



2024/25



CELEBRATING
150 YEARS



ANNUAL
REPORT



CELEBRATING
150 YEARS

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IRFU PRESIDENT'S REPORT

DECLAN MADDEN

AS THE 2024/25 SEASON DRAWS TO A CLOSE, IN THIS SPECIAL 150TH YEAR OF IRISH RUGBY, I WRITE TO YOU FOR THE FINAL TIME IN MY CAPACITY AS PRESIDENT OF THE IRFU.



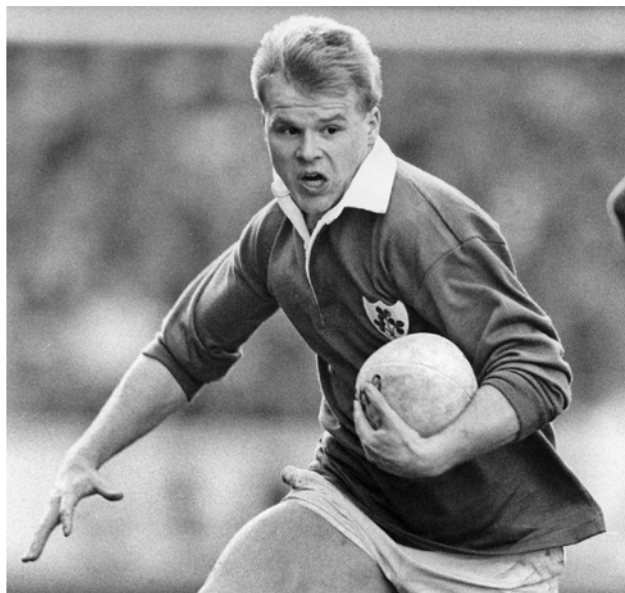
When I took up the office as President last August it was with a sense of trepidation as to the size of the task ahead and the special year I faced. My main thought was, I need to make this work. Now, on reflection, it is with a great sense of pride and relief that we have marked our 150th year in an appropriate and respectful manner. This was made possible thanks to the diligent work and support of so many, in the best traditions of the IRFU.

Over the course of the season we celebrated 150 years of international rugby in Ireland and in doing so we celebrated and championed all that is great about our wonderful sport. There have been many highlights during my term in office, both personal and collective. As the Union's 135th President, it has been a great honour to travel the length and breadth of Ireland over the past 12 months, meeting so many dedicated Club members and making new friends — all of which has reassured me that our grassroots game is in good shape.

My mission was to reinforce the powerful connections that exist between the IRFU, and our Clubs, schools, universities and Provinces. The pride, enthusiasm and love for the game was always visible in the army of volunteers, coaches, players, referees, administrators and supporters that I met. In my travels not once did I meet an issue, the sense of respect for the office was outstanding, the warmth of the welcome and appreciation in every club I visited was unbelievable.

I was amazed at the number of clubs who were also celebrating their 50th, 100th and a small number their 150th, I tried to prioritise all those clubs and attend, in as much as possible, their celebration functions.

The IRFU 150th celebrations have showcased the best of Irish rugby. While there were many more events I hope the following list gives a reflection of the year that was. This special season was launched in September in Kingspan Stadium by the women's team playing Australia. This was followed on the 27th of November by the massively successful 1,600 capacity Gala event in the RDS. The following day the Men's team played Australia in a special 150th celebration game to a full house in the Aviva. In particular I would like to thank Simon Rowe from Canterbury and his team for an outstanding design for the 150 commemorative kit and to Vodafone and Aon for facilitating their logos moving to the sleeve. The jersey was a resounding success, as evidenced by how quickly it sold out each time it went on sale. We had a really special night in January at an event hosted by Dublin University where we acknowledged the role that Trinity played in the events of 150 years ago. At the event we were joined by the RFU committee with whom we celebrated our first ever international game played against England at Kennington Oval in February 1875.



We marked the 50th anniversary of our first international Schools game by hosting a Schools international between Ireland and England last March at our historic and special rugby place at the Mardyke in Cork. That day we also hosted a reunion lunch for the first Schoolboys team that was captained in 1975 by Donal Spring.

We paid tribute once again in Cork, during the pre-match lunch before the Women's Six Nations game against England last April at Virgin Media Park. This special occasion honoured the pioneers of the women's game — past Presidents, Captains, and others who made a lasting impact during the era of the Irish Women's Rugby Football Union (1991–2008). Their contributions were recognised in a memorable and poignant ceremony. Those people were recognised by a special award ceremony in what was quite a memorable and poignant event.

Our Provincial lunches with Club Presidents, Referees and schools were amazing and really highlighted the ongoing need for the IRFU to stay connected with the grassroots. The launch of our special commemorative book in Dubray on Grafton Street was a special night. The book titled 'Together Standing Tall' by John Scally, was a beautifully written, an easy read full of stories of people and events that have been significant over the years. The launch venue was no coincidence, as the first meeting of the Irish Football Union took place two doors away

on 38 Grafton Street! We rounded out the 150th with a lunch at Leinster Cricket Club, Rathmines which was the venue for our first ever home international, played against England, in late 1875. The curtain finally came down on the 20th of June when the British & Irish Lions played Argentina in Aviva Stadium.

The various Club and Community initiatives across the season reinforced the sense of collegiality at all levels of the Game. That sense of collegiality was best illustrated rather poignantly by the Services to Rugby medal presentation ceremony on the day of the Energia All-Ireland League finals day at Aviva Stadium, where 100 volunteers were honoured for their commitment to Irish rugby.

Overall the 150th year of celebration was a great success. It was a time to pause, reflect and pay our respects to all those great people who have gone before us, the wise decisions, the prudent management that has brought us to where we are today. I want to make a special mention of Feargal O'Rourke whose in-depth knowledge of the history of Irish rugby was invaluable considering the memory of that time is well gone. I would like to thank our 150th Working Group, chaired by Paul Dean, and supported by Michael Collopy and Peter Breen and a most active and innovative committee who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the year.



Volunteers are the lifeblood of our game. It is vital that we continue to support and acknowledge all those who give so much to the Game and who instil a lifelong love and connection across our Clubs and Schools. The Domestic Game for men and women, boys and girls, continues to thrive and there is a huge amount of playing and coaching talent in our country. It is vital that we continue to invest in our people, our volunteers, as well as in our facilities. This investment is essential to the continuance of our thriving amateur men's and women's game.

I have greatly enjoyed representing the IRFU at home and abroad, representing a diverse and caring organisation that strives for excellence. I was always conscious of my responsibility to be the best I could be and to represent the IRFU with a sense of humanity always conscious of the burden of respect that our values place on us. I would like to thank all those who made my year in office such an enjoyable experience and who displayed such warmth and hospitality across my term.

My thanks to the IRFU staff across the High Performance and Administrative sections of the organisation for their hard work in helping the Game grow. In particular I would like to thank our CEO Kevin Potts for his ongoing support, and Louise Hart, Ellen Hanley and Eugenie Thornton who at all times went over and above to make my year as enjoyable and as easy as possible.

To my colleagues and friends on the various committees who work tirelessly for the advancement of the Game, thank you for your efforts. I would like to thank my fellow officers for their support particularly my vice presidents John O'Driscoll and Tony O'Beirne, and Niall Rynne, Patrick Kennedy and Greg Barrett for their help and support and my committee members who assisted selflessly and represented me at functions that I was unable to attend.

In thanking my fellow committee, I am conscious that they also have spouses and partners without whose support it would be impossible to carry out their various functions in the Union. I want to thank those partners for allowing our members the time and space to contribute as they do to the IRFU. Our committee members are volunteers giving freely and generously of their time, it is really offensive when our

committee people are branded on social media as ‘blazers’ availing of freebies etc. These comments are ill-informed and hurtful to our members and their families.

I want to acknowledge and thank the four provinces and particularly their Presidents; Declan Gardiner, Laurence Roche, Brendan Foley and Jimmy Staunton for their courtesy and hospitality on my visits to Aviva Stadium, Kingspan, Thomond Park and Dexcom.

We are privileged to have such outstanding players and coaches representing the country at such a consistently high level and my congratulations to Men’s Head Coach Andy Farrell, interim Head Coach Simon Easterby, Captain Caelan Doris and all the players and backroom team on a job well done.

Andy’s appointment by the British & Irish Lions was a most deserving honour and is testament to his incredible knowledge and leadership. We wish Andy well in his sojourn with the Lions in Australia. While it was disappointing to lose to New Zealand in the first of our Autumn Nations Series games, however winning three of our four games was a satisfactory result. Under the leadership of Simon, the Guinness Six Nations delivered our 14th Triple Crown and while we won four of our five games we still only finished third in the championship. Paul O’Connell is taking the team on the summer tour to Georgia and Portugal and we will have in all this season played 11 Men’s test matches. As I write the games in Georgia and Portugal remain to be played. Hopefully we will win both and many thanks to Andy, Simon and Paul for maintaining a high level of consistency in spite of the disruption to our management team.

The Women’s National Team has made significant strides forward and again achieved a third place finish in the Guinness Womens Six Nations. We unfortunately lost Erin King and Dorothy Wall to serious injuries, and although hampered by this the third place finish was a satisfactory result. The terrific performance in WXV1 in Canada, highlighted by victory over the Black Ferns, demonstrated the team’s potential, growing confidence and improving skill-sets as we look forward to the 2025 Women’s Rugby World Cup later this year in England. Our Head Coach Scott Bemand is building greater depth in the panel and we wish him and the squad the very best of luck for what we hope will be a successful Rugby World Cup tournament.

The Women’s game is in growth mode thanks to our clubs up and down the country supporting and establishing women’s teams. While the numbers are growing that growth is still fragile and needs to be nurtured and accommodated within the club structure. I commend our clubs for investing in facilities to accommodate the women’s game. I wish Lynne Cantwell well in her role as Head of Women’s Strategy as she puts in place plans to build a sustainable league and women’s structures.

The Under-20 Men’s team, in the 20th year of sponsorship by PwC, had a difficult Six Nations with a number of key players unavailable through injury. However, coach Neil Doak continues to provide talented young players with the opportunity to progress and we look forward to seeing these future stars continue to develop with their provinces and hopefully in time progress to the national team. The World Rugby U20 Championship commences at the end of June and I wish Neil and his squad well as they travel to Italy to compete in this most important development competition.

The top Divisions of the Energia All-Ireland Leagues concluded in an exciting crescendo at Aviva Stadium in late April where an exciting double-header saw UL Bohemian (Women) and Clontarf (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 the bedrock of our game 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.

I would like to mention and thank our referees who provide our game with an invaluable service. Respect for our referees is paramount, and this part of our values must be upheld both in our amateur and professional game. With continuing law changes etc it is not easy for referees, who at the end of the day are only human. They must be supported and encouraged and respected - without them we would have no game.

As the 2024/25 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.



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, who support our clubs and help to grow the game in Ireland.

My thanks go to the players, coaches, club members, media, referees and others who promote and work so hard to deliver the game of rugby football in Ireland throughout the year.

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.

To John O'Driscoll, I wish you the very best of luck as President of the IRFU next season. We will approach the years ahead with high hopes and as we reflect on a proud history, we look forward with confidence to an even brighter future.

When I look back on my long association in the game, the over-arching themes are one of friendship and community and a game that keeps giving back more than it gets. I would

especially like to pay tribute to Garryowen FC for their support and encouragement over the years. I have been honoured to follow in the footsteps of W.L. Stokes, Jack Macauley, JM O'Sullivan, James Flynn, Dermot G O'Donovan, Kevin Quilligan, and his son John Quilligan, all former IRFU Presidents from this wonderful club. It has been an honour and a privilege to serve the IRFU over the last 12 years, 10 of those years as an officer of the Union.

Finally, to my wife Gerardine, our children, Deirdre and David, my daughter-in-law Caitriona, our grandchildren Emily and Ben and my wider friends and family I would like to acknowledge their unconditional support over the years of being involved in rugby at all levels. Gerardine has been by my side throughout the year and I am especially grateful for her companionship, support and understanding.

In closing, thank you once more for making it a year to remember.

Yours in rugby,

DECLAN MADDEN
President, IRFU 2024/25

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

KEVIN POTTS

AS WE CELEBRATE 150 YEARS OF IRISH RUGBY, IT IS A TIME TO BOTH REFLECT ON OUR REMARKABLE JOURNEY AND TO LOOK FORWARD WITH CONFIDENCE AND AMBITION.



I am pleased to report that rugby in Ireland is in a strong position. More people are playing, watching, and supporting the game than ever before, and our standing on the global stage continues to be strong. Our 150th anniversary year has been an opportunity to showcase the depth of our community, the strength of our teams, and the pride of people across the island of Ireland. As part of our 150th anniversary celebrations, we organised a range of initiatives to celebrate our rich heritage. As our President said so eloquently, the theme of the IRFU150 was *'a celebration of the countless volunteers, referees, administrators, players, and coaches whose vision, determination and courage, through the ages, have taken us to this special time in our history'*.

The IRFU 150 Working Group initiated community events across the provinces, held special celebratory international fixtures involving both our Men's and Women's Senior teams against Australia and a gala dinner in November which was a very special occasion. These celebrations culminated in a truly historic event: the first ever British & Irish Lions match on Irish soil, when the Lions faced Argentina at a packed Aviva Stadium in June. It was a landmark moment, not just for Irish Rugby, but for Irish sport.

Last year saw the formal release of our **Strategic Plan for Rugby in Ireland 2024–2028: Inspire, Connect, Thrive**. Built around four core pillars—Great Rugby Experiences, High-Performance Ambition – “Winning Teams”, Accelerating the Women's Game, and Inspiring Our Fans—the plan is both ambitious and grounded in the values of Respect, Integrity, Inclusivity, Fun, and Excellence. Our steadfast commitment to player welfare remains at the centre of everything we do, and I am pleased to say there is a report on the progress of the strategy on page 12.

Irish Rugby's international standing remains exceptionally strong. One of the undoubted personal highlights of my year was being in Durban for Ciarán Frawley's last second drop goal in the second test against South Africa, securing a magnificent win for Ireland against the World Champions in their back yard.

The Men's XV opened our Autumn Nation Series with a fiercely contested battle against New Zealand, and we look forward to meeting them again in Chicago in November for what will surely be another epic encounter. A special celebratory fixture that marked the IRFU's 150th anniversary rounded out our November internationals when we welcomed Australia to Aviva Stadium for a truly competitive test match, with Ireland gaining a narrow victory by 22-19.



While we did not retain our Guinness Men's Six Nations title this year, securing the Triple Crown is still a significant achievement and a testament to our continued high standards. Something that years ago would have been hugely celebrated in Irish Rugby circles, serves to remind us of how far we have come. Our Men's National Team continue to be one of the best in the world, currently sitting at third in the world rankings. Our players, coaches, and support teams continue to set world-class standards on and off the pitch, and we remain the envy of many rugby nations. I would also like to congratulate Leinster on winning the United Rugby Championship this season. They showed outstanding form in the league all year and winning the title was thoroughly deserved.

We also celebrated major milestones across the Women's game. Under Head Coach Scott Bemand, our Women's XV have continued to build and opened our 150th celebrations with an emphatic victory over Australia in Belfast last September before heading to the WXV1 tournament in Vancouver and pulling off a stunning win in their opening game against the reigning World Champions, the Black Ferns. We again finished third in the Guinness Women's Six Nations and have climbed to 5th place in the World rankings, starting the season as 10th. This reflects the great strides made by the squad this season and we look forward to the Rugby World Cup in August with confidence and wish Scott the players and team management every success.

We are continuing to increase our investment in all parts of the Women's game, with a total spend of €8.3m last season, €2.6m more than the prior year and our investment is expected to reach €9.5m this year. We are all hugely excited about the upcoming Rugby World Cup in England, and I expect that this will be a transformational moment for women's rugby. The acceleration of the women's game is a key pillar of our strategy, and I was delighted to welcome Lynne Cantwell as Head of Women's Strategy in January. You can read more about the work Lynne is doing in her report on page 42.

Domestically, the game continues to grow in strength and visibility. Energia All-Ireland League Men's and Women's Divisions delivered memorable double-header finals at the Aviva Stadium, with Clontarf and UL Bohemian crowned champions in two incredibly exciting finals that were a superb advertisement for Irish Club rugby.

The Leagues have proven to be a wonderful showcase of our club game. We are committed to increasing the exposure for these competitions as a key element in spreading the rugby message into communities throughout Ireland.

