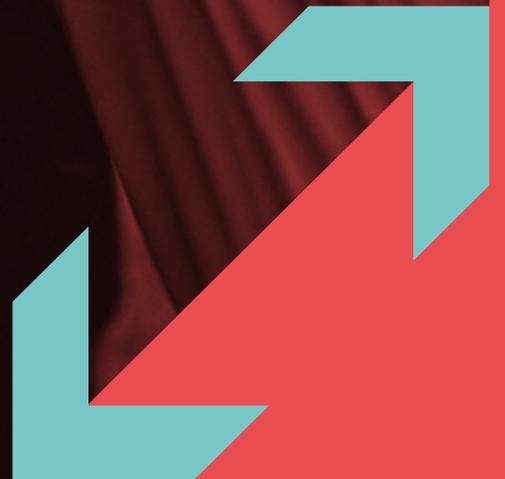


A photograph of a group of women in a huddle, with their arms around each other's shoulders. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The background is a solid red color.

**A TOOLKIT FOR
GROWING RUGBY
LEAGUE FOR
WOMEN AND
GIRLS GLOBALLY**



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	GLOBAL MAP.....	4
	FOREWORD	5
CHAPTER 1	IRL INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES	7
CHAPTER 2	GROWING THE WOMEN'S GAME IN ESTABLISHED AREAS	21
CHAPTER 3	GROWING THE WOMEN'S GAME IN NEW AREAS.....	47
CHAPTER 4	WOMEN'S HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS.....	84
CHAPTER 5	FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS	95
FUTURE WORK	FEEDBACK AND SUGGESTIONS.....	107



INTRODUCTION



CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3



CHAPTER 4



CHAPTER 5

FOREWORD – IRL WOMEN AND GIRLS ADVISORY GROUP

Rugby League is uniquely able to foster unity, inspiring communities and offering role models to people of all ages while igniting profound passion. With a rich history of challenging societal norms and championing inclusivity, this sport, originating in England in 1895, saw women participating as early as 1921, marking a century of women's involvement in rugby league matches in England and Australia.

Although traditionally viewed as a hyper-masculine pursuit, rugby league initially prioritised the men's game. Nevertheless, women worldwide have broken barriers and reshaped perceptions by participating in rugby league over the past century. The last seven years, in particular, have witnessed unprecedented growth in women's and girls' rugby league.

Despite more than a century since its inception, significant disparities persist between men's and women's rugby league, encompassing player numbers, the lower profile of women's competitions, and a dearth of women in leadership roles. This lack of representation translates into reduced revenue, sponsorships, and broadcast opportunities for women, exacerbating inequality. However, by capitalising on the burgeoning popularity of women's and girls' rugby league and drawing inspiration from successful models globally, we can rectify this situation.

In 2019, the International Rugby League (IRL) established the Women and Girls Advisory Group (WGAG) to coordinate international endeavours aimed at bolstering women's and girls' rugby league. Since its inception, this expert panel, comprised of representatives from regional rugby league confederations, has delineated seven strategic pillars and high-level outcomes, forming the foundation for the development guidelines presented in this toolkit.

[Click here to view the seven strategic pillars](#)

These development guidelines set forth the expectations for federations to meet both on and off the field, signifying their commitment to the advancement of women's and girls' rugby league. They provide a blueprint for federations to implement a strategic approach that ensures centralised accountability.

Rugby league has recently aligned itself with the global surge in women's and girls' sports, experiencing an unprecedented rise in interest and growth. However, even with this remarkable expansion, there remains a stark disparity in participation between men and women across the 53 nations affiliated with the International Rugby League (IRL). This imbalance extends to other aspects of the sport, including governance, administration, officiating, and coaching.

Over 30 federations have expressed a desire

to cultivate and nurture the women's and girls' game. IRL and WGAG emphasise the need for sustainable, long-term growth and are delighted to introduce the first of many tools aimed at supporting the global growth and development of women's and girls' rugby league.

Thanks to Robert Burgin for his extensive research, blood, sweat and tears to ensure that the toolkit is easy to read but linked to evidence and further reading for federations to explore subjects for themselves.

IRL Women and Girls Advisory Group

WGAG Representatives:

Independent Chair
International Rugby League
Rugby Football League
European Rugby League
Middle East Africa Rugby League
Australian Rugby League Commission
New Zealand Rugby League
Asia Pacific Rugby League
Americas Rugby League

CHAPTER 1

IRL INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION.....	8
1. STRONG DOMESTIC FOUNDATIONS.....	9
2. REGULAR PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL MATCHES.....	11
3. ABILITY TO ATTRACT & RETAIN PARTICIPANTS.....	13
4. VISIBILITY & SOCIAL IMPACT	15
5. OFF-FIELD DIVERSITY.....	17
6. EQUITY OF TEAM PROVISIONS.....	19

INTRODUCTION

Women's and girls' rugby league has enormous potential to grow the profile, participation base, and financial position of the sport. To achieve this potential, the IRL, confederations, and member nations need to commit to the meaningful and sustainable growth of the women's and girls' game.

There are considerable funding and partnership opportunities available exclusively for women's sports. Rugby league is competing for these opportunities with other sports, some of whom have had several years' head-start in investment, strategy, profile-raising, and capacity building for women. Many funders will expect rugby league to demonstrate the below requirements in order to be considered for funding.

In 2023 IRL committed to six categories of development guidelines which are the expectations of federations to fulfil on - and off field minimum standards/guidelines that will demonstrate a commitment to developing women's and girls' rugby league.

These guidelines are intended to put the IRL, confederations, and member nations on a strong trajectory to grow rugby league for women and girls meaningfully, sustainably, and with credibility.

The following pages give an overview of: the six categories of minimum development requirement and how they align with WGAG pillars of activity; the rationale for each category, based on lessons learnt from rugby league and other sports; how a requirement is assessed by IRL (the minimum standard); the expectations of a member nation; and the support that will be provided by IRL and confederations.



1. STRONG DOMESTIC FOUNDATIONS

- Evidence of sufficient & growing numbers in recent domestic competitions
- Evidence of established women's & girls' teams/clubs with consistent participation
- Defined formats, a calendar, multiple access pathways
- Match reports & footage
- Women and girl coaches, officials & staff
- Demonstrable plans for grassroots development & growth

1. STRONG DOMESTIC FOUNDATIONS

WGAG pillar: domestic competitions

A commitment to growing rugby league for women and girls in-country is key to creating pathways and sustainability for the women's game. Bringing together a team for RLWCQ should be underpinned by a regular program of participation and development opportunities in-country that unearths talent and builds capacity in the skills required for the players and staff of an elite women's national rugby league team.

ASSESSMENT INDICATORS	MINIMUM STANDARD FOR FUTURE RLWCs PARTICIPATION	EXPECTATIONS OF MEMBER NATION	SUPPORT PROVIDED BY IRL AND CONFEDERATIONS
Minimum level of domestic activity for women and girls	Population > 500k: 4-team competition, minimum 1 round. Population < 500k: 3-team competition, minimum 2 rounds.	Delivering the minimum level of domestic activity for women and girls	Toolkit and best practice-sharing on delivery of competitions for women and girls
Capacity building for coaches and other team and administration staff, including women	Program of work outlined in national women and girls' development plan	Conduct in-country capacity building, ensuring diversity and the inclusion of women	Facilitate training (face-to-face or virtual) and capacity building resources

2. REGULAR PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL MATCHES

- Creating relationships with neighbouring nations
- Knowledge sharing and gaining experience against nations in different stages of the development cycle
- Adherence & familiarity with IRL sanctioning process & protocols
- Providing value to sponsors & stakeholders
- Providing adequate incentives for domestic participants
- Providing a pathway for Match Officials

2. REGULAR PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL MATCHES

WGAG pillar: international opportunities

RLWC is the pinnacle of the sport. Bringing together a team to qualify for a RLWC without regular matches and only minimum activity between qualifying and tournaments does not demonstrate commitment to growing women's rugby league and risks losing players and staff to other sports who have more regular international fixtures and a clear calendar. Regular national team camps and international matches are also essential for giving players and staff access to high-level training and team environments.

ASSESSMENT INDICATORS	MINIMUM STANDARD FOR FUTURE RLWCs PARTICIPATION	EXPECTATIONS OF MEMBER NATION	SUPPORT PROVIDED BY IRL AND CONFEDERATIONS
<p>The nation must play a minimum number of international matches in a RLWC cycle, noting that, in some countries, participation in international matches and time spent in national team camps are the only high-level training experiences available to players and staff</p>	<p>Play at least one full international test match within the preceding 12 months, with additional matches strongly encouraged in nations where there are no other high-level representative matches nor other high-performance training environments</p>	<p>Take up opportunities to participate in IRL and confederation-run tournaments</p> <p>Facilitate additional bilateral matches if desired/required (noting the potential added value in terms of profile and sponsorship of playing in the country of a participating nation rather than in a third-party country)</p>	<p>Facilitate playing opportunities via the international calendar, including RLWC qualifying tournament(s)</p>

3. ABILITY TO ATTRACT & RETAIN PARTICIPANTS

- Understanding, demonstrating, communicating & fulfilling the attractions for women & girls to participate in a team sport
- Particular knowledge of the psychological drivers for women & girls to participate in a contact sport
- Knowing the needs & circumstances of your current players (individually & collectively)
- Cultivating ambassadors & leaders within the player group
- Establishing & maintaining organisational integrity
- Adequate protections on & off the field

3. ABILITY TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENT

WGAG pillar: pathways

In many countries rugby league competes with other sports for women athletes, so nations must be able to demonstrate clear structures to both attract and retain women in the game to build the quality of their international teams, and to position rugby league as a compelling sport of choice with visible and regular playing opportunities. While it is recognised that many women play multiple sports, players must be playing rugby league regularly and not drafted in from other sports only to participate in international matches.

