 11th. The team came into HPC on June 21st for a 3-day camp and will have another camp from June 28th to 30th, in preparation for the Six Nations tournament.

U18 SIX NATIONS

2024 saw the third successive year of staging the Six Nations U18 Festivals, with Colwyn Bay, Wales hosting the Women's Festival over Easter. The festival took place from March 29th to April 6th. Each team played four 35-minute matches and one 70-minute match. Ireland won two of their 35-minute games, scoring excellent tries in victories over Italy, 20-0, and hosts Wales, 14-5. However, they were defeated by England, 19-12, and France, 31-5. In a 70-minute game on the final day, Ireland ran in eight tries for a 48-7 victory over Scotland. The size 4.5 ball and the new tackle height laws were introduced in the festival under the WRU Framework.



Ireland in action in the Six Nations U18 Women's Festival held in Colwyn Bay



Wicklow Women vs Ireland U20 Women: Ireland's Jane Neill



Wicklow Women vs Ireland U20 Women: Ireland's Jade Gaffney



Ireland in action in the Six Nations U18 Women's Festival held in Colwyn Bay

IRELAND MEN'S AGE-GRADE PROGRAMMES

U20 - SIX NATIONS 2024

The Ireland U20 side has had a very busy programme starting in October 2023, taking in the U20 Six Nations Championship and at time of writing the squad are about to begin preparations for the 2024 World Rugby U20 Championship in Cape Town, South Africa between June 29th and July 19th. The team has been allocated in a pool with Italy, Georgia, and Australia.

Head Coach Richie Murphy and Manager Tom Kavanagh returned to lead the side for a third successive season, playing three preparation fixtures against Italy U20, a Leinster development XV and a Munster development XV prior to the commencement of the 2024 U20 Six Nations. The team had a series of impressive performances and remained unbeaten with a record of four wins and a draw over the championship. The final series of games brought mixed emotions as for a period, following victory over the Scotland U20 side, the team were on course to win the championship outright. However, an England victory against France in Pau, ensured they won the championship by the narrowest of margins, a solitary league point.

The players and management gave their all throughout the competition, mixing total dedication and commitment with expertise. They represented their families, schools, and clubs with distinction throughout and are a credit to the National U20 programme. All are eagerly anticipating a return to action this summer at the World Rugby U20 Championship in Cape Town. Three preparation fixtures have been organised in late May and early June against an Ireland Universities XV, Ulster A and Munster Development, prior to the squad departing on the 24th of June.



2024 Under 20 Six Nations Championship: France U20 vs Ireland U20.
Finn Treacy celebrates scoring a try with Jack Murphy

Following on from Richie Murphy's appointment as head coach for Ulster Rugby, Willie Faloon was appointed as the head coach for the U20's ahead of the 2024 World Rugby U20 Championship.

Ireland U20 (35) v Italy U20 (29)

Munster Development XV (29)
v Ireland U20 (24)

Leinster Development XV (28) v Ireland U20 (28)

France (31) v Ireland U20 (37)

Ireland U20 (23) v Italy-20 (22)

Ireland U20 (43) v Wales U20 (8)

England U20 (32) v Ireland U20 (32)

Ireland U20 (36) v Scotland U20 (0)

Connacht Rugby Junior C Schools Cup Final: Calasanctius Oranmore vs St Mary's Ballygar, Calasanctius Oranmore's Harry Fox and Ben Luft celebrate with the trophy



IRELAND U19

U19 V Wales - Cardiff

The Ireland U19 played their traditional two game fixture series against the France U19 in Belfast and Dublin during early April. This was supplemented with an additional fixture against Wales U19, with a side largely comprising of players who had left school. An initial 28-man squad led by Head Coach Kieran Hallett and Manager Noel McKenna played on the 3rd of April in Queens University Belfast and on the 7th of April at Templeville Rd, St Mary's College RFC. Each game was fiercely contested, with players on both sides demonstrating high skill levels in all facets of the game. The results went down to the wire, with France victorious in Belfast and Ireland striking back in Dublin. We look forward to returning to the South of France next season to renew our partnership with the FIR at this age-grade.

A new departure this season was a third fixture against the Wales U19 XV on the 13th of April. A 24-man was selected and played the fixture in Ystrad Mynach Centre of Excellence. In an entertaining high scoring contest, the players demonstrated great commitment and endeavour, notwithstanding the short preparation window for the game, finishing on a positive note for all after a successful Easter campaign. The programme will stand to the players as they move onto their U20 year. A big thank-you to all staff, management, and support team for their work in facilitating the fixtures.

Ireland U-19 (26) v France U-19 (28)

Ireland U-19 (19) v France U-19 (10)

Wales U-19 (31) v Ireland U-19 (43)

IRELAND U18 SCHOOLS (19) V WALES U18 (27) – MARCH 10TH

An initial 24-man squad was selected for a fixture against the Wales U18 on the 10th of March. The game was played on the 4G at Terenure College RFC and led by Head Coach Neil Doak and Manager Stephen O'Hara. It gave the squad a preparation fixture prior to departure to the Six Nations festival in Parma.

U18 SIX NATIONS FESTIVAL – PARMA - ITALY 2024

Following the Wales U18 fixture and culmination of the provincial school's cup finals, a 26-man squad was selected and led by Head Coach Neil Doak and Manager Stephen O'Hara for the U18 Six Nations festival. Three fixtures were played from March 29th to April 7th against France, Italy, and Portugal U18 sides. The emphasis on the development of players was promoted throughout the festival and each fixture threw up its own set of challenges. The players acquitted themselves to a high standard throughout and they can look forward to returning to their clubs and schools, with renewed vigour in advance of next season.

France U18 (50) v Ireland U18 Schools (7)

Ireland U18 Schools (36) v Italy U18 (10)

Ireland U18 Schools (54) v Portugal U18 (0)

U18 CLUBS – ITALY, RIETI 2023

The Ireland Clubs side played their annual Halloween fixture against the Italy U18 in Rieti on the 4th of November 2023. A 24-man squad led by Head Coach Damien McCabe and Manager Anthony McKibben for a second successive season spent a week in camp at The Kings Hospital School, in preparation prior to the fixture. Played under heavy under foot conditions the Irish team traded scores with their Italian counterparts from the first minute to last and rose to the occasion, doing themselves and their management team proud. This game continues to be a highlight occasion for the U18 clubs' side over the Halloween period and we look forward to returning to Italy for two fixtures next season, in a new departure for the programme.



Ireland in action in the Six Nations U18 Men's Festival held in Parma

ITALY U18S (31) V IRELAND U18 CLUBS (27)

MEN'S NATIONAL TALENT SQUAD (MNTS)

The MNTS numbers decreased slightly this season from 87 to 77. The programme continues to provide a range of supports to help identified players achieve their full potential on and off the field of play. This is provided under the leadership of National MNTS & Talent ID Manager Wayne Mitchell, provincial talent coaches, and support practitioners. Alongside this programme and the provincial talent squads, is the continued excellent work across the rugby playing clubs and schools of Ireland to develop future generations of rugby players.

2024 Under 20 Six Nations Championship: France U20 vs Ireland U20, Ireland's Head Coach Richie Murphy



2024 Under 20 Six Nations Championship: Ireland U20 vs Scotland U20, Ireland's Danny Sheahan celebrates with Wilhelm de Klerk

SEVENS

MEN'S 7'S

OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION:

The Men's 7's secured their spot at the Paris Olympic Games in 2024 by winning the European Games tournament in Krakow Poland in June 2023. The men beat GB in the final to gain qualification.

RUGBY EUROPE 2023

The team won the first round of the Rugby Europe Championship in the Algarve, Portugal, in June 2023. The team travelled with a more inexperienced squad to the 2nd round of the Rugby Europe Championship in Hamburg, Germany. The team won a bronze medal, and this result secured an overall gold for the European Championship across the two legs. This tournament was a great opportunity for fringe and development players to gain valuable experience in international competition.

RUGBY EUROPE 2024

The Men competed in Rugby Europe in June. Round 1 took place in Makarska, Croatia from the 7th - 9th of June, the men came 2nd. Round 2 took place in Hamburg from the 28th to the 30th of June and the Men's team came 1st in this leg. This competition served as the final preparation tournament before the teams depart for their Olympic base camp in Tours, France.

HSBC SVNS SERIES 2023/2024

The first round of the World Series took place in Dubai in December 2023. They finished in 5th place. The men beat Australia and Japan in the group phase before losing to the finalists, Argentina, in the final group game. They lost to Fiji 29-24 in the ¼ final before beating Samoa in the 5th/6th place play off 28-5.

The second leg took place in Cape Town the following weekend. Ireland topped their pool winning all three matches against South Africa, G.B. and U.S.A. Ireland beat New Zealand in the ¼ final, the first time in their history, before losing to Argentina 26-19 in the semi-final. Argentina were winners of the tournament.

Perth, Australia was the host in January 2024 for the third leg of the series. Ireland won two out of three pool games beating GB 17-12 in the opening game before losing 26-7 to the USA in the 2nd. They finished off the pool stages by beating Australia 19-10. They finished 2nd in their pool meaning they would play France in the ¼ final. Ireland won 21-14. They lost 24-5 to the eventual winners, Argentina, in the semifinal before beating Fiji in the 3rd/4th place playoff to win Bronze.

The Vancouver 7's took place from the 23rd - 25th of February. The team lost in the ¼ final to France 12-5 before beating Fiji 24-19 in the 5th place playoff. The LA 7's took place the following weekend. The team beat Argentina, the series leaders, in the ¼ finals for the first time in the series. They had a narrow loss to France in the semifinal 26-24 before beating Spain in the bronze medal match.

The Hong Kong sevens took place from the 5th - 7th of April. The team lost in the ½ final to France, 26-10, before defeating Australia in the 3rd/4th place playoff, securing bronze.

The Singapore 7's took place from the 3rd to the 5th of May. The team defeated Argentina, the series winners, in the ¼ final before losing to New Zealand, 17-14, in the final. This result marked their fourth medal of the series: 3 bronze and one silver, securing 2nd place overall in the series across seven legs.

HSBC World Rugby Sevens: Ireland vs South Africa, Ireland's Niall Comerford



HSBC World Rugby Sevens: Ireland vs New Zealand, Ireland's Hugo Keenan and Jordan Conroy



HSBC Rugby Sevens: USA Women vs Ireland Women, Ireland's Amee Leigh Murphy Crowe celebrates with Lucy Muhall

WOMEN'S 7'S

RUGBY EUROPE 2023

The team won a bronze medal at the Rugby Europe event in the Algarve, Portugal in June 2023. They lost to France in the semi-final before beating Poland in the bronze medal match. The team travelled with a development side to round 2 of the Rugby Europe Championship which took place alongside the men's tournament in Hamburg, Germany. The team had a disappointing 8th place finish after sending largely an experimental development team away to seek further game time.

