

IRFU Age Grade Rugby Policies

Introduction

Rugby prides itself on inherent qualities of Respect, Teamwork, Discipline and Friendship and it is important for our volunteers and participants to understand the importance of these and to strive to uphold what is good for the Game.

The objective of this document is to identify queries relating to Age Grade Rugby activities and to guide participants when conducting rugby activities so they may truly enjoy the “Rugby Experience”. Unless otherwise specified, the guidelines cover both girls and boys. Variations for girls’ age grade rugby are mentioned throughout the document.

Registration – Rugby Connect

- Clubs/ Schools must ensure they update their player register at the start of each season. **All** mini players must be registered from 2022/2023 season onwards.
- Players must be registered or de-registered (in the event of players who left the school) before participating.
- Branch Youth Registrars to verify the date of birth (copy of birth cert or passport) at the first registration of a player.

Mini Rugby

- Mini Rugby is a participation sport - any boy or girl registered with a club and/or school may take part.
- Date of eligibility for participants is that which is approved by the IRFU Rugby Committee (currently, the 1st of January 2026). For separate Girls’ Mini Rugby teams, players play in a two-year age band i.e. U8, U10, U12.
- Where Mini and Rugby Prime (Leprechaun rugby) are part of the school curriculum, eligibility is based on the year/ class the player is in.

- Concerns regarding eligibility must be raised through the Club/School to the Branch or if required the IRFU.

Players playing at a higher age category in Mini Rugby

In the event of clubs not having sufficient numbers, players can play in two age categories – the year a player is eligible for and one year up e.g. U10 playing also at U11. It is the club's responsibility to ensure all players get the opportunity to participate in mini rugby. Best practice is to play in their own age grade. No U11 player is allowed to play up if the U12 team are playing Stage 4 mini rugby.

Procedure for allowing U12 players to play at U13

- Only in instances where clubs have a concern regarding numbers e.g. not enough U13 players in the club, a club may apply to their Branch Youth Committee with supporting documents explaining the reason(s) to allow this.
- This to only apply to players who are U12 - no U11 player playing at U12 is allowed to play up to U13.
- Branch Youth Committee to ensure that the decision does not affect playing opportunities of the U12 team(s).
- Girls Mini Rugby teams play in a two year age band i.e. U8, U10 & U12. The next available age band is U14. It is not permissible for a player in the U12 age band to play or train at the U14 age band.

Mixed Gender Rugby

- Is allowed **only at mini rugby** level (up to and including U12).
- This is not allowed in the 15-a-side game post mini rugby.

Girls Only Mini Rugby

- Is encouraged in all clubs.

- Research shows that by separating the girls and boys from U10 leads to a greater number of girls playing rugby in the club.
- Girls only mini rugby teams play in two-year age categories U8, U10 and U12.

Rugby for Pre-Mini Rugby stage – players aged 5 to 6 years

The IRFU will not recognise any commercially- based enterprises in Mini & Rugby Prime (Leprechaun Rugby).

- Participants can only participate in non-contact rugby – Rugby Prime (Leprechaun) and/ or TAG Rugby.
- Parents/guardians to be present at sessions and at least one parent/guardian to attend the session at all times.
- Participants must have reached his/her 7th birthday before they can participate in fixtures and or events involving teams from other clubs.
- Adult player ratio to be 1 adult to every 5 players.

Transition from Mini Rugby to 15-a-side Rugby

- 15-a-side (including or 13-a-side rugby) can only commence once players or a team reached their U13 year.
- Clubs, teams or players are not allowed to start the transition to the 15-a-side game while still in their U12 season.
- End of season fixtures (for U12 players) allowing players to play in 13-a-side or 15-a-side matches **are not allowed**.
- Girls' rugby transitions from 10 a-side (at U12) to 13 a-side (at U14) to 15 a-side (at U16). The above points apply to these variations.

Fixtures in Mini Rugby

Competitions (meaning Leagues/ Cups & Blitzes ending with play-off matches or finals) **are not allowed** and Festivals / Events must be arranged according to the National Festival Day format.

These must be registered with the respective Branch prior to taking place and all Festivals/Events including matches involving teams from other Unions, must adhere to the IRFU Mini and Rugby Prime (Leprechaun Rugby) regulations.