Financial sustainability is one of the biggest challenges facing the game and it is a top priority for World Rugby and our fellow High-Performance Unions. We are all working collaboratively with World Rugby on a number of financial sustainability initiatives, including the RWC financial model. It is vital that participation in Rugby World Cups does not continue to have such a negative financial impact on participating unions. As the pinnacle event of our sport, Rugby World Cups bring so much joy to players and fans alike, so it is imperative that solutions are found to address the impact of the current financial model.

The IRFU continues to investigate new sources of revenue to support our ambitious targets for the game but we are equally mindful of the need to constantly review our cost base. We, together with our Provinces, are currently working with Portas, one of the leading management consultancies dedicated to sport, to identify efficiencies across the organisations. This will ensure we continue to invest in a financially sustainable manner, which, in turn, will allow us to deliver on our strategic priorities.





While our cost base is currently outstripping our revenues, we are fortunate to have a strong balance sheet including Cash advances for ten-year tickets and our long-term property and stadia investments. This enables the Union to protect the long-term future of the game and absorb any unexpected shocks such as Covid etc. I have stated before that we must live within our means and ensure the long-term financial viability of Irish rugby as a whole, and that we may not be able to continue to do everything we currently do. The current financial landscape has now required difficult and painful decisions.

One such decision was the discontinuation of the Men's Sevens programme after the Paris Olympic cycle. This was a difficult decision which followed reviews conducted by World Rugby and an internal IRFU-commissioned review conducted by Portas. The Union concluded that the Men's Sevens programme did not sufficiently contribute as a development pathway for the 15s game and identified the current academy structures within the provinces, as offering greater potential return on investment for the Men's development pathway. I know this was difficult for the players

and staff involved and we have been working with them together with Rugby Players Ireland to help them transition to other opportunities. Ultimately, this decision reflected the financially straitened circumstances which we face, and the need to ensure we prioritise activities which align to our strategic priorities

It is my privilege to be Chief Executive of Irish Rugby in this special year. The 2024/25 season has given us much to be proud of—on the pitch, in our communities, and in our future planning. There have been some highs and some lows, but we finish this year in a position of strength, ready for the next chapter. We will continue to work extremely hard together with our fellow Unions and our Provinces, on the challenges that face our game. It remains our mission to continue to inspire our players and fans. Change is never easy, but it is through our collective resolve, shared purpose, and love of the game that we will continue to build a stronger, more sustainable future for the game we love.

Yours in rugby,

KEVIN POTTS
Chief Executive

UPDATE ON RUGBY IN IRELAND STRATEGIC PLAN 2024 – 2028

IN JUNE 2024, THE IRFU LAUNCHED AN AMBITIOUS FOUR-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RUGBY IN IRELAND (2024 – 2028).

This plan defines our vision for the future of the game, how we intend to continue to develop the game, embrace opportunities and tackle challenges over the next four years. As the first year of the strategy draws to a close, we are seeing meaningful momentum and clear progress across our four strategic pillars.

Our vision to 'Inspire, Connect and Thrive' through rugby is built on four key strategic priorities:

- Delivering Great Rugby Experiences (A Thriving Grassroots Game)
- Driving our High-Performance Ambition (Winning Teams)
- Accelerating the Development of the Women's Game
- Inspiring Our Fans

To support this work, the Union has established its first dedicated reporting function to actively track progress, assess impact and manage risks with greater visibility and accountability.



A THRIVING GRASSROOTS GAME:

1. DELIVERING GREAT RUGBY EXPERIENCES (A THRIVING GRASSROOTS GAME):

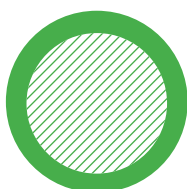


Player participation is up by
9% to 98k,
surpassing year 1 target of **94k.**

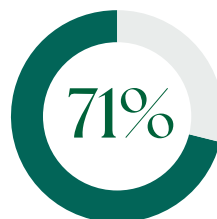


Women's player participation is
up by 17%,
surpassing year 1 target.

Completed a **rugby-wide coach compliancy project**, ensuring **all coaches** actively coaching underage or vulnerable adult players **are safeguarded**



17% of new referees
this season are
female, **surpassing**
the 10% target.



71% of clubs have a
trained medic on **Gainline**
(online education platform),
surpassing the year 1 **target**
of **50%.**



14 clubs
were granted a
facilities grant,
surpassing
the 10- club target.



91% of members
(players, coaches, match
and club officials) are either
very satisfied or **satisfied**
with being involved in their
role in rugby)

Player Welfare is of paramount importance to Irish Rugby and the Provinces, and we are constantly reviewing safety protocols for all players. Since the launch of our Strategic Plan, Year 1 and Year 2 of the Tackle Behaviour Trial complete. No other player welfare initiative in

the IRFU to date has had such a positive impact. Since the trial, concussion rates have been reduced by 50% in Year 1 and 43% in Year 2, (compared to pre-trial) outlining major progress and success.

WINNING TEAMS:

2. DRIVING OUR HIGH PERFORMANCE AMBITION

MEN'S:

- **Triple Crown winners** in the 2025 Guinness Men's Six Nations (4 wins from 5)
- **16 Irish players** named in the 2025 British & Irish Lions squad together with **11 coaches and management**
- **5 new caps** earned across Autumn Nations Series 2024 and the 2025 Guinness Men's Six Nations.
- **3 players earned senior caps** following the Emerging Ireland tour to South Africa
- Leinster **crowned winners** of the 2025 United Rugby Championship

WOMEN'S:

- **World Ranking rose** from 10th (Sep 2024) to 5th (Jun 2025).
- **3rd place finish** in Guinness Women's Six Nations.
- **7 new caps** across the WXV 1 2024 and 2025 Guinness Women's Six Nations.
- **2nd place** in WXV1, defeating reigning World Champions New Zealand.
- Celtic Challenge:
 - 2023/24: 14 games, 31 Six Nations players, 3 debut caps via the competition.
 - 2024/25: 20 games, 34 Six Nations players, 2 debut caps progressed via Celtic Challenge.
- Women's National Talent Squad (WNTS) grew from 53 players at inception in 2023 to 80 by 2025 — a **50% increase in under two years.**

3. ACCELERATING THE WOMEN'S GAME:

- We saw **record-level attendance** at both Guinness Women's Six Nations games, with 7,754 fans at Ireland v England
- Through engaging digital content and campaigns we have seen significant **increases in ticket sales** for the women's game
- Began **Women's Adult Club Competition Review** June 2025
- Launched the **Women's Strategy** in July 2025
- Furthered developed the four Provincial Roadmap Project which journeys with the provinces towards the **first semi-professional women's programmes.**
- Established **Women's Medical Strategy Committee** aiming to reduce the data gap about the female player May 2025.
- Established Former International Player network to engage on **future initiatives** in the game April 2025.

We remain committed to transparency and accountability as this strategic journey continues. Progress against the plan will be reviewed and reported annually, ensuring stakeholders are kept informed throughout the life of the 2024 – 2028 strategy.

4. INSPIRING OUR FANS

OPTIMISING SPONSORSHIP + BROADCAST:

- We have agreed in principle, a **new free to air TV deal** for 6 Nations from next season through to 2029, creating the platform for us to continue to inspire the country.
- We continue to **evolve the broadcast product** as we look to captivate the next generation of Irish Rugby fans.
- Our Ireland vs New Zealand, November 2025 game; 'The Rematch' is sold out & is on course to **beat the forecasted budget**, supporting our ambition to deepen the footprint of Irish Rugby in the US as we look forward to RWC 2031.

EMPOWERING OUR FANS:

- We achieved a **record breaking sell out season** with x6 Ireland home men's games sold out in the 24/25 season & our hospitality programme delivered over €500,000 - more than ever before.
- We achieved a **record-breaking attendance** at our Women's Guinness 6 Nations game vs England.
- We have launched **Project Thrive** in conjunction with the provinces to further maximise and future proof our fundamental revenue streams, while unlocking new opportunities.

EVOLVE & BUILD OUR CONNECTION'

- Through our in-house content team, we continue to **deepen our connection with fans** both in Ireland and around the world. By capturing behind-the-scenes moments and authentic in-camp stories, we aim to **bring supporters closer to the players**—helping fans feel more connected, more engaged, and more invested in the journey of Irish Rugby.

INSPIRE, CONNECT & ENGAGE:

- In line with our ambitions to use modern platforms to connect with and inspire our participants, we launched **Irish Rugby's first-ever streaming platform** (IrishRugby+) in August 2024. This platform focuses on promoting and publicising the Domestic Game, streaming as many Energia All-Ireland League fixtures as possible and has over 30,000 registered users to date.
- IrishRugby Grassroots Instagram account **exceeded Year 1 target** of 10k followers (11.3K in first 9 months).

150 REPORT

PETER BREEN

LIKE ANY IDEA IT BEGAN WITH A BLANK PAGE. AN OPEN CANVAS WITH AN INITIAL OVERARCHING OBJECTIVE AROUND HOW BEST THE IRFU COULD MARK 150 YEARS OF RUGBY IN IRELAND.

For a dynamic organisation with local and international reach – and with multiple stakeholders - this was an exciting challenge.

Following the first meeting of the IRFU 150 Working Group in Autumn 2022, a blueprint for implementing a meaningful calendar of events for the men's and women's game was developed with a focus on championing the story of Irish rugby across a time of great change in Irish society.

After much discussion, a list of objectives were approved which would become the north star on which all of our events are based. These were:

- Celebrate the past, frame the present and look to the future of Irish rugby.
- Create a calendar of events that brings together the Irish Rugby community to deliver world-class, memorable and inclusive occasions for all.
- Inspire future generations to participate at all levels.
- Continue to drive the IRFU brand.

From then on, we set about the task of establishing a brand identity, something vibrant and modern which offered a subtle throwback to the past. With thanks to our long-term kit partners, Canterbury of New Zealand, the IRFU 150 brand logo evolved for the 2024/25 across all internal and external communications and as a physical manifestation on all IRFU jerseys and merchandise.

Then we set about the task of meeting with a number of stakeholders and departments to get a sense of their mid to long term plans and initiatives.

Once the internal communications element was completed, the IRFU sponsors and other external stakeholders were engaged as a defined Calendar of Events emerged with the IRFU 150th season kicking off in Belfast with the Ireland Women's team defeating Australia in September.

The events came thick and fast with the re-named IRFU 150th 'A' Interprovincial series as well as the launch of 'Together Standing Tall', the official story of 150 years of international rugby in Ireland, in October 2024, skilfully written by John Scally.

All roads would then lead to Dublin for two sold-out events taking place in late November. The IRFU 150 Gala saw Ireland's Grand Slam winning captains honoured at a 1600 capacity event at the RDS Dublin on the eve of the 150 match against Australia with a series of musical and entertainment acts entertaining the huge crowd. The IRFU Charitable Trust, as the official charity partner of the season, were the chief beneficiaries to the tune of €70,000 on the night.

To cap off a busy 24 hours, the specially commissioned Ireland jersey also launched that Friday and it too sold out in no time with the traditional design capturing the hearts and minds of supporters across Ireland and beyond.

There was barely time to catch our collective breaths across the New Year as plans accelerated for a Late Late Show special on RTE's flagship and longest-running talk show presenting an opportunity to hear from male and female participants including Ireland Head Coach Andy Farrell. And on the eve of Ireland's Guinness Six Nations clash with England, a very special event was held in Dublin University FC alongside the RFU committee and assembled guests to mark the long-standing ties between the IRFU and Trinity College Dublin.



Collaboration and collegiality were other central themes throughout the 150th season and this was once again demonstrated through a successful partnership with An Post whereby an IRFU 150 branded postmark was delivered across one million homes and businesses to mark the celebrations. In February 2025, four special stamps were commissioned featuring Ireland internationals Beibhinn Parsons and Josh van der Flier and youth players Charlotte Fleming and Sam Kidd.

On 15th February 2025, 150 years to the day from that first Men's international against England, we invited the new parents of Ireland to nominate babies born on that date to receive a gift of their first Rugby kit in an initiative which may well inspire the next generation to pick up a ball.

As Spring rolled in the Ireland Universities welcomed their French counterparts to a fixture in Queen's University in Belfast with the hosts winning 25-22. We launched a drive for the Clubs and Schools of Ireland to nominate a total of 100 worthy recipients of the IRFU Services to Rugby medal with a poignant reception taking place ahead of the Energia All-Ireland League finals at Aviva Stadium in the last weekend of April.

We invited supporters to embark on an unforgettable journey through the sport's rich heritage. Thanks to the innovative storytelling of Imvizar, fans had the chance to immerse themselves in the moments that have defined generations of Irish Rugby legends at Ireland's Guinness Six Nations clash with France.

This season also marked the 50th anniversary of the inaugural Ireland Schools match (which took place against England to mark the IRFU's centenary in 1975) and a fixture was held in University College Cork RFC to mark the milestone, with the Ireland team coming from a heavy half-time deficit to beat England Schools 22-17.

To reinforce the importance of Community rugby, the IRFU invited Clubs to open their doors with a themed 'Rugby in the Community – Club 150 Day', a fantastic opportunity to showcase the grassroots game and the spirit of rugby in the Community. This initiative invited Clubs to connect with new and existing members, invite local representatives, schools, sports partnerships, or club sponsors to show them what their club offers for a prize.

The 150 Magic Moments series was focused on bringing the past glories across all aspects of Irish Rugby to life to a younger generation via Instagram and TikTok channels. In all, the series generated 3.4 million views across Irish Rugby's Instagram and TikTok accounts during the 2024/25 season. On Instagram, engagement has been particularly high through the use of our bespoke Magic Moments photo and video carousel, designed with the IRFU 150 logo and branding. 2.3 million of the Magic Moments series views have been on Instagram, with the content generating an average of 5,500 likes per post. On TikTok, 1 million people have watched a Magic Moments video so far, and the content has generated an average of 3,900 likes per video which is a little above our average of 3,800 on the platform. On Instagram, there have been 106,000 interactions (comments, likes and shares) with Magic Moment posts.

The closing events of the Calendar included the hosting of provincial lunches to honour the Clubs of Ireland with a specially commissioned 150 pennant as a collective acknowledgment of the Clubs contribution to the game. The Mayor of Cork marked the City's contribution to Irish rugby with an event in City Hall, while the changing face of society and Rugby's positive role in highlighting inclusivity was evident at a number of Festivals to celebrate Pride month in June.

The IRFU Charitable Trust Golf Cup in June celebrated the hosting of four provincial charity tournaments across the season.

The IRFU 150 celebrations fittingly culminated in an historic encounter, where Andy Farrell's British & Irish Lions hosted Argentina at Aviva Stadium which marked the Lions' first ever game played in Ireland. This ensured the perfect footnote to what was a memorable campaign.

As the IRFU 150th season draws to a close it would be remiss not to publicly acknowledge the leadership of the Working Group.

To IRFU Presidents, firstly Greg Barrett and then Declan Madden, thanks for their support and leadership throughout the course of the Project. As President throughout this milestone season Declan was a leading figurehead across

all of our initiatives over the course of the 150th celebrations and his support throughout was hugely appreciated. The wider IRFU senior management, directors and staff - both in our own HQ and across all four provinces - each played a role in the delivery of our events and initiatives. Without their support, these initiatives simply would not have happened.

As Chair, Paul Dean committed a huge amount of time and dedication to the Project and his steady hand ensured the smooth delivery of the initiatives, while the wider Working Group played active roles in ensuring that all ideas were discussed and delivered to the highest standards. The Working Group worked responsibly to heighten awareness of the 150th project which was a targeted profit neutral exercise to the IRFU, with profits generated from the Gala supporting the other initiatives throughout the season.

Our thanks to all our partners for their support in showcasing such a significant season in Irish Rugby's history. And the final thanks to the Irish supporters and media, at home and abroad, for engaging across each of our initiatives.

Our over-arching aim was to deliver a memorable series of events, but to do so in a meaningful way which would have a positive legacy for the game in Ireland. As the 2024/25 season draws to a close, hopefully we achieved that and brought a few smiles along the way.

IRFU 150 Mission Statement: Throughout the 2024/25 season, the IRFU will mark the 150th anniversary of Ireland's inaugural international rugby match with a calendar of events to celebrate the game of rugby in Ireland.

IRFU 150 Working Group: Paul Dean (Chair), Niall Rynne, Declan Madden, Greg Barrett, Michael Collopy, Yvonne Comer, Feargal O'Rourke, Rory Best, Ciara Griffin, Rob Kearney, Pdraig Power, Peter Breen, Aoife Clarke, Jessica Long, Ben Mulligan & Garrett Tubridy.