RUGBY EUROPE 2024

The Women also competed in Rugby Europe in June. Round 1 took place in Makarska, Croatia from the 7th - 9th of June. The Women's team finished 6th in Hamburg and like the men this served as a final preparation before departing to France.

HSBC SVNS SERIES 2023/2024

The first round of the World Series took place on the 2nd and 3rd of December. The team finished in 6th place after losing to Fiji on "golden point". They lost to Canada 14-12 in the ¼ final. The second leg took place in Cape Town the following weekend. Ireland lost 24-14 to the eventual winners, Australia in the ¼ final.

The third leg of the World Series took place in Perth, Australia, from January 26th to 28th. The team won the tournament for the first time in their history, defeating the hosts, Australia, 19-14 in the final. They were 31-7 winners against Great Britain in the semifinal and beat Fiji 14-12 in a closely contested quarterfinal.

The Vancouver 7's took place from the 23rd - 25th of February. The team did not qualify for the ¼ finals. The LA 7's took place the following weekend. The team faced New Zealand, the eventual winners, in the ¼ final and lost 36-12. Ireland finished the tournament in 8th place.

After the LA 7's, five players from the 7's squad were released to train and play with the Women's XV squad during the 6N.

The Hong Kong sevens took place from the 5th - 7th of April. The team lost to France in the ¼ finals before finishing 8th overall in the tournament.

The Singapore 7's took place from the 3rd to the 5th of May. The team was defeated 24-14 by Australia in the quarter final. They finished 5th after beating Japan 19-17 in the 5th place playoff. The women finished in 7th place in the overall series standings.

HSBC SVNS MADRID GRAND FINAL

The Madrid Grand Final tournament will adopt a different format compared to the regular season. It will feature the top eight men's and women's teams from the HSBC SVNS Series competing to be crowned champions. This event took place from May 31 to June 2 at the Civitas Stadium in Madrid (home of Atlético Madrid Football Club).

The men's team finished 5th whilst the women's team finished 6th, both having had a bad run of luck with injuries during the tournament.



HSBC World Rugby Sevens: Ireland vs Australia, Ireland's Aimee Leigh Murphy Crowe

HSBC World Rugby Sevens: Ireland vs New Zealand, Ireland's Gavin Mullin



7'S DEVELOPMENT TEAMS

The squads have continued to work hard on building depth and also looking for playing opportunities for the wider squads. Both squads have engaged in multiple training tournaments, participating in the Elche 7's in Spain in October 2023 and Dubai at the start of December 2023.

A women's development squad was taken to Marcoussis, France on the 15th of January for a four day tour. Comprising players not chosen for Perth alongside development players, they trained alongside their French counterparts.

A men's development team travelled to Lisbon from the 19th – 22nd of February 2024 to compete in a mini tournament with Portugal and the French Development team. The team comprised of the non-travelling members to Vancouver plus a selection of young talent from the age grade pathways.

In late February, the men's German team visited the HPC for matches against our development players.

March saw the women's team travel to France for a mid-month training camp. It was an opportunity for the less experienced members of the squad to get more game time to prepare for the World Series event in Hong Kong.

A men's development team travelled to Marcoussis, France for a three-day training camp from the 22nd-24th of April.

A women's development squad played in a tournament in Tours, France on the 18th and 19th of May

PARIS 2024 OLYMPICS PREPARATION

Both the men's and women's rugby sevens teams will use Tours, France, as their base camp for the Olympic Games. Tours was also used by the men's XV team as their base for the Rugby World Cup group stages in September 2023. The men's team will depart for Tours on July 10th before moving to the Olympic Village on July 20th. They will compete at the Olympics on July 24th, 25th, and 27th at the Stade de France, with a break on July 26th due to the Olympic Opening Ceremony. The women's team will depart for Tours on July 15th and move to the Olympic Village on July 22nd. They will compete on July 28th, 29th, and 30th.

U18'S BOYS AND GIRLS SEVENS RUGBY EUROPE

The U18's Girls and Boys Sevens Championship will take place in Strasbourg, France from the 6th – 7th of July.

REFEREE DEPARTMENT

RWC 2023 saw four IRFU Match Officials selected to be part of the Match Official team in France. These appointments matched the best ever representation of IRFU officials at a World Cup and is a fair reflection of the dedication and commitment of all involved.

IRFU match officials continue to contribute in a positive way at all levels of the game, including regular appointments in knock out games in URC & EPCR with representation and appointments through the Six Nations competitions.

Summer 2024 will see more progression for Irish Referees with Andy Brace, Chris Busby & Eoghan Cross all appointed to referee. Chris Busby will referee his first T1 v T1 games and Eoghan Cross has been appointed to referee in Japan and Canada. Andy Brace continues to establish himself as a leading referee with his appointments including the Rugby Championship match between South Africa v New Zealand.

IRFU Professional Referees are supported by our National Panel of referees who they work with as Assistant Referees & Television Match Officials.

This season we have seen three colleagues decide to take on new challenges and we wish David Wilkinson, Joy Neville & Johnny Lacey every success in their new roles with Major League Rugby in the USA & World Rugby. Frank Murphy will retire from refereeing at the end of season 23/24 to take up the role of High Performance Referee Coach & Talent ID Manager.

Ireland's representatives for the RWC2023 match officials team: Television Match Official Joy Neville, Referee Andrew Brace, Television Match Official Brian MacNeice and Assistant Referee Chris Busby



Match officials for the Men's All Final 2023/24

HIGH PERFORMANCE CENTRE

2023 saw an increase in the overall usage of the HPC, following on from growth in 2021 & 2022. With the addition of a full Men's National Team World Cup camp spanning June, July and August, as well as the introduction of the WXV competitions in the calendar, the total footfall in the building increased 15% in the first five months of the season to December.

For the first time, the HPC hosted a combined academies squad which took on Italy, one of the highest profile XV's matches held at the campus since the building opened. The Celtic Challenge Wolfhounds also based themselves at the HPC for their training sessions across December, January and February twice a week, meaning increased usage of pitches across full days and evenings.

As the HPC now moves towards its 6th year in operation, building works are starting to focus on upkeep as well as upgrade. Up to 30% of the full time staff in the HPC were new additions in 2023, and with this increase in team's support staff, the building had to adapt and grow quickly. Additional working space to accommodate these staff was installed, with the addition of desks in key areas and the acquisition of lounges and meetings rooms from Sport Ireland on a permanent basis. This will allow all squads operate in as unobstructed a space as possible.

Challenges faced in 2023 centred primarily around capacities and the volume of teams using the HPC for longer periods of time. The Women's programme has further professionalised their schedules, basing their training at the HPC for longer training camps as well as the 7s programmes hosting more developmental squads and training camps, for example the hosting of the German Men's 7s squad.



2023 Rugby World Cup Quarter-Final: Ireland vs New Zealand, Ireland's Peter O'Mahony competes in the lineout with Scott Barrett of New Zealand

In terms of HPC staffing changes, a new Operations Executive began with the IRFU mid-2023, and an extra casual employee signed onto an annual contract with the IRFU to aid with these more frequent peak periods. A member of the kitchen team departed in 2024, a position to be filled before the new season begins.

Future plans as we move into the next year include large scale work to the outdoor pitches to return it to its original standard, the further upgrade and branding of common areas to ensure all squads can spread through the building comfortably during down times, and the introduction of further new technology to streamline the working processes for squads using the training centre.

The High Performance team would like to thank the organisation for the support during a busy but exciting season for our National Teams.

RUGBY DEVELOPMENT REPORT

IN THE DYNAMIC LANDSCAPE OF IRISH RUGBY, THE ROLE OF THE IRFU RUGBY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT CONTINUES TO EVOLVE ALONGSIDE SOCIETAL CHANGES AND THE EVOLVING GAME. A FUNDAMENTAL ASPECT OF OUR MISSION REMAINS THE CULTIVATION OF A STEADY STREAM OF PLAYERS, VOLUNTEERS, COACHES, AND MATCH OFFICIALS TO MEET THE FUTURE DEMANDS OF THE SPORT.

Vision Impaired rugby training in Old Wesley



Pictured at the launch of the Energia All-Ireland League Finals are Harrison Brewer (Terenure College), Chloe Pearse (UL Bohemian), Niamh Byrne (Railway Union) and Jack Kelleher (Cork Constitution)

At this point in time we have more people than ever before playing the Game, in many different formats at many different levels. As our numbers continue to increase it is imperative that we support our Provinces, Clubs and Schools to grow the game and we create positive, welcome and inclusive rugby environments.

As we delve into the 2023-24 season, our focus has been on adapting to the changing needs of Irish Rugby while sustaining our core rugby programmes and initiatives. Despite the challenges posed by many factors, we remain committed to delivering impactful rugby initiatives that drive the growth and development of the game.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Increased Female Participation

We are pleased to report a continued increase in female participation across all aspects of the game, reflecting our ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity and accessibility.

Streamlined National and Provincial Development Programmes

Our comprehensive audit of all development programmes has enabled us to prioritise key rugby project initiatives aligned to our strategic goals, ensuring a more focused and impactful approach to rugby development, as per the 'State of the Game' survey feedback from Clubs and Schools.

Rugby World Cup Impact Programme

Leveraging the momentum of the 2023 Rugby World Cup, we have implemented initiatives aimed at enhancing the rugby experience and driving growth across the game. From online training resources to promotional modified games toolkits. We are empowering clubs and schools to continue to make the most of their online learning opportunities.

Behaviour and Discipline

Maintaining and upholding the core values of respect and sportsmanship remains a fundamental aspect of our mission. While our Behaviours and Discipline Group diligently works to nurture a culture of respect within our rugby community, we acknowledge that this is an ongoing process. It is imperative that we

collectively strive to ensure that the spirit of the 'Rugby Charter' is fully embraced across all levels of the game. Every member of our Clubs and Schools bears the responsibility and accountability for their conduct, both on and off the field, in alignment with the values of our sport. This necessitates continuous review and reinforcement to uphold the integrity of our beloved game.

Inclusive Club Facility grant funding initiative

We continue to develop training guides and education resources for clubs with a focus on retro fitting their changing facilities to accommodate all genders. The IRFU Inclusive Facilities Upgrade Guide which gives clubs information that they need to upgrade their facilities. The IRFU Inclusive Facilities scheme was launched in March 2023 and our guide gives clubs information that they need to upgrade their facilities. To date we have 77 expressions of interest from clubs who wish to redevelop their facilities to make them more inclusive. The Club Assistance Committee evaluates each application in conjunction with the IRFU Rugby Department and the four provincial CSOs. We were pleased to award grants to three clubs this season, Monivea RFC, Ballymoney RFC, and Banbridge RFC and we look forward to supporting more clubs over the coming years.