ASSESSMENT INDICATORS	MINIMUM STANDARD FOR FUTURE RLWCs PARTICIPATION	EXPECTATIONS OF MEMBER NATION	SUPPORT PROVIDED BY IRL AND CONFEDERATIONS
Clear pathway opportunities to facilitate selection of the women's national team	Pathway opportunities outlined in national women and girls' development plan	Establishment and communication of pathways	Toolkit and best practice-sharing on pathways, and support via development plans
Selection of players who have a demonstrated commitment to playing rugby league (without inhibiting their ability to participate in other sports, if applicable)	Demonstrated record-keeping of players and their participation levels in rugby league	Rewarding players who have demonstrated commitment to rugby league via selection in train-on squads or national teams	N/A
Clear calendars, including training camps and playing opportunities, for the national team	Full women's national team calendar communicated to playing group and staff at least once per year	Regular communication of national team training and playing opportunities	Toolkit and best practice-sharing on national team planning and management

4. VISIBILITY & SOCIAL IMPACT

- Clear, consistent, compelling channels of communication
- Building a brand and formulating a marketing strategy
- A concerted focus on capturing video & photographic assets, as well as recording and acknowledging history
- Adopting like-minded causes & forging relationships within the community with an eye to ongoing partnerships
- Understanding the difference between athlete attraction, fan attraction, volunteer attraction & stakeholder attraction
- Understanding and enhancing the value your organisation has in achieving greater social good & the value to potential investors

4. VISIBILITY AND SOCIAL IMPACT

WGAG pillar: profile

Women's rugby league has demonstrated unique potential for social impact. It is logical and strategically beneficial for rugby league to focus on growing the women and girls' game in markets where it can hold a significant position in that country's social landscape, as that will encourage growth both within that nation and possibly in other nearby and/or similar countries. The potential for women's rugby league to have strong visibility and impact in a country does not necessarily relate to the status of men's rugby league there. Areas of social impact may include driving gender equity (within and outside of sport), promoting women in leadership, and/or contributing to a country's development priorities. Being able to demonstrate achievement in, or potential for, social impact is often a key factor in securing funding (especially from government) credibility and partnerships (both financial and non-financial, eg facilities and expertise).

ASSESSMENT INDICATORS	MINIMUM STANDARD FOR FUTURE RLWCs PARTICIPATION	EXPECTATIONS OF MEMBER NATION	SUPPORT PROVIDED BY IRL AND CONFEDERATIONS
Demonstrated visibility and/or potential perception of rugby league as a genuine sport of choice for women from and in the nation, with communications and media featuring the voices of women	Participation of women and girls regularly communicated via social media (and mainstream media if possible), with organic social impact communicated increasingly in line with the member nation's development	Produce content on social media/owned platforms that profile the benefits of women's rugby league programs and/or the women's national team, and engage with in-country media to try to secure mainstream media coverage	Media toolkits and sharing of case studies and best practice, facilitating regional and international media coverage
Track record of, or demonstrated potential for, impact on the social landscape of the nation	Clear understanding of potential (or actual) social impact outlined in national women and girls' development plan and/or being delivered	Identify how women and girls' rugby league can make a social impact in the country context, increasingly linking this to potential or actual partnerships in line with the member nation's development	Sharing of case studies and best practice, and support via development plans

5. OFF-FIELD DIVERSITY

- What are you doing to welcome & encourage diversity as an organisation?
- Do your staff & leaders reflect your players, officials, volunteers?
- What operating procedures, committees & precautions are in place to ensure diversity is protected and valued?
- Are you considering all types of diversity? Age, gender, culture, political, spiritual, geographic location, sexuality, ability, etc.
- What education do you offer internally and externally to encourage positive attitudes to diversity?
- Do strategic development plans & measures of success include reflections & consideration of diversity?

5. OFF-FIELD DIVERSITY

WGAG pillars: coaching, leadership

Creating opportunities for more women as coaches, trainers, team officials, administrators and leaders is key to the holistic development of women's rugby league in every nation and, more broadly, in addressing the historical and entrenched lack of diversity across the sport.

ASSESSMENT INDICATORS	MINIMUM STANDARD FOR FUTURE RLWCS PARTICIPATION	EXPECTATIONS OF MEMBER NATION	SUPPORT PROVIDED BY IRL AND CONFEDERATIONS
Demonstrated commitment to growing multiple opportunities for women in non-playing roles	Commitment outlined in national development plan and/or women already engaged in non-playing roles	Increasing the number of women in non-playing roles	Sharing case studies and best practice, and support via development plans
Women being on the national federation's board and/or other relevant committees	Board and/or other relevant committees contain at least one woman by 2024	Appointment of women to key leadership roles based on talent identification and training processes	IRL and confederations role-modelling diversity in staffing, board membership and advisory groups, and supporting nations to identify and attract woman and girl talent
Women's voices being part of key decision-making and delivery of the women's national team	At least one member of the women's national team's staff for RLWCQ must be a woman	Appointment of women to key national team roles based on talent identification and training processes	Training (face-to-face or virtual) and capacity building resources

6. EQUITY OF TEAM PROVISIONS

- Team camps that are equitable regardless of gender
- Are uniforms appropriate for women & girls - culturally, aesthetically & functionally?
- Ensuring travel is of the same standard - and considers appropriate needs of women & girls (safety, sanitary etc)
- Ensuring accommodation is of the same standard - and considers appropriate needs of women & girls
- Is nutrition equitable and appropriate for women & girls?
- Is physio, medical & wellbeing support equitable?

6. EQUITY OF TEAM PROVISIONS

WGAG pillar: international opportunities

Standards (pay and conditions) for women in rugby league are evolving fast. RLWC 9s in 2019 and RLWC2021 have set standards of equality for women and men in tournament provisions. Convenors of international matches and tournaments (IRL, confederations or national federations running bilateral fixtures) should demonstrate commitment to being on this trajectory and working towards mirroring the equity standards set by the above tournaments in terms of similar provisions for a country's men's and women's national teams.

ASSESSMENT INDICATORS	MINIMUM STANDARD FOR FUTURE RLWCs PARTICIPATION	EXPECTATIONS OF MEMBER NATION	SUPPORT PROVIDED BY IRL AND CONFEDERATIONS
<p>National team camp and travel arrangements, allowances and (if applicable) match payments for women should be equal, or on a clear trajectory to becoming comparable, to those of that nation's men's national team (noting that arrangements for a national team will be considered in the context of the country and its accepted standards, and, in some cases, bargaining agreements or existing contracts may be relevant to determining these standards)</p>	<p>Women's national team camp arrangements outlined in national development plan, with strategy to improve or reach equity if that is not already in place</p>	<p>Facilitation of these provisions at matches or tournaments delivered bilaterally</p>	<p>Facilitation of these provisions at tournaments delivered by IRL or confederations</p> <p>Toolkit and best practice-sharing</p>

CHAPTER 2

GROWING THE WOMEN'S GAME IN ESTABLISHED AREAS

INTRODUCTION.....	22
WHAT DO SPORTS TEACH	23
ATTRACTIONS OF RUGBY LEAGUE	24
1. UNDERSTAND WHY WOMEN PLAY SPORTS	25
2. UNDERSTAND WHAT SELF-PERCEPTION & SELF-REALISATION MEAN.....	26
3. UNDERSTAND WHY WOMEN PLAY CONTACT SPORTS IN PARTICULAR	27
4. UNDERSTAND HOW WOMEN SOCIALISE DIFFERENTLY TO MEN.....	28
5. USE YOUR UNDERSTANDING TO APPEAL TO POTENTIAL PLAYERS	29
6. UNDERSTAND WHEN 'TRIALING' BECOMES A CEMENTED HABIT.....	31
7. UNDERSTAND INITIAL INHIBITIONS & OBJECTIONS.....	32
8. OVERCOMING INHIBITIONS & OBJECTIONS.....	33
MANAGING PERCEPTIONS OF RISK.....	35
WHAT CONSTITUTES AN ACCEPTABLE INJURY?	36
9. CONTROLLING RISKS & LOWERING NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS.....	37
10. UNDERSTANDING THE BEST TIMES & PLACES TO RECRUIT.....	38
IDENTIFYING ATHLETES BEFORE OTHER SPORTS.....	39
HOW DO WE APPEAL MORE FAVOURABLY?.....	40
BIRTHPLACE EFFECT	41
RETENTION OF PARTICIPANTS	43
PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND GIRL MATCH OFFICIALS	44
SAFEGUARDS.....	46

INTRODUCTION

Although rugby league is played worldwide, it holds particularly strong roots in certain regions, especially where the men's game has flourished historically. The following two sections cater to both scenarios: whether your federation boasts a rich rugby league heritage or is just beginning to embrace the sport. In some federations, there might be a deliberate focus on promoting participation among women and girls.

Whether your involvement with rugby league is well-established or just taking its initial steps, both sections offer valuable insights and support. We suggest beginning with the section most pertinent to your federation, as it will likely provide the most tailored guidance and assistance.



ATTRACTIONS OF RUGBY LEAGUE

If you aim to expand and enhance rugby league within your federation, it's crucial to grasp the motivations driving individuals to engage with the sport. Presented below are several compelling factors that might sway someone to choose rugby league over alternative sports.

- Dynamic & eye-catching
- Builds friendships, confidence & values
- Suitable to a variety of body shapes
- Good mix of individualism & teamwork
- High levels of energy expended
- Rapid improvements in fitness
- Pathway to jobs & education in other nations
- Platform for growing personal brand or causes

1. UNDERSTAND WHY WOMEN PLAY SPORTS

Studies of motivators for WOMEN & GIRLS to be involved in ANY SPORT point strongly towards the following factors, with the first being the most dominant motivator by far;

- A reaffirmation of self-perception & self-realisation
- Desirable personal outcomes (healthy, attractive, skilful, successful)
- Peer-related and family-related motivators
- Socioeconomic and environmental factors

2. UNDERSTAND WHAT SELF-PERCEPTION & SELF-REALISATION MEAN

Reaffirmed self-perception means proving to oneself you are:

- A good person of good moral character
- Someone of value to those that matter
- Somebody who will respond in certain ways when tested
- Somebody who is permitted to think positively of themselves

Self-realisation is slightly stronger & deeper, meaning:

- You are fulfilling your potential. Your actions match your ideals.
- Some people believe self-realisation is at the very root of happiness – and that contentment cannot occur until it is achieved

3. UNDERSTAND WHY WOMEN PLAY CONTACT SPORTS IN PARTICULAR

- Intrinsic motivations (being challenged, feeling empowered)
- Defiance (challenging stereotypes, finding unity in counter-culture)
- Future legacy, recognised as a pioneer, pave the way for younger family

And reasons all genders play a CONTACT sport:

- A form of therapy for psychological and sensory arousal levels
- A means to obtain and express motivation and self-control
- A means to obtain and express courage and a combative spirit
- A means to obtain and express comprehension and strategic thinking
- A strong pre-existing sense of responsibility