PETER BREEN
IRFU 150 Project Manager

HIGH PERFORMANCE REPORT

DAVID HUMPHREYS

IN THE EVER-EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF PROFESSIONAL RUGBY UNION, IRISH RUGBY CAN REFLECT ON A CHALLENGING YEAR WITH A CLEAR MESSAGE THAT A LOT OF GOOD WORK HAS BEEN DONE, BUT EVEN HIGHER STANDARDS WILL BE REQUIRED IN THE 2025/26 SEASON.

Professional sport, by its very nature, is the pursuit and delivery of elite performance standards and winning teams. To keep delivering at a high level, we need a unified IRFU High Performance system where all players, coaches, and staff are aligned and working toward the same goals. I would like to thank all those involved in the HP department for their hard work across the season. It is a huge honour to work for the IRFU and with that in mind, I am pleased to deliver my first High Performance report.



SENIOR MEN

SUMMER TOUR TO SOUTH AFRICA 2024

The Summer tour to South Africa marked an exciting challenge for the Men's National Team as they faced the Springboks in two test matches on their home turf for the first time after their Rugby World Cup win in Paris.

In the first test of the series, South Africa edged Ireland 27–20 at Loftus Versfeld in Pretoria. Kurt-Lee Arendse's early try, and Handré Pollard's accurate kicking gave the Springboks a 13–8 lead at halftime. Despite a late rally from Ireland, including tries from Jamie Osborne, Conor Murray, and Ryan Baird, the hosts held on to secure the win. Notably, Jamie Osborne made his international debut in this game.

In the second test, Ireland secured a dramatic 25–24 victory over South Africa in Durban, with Ciarán Frawley scoring two late drop goals, including a 45-metre effort in the dying seconds, to seal the win. This victory, marking Andy Farrell's 50th Test match in charge, gave Ireland their second-ever Test win on South African soil and drew the series 1-1.

EMERGING IRELAND TOUR TO SOUTH AFRICA

An Emerging Ireland squad departed for South Africa on Friday the 27th of September 2024. The squad consisted of the best young emerging talent in Ireland, including a few players who were part of the summer tour to South Africa and promising players from the past four to five years who have progressed through our player pathway and needed more rugby exposure to build depth and experience. The national team coaches, excluding Andy Farrell, led the squad during the tour. Ireland won all three matches, and the experience provided the national coaches with valuable insights into players' development, as they worked closely with them in a national team environment.

Following the tour, two players were selected for the Autumn Nations Series (ANS) squad, while two others joined as training panellists. Gus McCarthy was initially named as a training panellist and then drafted into the main squad. Cormac Izuchukwu and Sam Prendergast also participated in this tour, which was considered invaluable preparation for the ANS.

Results:

Wed 2nd Oct 2024:

Emerging Ireland 36-24 Airlink Pumas

Sun 6th Oct 2024:

Emerging Ireland 29 -24 Western Force

Wed 9th Oct 2024:

Emerging Ireland 33-24 Toyota Cheetahs

AUTUMN NATIONS SERIES 2024

The Men's Team concluded the 2024 Autumn Nations Series with 3 wins and one loss.

After a 13–23 loss to New Zealand in the opening match, the team bounced back with a hard-fought 22–19 victory over Argentina, highlighted by Tom Clarkson and Sam Prendergast winning their first caps. They then delivered a commanding 52–17 win against Fiji, with Cormac Izuchukwu & Gus McCarthy both earning their first senior caps for Ireland. The series finale saw a tense 22–19 triumph over Australia, secured by a late try from Gus McCarthy, marking a fitting send-off for Andy Farrell before his sabbatical to coach the British & Irish Lions.

GUINNESS MEN'S SIX NATIONS 2025

The Men's Team wrapped up a competitive Six Nations campaign by winning the Triple Crown, finishing with four wins and one loss to secure third place in the standings. France, England, and Ireland all recorded four victories and one defeat, but France claimed the championship title—its first since 2022—by earning the most bonus points.

One uncapped player, Jack Boyle, was included in the 36-player squad. He had previously been a development player during the Autumn Nations Series in November and earned his first cap by coming off the bench in the win against Wales in Cardiff in February.

Additionally, Hugh Cooney, James McNabney, Ben Murphy, and Cathal Forde were named as development players for the championship.

IRELAND 'A'

The Ireland 'A' team faced a much stronger and more experienced English team in their game in Bristol on the 24th of February, resulting in a 28–12 victory for England. The Head Coach for the game was Mike Prendergast, with Mark Sexton, Sean O'Brien, Jimmy Duffy and Colm Tucker completing the management team.



The purpose of this fixture was to provide enhanced competitive playing opportunities for Irish players of national interest, identify national coaching talent and provide these coaches with an opportunity to gain exposure to a national team environment and assemble a performance staff from across the four provinces to introduce a way of working.

The management team and players took many learnings from the week-long camp and the game. The 'A' concept is something that we will look to continue and expand on going forward.

MEN'S SUMMER SERIES 2025

Ireland undertook a two-Test summer tour to the unfamiliar locations of Tbilisi in Georgia and Lisbon in Portugal. Paul O'Connell took the helm as interim Head Coach, and he was supported by a backroom team which included Mike Prendergast (Backs/Attack), Denis Leamy (Defence) and Cullie Tucker (Forwards/Scrum).

After a short preparation period in the IRFU HPC in Dublin, a relatively inexperienced squad of 33 players travelled firstly to Georgia where they overcame the hosts in demanding conditions 34-5 in a match which saw six players – Tom Ahern, Jack Aungier, Michael Milne, Ben Murphy, Darragh Murray and Tommy O'Brien – make their international debuts.

The squad then moved to the warmer Lisbon where three further players Shayne Bolton, Hugh Gavin and Alex Kendellen made their first senior men's appearances as Ireland broke many records in defeating Portugal 106-7.

The squad were superbly led by Munster's Craig Casey and there's no doubt that well some of these future stars in the months and years to come from this tour..

UNITED RUGBY CHAMPIONSHIP

Leinster won the 2024/25 United Rugby Championship beating the Bulls 32-7 in Croke Park. Leinster won 16 of their 18 games during the course of the season.



BRITISH & IRISH LIONS TOUR 2025

Ireland can take immense pride in contributing sixteen players to the British & Irish Lions' 38-man squad for the 2025 tour to Australia—the largest Irish contingent in recent memory. Ten forwards (Tadhg Furlong, Andrew Porter, Dan Sheehan, Rónan Kelleher, Tadhg Beirne, Joe McCarthy, James Ryan, Jack Conan, Josh van der Flier and Finlay Bealham) and six backs (Jamison Gibson-Park, Bundee Aki, Garry Ringrose, Hugo Keenan, James Lowe and Mack Hansen) have been selected, ten of whom will hope to earn their first Lions cap. At the time of the report being finalised Jamie Osborne has been called up to the squad as a training panellist.

Off the field, Ireland's influence is equally strong: Head Coach Andy Farrell will lead the Lions tour, backed by defence coach Simon Easterby, scrum coach John Fogarty and attack coach Andrew Goodman—all of whom have been integral to Ireland's recent success.

At the time of finalising this report, Jamie Osborne and Thomas Clarkson have been called up as training panellists in Australia from Ireland's summer tour.

SENIOR WOMEN

150TH CELEBRATIONS GAME VS AUSTRALIA

The 150 Season celebrations kicked off in style in Belfast this September, as Ireland delivered a commanding 36–10 victory over Australia at Kingspan Stadium. Ireland dominated the first half, racing to a 17–5 lead with three tries and two conversions. They maintained their momentum after the break, adding two more tries, with the bench making a strong impact. The match provided an ideal confidence boost and valuable preparation ahead of the WXV1 tournament in Canada. Four players earned their first international cap, with Vicky Elmes Kinlan and Ruth Campbell impressing in their starting debuts, while Erin King and Siobhán McCarthy made notable contributions off the bench.

GLOBAL WXV1

Ireland delivered a standout performance at the 2024 WXV 1 tournament in Canada, securing a historic second-place finish in their debut at the top tier of global women's rugby. Under head coach Scott Bemand, the team showcased resilience and growth throughout the competition.

The campaign began with a sensational 29–27 victory over reigning world champions New Zealand, marking one of the most significant upsets in Irish Rugby history. Despite a 21–8 loss to hosts Canada in their second match, Ireland demonstrated determination, with Eimear Considine scoring the sole try of the second half. The tournament concluded with a 26–14 comeback win against the USA, solidifying Ireland's position as runners-up behind champions England.

Ireland's impressive performance in the WXV 1 tournament propelled them from 10th to 6th in the World Rugby rankings.

This tournament marked a significant milestone for Ireland's women's rugby, highlighting their potential and setting a strong foundation for the Guinness Women's Six Nations 2025 and the Rugby World Cup in Autumn 2025.

Erin King was honoured as the World Rugby Women's 15s Breakthrough Player of the Year. Transitioning from the Ireland Sevens squad to the 15s team, King made a significant impact in the Global XV tournament, notably scoring two tries in Ireland's historic WXV1 victory over the Black Ferns and securing a starting position in subsequent matches against Canada and the USA.

GUINNESS WOMEN'S SIX NATIONS

The WXV 40-player squad assembled on Monday, February 17th for their first camp of the Women's Six Nations campaign. Among them, there were eight uncapped players. Sophie Barrett, Jane Neill, Beth Buttimer, and Jane Clohessy all featured for Ireland Women's U20s last season, while Alma Atagamen played for the Ireland Women's U18s during the Six Nations Festival last year.

The team had a commendable campaign in the 2025 Guinness Women's Six Nations Championship. Under Head Coach Scott Bemand, the team finished third in the standings for the second consecutive year.

Ireland's tournament began with a 27–15 loss to France in Belfast. Despite crossing for three tries, France's Morgane Bourgeois made the difference with an assured kicking performance that kept the visitors in front. The team rebounded impressively in Round 2, securing a dominant 54–12 victory over Italy, with wing Anna McGann recording a hat-trick of tries. In Round 3, Ireland faced England and suffered a 49–5 defeat. Despite the loss, the team showed resilience and competitiveness against the reigning champions. Round 4 saw Ireland achieve a convincing 40–14 win over Wales in Cardiff, where flanker Aoife Wafer delivered a standout performance, scoring two tries and earning Player of the Match. In their final match, Ireland were narrowly defeated by Scotland, 26–19, at Hive Stadium in Edinburgh. The game was tightly contested, with Ireland levelling the score at 19–19 in the second half before Scotland sealed the win on the last play of the game.

The 2025 campaign also marked the emergence of new talent, with Aoife Corey and Jane Clohessy earning their first international caps and adding further depth to the squad.

Despite facing challenges, including injuries to key players like Aoife Wafer, Erin King and Dorothy Wall, Ireland's Women's XV demonstrated depth, resilience, and growing cohesion throughout the tournament, laying strong foundations ahead of the 2025 Rugby World Cup in England.

NEW CAPS

During the 2024/25 season Ruth Campbell, Erin King, Vicky Elmes Kinlan, Siobhán McCarthy, Andrea Stock, Aoife Corey, and Jane Clohessy were all awarded their first senior caps.

WOMEN'S RUGBY WORLD CUP

The 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup is taking place in England from August 22nd to September 27th. This tenth edition of the tournament will feature an expanded lineup of 16 teams competing across eight venues nationwide.

Our women's players returned from their off-season and started their Rugby World Cup preparations when they came into camp in the HPC on the 2nd of June.

The coaching team is led by Head Coach Scot Bemand, who is assisted by Denis Fogarty (Scrum Coach), Alex Codling (Forwards Coach), Gareth Steenson (Kicking Coach) and James Scaysbrook (Defence Coach).

Bemand named a 37-player preparation squad comprising of 21 forwards and 16 backs and is for the initial phase of the summer training block. There are two uncapped players in the squad – forwards Alma Atagamen and Ivana Kiripati. Additional players may be added to the squad before the tournament.

Ireland has been drawn into Pool C alongside reigning champions New Zealand, Japan, and Spain.

Fixtures:

Sun, 24/08/2025 12:00: Ireland vs Japan, Franklin's Gardens, Northampton

Sun, 31/08/2025, 12:00: Ireland vs Spain, Franklin's Gardens, Northampton

Sun, 07/09/2025, 14:45: Ireland vs New Zealand, Brighton & Hove Albion Stadium

The team will play two warm up matches in the Summer Series against Scotland and Canada, at Virgin Media Park and the Kingspan Stadium respectively, to finalise their preparations for the RWC.

Summer Series Fixtures:

Sat, 02/08/2025, 14:00: Ireland v Scotland, Virgin Media Park, Cork

Sat, 09/08/2025, 12:00: Ireland v Canada, Affidee Stadium, Belfast

CELTIC CHALLENGE 2024/25

Ireland again had two teams compete in the Celtic Challenge, the Wolfhounds and the Clovers. The Wolfhounds were crowned Celtic Challenge champions at the beginning of March, finishing the competition with an impressive record of nine wins from ten matches. Their sole defeat came in the second round during the festive derby fixtures, where they were beaten by the Clovers. The two sides met twice over the course of the tournament, with each claiming one victory. The Clovers'

fixture against Glasgow on January 25th was postponed due to Storm Eowyn and was not rescheduled; both teams were awarded a 0-0 draw. The Clovers ultimately finished second overall, just two points behind the Wolfhounds.

The competition continues to serve as a valuable development platform, with 71 players across the six participating teams named in extended training squads for the 2025 Guinness Women's Six Nations – a notable increase on last year's total. This includes 33 Irish players, 25 Welsh players, and 13 Scottish players. In comparison, 53 players were selected from the Premiership Women's Rugby (PWR) or other pathways, underscoring the growing importance and impact of the Celtic Challenge in national team selection.

IRELAND AGE GRADE TEAMS

U20 MEN'S SIX NATIONS 2025

The Ireland U20 side came together in November 2024 in preparation for the 2025 U20 Six Nations Championships. Head Coach Neil Doak and Manager Peter Smyth lead the squad this season, playing two preparation fixtures against Italy U20, and a Leinster development XV prior to the start of the 2025 competition. Nikki Corry, a new addition to the management team, excelled at providing support on all team operations. The players and management team displayed a real grit and determination throughout the campaign. They represented their families, schools, and clubs showing total commitment.

MEN'S U20 RESULTS

Ireland U20 (37) v Italy U20 (19)

Leinster Development XV (24) v Ireland U20 (31)

Ireland U20 (3) v England U20 (19)

Scotland U20 (15) v Ireland U20 (33)

Wales U20 (20) v Ireland U20 (12)

Ireland U20 (12) v France U20 (22)

Italy U20 (15) v Ireland U20 (12)

WORLD RUGBY MEN'S U20 CHAMPIONSHIP

At the time of this report being finalised the pool stages of the tournament have just finished. Despite an opening win against Georgia, the side lost narrowly to Italy before being beaten by New Zealand in the final pool game.

WOMEN'S U20/U23 PROGRAMME

2024 SIX NATIONS WOMEN'S SUMMER SERIES – ITALY

The inaugural Six Nations Women's Summer Series was held from July 4th to 14th, 2024, in Italy. This developmental tournament targeted players under the age of 20, with each team permitted to include up to five players under the age of 23.

Ireland opened their campaign with a tough encounter against England, losing 33-10. Their second match saw a competitive 24-17 defeat to an impressive Italian side. Ireland finished on a high, delivering a strong 37-7 win over Scotland on the final day.

The Summer Series provided valuable international experience, enabling players to develop their game against top-level competition. It also offered the management team a key opportunity to assess emerging talent and identify players for future integration into the national high-performance system.

2025 SEASON – PREPARATION FOR THE WOMEN'S SIX NATIONS SUMMER SERIES

The 2025 season has already seen the continued growth of the Women's U20 programme. A two-day training camp was held on April 5th and 6th.

Preparations continued with two three-day camps in May during which Ireland played two matches against Canada at the IRFU High Performance Centre. Each team secured a win, in what was regarded a highly valuable exercise to aid the team's preparation for the Summer Series.

Final preparations included additional training blocks on June 21st–22nd and June 28th–29th, ahead of the team's departure for the 2025 Six Nations Women's Summer Series. At the time of finalising the report the team had won their



opening round fixture against Wales, with games against France and Scotland still to come for Niamh Briggs side.

2025 Six Nations Women's Summer Series
Fixtures – Ireland U20s

- Saturday, 5th July – Wales vs Ireland
- Friday, 11th July – Ireland vs France
- Thursday, 17th July – Scotland vs Ireland

U19 PROGRAMME

Following the success of a third fixture for the U19 programme last season, Head Coach Kieran Hallett and Manager Noel McKenna led a 26-man squad travelling over to Aberavon RFC for a game against the Wales U19, prior to the two traditional Easter fixtures against France U19. With a short preparation window, the squad showed some real attacking intent, putting several excellent passages of play to score some fine tries. Three tries shortly after halftime decided the result and the entire squad all played their part in a good start to the campaign.