Insights

This season, our primary focus has been on gathering insights and data to better understand societal norms alongside Rugby Clubs, Schools and stakeholder needs. By actively listening to players, coaches, match officials, and volunteers, we are better positioned to shape the future of Rugby in Ireland's Strategic Plan. In line with this, the IRFU undertook a 'State of the Game' survey with over 4,800 respondents. This survey sought to understand people's satisfaction, motivations, barriers, likes and dislikes. This spread across the following groups: players, facilitators and supporters (which included lapsed and current participants in all categories). This has acted as an audit of all activities, informing us of our stakeholders needs and enabled us to understand their priorities. This will be the catalyst in shaping our new rugby strategy and resulting programme offerings.

AGE GRADE AND THIRD LEVEL

This season, over 2,000 participants from 123 clubs participated in the Provincial Aviva Mini Rugby Festivals in Ballynahinch Rugby Club, Dungarvan RFC, Kilkenny RFC, Creggs RFC throughout October as well as the girls-only event at Edenderry RFC in February. The programme culminated in the National Festival at Aviva Stadium on Sunday, 21st of April. As the grassroots sponsor, Aviva is incredibly supportive of the mini rugby programme and is also encouraging other areas to assist with development of skills through their 'Safe to Dream' programme.

As in previous years, the IRFU supports Schools' rugby through the Schools of Ireland Scheme. 77 Schools received financial support to operate rugby programmes with over 20,000 participants, supported by over 1,147 coaches. This season these schools participated in over 11,027 matches, recovering to pre-Covid levels of participation.

Over the past few seasons, the IRFU has increased investment into third level rugby and entered partnerships with institutions for the provision of development officers, as well as Funding Agreements with Student Sport Ireland (SSI) and the Irish Universities Rugby Union (IURU). The IRFU works closely with the SSI to manage men's and women's rugby across third level institutions. 28 men's and 18 women's teams participated in the league and cup competitions which culminated in a four-game finals day hosted at SETU Carlow, with the following Divisional Winners: DCU (The Brendan Johnston Cup - Men's Tier 1 Cup), UCC (Men's Tier 2 Cup), University of Limerick (Women's Tier 1 Cup) University of Galway (Women's Tier 2 Cup).

In addition, there were league wins for University of Limerick (Men's Division 1), UCC/Stranmillis (Men's Division 2), MTU Cork (Men's Division 3), University of Limerick (Women's Division 1), DCU (Women's Division 2), TUS Midwest/ATU (Women's Division 3).



Energia All-Ireland Women's League: UL Bohemian vs Railway Union, UL Bohemians' Muirne Wall

Furthermore, as referenced in the High Performance report, the entering of a female Irish Representative team into the FISU World University Championship Rugby Sevens 2024 in Aix-Marseille in June 2024 is in cooperation with SSI.

Throughout the season, the IURU hosted their full suite of competitions. Dublin University won the U20 Conroy Cup in October; at the Kay Bowen Cup in MU Barnhall in February DCU won the 15s and Maynooth University won the X7s event. The Maughan-Scally Cup took place in Ulster University, Jordanstown in March. The tournament was won by UCD who beat University of Galway by 14 points to nil in the final. The Dudley Cup has not been contested in the 2023/24 season.

COACH DEVELOPMENT

The 2023/24 season saw further enhancements in the delivery of coach development activity throughout the country. The embedding of coach registration utilising Rugby Connect across our Clubs has provided greater insight on coaching capacity.

We continue to see the benefits of multi-modal learning opportunities provided through our coach development staff nationally and provincially alongside a growth in coaches accessing ongoing learning opportunities through the IRFU active coach badges. Diversified development opportunities have been made available to coaches, both through Gainline and our coach development staff, to reflect the support rugby coaches need to deliver positive experiences to our players.

During this season provincial coach development staff have provided 57 coach education courses across Ireland supporting 1672 coaches to gain awards. Further learning opportunities were offered through 177 in person workshops in conjunction with 10 online modules which have been accessed over 1700 times during the season.

In support of the IRFU tackle behaviours programme coaching, resources have been developed and made accessible to our Club and School coaches through the IRFU active coach badge programme. This season we recorded an active coach badge enrolment of 7840 coaches with over 2200 coaches attaining a bronze badge or above.

We employed the use of Gainline to undertake surveys among the coaching group and there was an overall satisfaction rating above 95% from coaches who took part in development programmes.

Rugby Connect has registered over 8300 coaches during this season providing reports to assist clubs in the validation of coaching members. We have recorded a small increase in female coaching numbers from last season.

Partnerships continue to provide learning opportunities for Irish Rugby coaches with access to national and provincial programmes through Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, World Rugby and the International Olympic Committee to support coaches throughout the game in Ireland.



2024 Under 20 Six Nations Championship:
Ireland U20 vs Italy U20, Ireland Assistant Coach Ian Keatley



Ireland Women's Rugby Under 20 Training Camp, IRFU High Performance Centre, Head Coach Niamh Briggs

PARTICIPATION RUGBY

NON-CONTACT RUGBY

The IRFU Rugby Department redesigned the offerings for Non-Contact Rugby. Websites were redesigned offering benefits and information of where to play the games along with a suite of education offerings. Bespoke Coaching, Refereeing and Playing courses were designed for both Tag and Touch Rugby. Tag and Touch Rugby takes place in the four provinces in Clubs, Universities and Schools. The Clubs have been encouraged to provide non-contact offerings in both versions of the game to cater for the whole community. The IRFU works hand in hand with the Ireland Touch Association to develop the game of Touch Rugby. They were instrumental in help creating the education offerings for the game.

ALDI PLAY RUGBY

The IRFU Aldi Play Rugby programme is a key part of our rugby development pathway. The programme had over 125,000 participants engaged in face-to-face sessions over the course of this season. This programme is driven by the Rugby Department through the provincial staff on the ground and, through their excellent work, the programme is more popular than ever. As part of the Rugby World Cup legacy programme, we released new schools class sessions which allowed rugby to be used in the classroom to drive core subjects such as Maths and Geography. This season hopes to see the return of Teacher Training courses ran through the Department of Education. These courses upskill teachers to deliver their own fun and safe non-contact rugby sessions.

TACKLE BEHAVIOUR TRIAL

The IRFU, following an extensive review and consultation process, agreed to enter into the World Rugby Global Tackle Law behaviour trial in the amateur game for season 23/24 and 24/25. Over the course of the season massive efforts have been undertaken to raise awareness, upskill coaches and players, and create a clear understanding of why we need to have safety at the forefront of everything we do, including through face to face workshops and microlearning modules on Gainline (our online educational hub). More information on the trial and how it was communicated and reviewed can be found on page 50 within the Medical Department report.

MATCH AND EVENT MANAGEMENT

The IRFU Rugby Department created an educational course to cater for the running of matches and events in the provinces. To date 27 participants have attended the course coming from staff and volunteers from the four Provinces.



2024 Guinness Women's Six Nations: Ireland vs Scotland, Ireland's Edel McMahon



Jack Murphy, Jane Neill, Head Coach Willie Faloon, PwC Markets Partner Marie Coady, IRFU President Greg Barrett, Head Coach Niamh Briggs, Evan O'Connell and Kate Flannery

TECHNOLOGY

RugbyConnect is now in its 4th season of operation and has been continually developing in line with user needs. The system is used for all player, coach, referee, and club official registrations. It is also used for game management including competition and game creation, referee allocations, team sheet generations and referee match reports. Coaching qualifications and safeguarding are also captured in the system. Registration for events such as Give it a Try and Tag Rugby events are also done through the system. Moreover, clubs can use an attachments section to upload any important documents that are required for grant submission or projects. This has significantly lessened the administrative burden on volunteers across multiple areas of the game. Developments this season have and are continuing to focus on

streamlining the approval process and referee database to decrease workload for provincial staff and volunteers. QlikSense has been used for a number of years to provide playing numbers. However, further developments in this area have begun this season, with the aim to have accessible visual dashboards that Branch and IRFU staff and volunteers can use to find all their information.

The Development Officers Portal is being successfully used by development officers to capture the details and reach of their programmes. Improvements were made to the system to improve user experience. Significant developments in the visualising of this data are nearing completion with future plans to integrate the data from RugbyConnect with it.

WOMEN'S RUGBY

As evidenced in the recent release of the new strategic plan, accelerating the Women's game is a high priority for the Union. The Union see this as a huge growth area and are committing to investing in all levels of the game. It is fantastic to see a 20% increase on Clubs with female teams in the past year alone, and we now have more women and girls playing than ever before.

The Women's Energia All Ireland League (WAIL) once again consisted of nine teams for the season 2023/24. The league has reverted to a season long competition following the movement of the Interprovincial series to the start of the season again. The WAIL final took place between UL Bohemian and Railway Union, with UL Bohemians winning in what was a very exciting and competitive game. This season also saw a reintroduction of promotion to the WAIL league. Qualifying league teams participated in play offs in April, with Tullow RFC gaining promotion to the Energia All-Ireland League Women's Division League for season 2024/25.

In January the Energia All-Ireland Cup was contested by UL Bohemian and Railway Union with the Limerick Club coming out on top. The Energia All-Ireland plate was contested between Galwegians RFC and Cooke RFC with Galwegians edging the contest. Both finals were held in Coolmine RFC with the Cup final streamed live.

This season has been challenging for clubs with the expansion of the Celtic Challenge and knock on effect of players availability, injury profile and retirements. This did lead to withdrawals from the Cup. Work is currently underway to review the Energia All-Ireland League Women's Division.

The Energia All-Ireland Junior Cup was retained for the second year running by MU Barnhall in a closely contested final with Tuam/Oughterard in Mullingar RFC in January.

The Vodafone Women's Interprovincial Series took place in August and September to help facilitate preparations for players taking part in the inaugural WXV tournament. Leinster won the title beating previous back to back

champions Munster in the final in Virgin Media Park. Once again TG4 & BBC NI provided coverage for all games which again proves very valuable in raising awareness and visibility around the women's game.

The U18's Interprovincial series, sponsored by PwC, was split into two windows this season. The initial three rounds took place alongside the Senior series in August and September. Players then returned to clubs and pathway programmes before reconvening post-Christmas. Semi-finals and finals took place in February prior to selection for the Ireland U18's Six Nations Festival. Leinster and Connacht contested the final in Buccaneers RFC with Connacht crowned the winners.