4. UNDERSTAND HOW WOMEN SOCIALISE DIFFERENTLY TO MEN

- Generally less inter-group aggression (ie with other clubs, opponents)
- More likely to enjoy opportunities to socialise with opponents
- Consider how this impacts the playing formats and schedules you set
- Within a team, women follow a less hierarchical structure to men
- This means less likely to defer to select individuals. Wider consideration of group needs and individual sensitivities is necessary
- A more considerate environment means greater complexity to communication. Resolving conflict can require indirect strategies
- Be careful of elevating one woman above the group (or of players that attempt this). Exceptionalism generally provokes negative consequence

5. USE YOUR UNDERSTANDING TO APPEAL TO POTENTIAL PLAYERS

- Focus on words like 'Capability', 'Fulfilment', 'Valor', 'Leadership', 'Legacy'
- Market towards the social aspect of the sport
- Women will generally only resolve to play a sport when two or more needs are fulfilled. Choose appropriately reflective images and messaging
- Marketing needs to support a call-to-action - include informative details like venue, training times, costs, necessary equipment, next game etc.
- Turn current players into your biggest ambassadors by spreading word of their enjoyment. Allow them input & freedom with content creation.
- In a quest for identity, 'certainty' has high value.
- Provide certainty with forward planned fixtures & create confidence by delivering on promises

“PEOPLE WHO SELECT SPORTS THAT FIT THEIR PERSONALITY ARE MORE LIKELY TO ENJOY THEM, TO BE ENGAGED IN THEM, AND TO SHOW LESS ATTRITION”

(DE VRIES, 2020)

6. UNDERSTAND WHEN ‘TRIALING’ BECOMES A CEMENTED HABIT

As a sport we want to transition from ‘an experience’ to ‘an identity’. Collated research & experience points towards a **4-8-2** model or similar. That is, using a methodology to ensure rugby league becomes a habit:

- 4** Direct interactions. Training or 1-to-1 conversations.
- 8** Indirect reinforcements. Newsletters, social media, adverts. Non-pressured & fun (not a chore).
- 2** All taking place within a two-month timespan.

7. UNDERSTAND INITIAL INHIBITIONS & OBJECTIONS

- Women generally more likely to under-estimate their physical potential.
- Lower lifetime exposure and knowledge of contact sports (eg. 25% of Welsh girls experience rugby union, as opposed to 55% of Welsh boys).
- Less sense of conformity with peers than males experience. 85% of teen girls globally do not reach recommended level of physical activity.
- Women biologically hard-wired to feel greater sensations of repulsion at unhygienic, malnutritious or uncomfortable situations. Maternal impulse.
- Women anticipate lower parental & partner support in sporting pursuits.
- **Women suffering injury are much more likely to stop/alter participation.**

8. OVERCOMING INHIBITIONS & OBJECTIONS

- Highly-encouraging, positive reinforcement of capability by coaches.
- Consider offering introductory education materials, take time to explain the reasoning behind strategies. Don't get caught up in 'footy lingo'.
- Personal recommendations become even more valuable than with male participants. Family and friends become great targets for future recruits.
- Consult with women around things like food, facilities, uniforms. They will not blindly accept the same things as have worked for male players.
- Encourage activities that include families and partners.
- **Control the actual risks of the sport. Lower the perceived risks.**



**“WOMEN ARE GENERALLY
OBSERVED TO ENTER
SPORTS WITH LOWER
EXPECTATIONS OF
THEMSELVES AND WHAT
THEY WILL RECEIVE,
LEADING THEM TO DISPLAY
GREATER GRATITUDE
AND LESS ENTITLEMENT.”**



(KIM, MCINCH, KERR, 2023)

MANAGING PERCEPTIONS OF RISK

CASE STUDY:

Despite some early Olympic success, long-distance running in Eastern Europe was considered a health risk to amateurs...

...and only for professional runners until after the Second World War, when fun runs and marathon circuits became more popularised and the perceived risk of distance running fell sharply (Perenyi, 2015)



WHAT CONSTITUTES AN ACCEPTABLE INJURY?

Part of the challenge growing rugby league anywhere is not only the different levels of perception of risk, but also different notions of what is an 'acceptable' injury. If we counted every single injury per game (including bruised knuckles, scratches, minor muscle strains), indications are that we would average more than 60 injuries per match, spread over two teams.

Different people and groups have different thresholds. An extended acclimatisation period, using different modalities of the sport (touch, tag, grab, 9s etc) may be necessary.



9. CONTROLLING RISKS & LOWERING NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS

- Have accredited, capable support staff, particularly medical.
- Thorough field and venue safety checks. Appropriate equipment.
- Incremental development of correct techniques for collisions and falls.
- Video footage of multiple levels of the sport is an invaluable reference point, & also acts as a validation about the level of acceptable risk.
- Be careful how you promote the sport. A 'Competitive Lifestyle Sport' is a good fit. It's not risk-free, but it's also not extreme sport. It's a culture.
- Research proves rugby league has fewer catastrophic injuries than rugby union, ice hockey, boxing, canoeing, equestrian and cheerleading per 1000.

10. UNDERSTANDING THE BEST TIMES & PLACES TO RECRUIT

- After age 13 there is a marked decrease in severe injuries from contact.
- In models of 'Identity Formation' this is also a similar age to where identity, roles and social relationships become most important to people.
- At age 13-14 anatomical & hormonal differences between boys and girls become pronounced. Separate pathways become necessary.
- Age 13-14 also a good opportunity to recruit prior to other contact sports.
- As well as recruiting using friendship, family and school links, other sports & social communities provide crossover potential (eg dance, judo).
- Some evidence suggests children who experience trauma via the death, disability or incarceration of a close person etc will excel at contact sport.

IDENTIFYING ATHLETES BEFORE OTHER SPORTS

- The advantages of identifying contact-sport primed athletes before similar pursuits
- Most of the psychological drivers are the same.
- Once embedded into other sports programs, athletes will compare all facets, including finances, facilities, volunteer levels, travel opportunities etc. It is best this is avoided.
- For those who juggle two or more sports, the league calendar will normally have to work around the other's calendar, which may be modified at short notice to create conflict.
- Often you will receive the players who have isolated themselves in other sports through bad behaviour on and off the field.
- If league does not offer anything substantially different, athletes will return to other sports as their 'first love', if only for nostalgia and familiarity.
- Cross-code athletes may be fixated on national jerseys without any thought to contribution or legacy towards rugby league's development.
- Greater belief in injury and greater belief in failure because they see league as a 'riskier' alternative, with some evidence to say this attitude becomes self-fulfilling.
- In emerging areas it is common that athletes pick up bad habits from inexperienced contact sport coaches that go unchecked, but become entrenched in their minds.

HOW DO WE APPEAL MORE FAVOURABLY?

The greatest point of opportunity Rugby League (XIII) has against other contact sports – outside of what occurs on the field – is to ensure everybody is treated and valued equally.

- Avoid domestic competitions or national teams where there are clearly favoured 'strongholds'. If all the best players, national training staff, or events are based around capital cities, coastal locations, or politically powerful locales, growth and parity will be difficult to achieve. Naturally, these places are important, but shouldn't dominate.
- Ensure selectors are people of high integrity, either completely independent of clubs and cliques, or equally balanced between these. They must select without regard for race, sexuality, hometown, age, wealth, religion, friendship, politics etc.
- Communicate selection criteria up-front. It is suggested the 3 best determinants, in order are: 1) Application of what is taught at training, 2) Attendance at training, 3) Experience.
- This hierarchy avoids two polar situations: 1) Players who think they will be chosen merely by attending training, without actually applying what they have been taught, 2) Players who are highly experienced but rarely attend training.
- Maintain records of how regularly people attend training & provide recognition for the number of training sessions or games played. A token reward, such as a singlet or keyring, costing a minimal/ small amount could be presented to show appreciation and an incentive to retain players. It's a small sacrifice for something that could retain players another year or two.
- These become alternative motivators to national team selection.

BIRTHPLACE EFFECT

The best catchments for athlete and volunteer recruitment are often not the biggest cities. This is supported by peer-reviewed university research across multiple sports including the NRL, NFL, ice hockey and tennis.

- Towns with populations between 1,000 people and 500,000 people are generally regarded as the most 'fertile' for sports development.
- This is because athletes often have easier access to sports facilities, will often be asked to compete against children of older age groups, are more likely to have a better coach-to-player ratio, will gain confidence from excelling over a smaller pool of children the same age & are more likely to receive municipal or sponsor support through community linkages.
- There is also less saturation of recreational pursuits and more likelihood of being involved in physical labour from a young age, which places a developing sport like rugby league in a good position to gain support.
- There is evidence to also suggest that younger siblings in sporting-minded families will be the most successful. Introduce the eldest sibling, reap rewards with younger siblings.

11. UNDERSTANDING THE KEYS TO RETENTION

- Four main retention keys are **coaching, playing, club & socialisation**.
- In senior players the three factors most likely to stop someone returning were;
 1. Injury or fear of injury.
 2. Other commitments.
 3. A negative experience
- Junior players are more likely to quit because of a negative experience.
- Two main sources of negative experiences were 'Player selection not fair' or 'Felt I wasn't valued'. This was consistent across age groups & regions.
- "It would be reasonable to suggest rugby league needs to invest in effort around aspects of the game more focused on social engagement & individual motivations (especially in juniors), rather than solely aimed at ensuring high level of competition and game results" (Usher, 2017)

RETENTION OF PARTICIPANTS

A high degree of negative response associated with:

- Player selection being unfair and unequal.
- Not enough fun and enjoyment.
- A sense their contribution is not valued.
- Inadequate degree of support for players.
- Club's level of competitiveness during game (Junior RL players more likely to see negatives).
- Player safety appears inadequate.
- Rewards and incentives for players being insufficient.
- Poor general communication and organisation.

A common complaint was there not being enough social meetings outside of games and training.

A high degree of positive response associated with:

- Coaches having an excellent knowledge of the game and training techniques.
- Games scheduling being well co-ordinated.
- Appropriate level of commitment to training and competition.
- Club's level of competitiveness during game (Senior RL players more likely to see positives).

RAISING THE GROWTH AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND GIRL MATCH OFFICIALS

From grassroots participation involving ordinary citizens at weekends to elite international sports competitions followed by an audience of millions across the globe, sports would grind to a halt without match officials.