Following the Wales U19 fixture and another preparation camp, the U19 squad travelled to La Roche Sur Yon in France for the traditional two game fixture series against the France U19 side. Game 1 saw the team played into a tricky breeze and fall behind 21-5 to a score right on half-time. The 2nd half saw a more cohesive performance closing the gap on a couple of occasions before finishing 42 – 26 out to a powerful French side. Game two saw the Ireland team have an excellent start and build a commanding 20 – 0 lead at halftime. As expected, the French side came out in the 2nd half with renewed vigour, closing the gap to four points (30-26) with 10 minutes remaining, before a drop-goal closed out the game in Ireland's favour.

The entire squad and management team can be very proud of their efforts over the Easter programme. They demonstrated real endeavour and commitment during all camps and games, and it was a highlight to deliver the level of performance for the 2nd match against France, especially considering the 4-day turnaround between the matches. A big thank-you to Wayne Mitchell and Hannah Hanlon on their work with all logistics and organisational elements of the U 19 programme.

Wales U19 (24) v Ireland U19 (46)

France U19 (42) v Ireland U19 (26)

France U19 (24) v Ireland U19 (33)

U18 MEN'S SIX NATIONS FESTIVAL – VICHY - FRANCE – APRIL 2025

Following the 50th Ireland Schools fixture against the England U18, a 26-man squad was selected for the U18 Men's Six Nations festival. Three fixtures were played from the 10th to 18th of April against Wales, Scotland, and Georgia U18 sides. As per festival regulations each player started one of the games and received appropriate gametime throughout. The players and management acquitted themselves superbly and represented their clubs and schools with distinction on and off the field of play. Individual player development is a core aspect of the schools' programme and exposing the players to international matches is a valuable tool at this stage of their developmental journey.

Ireland U18 Schools (22) v England U18 (17)

Ireland U18 Schools (24) v Wales U18 (32)

Ireland U18 Schools (38) v Scotland U18 (21)

Ireland U18 Schools (26) v Georgia U18 (21)

U18 MEN'S CLUBS – ITALY, PADUA – OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2024

The Ireland Men's Clubs travelled to Italy for their regular Halloween fixture against the Italy U18 side. In a new departure, to expose players to increased match opportunities, two matches were played over the mid-term break on Wednesday the 30th of October and Friday the 2nd of November, instead of the one game held previously. A 27-man squad led by Head Coach Jamie Kirk and Manager Anthony McKibben saw the players selected from 24 different clubs.

Both games were competitive outings against a strong Italian U18 side and plenty of positives and lessons were taken from the matches. This strong relationship with the FIR at U18 level continues to be a focal point for the U18 clubs' side over the Halloween period. The hard work put in by the squad and management team will continue to assist the players as they move along the pathway.

Italy U18s (31) v Ireland U18 Clubs (17)

Italy U18s (54) v Ireland U18 Clubs (26)



2025 SIX NATIONS U18 WOMEN'S FESTIVAL

2025 marked the fourth consecutive year of the Six Nations U18 Women's Festival, with Wellington College, England hosting the event over the Easter period. The festival ran from April 11th to April 19th and provided a valuable development and benchmarking opportunity for all participating nations.

Each team played four 35-minute fixtures and one full 70-minute match. Ireland began the tournament strongly, recording two impressive victories on the opening day with a 29-7 win over Italy and a 21-0 win against hosts England. The team continued their strong form on day two with a 22-7 win against Scotland, before falling to France, 14-0, in a difficult match. On the final day, Ireland played a 70-minute fixture against Wales, which ended in a highly competitive 24-24 draw.

The festival offered a high-performance environment to assess individual and collective progress. It served as an important platform to benchmark Ireland's WNTS programme against our Six Nations counterparts, and to evaluate player development within a structured international framework.

WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY SEVENS TOURNAMENT

The 2025 University Sevens tournament marked the second year of this competition. The tournament continues to play a crucial role in the development of women's rugby in Ireland, helping to broaden the national talent pool. It serves not only as a key development tool for players already within the pathway, but also as a gateway for identifying new talent. In particular, it offers opportunities to engage athletes from other sports who possess the physical attributes to excel in rugby. The goal remains to identify and nurture players capable of contributing to Irish Rugby across both Sevens and 15s formats.

Round 1 took place on March 5th at Queen's University, with teams from each province and a travelling IQ Rugby side taking part. National coaching staff were present to monitor emerging talent, including current national team players who featured in the matches.

Round 2 was held on March 18th at the University of Limerick, followed by Round 3 on April 2nd at SETU Carlow. The final round took place at the University of Galway on April 9th, bringing the second edition of the tournament to a successful close. Connacht were crowned overall champions for the second year in a row.

IRELAND SCHOOLS TOUR TO SOUTH AFRICA – AUGUST 2024

The last action of age-grade rugby in season 2023/24 was an Ireland Schools tour to South Africa last August. A 26-man squad was selected by Head Coach Michael Hodge and led by Manager Stephen O'Hara, a notable renewal of the touring tradition of the Ireland Schools. It was the first Ireland Schools tour since Australia in 2004, making the trip even more memorable for the squad and management team. Three fixtures were played over a 9-day period against England U18, South Africa U18 and Georgia U18. Wayne Mitchell was also instrumental in ensuring the planning and organisation of all elements of the tour was successful.

Ireland U18 Schools (42) v England U18 (28)

South Africa U18 (38) v Ireland U18 Schools (26)

Ireland U18 Schools (17) v Georgia U18 (15)

50TH ANNIVERSARY SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL – MARDYKE – CORK - MARCH 2025

An initial 26-man squad was selected for a fixture against England U18 in preparation for the upcoming U18 Six Nations festival and to celebrate 50 years of the Ireland Schools team. The game was played at the Mardyke (UCC RFC) and led by Head Coach Michael Hodge and Manager Stephen O'Hara. A late Ireland try proved to be a decisive score against an excellent English side. This game was played 50 years to the day of the very first Ireland Schoolboys fixture against the same opposition on the 29th of March 1975. The match also formed part of the IRFU's 150 celebrations for this season.

MEN'S NATIONAL TALENT SQUAD

The (MNTS) numbered 66 players this season, spread across the three bands from NTS 3 to 1. The programme continues to be a vital pillar in supporting identified players navigate the challenges of the player pathway by providing supports across all player development departments. Under the continued leadership and management of National NTS & Talent ID Manager Wayne Mitchell, provincial talent coaches, and support practitioners, the programme continues to deliver for Irish Rugby.

WOMEN'S NATIONAL TALENT SQUAD (WNTS)

A combined U18 and U20 camp took place at the HPC from October 30 to November 1, 2024, and also in January 2025. The following took place over the three days.

- **Athletic Profiling:** On Day 1, players underwent athletic profile testing. Current players were benchmarked against last year's results, while new players entering the system were tested for the first time.
- **Education Modules:** Players participated in sessions on mental skills and nutrition, receiving tools to enhance mental resilience and learning strategies for optimal fuelling during training and competition.
- **Coaching Curriculum Introduction:** The players were introduced to the new coaching curriculum being implemented for the WNTS.
- **Skill Development:** Coaches led position-specific training sessions, focusing on the "core four" skills essential to each role on the field.
- **Game Play:** Small-sided games were held for each age group.
- **Squad Assessment:** This camp allowed coaches to evaluate positional depth across age groups, which helped inform squad selections for the U18 and U20-U23 Six Nations.
- **John McKee, Denis Fogarty, and WNTS coaching staff** were present throughout the camp, providing valuable guidance and oversight.

WNTS NUMBERS BY PROVINCE:

The 2024/25 season saw a significant increase in participation across the WNTS programme, with strong growth evident in three of the four provinces. Leinster has 28 players involved, up from 20 in 2023. Munster recorded the most substantial growth, rising from 8 players in 2023 to 19 this season. Connacht also saw a notable increase, with 20 players selected, compared to 12 the previous year. Ulster maintained consistent engagement, with 13 players involved, matching their numbers from 2023. This growth reflects the deepening talent pool and the expanding reach of the WNTS programme nationwide.

SEVENS

MEN'S SEVENS

HSBC SVNS SERIES 2024/25

The 2024/25 season marked a period of transition for the Ireland Men's Sevens squad, following the departure of six core players after the Paris Olympics in July 2024. With a relatively inexperienced group, the squad faced early challenges but grew in cohesion and confidence as the season progressed, culminating in stronger performances in the latter rounds.

- **Round 1** – Dubai (Nov 30 – Dec 1): A tough start to the campaign saw Ireland finish in 11th place.
- **Round 2** – Cape Town (Dec 7–8): The squad battled adversity, including a salmonella outbreak that sidelined several players, finishing 12th overall.
- **Round 3** – Perth (Jan 24–26): Ireland finished 11th as the young team continued to build experience.
- **Round 4** – Vancouver (Feb 21–23): A win over Kenya in the playoff secured another 11th place finish.
- **Round 5** – Hong Kong (Mar 28–30): Ireland showed marked improvement, beating Great Britain 28–12 to claim 7th place.
- **Round 6** – Singapore (Apr 5–6): A dramatic 21–19 victory over New Zealand secured another 7th place finish, confirming Ireland's 11th place standing in the final overall rankings.

LOS ANGELES (MAY 3-4):

HSBC SVNS 2025 PLAY-OFF

The Men's Sevens team entered the HSBC SVNS Play-Off in Los Angeles after finishing 11th in the overall 2024–25 series standings. This tournament featured the four lowest-ranked core teams (those placed 9th–12th) alongside the top four teams from the Challenger Series. Ireland had been drawn into Pool B alongside Uruguay, Germany, and Canada. Ireland lost all three of their pool games which meant they did not qualify for the cross over games to gain a place in SVNS 2 next season.





WOMEN'S SEVENS

HSBC SVNS SERIES 2024/25

The Ireland Women's Sevens team embarked on the 2024/25 HSBC SVNS Series with a mix of seasoned campaigners and emerging talent.

- **Round 1** – Dubai (Nov 30 – Dec 1): Ireland finished 6th after a quarter-final loss to New Zealand (32–12).
- **Round 2** – Cape Town (Dec 7–8): The team finished 8th after falling to Great Britain in the final match.
- **Round 3** – Perth (Jan 24–26): With an average age of just 21, Ireland fielded an inexperienced squad, finishing 12th in a valuable learning experience.
- **Round 4** – Vancouver (Feb 21–23): A 12th place finish followed a defeat to Spain in the playoff.
- **Round 5** – Hong Kong (Mar 28–30): Ireland again placed 12th, with another close loss to Great Britain.
- **Round 6** – Singapore (Apr 5–6): The team secured a 10th place finish after a 17–5 defeat to Spain, concluding the series in 11th overall.

LOS ANGELES (MAY 3-4):

HSBC SVNS 2025 PLAY-OFF

The Ireland Women's Sevens team competed in the HSBC SVNS Play-Off in Los Angeles, having finished 11th in the overall 2024–25 series standings. As with the men's competition, the Play-Off brought together the bottom four teams from the core SVNS circuit and the top four sides from the Challenger Series. Drawn into Pool B alongside China, South Africa and Argentina, Ireland lost all three pool matches and therefore did not advance to the crossover games for qualification to SVNS 2 next season.

RUGBY EUROPE 2025

After the decision was made to discontinue the men's program at the end of the 2024/25 season, it was confirmed that the team would not compete in Rugby Europe.

The women's team participated in both legs of the Rugby Europe competition, which served as a qualifier for SVNS 2 in the 2025/26 season. Two spots remained available, and Ireland had the opportunity to qualify by finishing among the top two non-qualified teams (GB, Spain and France had already qualified). Success would have secured entry into the Global Repechage - scheduled later in the year - where a top-two finish would have earned a place in the 2025/26 SVNS 2 circuit.



However, after finishing 9th in Croatia (13th – 15th June) and 5th in Germany (27th – 29th June), Ireland failed to qualify for the repechage and will not compete on the SVNS circuit next season.

SEVENS PROGRAMME REVIEW

MEN'S SEVENS – SIXTH PLACE FINISH

The Ireland Men's Sevens team achieved a commendable sixth-place finish at the Paris 2024 Olympics, improving upon their tenth-place result from Tokyo 2020. They began their campaign with a strong 10-5 victory over South Africa in the pool stages. In the quarter-finals, Ireland faced reigning Olympic champions Fiji and narrowly lost 19-15 in a tightly contested match. Subsequently, they played against New Zealand in the 5th/6th place playoff, where they were defeated 17-7, concluding their tournament in sixth place.

WOMEN'S SEVENS – EIGHTH PLACE FINISH

The Ireland Women's Sevens team made their Olympic debut in Paris 2024 and secured an eighth-place finish. They advanced to the quarter-finals after a strong performance in the pool stages. In the quarter-finals, Ireland faced Australia and, despite a valiant effort, lost 19-14. In the subsequent placement matches, they were defeated by France 19-7 and then by Great Britain 28-12 in the 7th/8th place playoff, concluding their inaugural Olympic campaign in eighth place.

SEVENS PROGRAM REVIEW

The IRFU has confirmed that, following comprehensive reviews of its Sevens programmes after the conclusion of the 2024 Olympic cycle, it will cease the Men's Sevens programme at the end of the 2024/25 season. The Women's Sevens programme will continue to operate, as it plays a vital role in our strategy to accelerate the development of the women's game.

REFEREE DEPARTMENT

Season 2024/25, saw the changes from previous season bed in with Frank Murphy taking on the role of High-Performance Referee Coach and Peter Martin joining the ranks of professional refereeing. All members of the referee team have continued to contribute to all competitions within professional rugby along with coaching of domestic referees. Chris Busby was appointed to and refereed his first tier 1 international with Andy Brace and Eoghan Cross also selected for appointments across multiple continents. Whether it is as referee, assistant referee (AR) or television match official (TMO), IRFU match officials continue to be selected for high profile or knock out fixtures within all competitions.

As with previous seasons, our High Performance Referees have been supported by members of the National Panel who have given a lot of time to preparation and delivery while also continuing to be available to referee matches themselves, meaning double appointments on many weekends.

In recent seasons, there has been a noticeable rise in instances of online abuse directed at match officials. The IRFU Communications team, in collaboration with the provinces, is actively working to address this growing concern through education, support initiatives, and policy development. Some competitions have also begun to leverage technology—such as moderation tools—to help protect referees and foster a safer environment both on and off the pitch. We welcome all initiatives that will protect our team of match officials.

There is no doubt, season 25/26 will present fresh challenges for the team but these will be faced head on with Irish refereeing continuing to contribute to the highest level of the game.

HIGH PERFORMANCE CENTRE

The 2024/25 season at the High Performance Centre (HPC) on the Sport Ireland Campus focused initially on the Olympic cycle for both the Men's and Women's Sevens squads and their pre-Paris camps. This followed now regular calendar events including the WXV1 competition

preparation and ANS internationals with squads running training camps fully at the HPC before competition. The Celtic Challenge squad also extended their season to add to the winter evening usage of the facility and outdoor pitches.

A first for the HPC was the running of the Men's A squad match preparations during the Six Nations period, operating the facility at peak capacity with two men's and a women's national team simultaneously. The building also hosted an Emerging Ireland pre-tour camp.

To facilitate this peak capacity, some building changes were made in preparation for extra usage. A dedicated nutrition and supplement store was constructed plus extra office space. A revamp of a second players lounge to facilitate more squads was also undertaken along with the main elite pitch being stripped and relayed to ensure our main national teams could train on a surface that mirrored stadium conditions.

Challenges in 2024/25 again focused on building capacity during peak times, as the Women's programme increases in size and professionalism, running more thorough training camps in parallel to others. Further issues arose this season around grounds and pitch quality which will be addressed this summer.

Projects being undertaken in the upcoming months include that above remedial work for the outdoor pitches, possible additional athlete recovery spaces and new branding, to ensure the facility continues to keep its world class appearance as wear and tear increases.

Our thanks to all the staff working across the High Performance areas who continue to ensure our teams are prepared as possible for all competitions.

While on-field success is the fuel which drives rugby in Ireland, we can look back with pride on a year of achievement and change. Our various men's and women's international, provincial and domestic departments continuing to operate at a high level and we will continue to evolve, adapt and accelerate Irish rugby forward next season and beyond.