The U16 & U18's Interprovincial 7's series took place over two weekends in May with qualifying taking place on the first weekend and playoffs taking place on the second. Connacht won the U18 title while Munster won the U16 title.

The Canterbury 'Give it a Try' programme once again took place in the Summer of 2023. 74 clubs participated with 1,305 new players taking part. There was a conversion of approximately 301 participants who went on to become full members of their respective clubs.

As referenced earlier the Aviva Minis programme continues to go from strength to strength but particularly in terms of attracting more girls. An Aviva Mini Girls Festival took place at Edenderry RFC in February with approx. 200 girls at U10 and U12 from across the country participating. The energy from the teams on the day was fantastic with a number of teams commenting on how great it was to meet and see teams from other provinces. A number of the teams on the day went on to play at the Aviva Mini Festival on April 21st.

The X Rugby 7s finals took place on April 24th. This year has seen the date of eligibility align to the Club game, U14's, U16's & U18's. This is to help align the Schools with the Clubs and to encourage those trying rugby for the first time in school to join their local Club. The U18's group have also transitioned to playing on a larger pitch with the U16's and U14's continuing with the cross pitch element.



Energia All-Ireland League: Wicklow RFC vs Galwegians, Galwegians' Aoife Williams



Energia All-Ireland League: Cooke vs UL Bohemian, UL Bohemian's Aisling Stock tackles Kelly McCormill of Cooke



Energia All-Ireland League: Wicklow RFC vs Galwegians, Galwegians' Ellen Connolly and her teammates celebrate after the game

MEN'S ENERGIA ALL IRELAND LEAGUE

The highlight of the season was undoubtedly the Energia AIL finals day which saw both the Men's Div 1A final and the Women's final played as a double header in Aviva Stadium on 28th April. This day showcased the best of rugby across the two matches and saw a huge crowd attend.

Following the very successful end to season 2022-23 which saw Terenure College RFC win their first ever Energia AIL Division 1A title, 2023-24 was hugely competitive and some excellent rugby was played across all five divisions of the AIL. The weather was kinder this season and only two matches out of the 450 league matches were refixed which was a huge testament to those clubs who were able to get their AIL matches played in alternative venues when the weather did threaten fixtures. The final of Division 1A saw Terenure College take on Cork Constitution with Cork Constitution running out as eventual winners. The All Ireland Provincial League Championship saw Ballyclare RFC promoted to the Energia AIL for the first time following in the footsteps of two previous Ulster clubs Instonians and Clogher Valley. Terenure College RFC retained the Energia Bateman Cup in a hard-fought match against Young Munster enabling them to engrave their name on the trophy for the second time.

In March the IRFU broke new ground with an Energia Club International XV travelling to Lisbon to play Portugal A. The Irish team ran out winners 17-20 in a great game and the Portuguese Union are very keen for links to further develop between the two Unions. An exchange of referees between the two Unions is planned.

AIL WINNERS

Women's Division – UL Bohemian RFC
 Division 1A – Cork Constitution FC
 Division 1B – St Marys College RFC
 Division 2A – Nenagh Ormond RFC
 Division 2B – Instonians RFC
 Division 2C - Clogher Valley RFC



Energia All-Ireland League: Clontarf vs Ballynahinch, Ballynahinch's Reuben Crothers and Ryan Wilson tackle Matt D'Arcy of Clontarf



Energia All-Ireland League: UCD vs Shannon, Ben Brownlee of UCD

DOMESTIC REFEREEING

As with previous years this season started with the IRFU National Referee Camp and four provincial pre-season seminars taking place. This season saw the introduction of the tackle height trial which was a big focus area. The National Female Referee day was once again held in the HPC with 16 referees attending. Some good learnings were taken from this day with particular focus on self-management & handling of difficult situations. The day was led by one of our World Rugby accredited educators. During the day the educator ensured the environment was right for all to feel comfortable to contribute and take part. The roll out of the general pre-season physical sessions continued with a good number of domestic referees taking part in the 8 week programme.

Recruitment activity has continued well with numbers across the country growing to 578 at the time of writing. While general referee numbers and availability is still an ongoing challenge, all four provinces have continued to manage new referees through the trainee referee programme very well. This has been vital to ensure we continue to be in a position to appoint referees to meet the needs of the game. In addition to our four Referee Development Managers, we have been fortunate to have an army of volunteers who contribute week in week out both on and off the field at all levels of the game to ensure the smooth running of the game across the country.

As with previous years, we continue to need experienced referees to stay involved in the game and contribute as evaluators, coaches & mentors.

Special mention and acknowledgement to all referees for how they adapted to the tackle height trial. Despite players, coaches & referees needing to get used to this change, a high level of consistency was achieved with positive outcomes expected from the trial.

IRFU referees again officiated at both the girls and boys U18 Six Nations tournaments in Wales & Italy and will be part of the Women's U20 Six Nations in Italy this July. We continue to invest in our development referees with opportunities to referee in Scotland, America & South Africa this season.

As always, education remains a key pillar for the IRFU referee department with further expansion of the education offered on Gainline to be expanded over the summer with the planned introduction of a new evaluator course to be designed and made available to all domestic evaluators.

The department has taken part in a number of exciting projects this season including a multi-sport review with Sport Ireland. Plans are in place to take part in some EU funded research around match officiating across all sports while also being asked to assist some other unions in Europe with the development of their educational programmes.

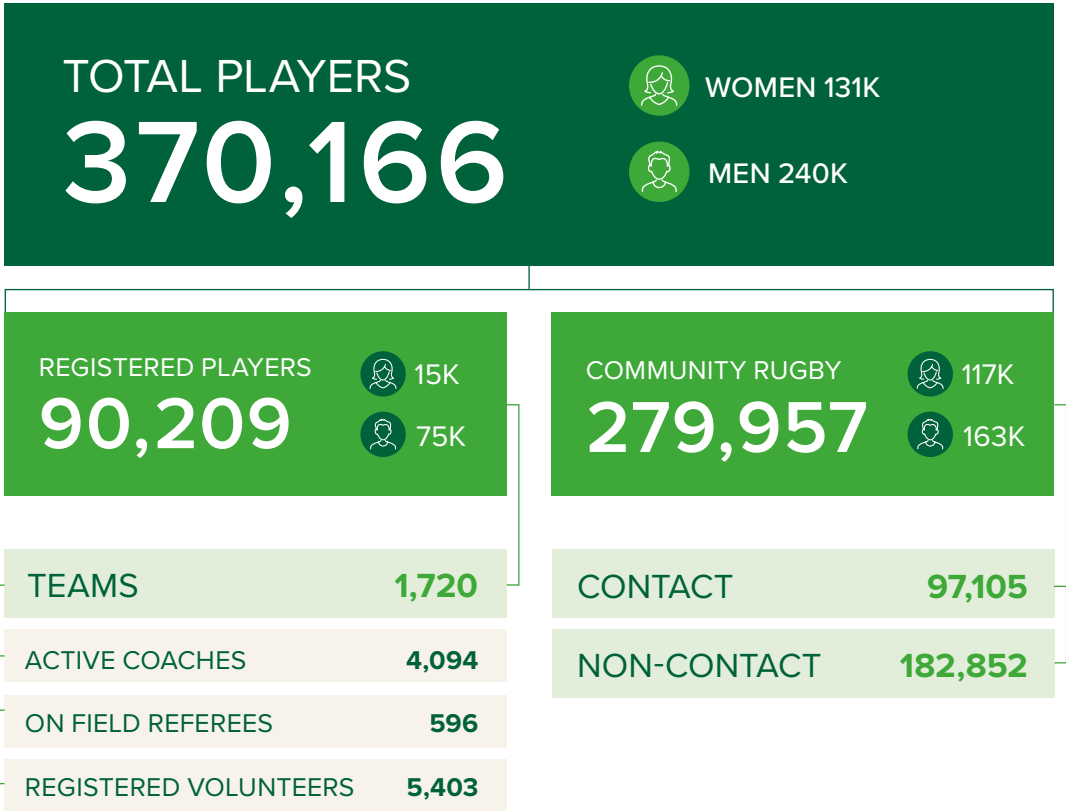
LOOKING AHEAD

As we continue to chart the course for Irish Rugby, we remain dedicated to collaborating closely with our provincial partners, Clubs and Schools to ensure that our initiatives are aligned with the evolving needs of our rugby community.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to another successful season. Together, we will continue to propel rugby in Ireland forward into a bright and promising future.

PARTICIPATION NUMBERS AS OF JULY 2024

Rugby is a game for all, played in many formats including 15s, 7s, touch, tag and mixed ability.



DEFINITIONS

Participation: A ball in hand player – all registered playing members in the current season in any format of the game and all participants who took part in sessions delivered by community rugby officers from May 1st, 2023 – April 30th, 2024.

Community Players: Participants who took part in sessions delivered by community rugby officers from May 1st – April 30th of the current season.

Total Registered Players: Includes active membership categories: Pre-Mini, Mini, Youth, Adult, School, Tag, Give it a Try and Provincial.

Full Onfield Referee: Fully trained onfield referee that has officiated at least one game in the season
Club Teams (15s)*: 15 a side teams that have a team panel set up and at least 4 games played in the season

Active Coaches: Registered coaches who are assigned to a team.

*No game management system for 7s or modified format teams.



2024 Guinness Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Scotland, Ireland's Jamison Gibson-Park

SPIRIT OF RUGBY REPORT

PROMOTING AND PROTECTING THE VALUES OF THE GAME IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR WORK WITHIN IRFU. SEPTEMBER 2023 THE IRFU, GAA AND FAI PLEDGED TO WORK TOGETHER ON AN IMPORTANT JOINT INITIATIVE, 'RESPECT OUR GAME' TO UPHOLD THE VALUES OF SPORT, WHERE RESPECT FOR PLAYERS, OFFICIALS AND VOLUNTEERS REMAINS THE CORNERSTONE OF A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE FOR ALL.

Over three weekends, 6-8th October 2023, 2nd-4th February and 26-28th April 2024, the three governing bodies supported clubs to host events where behaviour on and around the field was as important as the result on the field. IRFU had over 100 of its clubs take part in various initiatives highlighting this important message, as well as a number of provincial events, an impact survey and the provision of branded gear for those involved. It is planned to run this campaign across rugby in the 24-25 season.

The Spirit of Rugby programme, rolled out nationally and deployed within our clubs through the Spirit of Rugby Officers in the provinces, continued to provide training and support for players, coaches and volunteers across a range of topics. Over 9,322 modules were accessed this season, that included blended-learning, using online modules and in-person training sessions. This approach allows greater participation of volunteers with ease of access to information.