The message is simple:

NO MATCH OFFICIALS = NO SPORT

But players and spectators also need match officials who are representative of the wider population and provide role models for all aspiring young people.

The role of match officials (referees, touch judges, and in-goal judges) involves specific demands such as observation, interpretation of events, decision making and communication. This complex process of rule interpretation and judgment must be executed in real-time under the critical gaze of players and spectators. Making correct, impartial, and clear judgements is central to sport officiating across every sport. The role of the match official is, therefore, vital at all levels of rugby league, with match officials ensuring that fair competition within the rules of rugby league is possible.

In terms of gender equality, the world of officiating is trailing well behind other occupations and sectors. Women match officials can achieve the appropriate levels of physical fitness; they observe as keenly as men; they are as fair-minded as men; they can make quick, accurate decisions; they can be great communicators and leaders.

It is important for national federations to select, train and retain women match officials who play a critical role in the successful delivery of men's and women's rugby league.

Research indicates that women sports officials operate in difficult environments. Forbes et al. (2015) argue that deep-rooted sexism in football culture has led to the sexist abuse of women officials in addition to the general abuse that all referees receive.

Rugby league needs to recognise issues and develop strategies to address gender diversity however, many have focused on player and coach development and neglected strategies focused on officiating.

This section looks at addressing **gender equity in officiating** using the WINS toolkit. This 36-month Erasmus European funded project undertook comprehensive research activities into the problems facing women and girl sports officials and produced practical solutions which can support their recruitment, retention and development.

The WINS project has developed a toolkit to recruit and develop women and girls officials, which can be found on this link:

[WINS-European Research Report on Gender and Sport Officiating-2023](#)

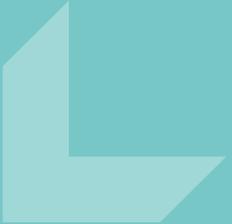


“MY EXPERIENCE IS THAT WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE MORE LIKELY THAN MEN TO BE CONVINCED THAT YOU DON’T LIKE THEM BECAUSE OF A SOLITARY INCIDENT OR DISAGREEMENT. YOU MAY LOSE THEM FROM THE SPORT ALTOGETHER, OR SEVERELY DIMINISH THEIR CONTRIBUTION AND ADHERENCE TO GROUP UNITY.”

CURRENT INTERNATIONAL COACH

“I SELDOM RECOMMEND USING LANGUAGE THAT CAN IN ANY WAY BE HURTFUL, OR CAN BE REDUCED TO A CRITICISM OF CHARACTER. THERE ARE ALWAYS BETTER WAYS TO COMMUNICATE IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT LONG ENOUGH. FOCUS ON CONSTRUCTIVE, PROFESSIONAL FEEDBACK ABOUT ACTIONS, NOT PERSONALITY TRAITS”

CURRENT INTERNATIONAL COACH



SAFEGUARDING

One randomised trial found that 20% of young adults aged 17–24 attending general practices were afraid of an intimate partner or family member. This reinforces the need for discretion, even when encouraging multiple family members to enter into a sport, either as teammates or club members.

A frequent comment in discussions with key figures in women's and girls' International Rugby League was the need to protect young women entering senior squads, not only against male staff or clubmates, but specifically senior women and girl members of the same team. One current player remarked 'I have tolerated approaches and behaviour by older women and girl teammates I would have reported to police if they were initiated by a man'.

In some countries, identity cards and checks exist for working with children, and also working with people with disability.

- In some countries, identity cards and checks exist for working with children, and also working with people with disability.
- Working with children education & protections.
- Developing intra-team policies about intimate relationships. Suggestion that in liberal-minded cultures this is best achieved by open discussion. In more conservative cultures, a blind vote.
- Anti-grooming measures and awareness for both players and staff.

- Mental health and wellness assessments (incl. substance abuse).
- Satisfaction surveys & open channels for feedback.
- Highly recommended personality test to flag early concerns:

https://survey.ucalgary.ca/jfeformSV_0icFBjWwyHvJOfA

(available in 42 languages)

CHAPTER 3

GROWING THE WOMEN'S GAME IN NEW AREAS

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENT INHIBITORS.....	49
OVERCOMING INDIVIDUAL INHIBITORS.....	50
TIPS ON BEING AN EXPANSIONIST.....	53
FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION.....	54
HOW DO WE APPEAL MORE FAVOURABLY?.....	55
FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION.....	56
THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUAL MEDIA COVERAGE.....	65
PROBLEM WITH 'WORKING CLASS GAME' TAG.....	66
A SPORT FOR NON-CONFORMISTS?.....	67
WHEN OPPOSITES ATTRACT.....	71
FORMING A TRIBE: ATTRACTING PARTICIPANTS TO CONTACT SPORT.....	72
SPORT AS A THERAPY.....	76
GROWING A TRIBE: BUILDING A CULTURE.....	77
OPERATING A PRESTIGE-BASED SYSTEM.....	78
VALUES OF A PRESTIGE-BASED SYSTEM.....	79
GROWING A TRIBE: BUILDING A CULTURE.....	80
GROWING A TRIBE: BALANCING WORLD CUP DREAMS WITH DEVELOPMENT.....	82
PITFALLS OF 'WORLD CUP OR NOTHING'.....	83



INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENT INHIBITORS

New areas often have completely different restraints:

Healthcare & insurance	Access to key equipment
Wages, work hours & holidays	Available playing venues
No peer links to rugby league	Available nourishment & recovery
Average height & BMI	Public crime & safety
Family or religious obligations	Passport power (ability to travel)
No pay-to-play, no fame	No regular calendar of events
Cultural attitudes to women and girls in sport	Coaching & development level
Level of media exposure	Records & history-keeping
Level of volunteerism	Road network & domestic travel

OVERCOMING INDIVIDUAL INHIBITORS

Healthcare & insurances

- Be aware of everybody's personal insurance situation. May need waivers.
- Establish a pooled fund & legal plan for cases of players seriously injured.
- Be mindful when travelling that insurance entitlements may change.

Wages, work hours and holidays

- Consultation about season length & match frequency is vital.
- Do not over-commit to events, camps and fixtures which will require long weekends or annual leave, unless expressly discussed.
- Training schedule may require alteration (later at night, lunch time).

No peer links to rugby league

- Consider the importance of players/coaches in the education system.
- Exchange programs involving visits or personnel from outside nations.
- Consider the importance of 'influencers', emergency responders, community group leaders.

Average height & BMI

- Bring an open-minded approach to selecting positions.
- Don't try to carbon copy game plans that work for different body shapes.
- Give all a chance to learn play-making (kick, pivot play, pass off ground).

Family or religious commitments

- Avoid taking a stance where athletes are asked to choose between their family or religious obligations, and their sport.
- Consultation about timing of training & games (esp. around holidays).
- Carefully incorporate & welcome family & faiths into team environment.

Little financial reward or fame

- Target intrinsically motivated individuals. Identify player motivations.
- Use own media channels to acknowledge/celebrate milestones & efforts.
- Work towards a long-term professionalism plan (even if decades later)

Cultural attitudes to women and girls in sport

- Use this as a strength. Lots of research shows that defying stereotypes & counter-culture behaviour is very beneficial in building group unity.
- Identify & work with allies in position of influence to change concepts.
- Create dialogue around inequalities. Educate, don't simply demonise.

Level of volunteerism

- Be mindful the causes & frequency for volunteerism are not the same in all places, due to cultural/socioeconomic factors. Manage expectations.
- Consider the incentive/benefits ratio. Could a relatively low-cost meal can bring in a return 10 or 20 fold in gate takings or merchandise sales

Availability of playing venues

- Strategic alliances with other sports. Although rugby union has most similar fields, sports like football or gridiron may be more cooperative.
- Treat your venues well. Be clean & considerate. Implore this of athletes.
- Prioritise safety in all aspects. Lighting is vital. Are local grants available?

Limited exposure to rugby league via media

- Use of free women's league channels like Our League & QPlusTV.
- Consider the use of video games to build awareness & strategy.
- Establish YouTube channel early & record all games. Several benefits.

Access to key equipment

- Know the rules around import taxes, declarations, quarantine periods.
- Equipment brought in by foreign educators beneficial in many ways.
- Identify & promote suppliers who are potential long-term partners.

Available nourishment & recovery

- Consider ways group meals for a small fee could be introduced.
- Strategic partnerships with butchers, grocers, physios, supplements etc.
- Promote strong, healthy bodies and good nutrition

Public crime & safety

- Consider how your player's will get to & from trainings & games.
- 'Nobody gets left alone' policy.
- Consider how personal belongings & team equipment will be stored & monitored at all times (may even need to prevent intra-athlete access).

Passport power & ability to travel

- Long lead times may be necessary when planning international games.
- Consider incentives for nations with better passport power to visit.
- Develop a thorough understanding of all visa options & costs.

Records & history-keeping

- Keep records from the very first games, including representative & finals.
- Acknowledge each players' place in history. Enhances sense of identity.
- Independent, long-term historian is invaluable. Archive pics & videos too.

Road network & domestic travel

- Be mindful of the hazards that weather may cause. Have contingencies.
- Use of team bus to ensure all arrive safe & together. Set safety example.
- Plan fixtures to allow gaps between flights/buses, so money can be saved.
- Encourage new teams to grow in pairs, not alone. Creates local derbies.

TIPS ON BEING AN EXPANSIONIST

1. DON'T FOCUS ON STAYING IN POWER. FOCUS ON STAYING USEFUL

Your sustained involvement & legacy, plus the health of your organisation, depend on your utility, not the power yielded.

2. PUT THE GOAL OF BUILDING A COMMUNITY ABOVE DAILY EMOTIONS

There will be times of personal sacrifices & strained relationships, but ultimately fulfilment comes by realising long-term objectives.

3. MAKE MONEY A STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE, NOT A PERSONAL MOTIVATOR

Finances are important to sustainable teams, but few people get rich via rugby league. Separate personal commercial interests.

4. BE FIERCELY LOYAL & HONEST, BUT DON'T BELIEVE IT WILL ALWAYS BE REPAID

A leader creates a stable environment by building trust & open dialogue. But don't take it to heart the times it isn't reciprocated.

5. SIMPLY BE THERE

The value in being physically present for training, games, fund-raisers is immense. Builds strong bonds & knowledge of situations.

6. HAVE CLEAR OBJECTIVES

State objectives & events, then work towards them relentlessly. Talking in circles & entertaining doubts is a momentum killer.