DAVID HUMPHREYS
Performance Director

RUGBY DEVELOPMENT REPORT

COLIN MCENTEE

THE 2024/25 SEASON WAS A DEFINING CHAPTER IN RUGBY DEVELOPMENT, MARKED BY AMBITIOUS DELIVERY ACROSS FIVE PILLARS: PEOPLE, PARTICIPATION, PERFORMANCE, PROMOTION AND PLACE.

In line with the IRFU's strategic pillar of Delivering Great Rugby Experiences, we continued to shape and strengthen the grassroots game, anchored in the values of respect, excellence, fun, integrity and inclusivity. Our rugby community is our biggest asset.

This year's end-of-season review with the four Branches (Connacht, Leinster, Munster, and Ulster) showcased commendable progress under the IRFU's strategic framework. The implementation of our strategy has driven impactful and aligned development across the domestic game. There is clear evidence of an embedded collaborative culture and strong leadership at both Union and Branch levels.

Our game's foundation lies in the depth of our grassroots network of clubs, schools, players, coaches, match officials and volunteers, who ensure rugby is not only played but lived, across every community in Ireland. We adapted our programmes to meet the evolving needs of society while continuing to drive engagement across minis, youth, adult, and third-level rugby. There was strong focus on initiatives in coach





development, promotion of the domestic game, inclusive facility funding, defining the Performance space, and the tackle behaviour trial point to a progressive and sustainable rugby ecosystem.

With a player retention rate averaging 72% and registered player numbers up by 9%, we are not only retaining but growing our base. Female participation has seen a significant 17% rise across all provinces, strengthening the IRFU's commitment to Accelerating the Women's Game. These outcomes underscore the depth of buy-in at all levels.

PARTICIPATION AND GROWTH HIGHLIGHTS

METRIC	2024–25 FIGURES
Total Participants	460,000 (up 24%)
Registered Players	98,000 (up 9%)
Teamsheet Players	56,000 (up 9%)
15s Teams	2,067 (up 4%)
Female Participants	154,000 total (up 36%) 17,900 registered (up 17%)
Player Retention	72% average across the four Branches
Panelled Coaches	6,006 (up 48%)
On-field Referees	593 (no change)

The success of Irish rugby is deeply rooted in a vibrant ecosystem of clubs and schools, supported by dedicated coaches and volunteers.

This grassroots environment is essential for recruiting and developing future players, coaches, referees, and volunteers, and serves as the foundation for professional rugby. Our focus remains on delivering positive experiences to attract and nurture talent, ensuring sustained involvement in rugby at all levels.

As the 2024/25 season progressed, our strategy adapted to meet the evolving needs of Irish society while maintaining our core rugby programmes and initiatives.

We remain focused on collaborating with high-performance teams to maintain a strong, vibrant grassroots game while ensuring that talented players receive the support they need to develop and realise their potential.

There has been significant growth in female participation across all aspects of the game within the four provinces, highlighting our commitment to inclusivity. Efforts continue to focus on developing female competitions, coaching, refereeing, leadership, and governance, especially with the Women's Rugby World Cup approaching.

We have commenced a comprehensive review of coaching development from grassroots to high performance, establishing a unified vision and approach supported by technical frameworks and coaching pedagogy.

A review of the men's Energia All-Ireland League (AIL) structure is underway, in line with our strategic plan, ensuring it remains fit for purpose, strong, and competitive.

Upholding core values of respect and sportsmanship remains fundamental. Our Behaviours and Discipline Group continues to nurture a culture of respect throughout the game. This has been supported by "Respect Our Game" initiatives, branding, and communications throughout the season.

We have seen an uptake of clubs retrofitting their changing facilities to accommodate all genders; this falls under the Inclusive Club Facility grant funding initiative.

Entering its second year, the tackle law trial has shown promising results, with injury rates decreasing by up to 24% and concussion incidence by 50%, you can read more about this in the medical report on page [x](#).

Launched as part of our strategic plan, the IRFU EDI Action Plan '2024–2028' focuses on ensuring all participants have a positive experience, offering access to rugby for everyone, regardless of individual characteristics.

We remain committed to collaborating with provincial partners, clubs, and schools to ensure our initiatives meet the evolving needs of the rugby community. Therefore, we are now conducting a further "State of the Game" survey to gather current insights and align our strategy with societal norms and the needs of Irish rugby.

Thank you to everyone, especially our players and volunteers, for their immense contributions to Irish Rugby.



AGE GRADE AND THIRD LEVEL

This season, over 2,000 participants from 130 clubs participated in the Provincial Aviva Mini Rugby Festivals in Dungarvan RFC, Balbriggan RFC, Creggs RFC throughout October as well as the girls-only event at Edenderry RFC in November and our re-scheduled Ballynahinch RFC festival in March, culminating in the National Festival at Aviva Stadium on Sunday, 6th of April. Our 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. 80 schools received financial support to operate rugby programmes with over 20,000 participants, supported by over 1,144 coaches. This season these schools participated in over 11,195 matches, returning 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 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 DCU's Morton Stadium, with the following Divisional Winners: DCU (The Brendan Johnston Cup - Men's Tier 1 Cup), TUS Mid-west (Men's Tier 2 Cup), DCU (Men's Tier 3 Cup), DCU (Women's Tier 1 Cup), UCC (Women's Tier 2 Cup) and Queen's University (Women's division 3 Cup)

In addition, there were league wins for SETU Carlow (Men's Division 1), SETU Waterford (Men's Division 2), UCC v Stranmillis 16/4/25 (Men's Division 3), University of Limerick (Women's Division 1), University of Galway (Women's Division 2) & Queens University (Women's Division 3).

Furthermore, the Irish Universities Men's XV, enjoyed a hard-fought 25-22 victory over their French counterparts at Shaws Bridge in March.

Throughout the season, the IURU hosted their full suite of competitions. UCC won the U20 Conroy Cup in October defeating Maynooth University in the final, while UCD captured the Coghlan-Kelly Cup (Freshers); at the Kay Bowen Cup in UCC in February was won by UCD (15s) beating Queens in the final and SETU Carlow won the X7s event in a countback after drawing with MTU Cork in the final. The Maughan-Scally Cup took place in UCD in March and was won by Trinity for the first time. The Dudley Cup was contested numerous times over the 2024/25 season and currently resides with UCC.

COACH DEVELOPMENT

The IRFU Coach Development program for the 2024-2025 season has been marked by a substantial level of activity and a clear impact on the coaching landscape in Ireland. The program's core focus has been to broaden the reach of coach education and elevate the overall quality of coaching practices across the country. This commitment is reflected in the range of offerings and the significant participation numbers recorded throughout the season.

COACH REGISTRATION

Formal recognition of coaching awards and the maintenance of a comprehensive register of coaches are important aspects in providing a quality approach to coaching:

The total number of registered coaches reached over 9,500. This figure provides a valuable snapshot of the size of the current coaching cohort in Ireland and facilitates communication and support from the IRFU to its coaching members.

Registration shows over 5,800 coaches are panelled and actively working with teams. This highlights the number of coaches who are directly contributing to the development of players across various levels of the game.



This season over 600 panelled coaches were female, highlights the tracking of gender inclusion within coaching.

COURSE DELIVERY

A cornerstone of the IRFU coach development program is the provision of formal learning opportunities for coaches. During the 2024/25 season, a total of 71 coaching courses were delivered, covering various stages of the IRFU LTPD. These courses provide coaches with the foundational knowledge and practical coaching skills necessary to effectively develop players at the different stages of development. Over 1,700 coaches accessed courses. This indicates a healthy demand for formal coaching education.

WORKSHOP DELIVERY

175 practical workshops were offered through the provinces and delivered by development staff. These workshops are designed to provide hands-on coach education, allowing coaches to apply theoretical concepts in practical scenarios under the guidance of experienced coach development staff. The emphasis on practical application is crucial for developing coaching competency and confidence. Over 30 online modules covering 10 topics have been made available to coaches throughout this season. The online component significantly enhances the accessibility of coach development, removing geographical barriers and allowing coaches to engage with learning material

at their own pace. The flexibility of online learning is particularly valuable for volunteer coaches who may find it challenging to attend classroom-based workshops. There were over 6,000 completions of online modules. This high number of completions underscores the effectiveness of Gainline (this is the IT system we use for training) and the willingness of coaches to utilise digital opportunities for their ongoing development.

ACTIVE COACH BADGE (CPD)

Over 2,500 active coach badges were issued. These badges serve as formal recognition of a coach's undertaking of personal development through the available practical workshops and online modules. This extensive CPD program ensures that coaches have access to the latest coaching techniques and best practices. The high number of workshops delivered across our provinces demonstrates a commitment to providing accessible CPD opportunities throughout Ireland. The provincial delivery mechanism also ensures a more bespoke provision of CPD activity and aligns to the IRFU definition of a qualified coach.

OVERALL SATISFACTION

The overall satisfaction rating of the coach development initiatives was above 95%. This satisfaction rating provides strong evidence of the quality and effectiveness of the programs offered. It confirms that coaches find the courses, workshops, and online modules to be valuable and relevant to their needs.

The IRFU's commitment to developing and supporting coaches is evident in the breadth and depth of the programs offered during the 2024-2025 season. The high levels of participation, the positive feedback from coaches, and the increasing number of qualified and active coaches all point to the positive impact of these initiatives.

PARTICIPATION RUGBY

NON-CONTACT RUGBY.

Following the creation of bespoke Coaching, Refereeing and Playing courses, the IRFU Rugby Department ran staff training in Tag and Touch Rugby in the four provinces. The Touch Rugby training was conducted with the Ireland Touch Association who we continue to have a very successful partnership with. The ITA provided staff to these sessions. Tag and Touch Rugby continues to take place in the four provinces and these offerings are growing. This year we created Coaching, Refereeing and Playing courses for T1 Rugby, the new non-contact offering from World Rugby. A staff training webinar for the four Provinces was delivered by World Rugby staff.

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. The programme crescendos with a National Festival which takes place in the Aviva stadium with 20 primary schools from all over Ireland playing non-contact rugby matches.

TACKLE BEHAVIOUR TRIAL.

Irish rugby in year 2 of our tackle trial have continued to reinforce positive behaviours for all regarding tackle technique in domestic rugby. With an emphasis on education and promotion of good habits, we have been able to build on the positive sentiment from year one. Utilising the IRIS (Irish Rugby Injury Surveillance) project we have provided early indications of the progress of the trial and presented such to Irish Rugby stakeholders.

[CLICK HERE](#) to watch Tackle Behaviour webinar from September 2024.

CLUBS INCLUSIVE FACILITIES GRANT FUNDING.

Following the introduction of the Inclusive Facilities grant last season, the IRFU awarded over €500k to clubs upgrading their facilities. We currently have upwards of 100 Expressions of Interest from clubs. The Club Assistance Committee works very hard to assess each application and interview each club prior to making a decision.

MATCH AND EVENT MANAGEMENT.

The IRFU Rugby Department continues to Match Manage a number of Domestic finals and play-off games. Following the 2023-24 Match and Event Management course, we have started to appoint successful participants to these games. A number of successful candidates undertook the World Rugby Match Commissioner course. This will lead to opportunities for them to represent the IRFU at international tournaments.

TECHNOLOGY

RugbyConnect is now in its fifth season and is performing strongly in registrations, game management, and event coordination. This season's developments have focused on enhancing the user experience for club and provincial administrators while also refining data extraction into our data lakehouse.

The Participation Data Hub serves as a central data lakehouse, integrating information from RugbyConnect, the Development Officers Portal, and historical data from Clubhouse. Ongoing efforts are dedicated to data cleansing and the creation of bespoke tables, ensuring efficient analysis and visualisation.



The first major visualisation, the Participation Analysis Dashboard, has been successfully launched, providing real-time insights from the Development Officers Portal. This has led to improved data input, as staff can now access clear, up-to-date reports instantly.

Currently in development, the Club Health Check Dashboard will focus on club and team panel data, helping clubs verify that coaches are properly assigned and appropriately qualified. This initiative aims to support clubs in maintaining compliance and fostering a well-structured coaching environment.

ENERGIA ALL-IRELAND LEAGUES

The 2024-25 Energia AIL season came to a gripping conclusion on Saturday 27th April with the Men's and Women's finals played at Aviva Stadium in a double header. Two hotly contested matches saw UL Bohemian defeat Railway Union 29-24 with the last score of the game thus retaining their title, followed by the Men's match which saw Clontarf beat Cork Constitution 22-21. Both matches showcased the best of Irish domestic rugby across the two matches and drew a big crowd.

The Men's Energia AIL was hugely competitive and some excellent rugby was played across all 5 divisions of the Energia AIL. 22 of the 25 matches on week 18 still had something to play for with one or both of the teams involved. Despite the occasional storm only a handful of matches were refixed which was a huge testament to those clubs who were able to get their matches played in alternative venues when the weather did threaten fixtures.

At the time of writing a full review of the Energia AIL is being conducted by former EPCR CEO Derek McGrath. This review encompasses all areas of the league and will give the IRFU a solid platform to move forward and make the Energia AIL a stronger and more sustainable competition at all levels.

The Energia AIL Women's Division continued in 2024-25 with 10 teams participating in a full 18 round competition. Clubs continue to face challenges around player numbers and injuries, and this led to four matches being conceded from three different clubs during the season. At

the end of the season Suttonians RFC who had been playing in the Women's Energia AIL for ten years announced that due to falling numbers they would not be in a position to participate in next seasons competition and withdrew. Work is ongoing to review the Women's Energia AIL.

A full round of promotion/relegation matches was played this season with Ennis playing Enniskillen in the final with Ennis running out the victors to gain promotion to the Women's All Ireland League.

The All Ireland Provincial League Championship saw Bective Rangers FC defeat Thomond RFC in the final winning promotion back to the Energia AIL after a seven year absence. Not to be outdone Thomond RFC then went on to beat Omagh in the play-off match and they will participate in the Energia AIL next season for the first time since 2019. Bective capped off a great season by completing the Junior double also winning the Energia AIL Junior Cup beating Enniskillen in the final.

The Bateman Cup final was held between Lansdowne FC and Instonians RFC with Lansdowne running out the winners.

The Women's Junior Cup was retained by MU Barnhall after a well contested final against Malone at Mullingar RFC in January.

Following on from the successful first foray to Portugal the Energia Club International XV again travelled to Lisbon in March to play a mixture of Portugal A and their U 20s. This season the Irish team were too strong and won the match 50-0.

ADDITIONAL WOMEN'S RUGBY ACTIVITIES

Vodafone Women's Interprovincial Series took place once again in August & September 2024. The finals were hosted in Kingspan Stadium where Leinster retained the title beating Munster in the final. As always TG4 provided coverage for all games.

Buccaneers RFC once again provided the backdrop for the PwC U18s Interprovincial Series final. As with last year competition Leinster and Connacht went head-to-head in the final this time Leinster were the victors in what was an intensely fought game. In a return to a more traditional competition format the U18's interprovincial fixtures took place alongside the senior interprovincial fixtures.

U18'S

Eight teams participated over two weekends in Mullingar RFC. Each province brought two teams .The first weekend comprised of groups games with teams seeded for the second weekend into quarter finals, semifinals and finals.

Over the course of the two weekends players were further identified to enter programs over the summer and into the new season. Leinster U18's were the eventual winners.

U16'S.

The U16's Sevens tournament took place on a single weekend in Mullingar RFC. Two teams from each province participated. This event served as a player identification event and did not comprise of a competitive element.

Similar to the U18's program players were identified for programs both provincially and nationally into the summer and new season.

The ever-popular Canterbury Give it a Try programme saw 80 clubs participate in 2024. 1,782 new participants took part in the program with just over 23% going on to become full members of their respective clubs.

The Aviva Mini Girls Festival took place at Edenderry RFC in November. Approx. 200 girls at U10 and U12 from across the country participated. As always, the level of enthusiasm



and excitement on the day was palpable. This was followed by the National Aviva Mini Festival in April where a number of the girls teams went on to participate.

The X Rugby Sevens finals took place on April 9th in MU Barnhall RFC. Once again, schools from across the provinces competed in Junior and Senior Cup and Plate finals. The Senior Cup was taken home by Sacred Heart Clonakilty while the Junior Cup went West with Sacred Heart Westport. The Senior Plate saw Ard Scoil Na Trionade Athy take victory and Killina Presentation School winning the Junior Plate.