IRFU is working with the Irish Centre for Diversity to build an organisation where everyone feels valued and respected. The first part of the work was completed by a staff survey and a game wide survey closed in April 2024. An EDI plan for the whole of the organisation will be put in place based on the assessments and recommendations of the Irish Centre for Diversity before the end of 2024.



2024 Guinness Women's Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Italy, Ireland's Eve Higgins

SAFEGUARDING

The welfare of young people in our game comes first, always! It is our collective duty - at Union, Branch, Club and Schools levels- to ensure we deliver on this responsibility through those directly involved with our age-grade players. Our Child Safeguarding Statement has been developed in line with requirements under the Children First Act 2015 and in Northern Ireland, the Club Framework for Safeguarding Standards, a copy of which can be found on the Safeguarding section of our website. An online reporting tool is available for Club Welfare Officers or for anyone who has a concern about an age-grade player in rugby.

The annual safeguarding audit was completed by 197 clubs that have youth sections and/or vulnerable adults as members. Vetting and training continued with an additional 3240 vets completed this season and 2284 volunteers completing safeguarding in rugby training. The following CPD modules for volunteers were also availed of to assist clubs to maintain a respectful and safe environment in their clubs:

One Good Coach (mental health for young people)	907
Tackling Bullying Behaviour	351
Diversity & Inclusion	1485
Disability Inclusion	610

In addition, the IRFU Youth Council created a Youth Volunteer Award, to encourage 16–24-year-olds into volunteering. The modules give young players a chance to learn about a range of roles in rugby. 121 young volunteers are enrolled, with 17 achieving the bronze award, 8 silver and 4 gold.

ANTI-DOPING

Testing by both Sport Ireland and World Rugby continued throughout the season, with 363 tests completed. 1,821 players and staff completed the IRFU anti-doping education module, that includes World Rugby's Keep Rugby Clean certificate, and 38 face-to-face workshops were held for squads at both national and provincial levels.

IRFU 23/24 ANTI-DOPING FIGURES

Total number of tests 363

TEAM	IN COMPETITION	OUT OF COMPETITION
Mens (15)	20	59
Provincial (including Academy)	18	131
U20s	8	15
Womens (15)	6	11
Womens (7)	5	33
Mens (7)	8	25
AiL	4	0
Age-grade	9	11
TOTAL	78	285

Note:

1: Figures are for number of tests, carried out between 1st June 2023 – 31st May 2024.

2: Increased figures in 2023-24 season to allow for return to pre-Covid testing levels, including User Pays tests.

The IRFU become a member of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower. Pictured (L-R): Aileen Bailey IRFU, Tristan Casson-Rennie HD Sunflower, Lorna Danaher Energia, Minister Anne Rabbitte, David McKay IRFU and Ruth Rabét HD Sunflower



DISABILITY & INCLUSION

There are 51 teams across 4 provinces for players with a disability, 40 tag teams, 10 mixed ability teams and 1 team for players with a visual impairment based in Leinster.

Resources were made available for clubs to increase access to those with a disability as well specific projects to enhance the experience of those involved in coaching and volunteering by provision of resources and videos.

A partnership with St. Michael's House began a work placement initiative that began with a training day at the Aviva Stadium by St. Michael's House. In addition, we used Sport Ireland funding to launch the Sunflower Lanyard scheme with Hidden Disabilities Ireland, supported by Energia, launched by the Minister for State, Minister Rabbitte on 17th April, <https://www.irishrugby.ie/2022/12/05/rugby-communications-boards-to-help-clubs-provide-for-people-with-additional-needs/>

A Mental Health working group produced resources for club, including a club toolkit, posters, factsheets for World Mental Health Day, Oct 10th <https://www.irishrugby.ie/playing-the-game/spirit-of-rugby/health-wellbeing/>



Energia All-Ireland League: UL Bohemian vs Railway Union, Railway fans ahead of the game

LEADERSHIP

Club volunteer training began in April and will run to the start of next season with 22 volunteers across the 4 provinces taking part. A specific 'Female Accelerator' course started in March, with 13 coaches, referees and former international players taking part. The IRFU Women in Rugby network held 5 events through the season, with a chance for women in all roles across the game to share best practice on the development to the game. The Women in Rugby online LinkedIn page was launched in January and tickets went on sale on 8th May for the first ever Women in Rugby conference that will be held on 8th September 2024.

COMMERCIAL AND MARKETING

THE 2023/24 SEASON HAS BEEN ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL SEASON FOR THE COMMERCIAL AND MARKETING FUNCTION OF THE IRFU.

In a challenging environment, the Commercial and Marketing Chair, Michael Collopy, his C&M Committee, and the Executive department have continued to drive revenue & commercial success this season. The IRFU brand has consistently developed brand equity amongst the supporters whilst helping to provide increased value to our family of partners.

The growth in Irish Rugby fans continues to increase year on year. The incredible support seen both at home and abroad for the 2023 Rugby World Cup was truly amazing. Ireland's epic World Cup quarter-final defeat to New Zealand was the most-watched sporting event in the country last year, with almost 1.4 million tuning into Virgin Media One for Johnny Sexton's final game. The group game with South Africa came next with 1.25 million turning on the RTÉ 2 broadcast, with 1.2 million watching Virgin Media's coverage of the World Cup match against Scotland. The Irish supporters continued to show their passion for the Guinness Men's Six Nations championship, with an increase of +35% TV viewership for the Guinness Men's Six Nations and sellout crowds at Aviva Stadium. 3 out of 5 matches peaked at over 1 million viewers while the remaining two matches peaked at more than 965,000.

Our corporate box holders and all the rugby supporters who take up our hospitality offering on match day also make a significant contribution to which we are very grateful.

We sincerely thank all our partners for their continued backing to help support the IRFU. As a not-for-profit National Sports Governing body, the IRFU cannot deliver rugby programmes without our family of partners and sponsors. It is vitally important that this support continues as Irish Rugby aims to continuously improve across all aspect of the game.

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Vodafone CEO Amanda Nelson and her team for their support and elevation of our game.

Canterbury have also continued to provide financial support and outstanding kit for our teams & supporters alike. We are delighted that the Canterbury 'Give It a Try' grassroots girls rugby programme, aimed at recruiting more girls aged 8-14 into the game, continues to build momentum year on year.

We thank Diageo, our official beer partner and title sponsor of both the Men's and Women's Guinness Six Nations.

We also thank and congratulate Energia for their increasing support for rugby in Ireland. As the title sponsor of the Energia All Ireland League, they are at the forefront of supporting Club rugby for which we are enormously grateful. They also have come onboard to support many of our inclusivity initiatives. Their continued support of the 'Your Club Your Country' initiative is also essential in helping raise nearly €1 million for the grassroots game in 2023.

This year, we welcomed two new partners; Bank of Ireland joined as the 'Official Banking Partner' and Harvey Norman as an Official Sponsor of Irish Rugby. We look forward to long standing partnerships into the future with these key players in the Irish market.



Amanda Nelson, Chief Executive of Vodafone Ireland and Kevin Potts Chief Executive of the Irish Rugby Football Union alongside Irish Internationals Craig Casey, Natasja Behan, and Robbie Henshaw

The 'Aldi Play Rugby' initiative goes from strength to strength with over 125,000 boys and girls having taken part in the programme at primary schools' level. We thank Aldi for the renewal of the partnership this season and look forward to continuing this initiative for years to come.

Aon have continually been a proud supporter of the Women's national team. We collectively have high ambitions to grow our women's game year on year.

This year the Guinness Women's Six Nations games were held in the RDS, Virgin Media Park and Kingspan Stadium. We thank and congratulate Leinster, Munster and Ulster for driving record breaking attendances and creating a fantastic experience for fans. Having the team play at different locations around Ireland has helped us to win new fans and offered supporters the opportunity to watch international rugby in their local grounds.

Many congratulations and thanks to PwC on their investment in our age grade system of Men and Women's teams. Supporters across Ireland got behind the Men's U20's team for the 2024 Six Nations tournament with the peak audience at nearly 430,000 for Ireland vs Scotland.

Our Sevens pathway remains an important development programme and promotional platform for our sport, and we would like to thank Tritonlake and David Barry for their continued support across the men and women's teams.

We thank Opel as our official car partner. They have made a substantial and important contribution to the game in Ireland for the men and women's teams.

To all of our remaining partners including Aviva, Lucozade Sport, Aer Lingus, Dove Men + Care, Ballygowan, Eden Park, DHL Express, Gilbert and 3fe, we thank you for your ongoing support.

Our partners are most effective in amplifying their association with Irish rugby with the help and support of our coaches, managers, and players. We thank Andy Farrell, Scott Bemand, Allan Temple-Jones and James Topping & all the international players for their help in delivering our commercial programmes.

COMMUNICATIONS

SEASON 2023/24 FOR THE COMMUNICATIONS FUNCTION HAS BEEN ONE OF GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY. UNDER NEW LEADERSHIP THE TEAM HAVE LOOKED AT WAYS TO FURTHER SUPPORT THE GROWING NEED FOR PROACTIVE AND ROBUST COMMUNICATIONS TO KEEP THE MULTITUDE OF RUGBY STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED AND INFORMED ACROSS THE UNION'S EXPANDING CHANNELS.

There is an increasing focus on collaboration and engagement with all parts of the Union and Provinces to help drive promotion of the game from Club level up. We aspire to deliver more video content and are expanding our team to bring this service inhouse. We aim to deliver more support to all parts of the game through compelling and personal storytelling.

NATIONAL TEAM COMMUNICATION

On the media relations side we had an exceptionally busy year with the Rugby World Cup, WXV tournament in Dubai, Celtic Challenge and Guinness Six Nations tournaments for our Men's and Women's National Teams along with the U20's. Throughout each tournament there was a regular media schedule involving vision access and press conferences, delivered both online and in person.

It is worth noting that at the RWC there were 329 events in all which included press conferences, launches, community engagements, hospital visits and commercial activities throughout the lead in and during the tournament.

There is increasing interest in our Women's National Team however their media exposure still falls far short of that of their male counterparts. A new approach to communications to build an engaged fan base for the women's game will be explored as we head into a RWC year.

This season also saw the airing of "Six Nations: Full Contact" – the first series on Netflix which followed all six teams during the 2023 Guinness Men's Six Nations. It was a challenging project to be part of, but we can appreciate that this international exposure is part of a greater opportunity to win new fans in an increasingly competitive market.

Our sincere thanks to our National Head Coaches Andy Farrell, Scott Bemand & Richie Murphy and all the players, coaches and wider backroom teams for their cooperation in delivering these various interactions throughout the tournaments in such an engaging and professional manner.