7. VALUE OPINIONS, BUT RECOGNISE THE COST OF PESSIMISTS & CONTRARIANS

Democracy is imperative to good rugby league organisations. But don't place too much weight on those who always complain.

8. CONSTANTLY ANALYSE HOW YOU ARE HOLDING THINGS BACK

Everybody has strengths & weaknesses. Don't limit growth based on your skills, traits & opinions. Be comfortable accepting help.

9. BELIEVE IT WILL BE. SAY IT WILL BE DONE

It's important to retain the same hunger & drive of forming your first 17 players. People retire, leave & grow complacent constantly.

10. BE TRUE IN YOUR INTENTIONS

Rugby league is an environment where people quickly sense ulterior motives. Be there for the reasons you say you are.

11. BE PREPARED TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE, NOT JUST IMPART IT

New areas may not have a tradition in rugby league, but each culture has wisdom from other fields that can be useful.

12. BE COMMITTED TO CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

Whether learning a language, attaining coaching/management accreditations, or getting fit, athletes seek leaders on path to betterment.

FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION

FIRSTLY

Remember why women play CONTACT sports in particular

- Intrinsic motivations (being challenged, being empowered)
- Defiance (challenging stereotypes, finding unity in counter-culture)
- Future legacy, recognised as a pioneer, pave the way for family

SECONDLY

Remember the power of self-realisation & self-perception

THIRDLY

Understand the two situations where women and girls will exhibit similar risk-taking behaviour & experience similar sensory arousal as males:

- A quest to be seen as formidable (often a protection mechanism)

HOW DO WE APPEAL MORE FAVOURABLY?

The following section delves into strategies for expanding rugby league participation among women and girls. It emphasises the importance of conveying appropriate messaging and comprehending your target audience to achieve optimal outcomes. Effective promotion of your projects is fundamental for enhancing visibility, establishing credibility, and ensuring long-term sustainable growth.

Broad tips on marketing

- Not sanitised or air-brushed, but still appealing
- Create a counter-culture & defy stereotypes
- Equal use of superlatives (heart-breaking, phenomenal, legendary)
- Language used predominantly by women and girls of athletic demographic (eg. slay, goddess, vibe, wholesome)
- Emphasise life balance
- Incorporate dance, music, rituals & celebrations
- Don't be afraid of conflict & emotion
- Nurture, regeneration, legacy & the life cycle



FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION

England Rugby - Introducing the Red Roses (Cycle of Life)



INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5

FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION

AFLW - This is Us



INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5

FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION

BBC - We Know Our Place



INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5

FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION

UEFA - We all Rise With More Eyes



INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

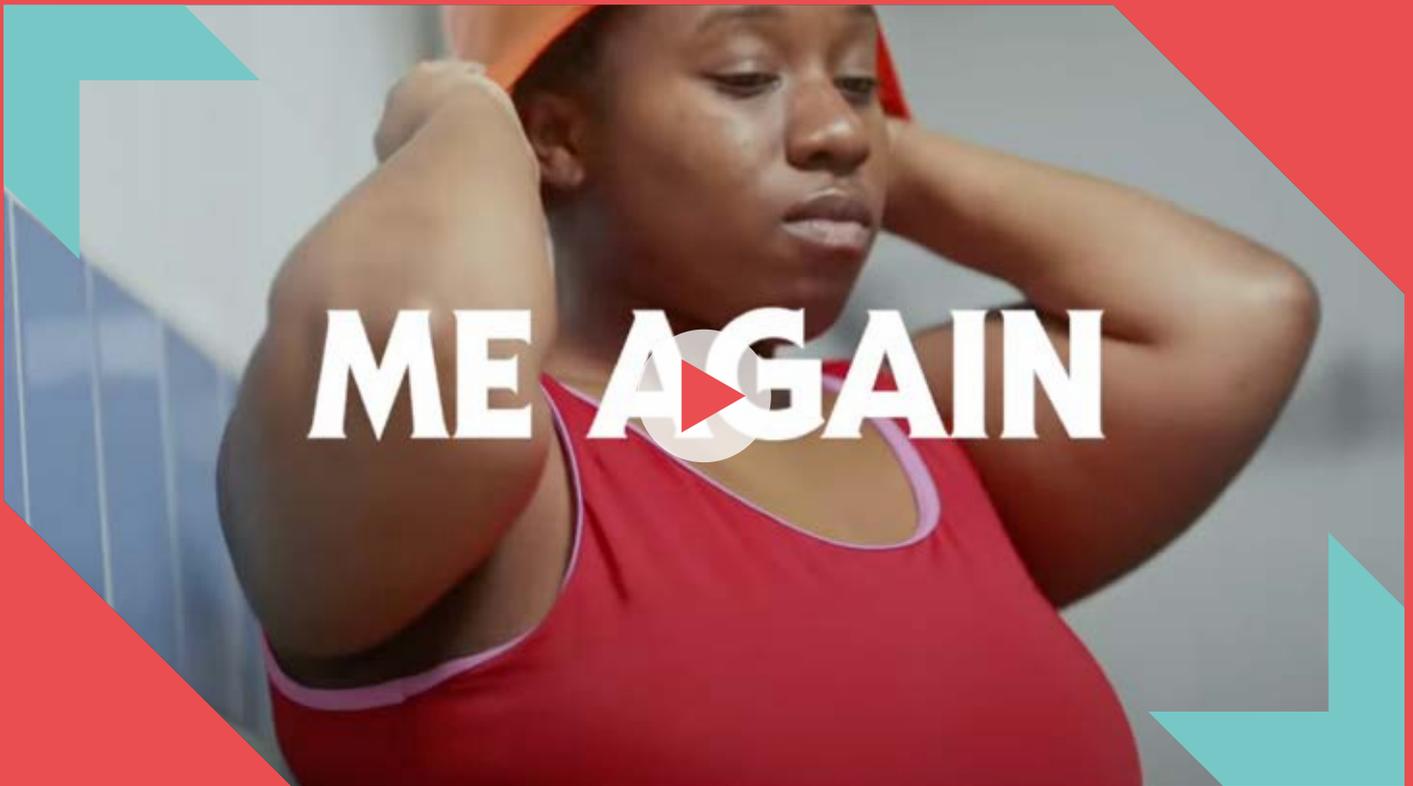
CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5

FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION

Sport England - This Girl Can



INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5

FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION

Concept centres around back to the 80s. Poking fun & having fun at the same time (women being amateurs or paid 1980s match fees).



FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION

Colour, warmth & emotion embodies the duality of a high-profile partnership with the rawness of a game still growing. Note non-conformity theme.



FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION

Simplicity in taking a stand. Use of antagonism and advocacy to achieve a greater good that cuts across sport and into broader society. Wider exposure & unity.



FORMING A TRIBE: MEDIA, MARKETING & PROMOTION

More specific tips

- Journalists who are strong allies to women's sports are rare, and maintaining relationships is very important
- Don't go head-to-head with other major events. Plan events so they can be staged in a complementary manner.
- Don't rely on the national team to bring coverage. Develop celebrities within the sport & club recognition.



THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Visual coverage is especially important.

It makes the viewer feel safer because they can copy behaviours, and because they physically witness most tackles eventuating in no injury. Game footage provides an unspoken validation that the sport is accepted and safe by social standards.

It is therefore recommended that in nations without broadcast rugby league coverage, that national federations establish their own YouTube channels to upload domestic match footage, because this visibility will work over time towards a more favourable perceived risk level.

A YouTube solution also avoids the costs associated with livestreaming and, if uploaded posthumously, avoids the conflict with gate takings. Several paywalled streaming services such as Recast exist that can provide clubs and federations with income, however this is best saved for marquee events, because there will still be production costs and you will diminish your audience if it is paywalled.



PROBLEM WITH 'WORKING CLASS GAME' TAG

Visual coverage is especially important.

Being a 'Working Class Game' only suits a limited number of nations, where being working class is not an inhibitor to participation on multiple fronts.

In several newer nations to take up the sport, we've witnessed high rates of university education and 'wealthy' class participation, because the risk factor is manageable for them.

Limiting the sport to a 'working class' tag also limits sponsorship avenues.

As per previous pages we've listed more than 20 factors that will result in objections to playing rugby league. There are more, such as language barriers.

What is needed, more than ever, is to understand the psychological factors that can convince somebody to try a sport which is a physical risk, perhaps in a non-traditional territory.

We also need to understand and act on the demonstrated preferences and differences of appealing to women & girls as opposed to traditional messaging to men.



A SPORT FOR NON-CONFORMISTS?

Rather than being positioned as 'The Working Man's Game', a tagline that does appear to ring true for modern rugby league is that it is 'The Non-Conformist's Game', particularly for women.

In general, non-conformists display a lot of similar traits to rugby league players, with the philosophies they oppose usually linked to systemic problems in their nation (anti-corruption, anti-homophobia, anti-sexism, anti-fascism etc).

Although it seems counter-intuitive, non-conformity offers a sense of belonging & group identity & can encourage people to adhere to moral standards (Psychology Today).

If your sport aligns with a cause that is in some way non-conformist but ultimately aims to achieve a greater good, you can achieve incredible unity. (Richards, 1975) (Silke, 2003).

Note non-conformity does not equate with independence (Nycza & Sznajd-Weron, 2013) and is therefore easier to harness in a group context.

Non-conformity can project power, confidence and desirability.

This does not necessarily limit numbers, because non-conformity can often be at more than 50% of the population prior to significant change, exemplified by Indigenous Right to Vote (94%) and Same Sex Marriage referendums (80%) in Australia.

“THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN ALIENATED BY TRADITIONAL SCHOOL-BASED AND INSTITUTIONAL SPORT ARE OFTEN ATTRACTED TO LIFESTYLE SPORTS. AFFILIATION PROVIDES PARTICIPANTS WITH MEMBERSHIP INTO AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB INCLUDING EQUIPMENT, CLOTHES, LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE, BOOKS AND WEBSITES AND CAN CREATE A SOCIAL GROUP AND SUB-CULTURE.”

(WHEATON, 2004)

A SPORT FOR NON-CONFORMISTS?

CASE STUDY:

“Snowboarding was born in youthful resistance to the popular sport of skiing and the values of sport it represented. The media appropriated the image of youthful rebellion in snowboarding and commodified it. Snowboarding is now going through the process of becoming more mainstream.”

(Heino)



A SPORT FOR NON-CONFORMISTS?