PROVINCIAL TEAMS

Leinster Rugby, URC winners 2024/25

ENERGIA AIL WINNERS

Women's Division - UL Bohemian RFC

Division 1A – Clontarf FC

Division 1B – Old Belvedere RFC

Division 2A – Instonians RFC

Division 2B – Wanderers FC

Division 2C – Enniscorthy RFC

The strength of Irish rugby stems from a resilient and forward-thinking development ecosystem, one that is people-powered, performance-aligned, and built for the future. Our ability to create meaningful rugby experiences at all levels continues to unlock potential, inspire the next generation, and connect communities through the power of the game.

Across every initiative this year, be it the record numbers in the Aldi Play Rugby schools programme, growth in female participation, enhanced coach education pathways, or the expansion of non-contact formats like Touch and T1 Rugby, we have worked to ensure our game reflects the diversity and ambition of Irish society.

With the Women's Rugby World Cup on the horizon, and the continued evolution of our domestic competitions, we will keep working closely with our provincial and club partners to sustain growth, foster excellence, and provide a clear pathway for Winning Teams to emerge from a vibrant grassroots system.

COLIN MCENTEE

Rugby Development Director

WOMEN'S STRATEGY

LYNNE CANTWELL

I STEPPED INTO THE ROLE OF HEAD OF WOMEN'S STRATEGY IN JANUARY 2025 NOT KNOWING FULLY WHAT TO EXPECT.

The creation of the Head of Women's Strategy role brings with it significant opportunity to elevate the priority of the Women and Girls game within the Irish and Provincial Unions. The role has received strong support at a leadership level and an eagerness to position it effectively to enable meaningful growth within the game.

I've been deeply passionate about all sport and specifically women's sport for much of my life, and this felt like the right challenge at the right time—personally and professionally.

The launch of the Rugby in Ireland Strategy 2024–2028 in June 2024 was a defining moment. The Women's game is one of the four strategic priorities of the strategy. Since coming on board in January, I have worked closely with each of the Directors and leadership within the Union and Provinces to detail the priority objectives of each of the Pillars. The opportunity of the women's strategy is that it will collectively reflect all the priority growth areas in the game and detail plans for progress in all.

The strategy sets out a clear ambition to accelerate the development of the women's game. A significant theme in the strategy is one of women and girls insight. Whilst sport in Ireland is at a progressive stage to acknowledge men's and women's sport have differences, we largely struggle to produce data to understand those differences. This strategy will therefore attempt to gather data relating to the physiological, biomechanical, psychosocial and environmental factors that influence women and girls in rugby to enable and inform long term decision making aiming to build systems with women and girls in mind. In the short



term, current insight does exist that should be applied, through data collated so far within women's rugby and/or different sports.

These data gaps extend into our commercial and marketing pillars when we are trying to understand the women's sport fan, alternative brand and new markets. Gathering these insights for the women's rugby fan in Ireland will enable the game to grow through targeted sponsorship, partnerships and revenue growth.

Over my first six months in the role, I've focused on listening—spending time with a broad range of stakeholders across the Irish rugby landscape to better understand the current picture and to co-create a shared vision for the future. A recurring theme has emerged: growing the women and girls' game strengthens rugby as a whole. The data supports this—clubs that welcome more women and girls see growth across all demographics. This is not a zero-sum game. Women's rugby is a growth engine.

The Women's Rugby Strategy is built around three core aims:

- **Inspire participation** by creating inclusive, enjoyable, and accessible rugby experiences—from minis to elite—with systems specifically designed around the needs of women and girls.
- **Connect communities** through strong pathways, greater volunteer engagement, and deeper collaboration across clubs, schools, Provinces and our National teams.
- **Thrive through excellence**, with the ambition for Ireland to consistently rank among the world's top teams.

To achieve this, the strategy outlines five key pillars:

- **Thriving Grassroots**
- **Winning Teams**
- **Leadership & Governance**
- **Revenue & Investment**
- **Visibility & Engagement**

These are underpinned by 26 measurable objectives, aligned with our performance indicators. Progress will be tracked and reported annually as part of the overall *Rugby in Ireland Strategy (2024–2028)*.

By the end of 2025, we hope to have made significant progress on the below priority areas:

1. Women's rugby leadership and staffing model to enable and maximise direction, alignment and progress in women's rugby across all union departments and provincial leadership.
2. Partner with the four provinces as part of our Four Provincial Roadmap project as we take steps towards professionalising the women's provincial game.
3. Initiate and conclude an Adult Club Competition Review to agree on a comprehensive competition structure that supports players at all levels have access to the right level of competition and development
4. Maximise the impact of the Rugby World Cup 2025 through a high profile communications plan, engagement with all national and community stakeholders and positions of the women's rugby strategy to springboard long term growth and sustainability initiatives.
5. Develop Irish women's rugby commercial insights to define the identity of women's rugby in Ireland and target commercial and marketing approach to fan engagement, building audiences and commercial partnerships.

I want to sincerely thank everyone who has contributed so far—from clubs and communities to volunteers and staff. Over the next year, I look forward to deepening these connections and continuing to build a shared vision for what women's rugby in Ireland can be.

Together, we are laying the foundations for a stronger, more inclusive future.

LYNNE CANTWELL

Head of Women's Strategy

SPIRIT OF RUGBY REPORT

ANNE MARIE HUGHES

ENHANCING THE OVERALL RUGBY EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The Spirit of Rugby programme, assists our **‘Delivering Great Rugby Experiences’** pillar of the IRFU Strategy, primarily through education of players, coaches, staff and volunteers across the organisation.

The ‘Respect Our Game’ campaign aims to enhance the overall rugby experience and satisfaction of participants. Following its inception in 2023, it focuses on amplifying the value of Respect towards our players, officials and volunteers, a crucial element to ensuring a positive experience for all.

Working with our clubs and provinces to expand this message, IRFU targeted the weekends of 18th–20th October, 10th–12th January and 25th–27th April. During these weekends 156 clubs promoted the importance of ‘Respect’ with signage, branded merchandising, social media posts, fair play awards and positive sideline activities.

Training, through the Spirit of Rugby staff, is delivered to support the campaign of Respect and enhance the implementation of values, especially inclusivity and integrity. 5834 volunteers accessed training modules this season, that included blended-learning, online modules and in-person training sessions.

This approach allows greater participation of volunteers with ease of access to information. The following CPD modules were accessed between 1st August 2024 and 31st May 2025, by coaches and volunteers to assist them maintain a respectful and safe environment, including a new module supporting the IRFU’s Club Mental Health Toolkit

One Good Coach (mental health for young people)	1480
Tackling Bullying Behaviour	1147
Diversity & Inclusion	1156
Disability Inclusion	1118
Club Mental Health toolkit	933
Youth Volunteer Award	181

To create positive, welcoming and inclusive rugby environments, especially within the youth and disability game, safeguarding audits were completed for 197 clubs with youth and minis players and/or players with a disability. 5906 vets were completed this season and 3682 volunteers completed safeguarding in rugby training.

The IRFU Youth Volunteer Award is led by the IRFU Youth Council, offering 16-20-year olds a pathway into volunteering, learning about a range of roles in rugby. The IRFU Youth Council is carrying out 30 youth consultation workshops with players 13-18 years of age, as well as completing a project with Erasmus on gender equity in rugby. Results of this will be available for clubs early next season.

IRFU worked with Irish Centre for Diversity to achieve its Silver award and develop its Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity Action Plan. Based on a game wide survey and other relevant rugby research, it sets out a plan to ensure the game offers a welcoming environment for all, that begins with the welcome the gate, building an organisation where everyone feels valued and respected.



DISABILITY & INCLUSION PROGRAMMES PROVIDE A RANGE OF GAME FORMATS AND ACCESS FOR PARTICIPANTS AND VOLUNTEERS

There are 54 clubs with 57 teams across the 4 provinces offering rugby for players with a disability, across physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities.

As well as developing playing opportunities for players with a disability, this season the focus was on improving accessibility across the game. Sensory rooms were made available across the provinces, modified equipment to the clubs to make the game more accessible, including communication boards and a partnership with Hidden Disability Ireland was devolved to the clubs, supported by Sport Ireland and Energia. In addition, a work placement that began in April 2024 continued with further placements put in place in the High Performance Centre in 2025, offering work opportunities for people with a disability. The plan is to roll out volunteering roles within clubs for players with a disability in the 25-26 season.

LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE EMPOWERS INDIVIDUALS TO THRIVE AND GROUPS TO ACHIEVE THEIR AMBITIONS

Club volunteer training expanded across the provinces this season, growing from 20 participants to 80 in 2025. A phase 2 is now in place with 30 volunteers continuing their leadership development on a national level with a 50:50 gender balance. A female specific programme that began in 2024 continued with 30 players and pathway staff in 2025 to accelerate their leadership development.

Following the inaugural Women's Rugby Conference in September 2024, the Women's Rugby Network has grown to 176 LinkedIn members and 74 WhatsApp members. Members and non-members participated in 6 online networking calls, covering topics from injury prevention and management, breast health, coaching, refereeing and club development. There have been 3 in-person networking sessions in Connacht, Munster and Ulster with the remaining scheduled for August.

To raise the standard and quality of club facilities, IRFU announced its link with FabLittleBag in October 2024, to promote period positivity, by purchasing FLB dispensers and period products for teams in the Women's

All Ireland League, Celtic Challenge and pathway teams. In March 2025 IRFU began a club grant supporting clubs to join the FabLittleBag movement, assisting 53 clubs to create a more female friendly environment.

Connecting people to Irish Rugby and each other is central to enhancing inclusivity. The introduction of the IRFU Healthy Ireland Walking Tracks grant in October 2024 supported 21 clubs across the country to improve their facilities while encouraging the local community to enjoy physical activity in a safe and accessible space, with the potential benefit of recruiting more members and volunteers through use of club facilities.

ANTI-DOPING – ACHIEVING INTEGRITY AND ASSISTING THOSE IN THE HIGH PERFORMANCE ENVIRONMENT TO ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL

Testing continued throughout the season, with 281 in and out of competition tests completed by Sport Ireland and World Rugby. 1,148 players and staff completed the IRFU anti-doping education module, that includes World Rugby's Keep Rugby Clean certificate, and 29 face-to-face workshops were held for squads at both national and provincial levels. Break down by teams is below:

IRFU 24/25 ANTI-DOPING FIGURES

1st June 2024 - 31 May 2025 - Total number of tests 281

TEAM	IN COMPETITION	OUT OF COMPETITION
Mens (15)	14	28
Provincial (including Academy)	14	118
U20s	11	10
Womens (15)	4	11
Womens (7)	11	16
Mens (7)	10	16
AIL	2	0
Age-grade	8	8
TOTAL	74	207

Note:

1: Figures are for the number of tests, (including urine, blood and dried blood testing), carried out between 1st June 2024 – 31st May 2025..

AMPLIFYING THE VALUES OF IRISH RUGBY THROUGH SPIRIT OF RUGBY PROJECTS.

At the core of all we do will remain the values of Irish Rugby. Every participants needs to know that they will be offered a positive experience through rugby, and that starts with the welcome at the gate.

The publication of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity Action Plan will help us achieve this goal and allow us to further develop the

game, embrace new opportunities and tackle challenges through rugby. The targets laid out in the EDI Action Plan will assist in creating places where people can thrive, where they can be inspired by others and where they can be themselves and connect with each other through rugby. [CLICK HERE](#) to read the EDI Action Plan.

ANNE MARIE HUGHES

Head of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion



COMMERCIAL & MARKETING

PADRAIG POWER

FROM A COMMERCIAL STANDPOINT THE GLOBAL CONTEXT FOR RUGBY CONTINUES TO PRESENT SERIOUS CHALLENGES. AS THE COSTS OF DELIVERING THE GAME BOTH PROFESSIONALLY AND DOMESTICALLY CONTINUE TO RISE, THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL REVENUE IS EVEN MORE ACUTE.

To that end, as IRFU CCO, I'm delighted to report a strong performance from the Commercial & Marketing (C&M) function this past season. The C&M Committee chaired by Mick Collopy, provided great oversight in helping to navigate through challenging times. As Mick Collopy vacates the Chair and moves to the position of Junior Vice President, I would like to thank him and the committee members most sincerely for all the support and wise counsel. I wish Mick well.

COMMERCIAL PERFORMANCE:

Our underpinning financial fundamentals of Test match day ticketing, hospitality and sponsorship have held up well, making strong contributions to the organisation's finances.

Irish Rugby continued to demonstrate exceptional audience engagement throughout the season. The Guinness Men's Six Nations 2025 attracted substantial viewership, drawing peak audiences ranging from 976,800 to 1.1 million viewers. The U20 Six Nations also garnered impressive figures, with the Ireland U20 vs. Scotland match peaking at 325,000 viewers. The Guinness Women's Six Nations are garnering strong TV audiences year on year with almost 200,000 tuning in to see Ireland's opening game against France in Ireland & Northern Ireland.

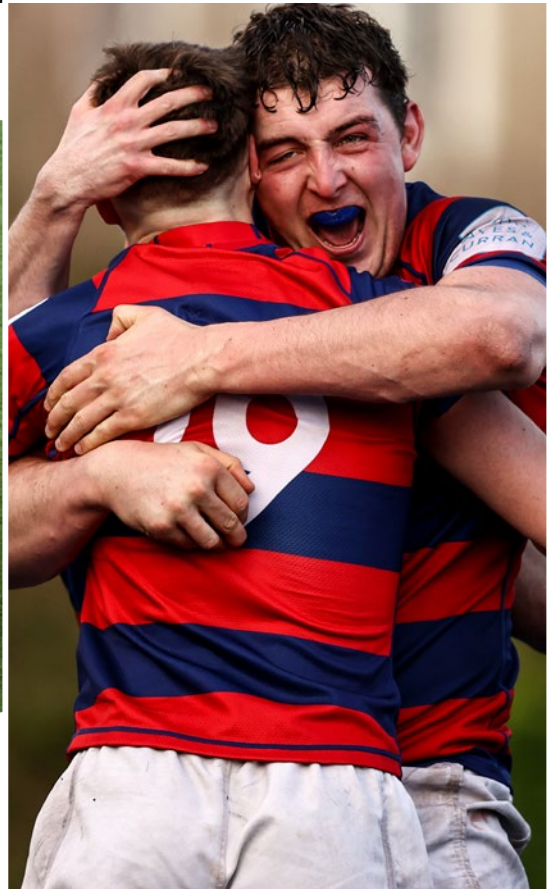
Additionally, the Autumn Nations Series 2024 achieved an audience of 3 million across four fixtures in the UK & Ireland. These figures highlight our Teams popularity and our sport's robust presence in the public consciousness.

On the men's side of the game, we have also had sell outs for our four Autumn Nations Series in 2024 and our two home Guinness Men's Six Nations fixtures in 2025.

We remain extremely grateful to our 10-year ticket/Patrons Club members whose unstinting loyalty underpins our financial model. Our corporate box owners and match day hospitality programmes were also very strong again this past season and we gratefully acknowledge this support.

On the women's side of the game, we had strong crowds in Belfast and a record breaking 7,754 in Cork for our two home games. This generates great momentum in our ambition to continue to grow the audiences for women's rugby in Ireland.

Our commercial partnerships are central to the IRFU's ability to fund the game, from grassroots to high performance.



SPONSORSHIP:

The 2024/25 season saw several new and renewed partnerships that will support the continued growth of rugby across the island. Goodfella's joined as an Official Sponsor of the Ireland Women's Team in January 2025, marking their inaugural major sporting partnership. This collaboration focuses on promoting values of unity and camaraderie, while aligning with the IRFU's commitment to elevating women's rugby. In March 2025, DMG Media was announced as the Official Media Partner of the Ireland Women's Rugby Team. Through its Evoke.ie platform, DMG will help to elevate the women's game through increased visibility and storytelling. Opel Ireland renewed its partnership with the IRFU in December 2024, extending its role as our Official Car Partner until 2028.

We thank all our partners for their continued and loyal support. As a not-for-profit National Sports Governing body, the IRFU cannot deliver rugby programmes without our family of partners and sponsors.

We thank Vodafone CEO Amanda Nelson and her team for their ongoing support and elevation of our game. We wish Amanda well as she moves on from her role and welcome new CEO Sabrina Casalta.

Long-standing partner Canterbury provides financial support and outstanding kit for our teams & supporters. The Canterbury 'Give It A Try' grassroots girls rugby programme, continues to build momentum year on year, the programme recruits girls aged 8-14 into the game, and we have seen a number of players called up to the National squad this season who started their rugby careers in the Give It A Try programme.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all our partners, including Vodafone, Canterbury, Diageo, Bank of Ireland, Aviva, Energia, PwC, Opel, Aon, Lucozade Sport, Aer Lingus, Aldi, Dove Men+Care, Ballygowan, Eden Park, Goodfellas, DHL Express, Gilbert, TritonLake, 3fe, DMG, and David Barry, whose unwavering support is vital to the ongoing success and growth of Irish Rugby.