DOMESTIC GAME

Domestically we were delighted this year to announce that for the first time ever the Men's and Women's Energia AIL finals would be held as a double header in Aviva Stadium. It proved to be a fantastic occasion with two brilliant games. This year also saw the reintroduction of the Club International for the first time in four years with the Ireland Club XV running out 20-17 winners against a Portugal 'A' side in Lisbon.

We hope to further deepen our connection with Clubs in the coming year as we aim to get stories from the players, coaches, referees and volunteers involved in the game instead of just reporting on the game itself.

We are fortunate that within the Spirit of Rugby area there is an abundance of brilliant initiatives and stories that we can shout about which are referenced in their report. This year we were proud to help communicate about the positive partnerships with St Michael's House and Hidden Disabilities Ireland in particular.

DIGITAL & SOCIAL MEDIA

Across all our channels our social media followers have hit three million mark, a 21% increase in followers, with Instagram our most popular platform and TikTok having the strongest growth. Our content on these channels focuses on offering fans glimpses of life in camp with national teams or events on match day that cannot be found anywhere else. Increasing our content and ensuring it stays relevant is key to growing our audience and potentially generating revenue. We have had over 120 million views on our video content alone. That growth and engagement has helped to deliver better content segmentation, brand value to our sponsors and crucially, timely engagement with the Irish Rugby fan base around the world.

Our website continues to perform well with strong traffic figures across the season. Our use of dedicated hubs for certain areas such as the Energia All-Ireland League and Ireland 7s means we can tailor content to the user and their browsing habits. For example, Club rugby content proves to be the most popular on a Saturday morning and evening around the weekend's fixtures or on a Monday when all results are in; highlights and live games enhance the profile and reach of the league across other channels.

Our ezine subscriber numbers have grown again this season and our adherence to strong GDPR rules combined with relevant content has delivered an extremely high open rate of 35% on average.

This season has seen a move to Microsoft Dynamics to create a single data source across the game including registered players, fans, subscribers and ticket purchasers. This move will enable us to provide more relevant information to our stakeholders in a more efficient manner as well as providing all the latest Irish Rugby news.



The IRFU High Performance Centre: Ireland Head Coach Andy Farrell meets Stevie Mulrooney and presents him with a signed jersey

The Irish Rugby Supporters Club has grown to one of the highest levels in recent years. Members have also benefitted from a number of priority tickets sales for Ireland Men's and Women's internationals and open training sessions as well as ticket competitions.

Good communications is not just externally focused. We worked closely with the HR and IT teams to implement a SharePoint Intranet site for the IRFU staff which operates as a home for useful documents, HR policies and provides regular news stories to keep our growing, multi-site teams up to date with all the happenings in the organisation.

Undoubtedly one of the main highlights for the Communications team this year was the emergence of a new star – not a player but young Stevie Mulrooney who stole the nations hearts at the Ireland v Italy game back in February with his rendition of Ireland's Call.

A special word of thanks to the rugby media for their ongoing efforts to promote the game of rugby through print, broadcast and digital channels. Their efforts in covering games, home and away, is an essential part in creating interest and knowledge around the game and we appreciate the exposure that we get from them.

MEDICAL

LAST YEAR FOR THE FIRST TIME WE PROVIDED AN INDEPTH REPORT COVERING THE ENTIRE MEDICAL AREA FROM PHYSIOTHERAPY TO REHABILITATION TO NUTRITION AND PSYCHOLOGY SERVICES ACROSS ALL OF OUR NATIONAL TEAMS AND SERVICES TO THE DOMESTIC GAME. GIVEN THAT PLAYER WELFARE IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO THE IRFU WE HAVE AGAIN REPORTED EXTENSIVELY ON THE WORK BEING DONE IN ALL AREAS OF THE GAME. OUR MEDICAL DEPARTMENT ARE SUPPORTING OUR PLAYERS TO BE PHYSICALLY ROBUST, MENTALLY RESILIENT AND NUTRITION READY FOR THE DEMANDS OF THE GAME.

RUGBY WORLD CUP

The IRFU established a Medicine & Science group to produce a strategy for 2023 Rugby World Cup. The group oversaw and aligned delivery of this strategy. The support structure had a three pronged approach:

1. Performance Project Group that oversaw the delivery of key squad wide performance impacting projects.
2. Individual Player performance planning delivered in collaboration with the provincial Medicine & Science Support teams
3. National Team Service provider group whose focus was to enable the Support Providers to perform to their optimum.

The overall performance support vision was 'To have the maximum number of players optimally prepared and available to perform throughout the 2023 Rugby World Cup'.

In order to achieve this vision a specific focus was placed on projects covering;

1. **Physical Robustness & Mental resilience:**
heat & cooling, recovery, performance medicine, sleep and psychological support of the whole squad.
2. **Environment:**
The physical environment / culture at Carton House and the High Performance Centre in Ireland and at the RWC base in Tours, France.
3. **Performance Support Providers:**
A structure, systems and processes and service provider specific support (individual and group) to enable support staff to perform to their maximum.

At the RWC we had a very low injury rate with only three key players unavailable for key games. Over the entire RWC period, we had a match injury incidence of 52.1/1,000 playing hours which is close to half the rate of the English Premiership injury surveillance study. 26 (79%) of players had 100% match day availability, 3 players had 80% availability, 3 players had 60% availability and 1 player had 40% availability. No concussion were recorded during the tournament.

PLAYER WELFARE

Tackle Behaviours Trial

Following a thorough community consultation process around tackle behaviours in the domestic game, the IRFU Union Committee agreed to a trial of a lower tackle height. As part of this process the IRFU formally opted in to World Rugby's global trial to lower the tackle height, beginning at the start of the 2023/24 season. The IRFU Medical Department have worked closely with the Rugby Department to implement this trial across all levels of the domestic game. The IRFU Medical Department have produced an information guide and have participated in presentations to key stakeholders in the domestic game, outlining the relevant research in the area of head injuries and the tackle event. This has included preliminary reviews of injury data at the mid-season point and six months into the trial, with view to a more comprehensive review at the end of the first season. The IRFU Medical Department is leading the research aspects of the trial including:

- Ongoing monitoring of injury types and mechanisms, in collaboration with the Irish Rugby Injury Surveillance (IRIS) Project. This will include comparison of pre- and post-trial injury data, across the senior men's and women's club game, and the schoolboy game.
- Video analysis of injury mechanisms, tackles events and game metrics, in collaboration with World Rugby and Lero, the Science Foundation of Ireland Research Centre for Software. This will include coding of pre- and post-trial match video footage, across a representative sample of senior men's and women's, and age-grade boys' and girls' matches. Video analysis will be conducted in line with World Rugby's guidelines to allow inter-study comparisons.
- Stakeholder feedback, in collaboration with the University of Limerick. This will include surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus groups across all key stakeholder groups, including coaches, players, match officials, medics/strength & conditioning and volunteers.

Concussion

The IRFU Medical Department has developed the IRFU Concussion Strategy 2024-2027. The vision of the updated strategy is 'That the risk of concussion is minimised as much as possible, and that all concussions are removed from the field of play appropriately and returned safely'. The previous strategy focussed on recognising concussion and appropriately managing concussion in the acute setting, through the 'Recognise and Remove' protocol. The updated strategy turns the focus to the prevention of concussion through law changes, improving tackle technique and increasing player robustness. A specific focus of the strategy is engagement with coaches and players around reducing the risk of concussion, and should a concussion occur, appropriately managing and rehabilitating players before returning to play.

New updated Guide to Concussion and Graduated Return to Play (GRTP) protocol guidelines were published in June 2023. Significant updates to the GRTP protocol were made to adopt a more proactive approach to the management and rehabilitation of concussion, including a graded return to aerobic fitness, strength, balance, cognitive function, contact skills and rugby performance. The majority of concussions occur in the tackle, so there is now a focus on addressing tackle technique to reduce the risk of subsequent injury. The graded return to contact skills outlined in the GRTP, aligns to the Rugby Department resources on coaching good tackle technique. The IRFU Medical Department provided in-person training on the updated resources in the provinces, in addition to webinars and distributing wallet cards across clubs and schools.

The Long-Term Brain Health group has continued to be active this year with output including:

- Information guide for players exiting the system, including information on promoting long-term brain health and healthy lifestyle habits.
- Summary report of player interviews exploring attitudes to injury, concussion and brain health. Key points of this report have influenced our education strategies, our concussion GRTP protocol and the player exit information guide.

2022 Under-20 Six Nations Championship: Ireland U20 vs Scotland U20, Ireland's Charlie Tector receives medical attention



2023 Rugby World Cup: Ireland vs Scotland, Ireland's James Lowe, Physiotherapist Stephen Mutch and Team Doctor Ciaran Cosgrave



2024 Guinness Women's Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Wales, Ireland's Christy Haney receives medical attention from Ireland National Team Physio Roisin Murphy and Team Doctor Matt Cosgrove

- A concussion tracker dashboard has been created to look longitudinally at a player's concussion history and relevant medical history and assessments.
- Collaborating with University of Pittsburgh Medical Centre (UPMC) and the University of Limerick to review our neurocognitive assessments (ImPACT). Preliminary analyses indicate that length of career and number of concussions do not negatively affect neurocognitive assessment results.
- In-career medical reviews continued this season. The focus of these reviews is on player welfare and not performance, with doctors conducting these at set time-points during a player's career.

Domestic Game Medical Strategy

The IRFU Medical Department are committed to providing appropriate support and guidance to the growing domestic game and have developed a medical strategy considering the varying levels of resources, medical support and qualifications available across the club and school game. The vision of this strategy is 'That all rugby union players, coaches and referees in Ireland are optimally prepared to enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of rugby in a safe environment and are medically supported to repeatedly perform/participate to the level they aspire.' This strategy covers four key areas:

1. People, including the players and stakeholders
2. Environment, including both the physical and cultural environment
3. Structures, systems and process to deliver the vision
4. Research and Discovery, so that all we do is evidence informed

The implementation of this strategy will need to be wide-reaching and suitable for a diverse population, and the IRFU Medical Department will look to develop a provincial medical structure to support the operational delivery of this strategy across the domestic game.

SAFE Rugby Programme

SAFE Rugby – Standard Approach to Field Emergencies in Rugby – now in its 10th season, continues to provide high quality, rugby specific first aid and immediate care courses designed to provide a standardised method of assessment and management of the initial stages of any injury or medical emergency occurring in rugby at all levels of the community and the professional game.