NON-CONFORMIST GROUPS THAT HAVE EMBRACED LEAGUE ELSEWHERE

- Animal Welfare Groups
- Vegans & Vegetarians
- Same-Sex relationship proponents
- Fans of specific music genres
- Niche sport practitioners
- Anglophiles in non-Anglican countries



WHEN OPPOSITES ATTRACT

Of course, there are multiple instances in women's rugby league of drawing together people from all ends of the spectrum.

Queensland's competition of the 1990s to early 2010s, which was more prominent and produced greater success in the representative arena than southern teams, was primarily started by three groups of people:

- Police officers
- Prison guards
- Prison inmates

Legend has it that bonds were formed when women and girl inmates were granted exercise time and the woman prison guards they used to run alongside invited them to fill in for their team. This is part of the story of how Debbie Kilroy went from serving jailtime for drug trafficking to becoming a high-profile lawyer on the Sentencing Advisory Council.

Marginalised women who challenge societal norms coming together from different spheres.



FORMING A TRIBE ATTRACTING PARTICIPANTS TO CONTACT SPORT

Understanding Paratelic individuals & the Paratelic state

- Paratelic individuals are those who respond positively to environments of high-arousal & being challenged.
- Paratelic people have psychological 'safety nets' that tell them that risk-associated sports are safer than how others perceive them.
- Many organisations have an interest in Paratelic-dominant personalities. It is a major area of health research in universities, is of interest to government, military, law enforcement, social welfare groups, sponsors - and it provides opportunities for rugby league organisations to partner with these bodies.

PERSPECTIVES OF RISK-TAKING

“RISK-TAKING IS A COMPLEX BEHAVIOUR UNDERPINNED BY A MOTIVATION THAT GOES BEYOND SIMPLE EXCITEMENT AND THRILL-SEEKING, AND BEYOND PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS SUCH AS NARCISSISM AND SENSATION-SEEKING”

(KANCHEVA)

PERSPECTIVES OF RISK-TAKING

“IT IS THE PURSUIT OF EXPERIENCE BY SOCIALISED MEANS”

(FREIXANET, 1991)

PERSPECTIVES OF RISK-TAKING

“MODERNITY’S RATIONALISING FORCES CAUSE PEOPLE TO BECOME DISENCHANTED WITH THEIR SURROUNDS. AS A RESULT, THEY TURN TO RISK-TAKING TO RE-ENCHANT THEIR LIVES. IN A SOCIETY OVER-PREOCCUPIED WITH RISK MANAGEMENT, ENGAGING IN ‘EDGEWORK’ AND RISKY BEHAVIOURS ACTS AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE AND PROTEST”

(LYNG, 2009)

PERSPECTIVES OF RISK-TAKING

“A MAJOR MOTIVATOR BEHIND PEOPLE’S ENGAGEMENT IN RISK SPORTS IS THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP A COMPETENCY, AND THEN PUT IT TO USE. THEY ARE NOT SIMPLY EXPOSING THEMSELVES TO RISKY ACTIVITIES, BUT ALSO TESTING THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN ONE’S OWN PERFORMANCE AND PHYSICAL LIMITS, AS WELL AS BETWEEN ONE’S BODY AND MIND. IT CAN CONSTITUTE AN ENDEAVOUR TO REALISE ONE’S POTENTIAL. TEAM CONTACT SPORTS ARE A CHANCE TO GAIN SELF-CONFIDENCE IN FRONT OF AN EVALUATIVE AUDIENCE. A STRENGTHENED SENSE OF SELF FOLLOWS A SUCCESSFUL CONFRONTATION”

(LYNG, 1990)

PERSPECTIVES OF RISK-TAKING

“IT IS A FORM OF TENSION-REDUCTION BEHAVIOUR THAT IS ADDICTIVE IN NATURE AND IS ASSOCIATED WITH RELIEVING A BUILD-UP OF INTOXICATING STRESS HORMONES”

(KLAUSNER, 1986)

PERSPECTIVES OF RISK-TAKING

“MODERNITY’S RATIONALISING FORCES CAUSE PEOPLE TO BECOME DISENCHANTED WITH THEIR SURROUNDS. AS A RESULT, THEY TURN TO RISK-TAKING TO RE-ENCHANT THEIR LIVES. IN A SOCIETY OVER-PREOCCUPIED WITH RISK MANAGEMENT, ENGAGING IN ‘EDGEWORK’ AND RISKY BEHAVIOURS ACTS AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE AND PROTEST”

(LYNG, 2009)

SPORT AS A THERAPY

CASE STUDY: EMPIRE FIGHTING CHANCE (BOXING)

- Boxing charity established in Bristol, UK. Qualifies for charitable and health funding avenues.
- Runs a 20-week program that includes an all-of-person curriculum (similar length to a season)
- High retention rate when activities are completed and some participants become mentors
- Participants 79% less likely to be involved in a gang and 75% less likely to commit crime.



GROWING A TRIBE: BUILDING A CULTURE

Dual strategies theory states humans increase their status in social hierarchies using two major strategies known as dominance and prestige (Maner, 2017)

- The first and oldest of the two strategies, dominance, is exemplified by the use of force, implied force or other forms of coercion to take power.
- The second of the two strategies, prestige, is defined as an approach in which an individual gains social rank through demonstrating traits valued by other group members such as high levels of skill, generosity or the ability to teach their skills to others.
- Prestige is clearly the better system under which to operate a community sporting group in a sustainable, positive manner.



OPERATING A PRESTIGE-BASED SYSTEM

Prestige is identified with a desire for admiration, respect, and elevated status. It is associated with tactics that include freely sharing desirable traits, expertise, collaboration, and grandstanding in order to gain higher social status.

Prestige is linked to positive traits such as authentic pride. Prestige appears to be unique to humans and the development of prestige is linked to the development of larger and more intricate social structures. Prestige-based leadership is more stable and long term as it produces mutually beneficial outcomes for followers and the leader.

Dominance-based structures are less likely to create intricate social structures. (Liu et al, 2021) (Maner and Case, 2016) (Cheng, 2020) (Savejnarong et al, 2022)

VALUES OF A PRESTIGE-BASED SYSTEM

- Recognises the importance of education and up-skilling
- Recognises the importance of democracy
- Recognises the importance of a code of conduct
- Encourages volunteerism and selfless behaviours
- Others defer to the leader in order to be closer and learn valuable abilities
- Exhibits social mobility & helps those born into socioeconomic difficulty
- Values humility in most circumstances (Jimenez & Mesoudi, 2021)



GROWING A TRIBE: BUILDING A CULTURE

Some elements of non-conformist attitude oppose players being paid.

This is an important element for federations and leagues looking to balance a budget and keep people content at the same time.

Higher-end communal goals are best stated and agreed upon in advance, with everyone uniting behind a budgetary allocation to achieve the objectives.

Commonly in this circumstance, club volunteers and contributors favour money being spent on facilities, equipment and infrastructure for participants and spectators rather than a small group of individuals being rewarded.

(Kennedy, 2013)

GROWING A TRIBE:
BUILDING A CULTURE

**“WOMEN GENERALLY
REPORT BEING LESS
ANXIOUS ABOUT
COMMUNICATING TO AN
AUTHORITY FIGURE, WHICH
MAKES THEM MORE
OPEN TO NEGOTIATE
WITH PARENTS, COACHES,
BOSSES, SPONSORS,
INVESTORS, GOVERNMENT
OFFICIALS ETC”**

GROWING A TRIBE: BALANCING WORLD CUP DREAMS WITH DEVELOPMENT

POSITIVES OF A WORLD CUP

- Global recognition
- Exposure for sponsors
- More players short-term
- Government leverage
- International linkages

NEGATIVES OF A WORLD CUP

- Heightened internal conflict
- Greater expenses
- Dip in numbers post-selection
- Gratitude not guaranteed, all expectations rise
- Gulf to top nations



PITFALLS OF 'WORLD CUP OR NOTHING'

Aoki et al (2016) observed that the number of years' experience competing domestically in rugby union in Japan had minimal correlation with ability to play national level, although it was more important for forwards. This means World Cup representation will not necessarily be a reward for your most loyal players and shouldn't be promoted this way in advance.

The concept that 'mega events' increase the participation numbers within a sport was found to be flawed in retrospective analysis of the Olympics. Olympic sports recorded greater frequency of participation before and after an event (those already partaking trained and played more), but not necessarily a rise in new participant numbers (aside from wrestling and swimming, which are potentially linked to wider societal trends and factors) (Kokolokakis, 2020).

There is a very real post-World Cup blues & 'crash' from the financial commitments, de-prioritised work & family commitments, seeking a purpose, volunteers burnt out, possible legal action etc.

CASE STUDY:

In 2013 the USA made one of the most prominent recent impacts at a Rugby League World Cup, when they qualified for the quarter finals. However, that came off the back of a pioneering founder mortgaging his house, then having to walk away to join another sport to keep his home. In intervening years the USA has suffered from instability, internal conflict & poorer on-field results.

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN'S HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

INTRODUCTION.....	84
GENERAL INJURY INFO	85
JOINT AND SOFT TISSUE INJURIES.....	86
BONE FRACTURES	87
MENSTRUAL ISSUES.....	88
PROMOTE STRONG, HEALTHY BODIES AND GOOD NUTRITION.....	90
CONCUSSION ISSUES.....	91
NUTRIENT ISSUES	92
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES	93

INTRODUCTION

For an extended period, women and girl athletes have often received coaching and training tailored to male standards. However, extensive research now indicates significant physiological and psychological differences between women and men. Consequently, gender-specific considerations are imperative. This section delves deeper into the health considerations specific to women and girls in sports.