Our appreciation also goes to the coaches, managers, and players—Andy Farrell, Simon Easterby, Scott Bemand, Neil Doak, and all members of the national men's and women's squads—for their participation in our commercial initiatives throughout the season.

150 ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS:

In addition to the normal seasonal activity, 2024/25 marked a significant milestone as the IRFU celebrated its 150th anniversary, which you will have read about in full in the earlier report. This landmark was commemorated through various events and initiatives that engaged fans and stakeholders nationwide, underscoring rugby's enduring legacy in Ireland.

I again thank C&M Chair Michal Collopy for his stewardship of the Committee and especially all the effort that went into making the 150-year celebrations as successful as they have been.

This important and historic initiative has yielded a fantastic outcome, and I commend 150-year anniversary Working Party Chair Paul Dean for his efforts and commitment as well.

STRATEGIC FOCUS:

We have endeavoured this past season to focus on being more strategic as we try to evolve and generate increased and new revenue streams.

We undertook a ticket pricing and sale strategy review on our International tickets which we hope will yield increased revenue as we move forward.

In parallel to the Portas review, we have launched Project Thrive which is an initiative aimed at working more closely with our four Provinces to explore collaborative ways in which we can increase the income into Irish Rugby collectively.

We are also looking at extending our global footprint and the Ireland game in Chicago versus New Zealand in November is already a sell-out which augurs well for our overseas ambitions especially in the US market.



Whilst there are many challenges that we face, there are also many opportunities, once such being the Women's Rugby World Cup in England. The tournament (Live on RTÉ) hopefully presents us with an occasion that creates greater awareness for, and that facilitates greater commercial support for women's rugby in Ireland as we move in to the future.

To conclude, as we reflect on a season of progress, resilience and innovation, it is clear that the strength of Irish Rugby lies in its people – from our grassroots volunteers and fans, to our elite athletes and commercial partners. The commercial and marketing successes of the past year have been hard-won in a challenging environment, but they reflect the enduring passion for the game across all levels and demographics.

Looking ahead, we remain steadfast in with the ambitions outlined in our strategic plan last year. Through initiatives like Project Thrive, new commercial partnerships, and growing media visibility – particularly for the women's game – we are laying the foundation for sustainable growth.

This next chapter will demand continued innovation and collaboration across our four Provinces and with our wider rugby community. By aligning our commercial efforts with the game's core values and strategic pillars, we are confident that Irish Rugby can not only meet the challenges of the future, but lead the way in shaping a vibrant, inclusive and financially resilient game.

PADRAIG POWER
Chief Commercial Officer



COMMUNICATIONS

AOIFE CLARKE

THE 2024/25 SEASON MARKED A TRANSFORMATIVE YEAR FOR THE IRFU COMMUNICATIONS TEAM, DRIVEN BY A RENEWED FOCUS ON ELEVATING CONTENT ACROSS BOTH THE PROFESSIONAL AND DOMESTIC GAME.

The historic 150th anniversary celebrations provided a unique platform to tell richer, more compelling stories across our channels — celebrating Irish Rugby's past while spotlighting its vibrant present and future. Initiatives such as the awarding of 'Services to Rugby' medals helped us gain a lot of regional exposure as many celebrated the individuals who were honoured in their communities.

A key milestone in our strategy was the expansion of in-house content creation capabilities. In July 2024, we welcomed a full-time videographer to the team — a move that immediately enhanced the depth and quality of our storytelling. Embedded within the Men's Summer Tour and later accompanying the Women's National Team to WXV1, our videographer played a pivotal role in capturing behind-the-scenes access and player moments that resonate with our digital audiences. These authentic insights have not only strengthened our engagement metrics but also allowed us to provide high-quality assets to players for use on their own social platforms — helping amplify Irish Rugby content organically and globally.

The IRFU digital channels have continued to engage fans, and add significant value for our sponsors, with a compelling mix of international team news, player insight and memorable moments. Instagram remains the best performing platform with the highest level of engagement while Tik Tok has shown the most

growth in the year. Video content is the biggest driver of engagement and the mix of highlights, emotional moments, and key milestones as well as insights into life in camp have delivered over 50 Million views.

Importantly, this season saw a significant step forward in how we connect with the wider rugby community. The launch of the dedicated Instagram page @IrishRugbyGrassroots has been a game-changer for how we support and showcase the Club game. This new channel allows us to highlight stories from every corner of the rugby community — from local heroes and rising stars to memorable match moments and community initiatives. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with the page quickly building an enthusiastic, engaged following, exceeding the target set of 10,000 followers and delivering over 5 million views on Club and community related content. It is proving an excellent way for Clubs to enhance their own engagement through collaborations and sharing of content, thereby adding value for their sponsors as well as attracting a wider audience to their initiatives.

As we look ahead, our goal is to continue developing innovative, relevant, and fan-focused content that serves the entire rugby ecosystem — from the national stage to the local pitch.

The topic of social media abuse is something that the Communications team are very aware of, and we are collaborating with our colleagues across Communications in the Provinces and other stakeholder such as HR, Medical and Rugby Players Ireland to proactively tackle this topic.

Media relations continues to keep the team busy with hundreds of media events held both online and in person over the course of the season. We were particularly pleased to see a marked increase in attendance for our home games in the 2025 Guinness Women's Six Nations and we are hopeful that the Irish media will engage as actively for the 2025 Rugby World Cup as they did for the men's 2023 edition. Six Nations confirmed ahead of the start of the 2025 Guinness Men's Six Nations



campaign that Series 2 of the Netflix series would be the final instalment of 'Full Contact' which was launched at the end of January and supported across all IRFU digital channels.

There is an increasing number of local and international requests that our team facilitates with domestic and international host broadcasters, newspapers, radio, photography, online and non-traditional rugby media such as Kids TV. We were pleased this year to also welcome dmg media owned Evoke as an official media partner and sponsor of women's rugby. Our sincere thanks to CEO Paul Henderson and his team for their ongoing support in helping to profile the women's game.

Our sincere thanks to our National Head Coaches; Andy Farrell, Scott Bemand, Neil Doak, Niamh Briggs, Interim Head Coaches Simon Easterby, Paul O'Connell 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. A special word of thanks for the media and content creators who continue to collaborate with us to promote the game of rugby through all channels.

In the domestic space we were delighted to bring onboard Final Whistle as a new partner in the delivery of scores and content for the Energia All-Ireland Leagues. Breifne and his team have been a pleasure to work with and we look forward to continuing to enhance the content delivery in the domestic rugby space in the seasons to come. A word of thanks also to those in Clubs who assist us in sharing stories and find interesting angles to promote.

This season we partnered with Wiistream to create IrishRugby+. This is a dedicated hub for streaming of Energia AIL & WAIL games. It is a service we hope to expand in the years to come. A huge thank you to Patrick Magee, Fionn Herlihy and Enterprise Ireland for their support. At the Federation of Irish Sport Awards, we were honoured to win the award for Best Use of Communications Platform in Sport for our collaboration on Irish Rugby+.

Our website continues to perform well with strong traffic figures across the season. We recognise there are challenges with our current website delivering the most up to date information in a timely manner and we are addressing this through a tender process which is underway.

There is a continuing focus on building our owned audience through our regular newsletter which delivers timely content and drives engagement with our website as well as offering regular competitions and incentives for fans as well as providing a further outlet for sponsors to provide relevant offers to the supporter base.

This year has seen us introduce new levels of audience segmentation in both the Club game and with Women's content. The focus on specific cohorts is paying dividends in helping to drive ticket sales during the Women's Six Nations as well as building a more connected community around the women's game at all levels with open and read rates on content exceeding industry averages by a significant margin.

We were proud to see our colleague Ryan Bailey selected to join the British & Irish Lions digital team for the 2025 tour—an outstanding achievement. We congratulate Ryan on this well-deserved honour and look forward to following his contributions throughout the tour.

As the IRFU Communications team reflects on a season of growth, innovation, and deeper connection with our audiences, we remain committed to evolving how we share the story of Irish Rugby and appreciate the efforts made to collaborate with our team through an ever expanding season.

AOIFE CLARKE
Communications Director



MEDICAL

DR ROD MCLOUGHLIN

A BIG FOCUS FOR THE PAST TWO SEASON IS THE TACKLE BEHAVIOURS TRIAL IN THE DOMESTIC GAME

Rugby is a magnificent team sport and for the vast majority of who play our sport the risks involved are far outweighed by the lifelong enjoyment and benefits it brings.

We are constantly striving to produce players who are physically robust, mentally resilient and nutritionally ready to perform / participate in a positively impacting environment. Our approach, based on scientific evidence, involves a commitment to ongoing education, monitoring, and application of safety protocols across the game, including proactively managing elite player game time with a focus on injury prevention and oversight.

This report highlights some of the medical activities that were undertaken to deliver these aims.

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 for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 seasons. The IRFU Medical Department is leading the research aspects of this trial, including monitoring injury trends, video analysis and stakeholder feedback. Preliminary findings from the first season of the trial show that the adaptation is having a positive effect on injury rates and head impact rates across the domestic game.

Overall, the average number of head impacts decreased from 5.7/game to 4.5/game, while other game metrics remained largely the same. Other key findings include:

MEN'S ENERGIA ALL-IRELAND LEAGUE (AIL)

- Concussion incidence rates decreased by 52%. Concussion incidence rates reduced from 9.1/1,000 player hours to 4.4/1,000 player hours
- On average a male player may sustain 1 concussion every 170 matches
- In the Men's AIL overall injuries decreased by 16%

WOMEN'S ENERGIA ALL-IRELAND LEAGUE (WAIL)

- Concussion incidence rates decreased by 23%. Concussion incidence rates reduced from 2.6/1,000 player hours to 2.0/1,000 player hours
- On average a female player may sustain 1 concussion every 375 matches
- In the Women's AIL overall injuries decreased by 25%

SCHOOLS CUP

- Senior Cup Trophy/Tournament (SCT) concussion incidence rate remained stable at 7.5/1,000 player hours
- On average a schoolboy player may sustain 1 concussion every 114 matches
- In the School's SCT overall injuries decreased by 10%

A full review of the two seasons of the trial will be conducted at the end of the 2024/25 season, including:

- Monitoring of injury types and mechanisms, in collaboration with the Irish Rugby Injury Surveillance (IRIS) Project.
- Video analysis of injury mechanisms, tackles events and game metrics, in collaboration with World Rugby and Science Foundation Ireland's Lero project.
- Stakeholder feedback, in collaboration with the University of Limerick.

The tackle behaviours trial intervention has decreased overall injuries in our Men's AIL by over 50% and overall injuries by just under 20%, which makes it the intervention that has had the single biggest impact on player welfare.

CONCUSSION

The IRFU Medical Department continued to drive the IRFU Concussion Strategy 2024-2027 during the 2024/25 season. The vision of this 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'. A mandatory concussion education webinar was provided for all school coaches involved in the Junior and Senior Cup ahead of the 2025 School's Cup.

The IRFU Medical Department is supporting the Rugby Headgear Effectiveness Study, which is one of the largest studies worldwide on concussion assessment and recovery in an amateur cohort. There are currently over 350 players, across the domestic club and school game, participating in the study. Data collection includes video, instrumented mouthguards, GPS, blood biomarkers, salivary biomarkers, concussion assessment (SCAT), neurocognitive assessments (ImPACT) and imaging. The study will enter its 3rd season of data collection in September 2025.

LONG TERM BRAIN HEALTH

The Long-Term Brain Health (LTPH) group has been renamed the Long-Term Player Health group to acknowledge that players health across the board and not just brain health, is a priority. The group now focuses on three sub-categories: Brain Health, Cardiovascular health and Mental Health.

A new Cardiovascular working group has been established. The group aims to develop protocols around screening, monitoring and promoting cardiovascular health amongst our players. The group is made up of medical, physiotherapy and nutrition staff as well as external experts in the field of athlete cardiac health. The area of Mental Health comes under the remit of the psychology department and brain health continues to come under the umbrella of LTPH.

Output from the group this year includes:

- An updated Terms of Reference document for the group to reflect the expanded remit (2025-2027) as well as an updated Strategy document (2025-2027)
- Information guide for players exiting the system, including information on promoting long-term brain health and healthy lifestyle habits was finalised.
- An educational document for current players on the risk factors for long-term brain health was developed. This aims to inform players about how their current lifestyle can affect their long term health and educates them about the elements of their current behaviours that both promote and possibly detract from their brain health.
- In-career medical reviews (ICMR) continued this season. The protocol around the ICMR was debated by the LTPH group and some changes made to reduce the administrative burden on the medical team whilst still maintaining the value of the interactions.
- Guideline documents on Blood Pressure management and Sleep Apnea in Rugby players have been drafted.
- Our collaboration with UPMC and the University of Limerick to review our neurocognitive assessments (ImPACT) has resulted in one paper being submitted for publication (Role of Demographic and Medical History Factors in Baseline Neurocognitive Performance and Concussion Symptoms Among Elite Rugby Players) with a second paper hopefully being submitted soon.

SAFE RUGBY PROGRAMME

- SAFE Rugby – Standard Approach to Field Emergencies in Rugby – is the IRFU's own in house player welfare programme looking after the welfare of those in the domestic game and is now in its 11th season. By the end of the 2024-25 season, we will have provided training across all 3 levels to over 750 attendees and will have completed over 40 individual courses.
- SAFE Rugby – Initially designed to provide tailored rugby specific first aid and trauma care training, SAFE Rugby continues to build on the experience of the past decade and provide high quality, rugby specific first

aid / immediate care courses. The SAFE Rugby suite of courses are now recognised as the preeminent programme across the Island and 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 domestic and the professional game. The SAFE Rugby program draws on the knowledge and experiences of a team of SAFE Rugby tutors in four pods covering the four provinces and is underpinned by the Irish Rugby Injury Surveillance (IRIS) data for content. All are experts in prehospital care.

- The SAFE Rugby team continue to provide Concussion and Return to Play education and support. SAFE Rugby via the Player Welfare Coordinator provides a 7 day contact and advice service for players, parents, as well as club and schools officials on a range of related topics. Our SAFE Rugby faculty have continued to provide the pitch side extrication for all home games in the Aviva Stadium, working alongside the national and provincial teams' medical staff. For this season and next, we have expanded this role to encompass Leinster Rugby home games at the national stadium. For the 2025-2026 season, we will trial a number of additional courses covering topics to include wound care as well as a sports taping course designed for the domestic game coaches.

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 700 coaches have completed this module. The Irish Rugby Injury Surveillance (IRIS) Project has reviewed methods of educating school coaches about the ENGAGE programme and insights from this work will help the IRFU Medical Department to work with the Rugby Department in effectively delivering education.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

The IRFU Research and Discovery Unit continues to initiate projects and collaborate with external experts to deliver research of value to the IRFU and rugby in general. A framework by which research projects are reviewed has been embedded within the system, ensuring that projects are of high quality, and delivered efficiently. This process involves a value assessment of projects, followed by an independent review by the IRFU Research Advisory Committee. An operational research strategy is currently being developed to establish a clear, unified direction for tackling multidisciplinary research questions across priority areas.

Current projects developed or supported by the IRFU Research and Discovery Unit include:

- A six-season epidemiological study investigating the incidence, severity, and time-loss burden of injuries across both provincial and national teams.
- A collaboration with Trinity College Dublin, exploring the psychosocial challenges experienced by players in the women's pathway.
- A collaboration with Ulster University investigating MRI grading of muscle injuries, and its relationship with return-to-play.
- A collaboration with Loughborough University, funded by World Rugby, investigating painkiller use across the professional game.
- A collaboration with Cardiff Metropolitan University exploring barriers to evidence-based medicine in women's rugby.
- Support of a large-scale investigation into concussion and head impact events in the domestic game, in conjunction with NPro headgear.

Additionally, several PhD research projects are in progress, exploring topics such as the nutritional and energetic considerations of development pathway rugby players and machine learning approaches to injury risk prediction.

EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATION

A new Learning and Development strategy and operational delivery plan have been drafted for the term 2025-2027 for our High Performance staff. The goal of our learning and development strategy remains the formation of a collaborative and growth mindset amongst our staff; a community of excellence where staff strive for improvement and learning in order to have the most impact on performance and to create a positive culture in all of our centres. The L&D Operational delivery plan clearly identifies all the learning opportunities available to us, considering both formal and informal modes of learning. Cross disciplinary learning is prioritised, specific target groups have been identified and a focused thematic approach to connect various facets of learning will be implemented.