The SAFE Rugby programme is managed by the IRFU Player Welfare Coordinator, Shane Mooney, who oversees a team of SAFE Rugby tutors in four pods covering the four provinces. By the end of July, we will have provided training across all three levels to over 7,400 attendees. During the 2023/24 season we will have completed over 50 individual courses with an expected attendance of approx. 750 participants. Our Level 2 SAFE Rugby Immediate Care in Sport course continues to grow as the demand increases, not just from rugby, but from health professionals from other codes. This season, in conjunction with our provincial teams' medical staff, we provided Irish Heart Foundation accredited Basic Life Support / AED training to 55 of the senior men's players from Munster Rugby and Ulster Rugby, all extremely well received.

During the 2023/24 season, we continued to develop our Sports Taping course. Two Level 2 courses were held in the Aviva Stadium for health professionals. We have developed and trialled a course for our club and schools' coaches and will aim to promote and run a number of them at the start of next season.

The SAFE Rugby team were involved in a number of Concussion and Return to Play workshops held in each province earlier in the season and all of our training courses now include the updated concussion education material. Our expert faculty have continued to provide the pitch side extrication for all home games in Aviva Stadium, working alongside the national and provincial teams' medical staff.



2023 Tiktak Women's Six Nations Championship: Wales vs Ireland

Home Union Player Welfare Group

The IRFU Medical Manager for the domestic game has joined a player welfare group with representatives from the RFU (England), SRU (Scotland) and WRU (Wales), established in 2023. This group meets virtually once a month and have in-person meetings every three months, with each Union taking turns to host. The IRFU Medical Department hosted this group in April 2024 for two days, with one day in the Aviva Stadium and one day in the High Performance Centre. The purpose of this group is:

- To identify priority areas where the four nations can work collaboratively to drive player welfare strategies across the four Unions.
- To share insights and learnings in an open and supportive environment.
- To drive impactful research across the amateur (community/domestic) game and develop evidence-informed policy specific to amateur rugby.

To date, this group have supported research into breast health and pelvic health and have shared resources for the women's game.

In addition, while each Union have their own guidelines for concussion and tackle behaviours, the group have shared insights and expertise during the development of these areas.

ENGAGE – IRFU Rugby Readiness Programme

The IRFU Rugby Readiness and Robustness programme, ENGAGE, was launched in September 2021. ENGAGE is an integrated and structured warm-up programme aimed at enhancing rugby performance and reducing the risk of injury. Coaches can access an interactive module on GAINLINE as part of their 'Active Coach Badge' and to date, over 500 coaches have completed this module. Preliminary results from investigations being conducted in the University of Limerick, show positive feedback from clubs in terms of acceptability, appropriateness and feasibility of the programme. Following one full season of use, there appear to be trends in reducing injuries, in particular hamstring injuries across both the men's and women's game. Focus is now turning to methods of upskilling and supporting coaches in the school game to implement ENGAGE.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

The IRFU Research and Discovery Unit has developed a research strategy, focusing on the value of research to the IRFU and rugby in general. This strategy includes a value assessment of projects, prior to independent review by the IRFU Research Advisory Committee ensuring that research activities are aligned to the IRFU strategic goals. Key projects the IRFU Research and Discovery Unit have developed and supported include;

- Collaboration with Calgary University in the IOC funded multi-centre investigation into the prevention, detection and management of concussion in rugby.
- Collaboration with UPMC and UL to explore recovery from concussion and rehabilitation strategies in the domestic game.
- Partnership with UPMC and UL to investigate changes to baseline neurocognitive function in High Performance Players.
- Supporting a large-scale investigation into concussion and head impact events in the domestic game, in conjunction with NPro headgear.
- Investigating the kinematic and kinetic modelling of the tackle event.
- Investigating women players' experience around tackle coaching, safety, and performance.
- Investigation into the prevalence, severity and performance impact of breast injury and pain in women's rugby.
- Investigating the relationship between training, injury, and match performance using a complex modelling approach.
- Investigating nutritional and energetic considerations of development pathway rugby players looking at low energy availability.

IRFU Research Advisory Committee

The IRFU Research Advisory Committee (established in 2018) provides independent oversight and governance to research activities involving our players and staff across all levels of the game. The committee has an

independent chair and representatives from the fields of health and sport. With significant increases in research activities, the IRFU Research and Discovery Unit first assess the value to the IRFU prior to the Research Advisory Committee review. This ensures that research activities are aligned to the IRFU strategic goals.

To date 87 applications have been reviewed and 68 have been accepted and supported by the IRFU. Three projects are currently in review.

EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Performance Support Programme

The Performance Support Programme (PSP) continues to provide oversight a strategic direction for the integrated delivery of support from all the performance support disciplines (medicine, physiotherapy, athletic performance, nutrition, psychology and analysis). The PSP led the development and delivery of several RWC performance projects (e.g. sleep, environmental acclimation, recovery). The learnings from these projects have been shared with the wider IRFU HP system and have contributed to preparation of the Men's and Women's 7s squads in their planning and preparation for the 2024 Olympic Games. The PSP continues to coordinate integrated player performance planning for players of national interest and drive a series of performance projects. During the past year Phil Glasgow has taken on the role of Head of Performance Support (HoPS) to oversee and coordinate the delivery of the PSP (see below).

Education

The IRFU Medical Department are arranging an in-person study day with the lead doctors and physiotherapists across each programme (national and provincial) to share insights from RWC 2023. This study day is planned for May 2024 and will provide a learning opportunity for all programmes within the High Performance System.

2024 Guinness Women's Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Scotland, Scotland's Caity Mattinson leaves the field with an injury



Gainline

The IRFU Medical Department is committed to upskilling and supporting those providing medical assistance across all levels of the game. There is a designated section on Gainline, just for medical professionals working in rugby in Ireland, with resources available around concussion assessment and management, GRTP protocols, ENGAGE and injury surveillance and management.

In addition, Gainline continues to host our annual concussion education module for referees and the concussion education and ENGAGE modules for coaches. A mandatory concussion education webinar was provided for all school coaches involved in the Junior and Senior Cup ahead of the 2024 School's Cup.

Mentoring Programme

The IRFU mentoring programme continued this year with medical and physiotherapy staff from across the HP system working both as mentors and mentees. Feedback from participants indicate that this initiative has been very worthwhile and has contributed to staff learning and development. The programme will now be expanded to include other performance support disciplines and provide mentoring for new staff.

STAFFING/STRUCTURE

Head of Performance Support

Phil Glasgow was appointed into the new role of Head of Performance Support (HoPS). This post was developed to enhance connection and alignment between coaching and support services and to assist support staff in optimally preparing players for training and competition. The HoPS will work in partnership with colleagues across National and Provincial teams to implement the Performance Support Programme and to provide strategic and operational leadership. Some key areas of focus for the role will be to ensure collaborative and cohesive service delivery to players, lead and manage discipline leads in science and medicine to work in a highly collaborative way, work closely with coaching to assist them to effectively engage with science and medicine staff.

There has also been a major expansion in medical support to our women's senior programme and the pathway. There has also been a reorganisation of the physiotherapy service provision to our 7s programme.

Contractor Panel

The IRFU Medical department offers physiotherapists working across Ireland the opportunity to be included as a contractor within our system. These contractors offer valuable support to our programmes and team medical staff, particularly during busy competition periods. The contractors are provided with opportunities to upskill, engage with ongoing CPD and experience a High Performance environment. A thorough review of this panel was conducted during the 2023/24 season due to the changing structure of programmes within the High Performance environment and to ensure that both the contractors' and the IRFU's needs are being met.

INJURY SURVEILLANCE

High Performance Game

We have produced over 30 reports on injury surveillance and ongoing player management in the professional game. This included central investigations into injury trends as well as specific requests regarding performance questions and opportunities, such as the prevalence of a specific injury. The 4th Professional Rugby Injury and Illness Surveillance Report (2022/23) was distributed across the High Performance system, including the women's game, the 7's programme, and the men's U20s. There was significant growth in the women's pathway during the 2023/24 season, and these data will be included in reports going forward. Team medical staff can also use the injury surveillance dashboard and concussion tracker for real time updates and overviews of their squads.

Domestic Game

The IRFU Medical Department, in conjunction with the provinces, continues to gather injury data across all levels of the domestic game via an online injury reporting system. The numbers using the online reporting system in the 2023/24 season are in line with previous years, indicating continued compliance. The IRFU Medical Department continues to work closely with the Refereeing Department, to monitor instances of suspected/confirmed concussions across the All-Ireland League via an online reporting system.

Irish Rugby Injury Surveillance (IRIS) Project

The Irish Rugby Injury Surveillance (IRIS) Project have published annual season reports in both the domestic men's, women's and school's game since 2017. The IRIS Research Team in the University of Limerick published a 2022/23 season report, detailing injury trends in both the men's and women's club game, and the schools' game. During the 2022/23 season, IRIS expanded school recruitment to include Leinster SCT squads. These reports have been a valuable resource during discussions around lowering the tackle height and addressing tackle behaviours.

Reports for both the 2023/24 club and school game will be available ahead of the 2024/25 season.

In addition to the annual reports, the IRIS research team have published 19 papers in internationally renowned academic journals and have presented at 54 conferences, both nationally and internationally.

THE HIGH PERFORMANCE CENTRE

Medicine and Science services at The High Performance Centre (HPC) have been expanded to include specialist rehabilitation to our players, which can be provided on a residential or day basis. The HPC is a facility with specialist facilities and equipment, where a community of experts across many specialist areas work collaboratively to provide holistic performance impacting care to our players. The services include performance medicine, athletic performance, specialist rehabilitation and psychology to performance nutrition.

PSYCHOLOGY

Mental Wellness Service

In November 2023, the IRFU medical department launched a Mental Wellness Service. The aim of this service is to support the well-being and mental health of national, senior and academy players, coaches and service providers. An external panel of 12 clinical and counselling psychologists has been established to deliver this service across the four provinces. From September to November 2023, six workshops were delivered to national and provincial coaches, service providers and HR personnel detailing the process of accessing the IRFU Mental Wellness Service. An infographic outlining the referral process was also developed and distributed across national and provincial teams. In January 2024, a clinical psychology trainee joined the Mental Wellness Service to provide clinical psychology support on-site at the High Performance Centre to the Women's national teams. To date, across the Union, sixty-four individuals have availed of the Mental Wellness Service.

Mental Performance

In late 2023 and early 2024, an initial consultation process was carried out with academy managers, sport psychologists and other service providers across the provinces to understand the mental performance capacity needs of players in the developmental pathways. This initial needs-analysis was conducted as part of a plan to develop collaborative, aligned and embedded mental performance programme for pathway players.