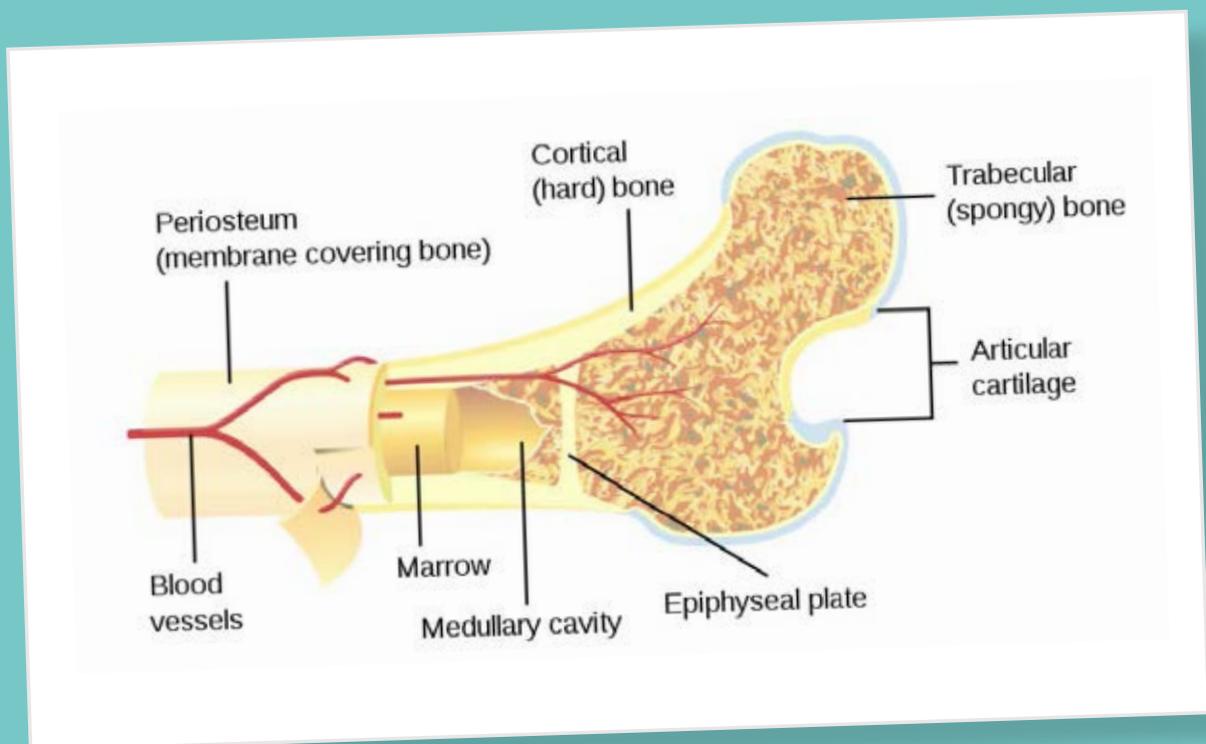
GENERAL INJURY INFO

- A 2010 study in New Zealand found that women have a much lower rate of serious injuries than men in rugby league.
- However, the rate of lower limb injuries as a percentage of total injuries was greater.
- Whiplash-type injuries also more common. Emphasises importance of technique in tackles & falls.
- Those in deskbound or sales/service jobs were more likely to be injured than workers in physical trades.



JOINT AND SOFT TISSUE INJURIES

- Soft tissue injuries are the most common injuries in women's rugby league.
- Importance of the correct sports bra & padding.
- Knees are the most common joint injury, followed by ankle, then shoulder.
- Reduced lower limb alignment, greater internal hip rotation & arch problems in feet in women and girls identified as risk factors for injury
- Weight-bearing exercises help increase bone mass density, however for those with menstrual abnormalities, they can lead to increased stress fractures.
- Lifetime fracture risk for athletes with menstrual abnormalities can be 47%, compared to 26% for those with normal menstruation. Non-athletes have 12.5% risk.
- Understand difference between trabecular & cortical bone. Stress fractures in trabecular sites more likely.



Trabecular bone found in vertebrae and at the end of the long bones in the body

BONE FRACTURES

- An inter-relation exists between menstrual irregularity, bone fractures, low energy & reproduction problems. The first three are referred to as 'female athlete triad'.
- Those in adolescence are particularly susceptible to this.
- Prevention strategies may include early screening of female athlete triad, promoting early participation in activities that improve bone health, nutritional strategies, gait modification, & orthotics.

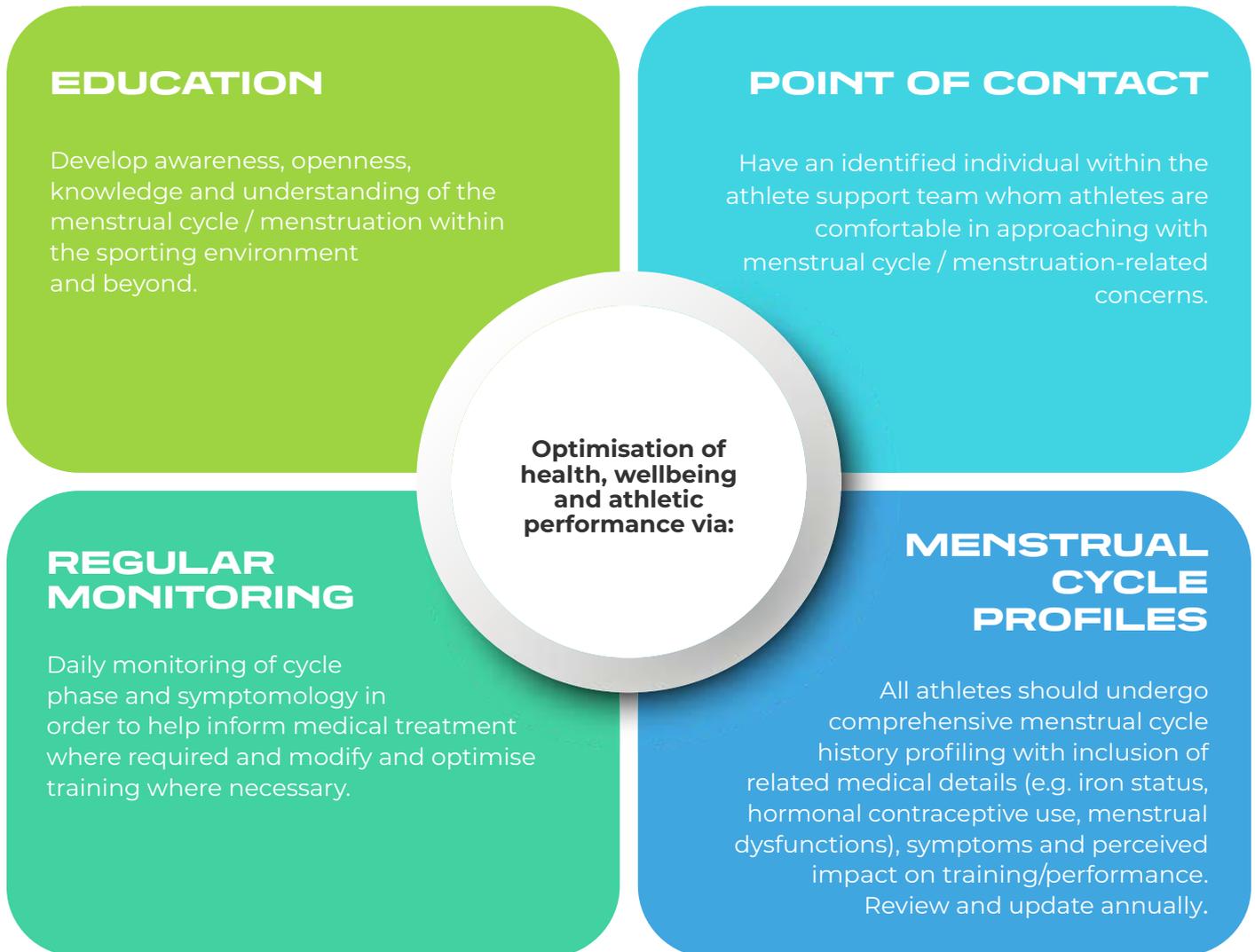


MENSTRUAL ISSUES

- Various studies indicate between 50-80% of women believe menstruation impacts their ability to perform.
- One third of women athletes report heavy bleeding.
- Factors associated with menstruation during performance: Pain (particularly abdomen & back), cramps, flooding & discomfort, low energy, worry, distraction, reduced motivation, fluctuating emotions, & headaches / migraines.
- Research has been done around how other cultures are communicating this topic with their athletes. Sport NZ is promoting a programme called the [Flow on Effect](#).



MENSTRUAL ISSUES



CONCUSSION ISSUES

- According to statistics from NRLW (Australia's professional women's competition) head injury assessments occur for 6.6 of every 1000 tackles for defenders and 6.1 of every 1000 tackles for attackers.
- Women report greater number of symptoms, increased symptom intensity & greater time lost from sport.
- Concussions caused by ball-to-head contact much more common in women & girls.
- Neck strength, hormones, evasion, technique & time spent training are all factors.
- Studies indicate concussions accounted for less than 4% of overall injuries, but are comparatively more expensive to treat, recover from, and insure.
- It has been indicated that the greatest risks of concussion is when competitions exist between different skill levels i.e. elite v sub-elite, sub-elite v social athletes, or elite v social athletes. This is of particular importance for World Cups & similar situations.



PROMOTE STRONG, HEALTHY BODIES AND GOOD NUTRITION

- Eating healthily is balance. It's not restricting this or cutting that, it's about giving the body all of what it needs.
- An active female needs carbs to keep the power on, fats to burn as fuel, and protein to rebuild so you can do it all again better, faster, and stronger.
- Carbs are not the devil but a necessity. The female body needs a decent baseline of carbohydrates just to keep its hormonal engine humming. Fat is essential, as are protein and micronutrients.
- Food is important and even more so for those who love to stay active.
- Cutting out food groups is not good advice. Fasting is not good advice. Deliberately undereating and overtraining will cause physical and/or emotional pain.



NUTRIENT ISSUES

- Micronutrient deficiencies are common in women and girl athletes, particularly in iron, vitamin D, and calcium.
- Strategies to prevent deficiencies include consumption of diverse foods & potential supplementation.
- At elite level consider having a hydration & sweat profile for each individual to assist recovery.
- Hyponatremia (low sodium levels) during exercise is much more common for women athletes.
- Hyponatremia typically occurs when consuming water far in excess of losses without electrolyte replenishment.
- Women more likely to experience this due to inexperience, lower metabolic rates, lower body mass.

The information is for general information purposes only and is not intended to provide health advice, diagnose, treat, cure or prevent disease. Always seek medical advice.



MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Studies of rugby league players have indicated:

- Women athletes are at greater risk of a range of psychological stressors.
- Women athletes report experiencing interpersonal conflict, financial hardship and adverse discrimination at higher rates than men athletes.
- Women are twice as likely as men athletes to experience depressive symptoms, higher rates of anxiety & higher rates of eating disorders
- Higher levels of alcoholism than the general public.
- Higher levels of depression and anxiety, particularly heightened in pre-season.
- Some evidence to suggest those entering the sport are twice as likely as normal to have experienced trauma relating to the death, permanent disability, or incarceration of a close family member or friend by age 20.
- It is EXTREMELY important to consider the role that inequality plays in mental health issues for women.
- Motherhood / caretaker responsibilities, sexual abuse, media sexualisation, a lack of representation and coverage in media, disparity in wages, the possibility of sex verification procedures, & access to fewer opportunities in leadership positions - these all contribute to lower mental wellness.

CHAPTER 5

FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS

RETHINK THE WAY YOU PERCEIVE THE IRL.....	95
OK, SO WHERE SHOULD I LOOK?.....	96
WHERE CAN I FIND SOURCES OF FUNDING?.....	97
WHAT TYPES OF GRANTS COULD I QUALIFY FOR?.....	99
ELEMENTS OF A GOOD PROSPECTUS.....	101
TIPS ON NEGOTIATING DEALS.....	102
RAISING THE GROWTH AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND GIRL MATCH OFFICIALS.....	103
LINKS TO RELEVANT INFORMATION.....	104

RETHINK THE WAY YOU PERCEIVE THE IRL

- It's very important - and can save much heartache & lost time - to understand why the IRL exists & what it is
- The IRL is like a collaborative, where national federations can come together to have a say in the development & future of the sport
- There have been limited times in the sport's history the IRL has been rich with resources to the extent it can fund the development of individual nations, provinces, clubs or programs
- Think of the IRL as a place where you go to have your voice heard, share experiences & advocate for improvements & priorities
- The best course of action is not to rely on the IRL to fund start-up & development costs, account for all tournament expenses, or cover debt
- Need to introduce NEW revenue to the sport, not fight for the same \$



OK, SO WHERE SHOULD I LOOK?

There are three main places you can source money from:

1. **Businesses or NGOs**
2. **Governments**
3. **The general public**

Remember there are usually multiple layers to all these at:

- Community level
- Municipal level
- Regional level
- State level
- National level
- Continental level
- Pan-Continental level
- Hemispheric level
- International / Global level

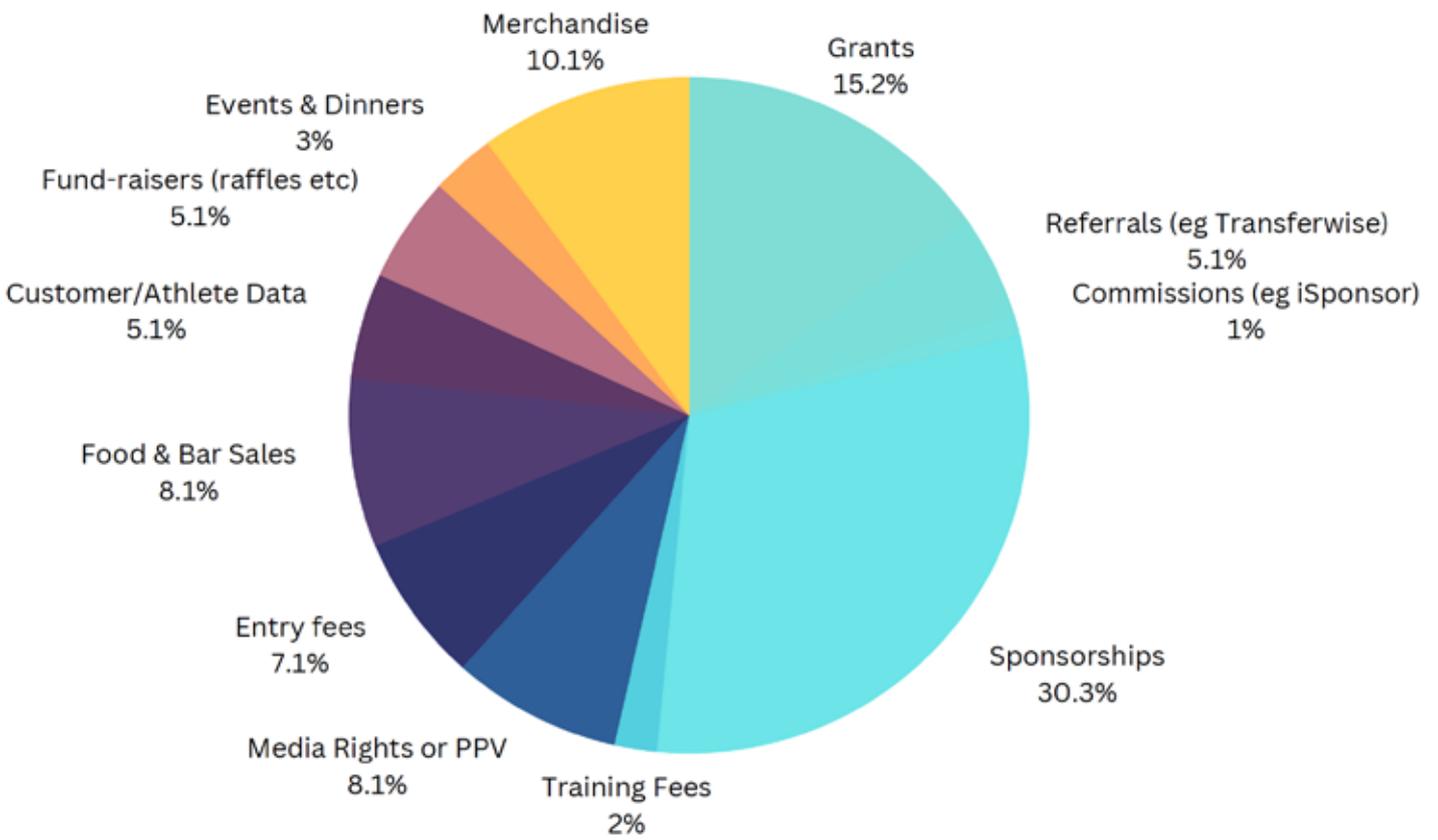
Often rugby league organisations will only aim for partners at the national or international level for 'glamour' enterprises such as airlines. Often these organisations are inundated with sponsor requests, have existing deals with other sports, have slim margins and do not see sufficient exposure.

WHERE CAN I FIND SOURCES OF FUNDING?

It is highly recommended to give attention to funding at a municipal level. Negotiations at this level generally occur:

- Without as many layers of politics
- With local people who can see direct benefit
- With people who perhaps have common contacts or linkages
- In a way that provides multiple chances to meet face-to-face
- In a manner not held back by competing national priorities
- In a way that decision-makers will feel pride/ownership at any success
- In a way that leads to one-upmanship between surrounding towns/cities
- In a way that will likely generate media coverage & cross-promotion

WHERE CAN I FIND SOURCES OF FUNDING? (EXAMPLE ONLY)



*PPV – pay per view

WHAT TYPES OF GRANTS COULD I QUALIFY FOR?

Negotiations at this level generally occur:

- Women's health grants
- Women's leadership grants
- Women's empowerment (eg anti-abuse)
- Active community grants
- Public use facility grants
- Multiculturalism grants
- Equipment grants
- Alternative education (literacy, numeracy) grants
- Community physical & mental health grants
- Anti-crime grants
- Renewable energy, water storage grants

GROWING A TRIBE:
FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS

**“NOW IS THE TIME
FOR WOMEN’S SPORT.
UNPRECEDENTED
OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND
TO MAKE SIGNIFICANT
ADVANCES, NOT ONLY FOR
YOUR ORGANISATION, BUT
FOR THE SOCIETIES YOU
REPRESENT”**

ELEMENTS OF A GOOD PROSPECTUS

- Refer to your stakeholders as 'partners' rather than 'sponsors'
- Highly visual, action-based. A picture paints 1000 words
- Identify and explain your goals, your values, your philosophy
- Highlight certain individuals who are key to your organisation. A brief bio including their highlights can build trust & familiarity
- Explain the history of your organisation. Whether you are a decades-old group, or a fast-growing one, there are good narratives
- Explain the significance behind your logo and uniforms
- A 1-2 year outlook with clearly identified dates is essential
- Diversify your sponsor offering so it is not just restricted to uniforms (ie venue, networking, referral, IT, equipment opportunities)
- Establish what you contribute towards in the community
- Have multiple price points for sponsors, and aim for multi-year deals
- Consider listing sponsor figures in \$USD if you are international

TIPS ON NEGOTIATING DEALS

- The benefits of multi-year deals are several, particularly for smaller organisations. Renegotiation and documentation of agreements all take extended time commitments. Additionally, multi-year deals provide stability for organisation, athletes and your public visage
- Identify the key decision-makers early and understand their general attitude towards rugby league & community sport. A company might have the budgetary means and similar target audience, but the key decision-makers may prefer another sport, or believe in other charities
- Human-to-human relationships are almost always the major deciding factor in whether a deal is done, the finances, length, and stipulations
- Cast the net wide, focus on strong leads, set reasonable deadlines
- Don't get hung up on how 'right' the fit is between your organisation and theirs. Sometimes, no matter the synergies, a deal won't happen

LINKS TO RELEVANT INFORMATION

- NETBALL Her is here to raise the bar for women and girls through the creation of expert resources, game changing learning offers and by being a strong and responsible voice for “her”:

[**Click here to visit link**](#)

- The world needs more women coaches:

[**Click here to visit link**](#)

- How basketball became the world's second biggest sport:

[**Click here to visit link**](#)

- How to launch the next great American sport:

[**Click here to visit link**](#)

- This Girl Can:

[**Click here to visit link**](#)



INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1



CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3



CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5



REMEMBER

**EACH INDIVIDUAL DESERVES
TO BE TREATED AS SUCH.**

**RESEARCH FINDINGS &
DATA CAN BE APPLIED TO
MAXIMISE THE CHANCES OF
SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES.**

**YET, IT'S IMPORTANT TO
REMAIN MINDFUL THAT
NO TWO PEOPLE ARE THE
SAME.**

FUTURE WORK

FEEDBACK AND SUGGESTIONS

The Toolkit is intended to deliver relevant and useful insight and guidance for the rugby league community. It is therefore essential that the Toolkit content is reviewed regularly to ensure the information is up to date and accurate and remains a valuable resource for the growth of rugby league for women and girls globally. We would welcome your feedback and suggestions and would kindly ask that you share these with us by...

[Click here to complete the feedback form.](#)