IN-PERSON SYMPOSIUM

Our staff have engaged in an in-person symposium, focused on the foot and ankle, hosted in the HPC and lead by Australian specialist Luke Kelly. Numerous online lectures by international experts have taken place as well as practice sharing sessions between staff on a monthly basis. A World Class Fundamentals programme has been launched (beginning May 2025) which aims to refocus performance support staff on some of the basics of their practice – beginning with Anatomy.

An interdisciplinary learning day, led by Phil Glasgow, Head of Performance Support, focussed on Communication was held in May 2025 also.

GAINLINE

Gainline continues to be a valuable resource for both high performance and domestic medical staff. It is a repository of all of the recordable CPD that takes place and continues to grow each year.

The IRFU Medical Department is committed to upskilling and supporting those providing medical assistance across all levels of the game. As part of the Domestic Game Medical Strategy (2024-2028), the IRFU Medical



Department set a target in the 2024/25 season to have 50% of all clubs in Ireland represented by a medical professional on Gainline. This target was surpassed, with 65% of clubs working or volunteering in rugby in Ireland now represented on Gainline. This allows the IRFU Medical Department to better engage with their stakeholders and provide access to a designated section on Gainline, just for medical professionals working in rugby in Ireland. Resources available in this section include concussion assessment and management, GRTP protocols, ENGAGE and injury surveillance and management. The IRFU will aim to have 100% of clubs represented and establish a provincial medical structure for the Domestic Game, supporting the delivery of the Domestic Game Medical Strategy. In addition, Gainline continues to host our annual concussion education module for referees and the concussion education and ENGAGE modules for coaches.

The IRFU Medical Department hosted participants of two large-scale research projects within the Domestic Game in the High Performance Centre in April 2025. These projects were the IRIS Project and the Rugby Headgear Effectiveness Study. Speakers from

the IRFU High Performance system shared insights and expertise in the areas of coaching, athletic performance and psychology, with coaches and medics working across the club and school game.

ONE TEAM

The HPC is a hub 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.

As part of the performance support programme, one of the biggest performance gains identified was to enhance how medicine, science and coaching work together to support and sustain high performance. In light of this, medicine in partnership with coach development has developed the One Team project as a framework for how we work. We have developed agreed ways of working that places emphasis on shared goals, collective success and community over individual achievement, competition, or self-interest. The following objectives for the incoming year have been agreed: 1. Prioritise the

HPC as the initial site to test and embed the one teamwork practices and 2. Connect national and provincial performance support staff to foster learning and innovation.

MENTORING PROGRAMME

Following on from the recent successful medical staff mentoring programme, we are currently developing a transdisciplinary mentoring programme for the IRFU HP system. This will adopt a similar approach to the medical mentoring programme and involve mentor training, pairing of mentors and mentees and development of ongoing peer support for those involved. This programme aligns with the focus on developing a One Team approach and enhancing collaborative working.

STAFFING/STRUCTURE

WOMEN'S GAME MEDICAL STRUCTURE

The IRFU Medical Department established a Women's Game Medical Sub-committee, which will answer into the Medical Advisory Committee. This group will be chaired by Prof Fiona Wilson who has vast experience in elite sport both as a competitor and researcher where women's issues are one of her interest areas, she has also had significant involvement with World Rugby on the women's game. A Women's Game medical operational group is established and will deliver on the strategic aims across the High Performance and Domestic game.

CONTRACTOR PANEL

The IRFU Physio contractor panel was expanded this year to include several qualified and experienced physiotherapists to provide cover across the national teams, from pathway to senior and Sevens. This panel provides a valuable resource to ensure the continued care of our players with suitably qualified staff.

Our doctor panel has all been developed this year. We have exposed more doctors to the elite match day environment to fulfil the Match Day Doctor and Immediate Care roles, as well as bringing in more doctors to cover the team doctor role.

INJURY SURVEILLANCE

IRISH RUGBY INJURY SURVEILLANCE (IRIS) PROJECT

The Irish Rugby Injury Surveillance (IRIS) Project have published annual season reports in the domestic men's, women's and school's game since 2017. The IRIS Research Team in the University of Limerick published a 2023/24 season report in September 2024, detailing injury trends in both the men's and women's club game, and the schools' game. These reports have been a valuable resource during discussions around lowering the tackle height and addressing tackle behaviours. Reports for both the 2024/25 club and school game will be available ahead of the 2025/26 season.

In addition to the annual reports, the IRIS research team have published 24 papers in internationally renowned academic journals and have presented at 71 conferences, both nationally and internationally. The IRIS Project currently has five PhD researchers working across the Domestic Game, with projects on coach education, breast health, concussion recovery, stakeholder feedback of the tackle behaviours trial and relative energy deficiency in rugby. The research on breast health has led to the development of an educational resource on breast injuries and pain, and advice on supportive clothing for female players.

PSYCHOLOGY

IRFU MENTAL WELLNESS SERVICE

The aim of the IRFU Mental Wellness Service is to provide active male and female senior and academy players with timely, confidential access to clinical and counselling psychology. Approximately one year after its launch, a review of the service was conducted across the four provinces. The aim of the review was to explore awareness of the Mental Wellness Service, barriers to engagement, areas of interest, views on psychological areas with the biggest impact on performance and preferred learning modalities. Key findings of the review included a 98% awareness of the service amongst coaching staff and 94% awareness amongst players. Feedback from the review will be used to guide the development of workshops and resources for players over the next two years.



This year the reach of the Service has been extended. In collaboration with Daragh Sheridan, the Head of Coach Development, the IRFU Mental Wellness Service is now also available to all National and Senior Coaches across the HP System.

STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT

As part of the Psychology team's overarching premise that 'Healthy People Drive Superior Performance,' strategic initiatives revolve around building a culture and resources that grow performance and prevent mental health difficulties. One initiative that has been the focus of this past year has been to develop minimum standards in psychology that are comparable and aligned with existing minimum standards in other disciplines. In a collaborative process with key stakeholders a draft framework has been developed and initial discussions around the framework initiated across the provinces. To explore the feasibility of delivering a competency framework in psychology for academy and WNTS players, pilot workshops and resources are currently being trialled within the WNTS playing and coaching group.

NUTRITION

PEOPLE & PLACE

The Performance Nutrition Department's Strategic Plan aims to support the IRFU's continued success now, and in the future. The department now has full time performance nutrition provision across all men's senior and academy teams. An ongoing aim of the department is to further grow the resource and provision for players in the sub academies and domestic game. Given there is still restricted nutrition provision within these cohorts, the department has recently agreed a 3 year partnership with Enterprise Ireland start-up company, Hexis. Hexis offers a platform that automates personalised fuelling plans for athletes through an app, offering our pathway nutritionists the ability to further support our sub academy players.

In our women's game, our service provision continues to grow, and a new part time position was recently created in the Women's pathway to ensure our players have access to performance nutrition support at both senior and development level. Leanne Varley now holds the position of Performance Nutritionist for the Women's Pathway, working alongside

Emma Brennan who leads the delivery for the Women's XV's. Leanne and Emma have been specifically working on building a curriculum of nutrition education that will be available to women's players in the pathway.

In total the Performance Nutrition Department now sits at 12 full time staff and 1 part time member of staff across the men's and women's system. The group meet on a monthly basis to connect, ensure alignment in delivery, and contribute to regular continued professional development to ensure they continue to develop and excel as a discipline.

As part of the continued professional development, in December 2024, the Nutrition and Athletic Development department held their first ever joint CPD event at the HPC. Practitioners from both disciplines came together for the day to discuss optimal ways of working and alignment in delivery.

RESEARCH & DISCOVERY

With the support and input of other disciplines, the Nutrition Department has been working on a 'Body Composition Position Policy' which they hope to finalise and disseminate this year. The purpose of the policy is to provide best practice protocols to enable a considered and safe process, for determining the appropriateness of body composition assessment of our high performing players.

The early results of the tackle are very encouraging as they show a 52% reduction in concussion rates in our Energia Men's All Ireland League. No other single intervention has had such a positive impact on player welfare. We will closely monitor developments in year two and continue to learn how we can continue to improve the safety of the game. Activities have ranged from the tackle trial, long term brain health, Engage our robustness programme, on-field injury management (SAFE rugby), people development to research and Innovation showing the complexity of the challenges. The IRFU is data-informed in our approach. We have also collaborated with other Unions, sports and research institutions and remain committed to player safety and to develop robust resilient players who will better enjoy the game and perform.

DR ROD MCLOUGHLIN
Medical Director



HUMAN RESOURCES

AILEEN BAILEY

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 on the Sport Ireland Campus, 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 fourteen nationalities working within the IRFU, of which 32% 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. We also have invested in a new Human Resources Information System (HRIS) which will streamline processes for HR & staff. Many initiatives have been put in place, ideas for these initiatives came from our two staff groups – Team Huddle (Employee Forum) & Mental Health First Aid Group.

The IRFU have worked with Great Place to Work for the last six years. This confidential staff survey allows us to receive feedback from staff & inform our HR strategy for the year ahead. For the past six years the IRFU has been named as a 'Best Workplace in Ireland' each year. We also learnt last September that the IRFU were accredited as a 'Best Workplaces in Europe,' our first year to achieve this accreditation. This is an accreditation that we are particularly proud of. This year the IRFU was also certified as a Healthy Place to Work.

The IRFU have also been working with the Irish Centre for Diversity in Ireland over the last few 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 continue to support initiatives with St Michael's House.

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

AILEEN BAILEY
Chief People Officer



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IRFU CHARITABLE TRUST

This past year has been a time for putting a stronger emphasis on our core responsibility – to ensure all 37 seriously injured players are supported in the best way possible; carefully considering player needs on an individual basis; and importantly identifying future needs as best we can to help with forecasting expenditure.

In tandem, our focus on tighter Financial Control and with online banking up and running in the Republic of Ireland, efficiencies continue to be experienced in this area. Northern Ireland e-banking should be in place in the very near future. Stronger Financial Management is vital in the current climate, particularly given the exponentially increasing costs of care.

The charity sector and fundraising in particular are facing more challenging times ahead. On a macro level, global conflict and uncertainty is having a negative impact on donations and sponsorships, in particular for events. And on a micro level, the competition within the charity landscape is tougher, given these conditions, with many larger charities eating into our rugby space. As a consequence, although fundraising continues to grow, the level of growth cannot keep pace with inflation and exponentially increasing costs of care.

Our overarching Provincial Strategy continues to reap benefits both in terms of care engagement, awareness and fundraising. The latter is best exemplified by the four Charity Golf Outings once again happening across all four provinces this year; and the fantastic provincial volunteer support as a result. The success of provincial volunteer's engagement is highlighted by the ongoing recruitment of FRIENDS, particularly rugby clubs, across the four provinces.

In support of our Provincial strategy, we have broadened our Trustee numbers to a total of seven; and we hope to augment our Trustee base with further provincial and more inclusive representation in the near future.



The renewing and revitalisation of our relationships with our primary partners and sponsors, as well as engaging more provincial partners, has proven to be successful, contributing to greater awareness and revenue. A key focus going forward is to further augment existing partnerships, including the IRFU, and appropriately engage and recruit new partners, both at a national level and provincial level.

Key goals for the coming year:

- Governance (in line with / learning with the IRFU)
- Care forward planning, forecasting and resourcing
- Further strengthen financial management and controls
- Explore additional sources of revenue
- Augment provincial strategy
- Further engage existing partners and recruit new partners

MICHAEL WHELAN
Chair of the Charitable Trust

STANDING COMMITTEES SEASON 2024/25



PRESIDENT

Declan Madden

VICE PRESIDENTS

John O'Driscoll
Tony O'Beirne

HONORARY

TREASURER

Patrick Kennedy

CHAIRPERSON OF MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Niall Rynne

IMMEDIATE

PAST PRESIDENT

Greg Barrett

IRFU COMMITTEE

Stephen Black

Grainne Carroll

Maeve Carton

Su Carty

Gerry Casey

Michael Collopy

Yvonne Comer

Robert Deacon

Kevin Dinneen

Josephine Feehily

Rosie Foley

Joanne Geary

Joe McDermott

John McKibbin

Regina Moran

Billy Murphy

Diane Nixon

Rachael O'Brien

Mark Orr

Gerry O'Shea

Liam Rattigan

David Ryan

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

Mark Orr

TRUSTEES

Der Healy

Stephen Hilditch MBE

Louis Magee

Mary Quinn

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Kevin Potts

SENIOR NATIONAL

COACHES

Andy Farrell

Scott Bemand

OFFICE BEARERS AND COMMITTEE

MANAGEMENT

Niall Rynne
Patrick Kennedy (Hon. Treasurer)
Declan Madden (President)
Kevin Dinneen (National Professional Game Board)
Michael Collopy (Commercial & Marketing)
Stephen Black (Rugby Committee)
Kevin Potts (CEO)
Su Carty (Co-option) in attendance
John O'Driscoll (Senior Vice President)
Padraig Power (CCO)
Thelma O'Driscoll (CFO)
David Humphreys (PD)
Aoife Clarke (CD)

FINANCE

Patrick Kennedy
Gerry Casey
Gerry O'Shea
Tony O'Beirne
Laura Thompson
Kevin Potts
Thelma O'Driscoll
Maeve Carton
Feargal O'Rourke (Co-option)
Lochlann Quinn (Co-option), in attendance
Ruairi McLoughlin

COMMERCIAL AND MARKETING

Michael Collopy
Niall Rynne
Patrick Kennedy
Liam Rattigan
Yvonne Comer
Laura Thompson
Fiona Sweeney
Billy Murphy
Padraig Power
Aoife Clarke
Jessica Long
Peter Breen
Paul Dean (Co-option)
John Riordan (Co-option)

NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL GAME BOARD

Kevin Dinneen
Gerry O'Shea
Eoin Reddan (Former Player)
Nora Stapleton (External HP Expert)
Michael Kearney (External with Pro game experience)
Nancy Chillingworth (Co-option)
Niall Rynne
Kevin Potts, in attendance
David Humphreys

RUGBY COMMITTEE

Stephen Black
John McKibbin
Yvonne Comer
Gerry O'Shea
Grainne Carroll
Gerry O'Shea
Joe McDermott
Gerry Casey
Colin McEntee
Kevin Beggs
Dudley Phillips

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

Tanya Horgan
Niamh Marshall
Mark Orr
Regina Moran

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

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

GOVERNANCE/ATTENDANCE

There were 9 Union Committee meetings held in the season 2024/25.

COMMITTEE	MEETING ATTENDANCE	TITLE/ROLE
Declan Madden	9	President
John O'Driscoll	8	Senior Vice President/World Rugby Rep
Tony O'Beirne	8	Junior Vice President
Patrick Kennedy	9	Hon Treasurer
Niall Rynne	9	Chair of the Management Committee
Greg Barrett	7	Immediate Past President
Su Carty	9	World Rugby Rep
Kevin Dinneen	9	Chair of the NPGB
Stephen Black	9	Chair of the Rugby Committee
Michael Collopy	7	Chair of Commercial and Marketing
Grainne Carroll	9	Leinster Branch Elected Member
Maeve Carton	8	Co-opted Member
Gerry Casey	8	Connacht Branch Elected Member
Yvonne Comer	8	Connacht Branch Elected Member
Robert Deacon	9	Leinster Branch Elected Member
Josephine Feehily	8	Connacht Branch Elected Member
Rosie Foley	9	Munster Branch Elected Member
Joanne Geary	7	Co-opted Member
Joe McDermott	9	Leinster Branch Elected Member
John McKibbin	9	Ulster Branch Elected Member
Regina Moran	4	Munster Branch Elected Member
Billy Murphy	9	Leinster Branch Elected Member
Diane Nixon	6	Ulster Branch Elected Member
Rachael O'Brien	8	Leinster Branch Elected Member
Gerry O'Shea	8	Munster Branch Elected Member
Mark Orr	8	Ulster Branch Elected Member
Liam Rattigan	6	Connacht Branch Elected Member
David Ryan	9	Munster Branch Elected Member
Fiona Sweeney	8	Co-opted Member
Laura Thompson	6	Ulster Branch Elected Member

OBITUARIES

Alfred Ronald (Ronnie) Dawson

Former Trustee and Past President (1989-90),
Former Ireland and British and Irish Lions Player
(1958-65, 27 Caps).

William Albert (Bill) Mulcahy

Former Ireland Player (1958-62, 35 Caps)

William (Billy) McCombe

Former Ireland Player (1968-75, 5 Caps)