Systems Approach

As part of an integrated model of delivery (medicine, physiotherapy, athletic performance, nutrition), psychology has contributed to a number of performance project groups including a RWC2023 and Olympics 2024. Psychology has also collaborated with other disciplines to deliver several workshops to national teams that span a range of mental health and mental performance topic areas. In line with best practice, psychology has now been integrated into the multidisciplinary team support of the Women's XV medical team.

NUTRITION

Performance Nutrition Strategic Plan Development

The IRFU Performance Nutrition department have revised their strategic performance plan with objectives aligned to the vision of supporting world leading rugby success now, and in the future. The department aims to deliver a system wide service that is fully integrated, understood, and enjoyed by both players and staff to optimise health, well-being and performance.

Staffing

To align to the organisation's objective of 'continued success now and in the future' the Performance nutrition department have spent the last several months reviewing the men's pathway nutrition provision. Key outcomes of this review were to firstly, ensure players have access to appropriate nutrition provision across the system, and secondly, to ensure the continued alignment between the provincial academies, and the IRFU national programmes.

To support these outcomes, the Ulster Academy nutritionist role will move from part time to full time from the end of the season, meaning all four provinces now have full time nutrition positions across their academy and senior setups.

There has also been the development of a new 'Elite player pathway nutrition lead' role, which Gary Sweeney started in March 2024 to ensure optimal alignment across the provincial and national systems.

For the Women's provision, Emma Brennan now holds the full time position of Performance Nutritionist for the Women's XV's and Pathway.

HR

WE ARE A PEOPLE FOCUSED ORGANISATION & OUR STAFF ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO US. OVER THE PAST YEAR THE HR DEPARTMENT HAS BEEN EXTREMELY BUSY ENSURING THAT ALL OUR STAFF ARE HAPPY AND MOTIVATED TO KEEP DELIVERING FOR OUR TEAMS BOTH ON AND OFF THE PITCH.

The IRFU employ 254 staff across Irish Rugby. These staff are based in IRFU offices on Lansdowne Road, the High Performance Centre, our logistic centre in Naas and some of our staff are based directly in the four Provinces. The organisation is made up of the following departments: Finance, Operations, Communications, Commercial & Marketing, Rugby Development, High Performance, Legal, Ticketing, Strategy & IT and HR. There are staff from seventeen nationalities working within the IRFU, of which 35% are women.

At the IRFU we work hard to ensure we have a world class working environment for our staff group, with a strong people focus. There has been a huge amount of work put into the areas of Staff Wellbeing, Learning & Development & Staff Engagement. Many initiatives have been put in place, ideas for these initiatives came from our three staff groups – Team Huddle (Employee Forum), Mental Health First Aid Group & the People Manager Group.

The IRFU have worked with Great Place to Work for the last five years. This confidential staff survey allows us to receive feedback from staff & inform our HR strategy for the year ahead. For the past five years the IRFU has been named as a 'Best Workplace in Ireland' and we placed 4th overall in the medium



Members of the IRFU team at the Great Place to Work awards

category this year, which is our highest ranking achieved to date. We also learnt in March that the IRFU were accredited as a 'Best Workplaces for Women,' our first year to achieve this accreditation. This is an accreditation that we have been working hard for since this journey began & one of which we are particularly proud. In April, with the results of the recent survey, the IRFU was also certified as a Healthy Place to Work. The Menopause Hub partnered with Great Place to Work to recognise and award those employers that are doing pioneering and groundbreaking work to support menopausal and perimenopausal women at work and we were delighted that the IRFU was a finalist in these awards.

The IRFU have also been working with the Irish Centre for Diversity in Ireland over the last couple of years & have achieved both the bronze & silver awards in that time. With Anne Marie Hughes in place as Head of EDI the work in this space will continue to grow our inclusive working environment. As mentioned in previous reports we were delighted to introduce and support initiatives with St Michael's House and Hidden Disabilities Ireland this year.

We would like to thank our staff for their ongoing support & commitment to the IRFU.



CHARITABLE TRUST

DESPITE THE RETURN TO MORE NORMAL FUNDRAISING EVENTS POST COVID, THIS YEAR HAS PROVEN TO BE A PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING TIME FOR THE CHARITY SECTOR IN IRELAND.

This is very apparent within the domestic and commercial landscape in Ireland, which has led to a noticeable increase in uncertainty and decrease in disposal income. Given the IRFU Charitable Trust depends heavily on the traditional rugby supporter, this has made fundraising difficult to plan and forecast.

Throughout 2023 the Trust continued the restructuring programme it began the previous year and as part of this development we have broadened our number of Trustees to a total of seven ensuring that the Trust continues to perform effectively and as efficiently as possible.

The Management Committee, led by Michael Whelan as Chair, continues the provincial roll out to include all four provinces. This initiative will see a drive across the island of Ireland to develop the Trust's FRIENDS Programme. This means across the full spectrum of this initiative the Trust will engage corporates, Clubs, Schools and individual rugby supporters. We have an ambitious plan to host a Golf Classic in all four provinces during the 2024 calendar year.

The Trust's primary object continues to be supporting and caring for the physical and psychological needs of our 36 seriously injured players. Our national Care Team liaise with the injured players and their families to



Injured player Brendan Glynn with his family

identify their individual needs and ensure that we are always there for them. In the last 12 months we continued to support these former players through mobility initiatives including adapted transportation, home alterations and wheelchairs, as well as physiotherapy, medical and the Trust's Christmas Hamper. Like all sectors very high levels of inflation are impacting on all these initiatives.

We look forward to next season with confidence to strengthen our relationship with all four provinces, our provincial teams, and our partners. We remain committed to working closely and effectively with our long-term partner – the IRFU, to ensure continuity of care for all our seriously injured players and their families.

OBITUARIES

Roly Meates	Former Ireland Coach (1975-77)
Pat Casey	Former Ireland Player (1963-1965, 12 Caps)
Dr Syd Millar CBE	Former Chair of World Rugby (2003-2007), Former Trustee and Past President (1995-96), Former Ireland and British and Irish Lions Player (1958-70, 37 Caps).
Paddy O'Donoghue	Former Ireland Player (1955-1958, 11 Caps)
Sir Anthony O'Reilly	Former Ireland Player (1955-1970, 29 caps), Former Ireland and British and Irish Lions
Ben Gormley	Former IRFU Committee Member (2012-2016), Leinster Branch President (2012/13)
Seamus Byrne	Former Ireland Player (1953-55, 3 Caps)

OFFICE BEARERS AND COMMITTEE



PRESIDENT

Greg Barrett

VICE PRESIDENTS

Declan Madden
John O'Driscoll

HONORARY

TREASURER

Patrick Kennedy

CHAIRPERSON OF MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Niall Rynne

IMMEDIATE

PAST PRESIDENT

John Robinson

IRFU COMMITTEE

Stephen Black

Grainne Carroll

Maeve Carton

Su Carty

Gerry Casey

Michael Collopy

Yvonne Comer

Robert Deacon

Kevin Dinneen

Josephine Feehily

Joanne Geary

Joe McDermott

John McKibbin

Regina Moran

Diane Nixon

Tony O'Beirne

Rachael O'Brien

Mark Orr

Gerry O'Shea

Liam Rattigan

David Ryan

Fiona Steed

Fiona Sweeney

Laura Thompson

WORLD RUGBY

Su Carty

John O'Driscoll

Kevin Potts

SIX NATIONS

Kevin Potts

John O'Driscoll

EPCR

Shane Nolan

URC

Padraig Power

Willie Ruane

LIONS

Tom Grace

Kevin Potts

RUGBY EUROPE

John O'Driscoll

David Nucifora

TRUSTEES

Der Healy

John Hussey

Stephen Hilditch MBE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Kevin Potts

NATIONAL COACHES

Andy Farrell

Scott Bemand

STANDING COMMITTEES SEASON 2023/24

MANAGEMENT

Niall Rynne (Chair)
Patrick Kennedy (Hon. Treasurer)
Greg Barrett (President)
Tony O'Beirne (National Professional Game Board)
Michael Collopy (Commercial & Marketing)
Stephen Black (Rugby Committee)
Kevin Potts (CEO)
Su Carty (Co-option)
John McKibbin (Co-option)

FINANCE

Patrick Kennedy
Gerry Casey
Gerry O'Shea
Tony O'Beirne
John Robinson
Kevin Potts
Thelma O'Driscoll
Maeve Carton
Feargal O'Rourke (Co-option)
Lochlann Quinn (Co-option)

COMMERCIAL AND MARKETING

Michael Collopy
Tony O'Beirne
Niall Rynne
Patrick Kennedy
Liam Rattigan
Yvonne Comer
Laura Thompson
Fiona Sweeney
Padraig Power
Aoife Clarke
Jessica Long
Paul Dean (Co-option)
John Riordan (Co-option)
Peter Breen
Ben Mulligan

NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL GAME BOARD

Tony O'Beirne
Kevin Dinneen (IRFU Comm.)
Eoin Reddan (Former Player)
Nora Stapleton (Former Player)
Michael Kearney (External with Pro game experience)
Nancy Chillingworth (Co-option)
Niall Rynne
Kevin Potts

RUGBY COMMITTEE

Stephen Black
John McKibbin
Yvonne Comer
Gerry O'Shea
Kevin Dinneen
Joe McDermott
Gerry Casey
Spirit Committee
Colin McEntee
Kevin Beggs
Dudley Phillips

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Su Carty
John O'Driscoll
Kevin Potts
Niall Rynne
David Humphreys
Garrett Tubridy

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

Tanya Horgan
Niamh Marshall
John O'Driscoll
Mark Orr

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Greg Barrett
Declan Madden
John O'Driscoll
Patrick Kennedy
Niall Rynne
John Robinson

In compliance with the Governance Code for Sport (Type C Organisation), the Union Committee, its Standing Committees and its various sub-committees have met regularly and in compliance with their respective terms of reference throughout the year since the last Annual Meeting on 28th July 2023. All committees ultimately report into the Union Committee, either directly or through the appropriate Standing Committees. Minutes are taken for all committee meetings recording attendance as appropriate. The Union Committee has met on ten occasions during the year. The Audit and Risk Committee is fulfilling its role as set out in paragraph 2.2(e) of the Governance Code and in compliance with its terms of reference and Schedule I of the Union's Regulations.

2024 Guinness Women's Six Nations Championship:
Ireland vs Scotland, Ireland's Aoife Wafer



2024 Guinness Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Italy, Ireland's James Lowe



2024 Guinness Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Scotland, General view of a scrum

THE IRFU WISHES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE FOLLOWING SPONSORS & SUPPLIERS OF IRISH RUGBY





2024 Guinness Six Nations Championship: Ireland vs Italy, Ireland's Jack Crowley



Irish Rugby Football Union
10-12 Lansdowne Road, Dublin 4
www.irishrugby.ie