Competitions in Mini Rugby

In accordance with the IRFU Long Term Player Development pathway – “**competitions**”, (defined as: ‘Leagues/ Cups/ Blitzes or other formally organised events resulting in play-off matches and /or finals) are not permitted at Mini and Leprechaun Rugby levels. This includes all rugby activities for participants U12 and younger.

Date of Eligibility at Age Grade Rugby

1st January

- Date of eligibility is the 1st of January.

1st July or 1st September

- To assist Branches maximising participation and to ensure clubs/schools can field teams at various age levels, Branches agree the date of eligibility and age categories applicable in their province, for Branch competitions, and formally apply to the IRFU Age Grade Committee for approval.
- The date of eligibility and age categories must be discussed and agreed with the relevant schools and youth committees.
- For Girls’ Youth Rugby the eligibility is set centrally by the IRFU and not by the branches.

Date of Eligibility

Age Groups	2026/2027	2027/2028	2028/2029
Under 6	<i>Born in: 2021</i>	<i>Born in: 2022</i>	<i>Born in: 2023</i>
Under 7	2020	2021	2022
Under 8	2019	2020	2021
Under 9	2018	2019	2020
Under 10	2017	2018	2019
Under 11	2016	2017	2018
Under 12	2015	2016	2017

Players playing at a higher age category in Age Grade Rugby

- Youth players can play in two age categories – the year a player is eligible for and one year up e.g. U14 playing also at U15.
- Any individual player identified to play 3 age categories above e.g. U17 to U19 or U18 to U20 must provide the written consent of:
 1. Parents/ Guardians
 2. Coach
 3. Clubs/ School
 4. IRFU Schools and Youth Committees will agree respective processes for administration in order to accommodate the above. [Consent to play in an older category form](#)
- Age Grade players in the Senior Cycle in schools are allowed play 2 years outside their age category. Schools maintain a duty of care to all players but particularly those playing outside their age category.

Playing at adult level

- Age Grade players (males/females) must have reached their 18th birthday prior to playing adult rugby.
- Boys turning 18 can only play AIL rugby after their age grade competitions have been completed.
- If a female player participating in their provincial U18/U18.5 competition seeks to play AIL when she turns 18, **it must first be notified in writing to the Women's Executive Officer from the players' own club (and also the AIL club in the case of a dual status player), that they are satisfied the player has the experience to compete safely at AIL level.** Preference should be given to playing for the U18/U18.5 team and no player may play two matches in a 48-hour period.

Time gap between matches

- In the interest of player welfare as well as participation, Age Grade players may play **no more than “a game and half”** (length of half being relative to the player's age) **within a 48-hour period.**

The 48-hour period begins once a player participates in a match whether as replacement or selected to start a match.

Variations

- There are several Regulation variations in place to ensure relevance to the capacity of players, appropriate skill development, physical conditioning issues etc. and with a view to maximising participant enjoyment and gradual progression.
- Regulations for the various levels in Age Grade Rugby are regularly reviewed and updated.

Matches involving a team(s) from other Unions (Home or Away)

- Clubs/Schools should ensure teams planning these fixtures/events follow procedures and as set out by the IRFU.
- **Application form (s) available at the link below under ‘Player Transfer and Tours’:**
<https://www.irishrugby.ie/running-your-club/resource-library/>

Footwear & protective clothing

Clothing

For all matches Clubs/ Schools must ensure that the players’ clothing complies with World Rugby Regulations and should be suitable to all types of weather conditions.

Track suits, hooded tops and hijabs

- Track suits can be worn during warm up and or fun activities and coaches should use their discretion regarding the wearing of such items in cold weather conditions.
- Track suits with hooded tops and bottoms with zips may be worn during warm up and drill work which does not involve contact with other players.
- During training, match time and/ or drills with contact and tackling etc. no clothing with a hooded top and or zips should be worn; it’s the responsibility of coaches and referees to check this prior to the start of a match or training session.

- Clubs/ Schools should ensure coaches/ managers enforce this message and if there are concerns over younger players being cold then they should be advised to wear a jog suit with elasticised leggings & top or other thermal wear / “skins”.
- Coaches with U7 players to use their discretion as they will be playing non-contact rugby.
- A hijab may be worn but must be securely fitted and completely tucked into the player’s jersey. It is advisable that a scrum cap be worn for the duration of a game to ensure any loose parts stay close to the head and secure.

Protective wear

- Clubs/ Schools must ensure **all protective wear complies with World Rugby Regulations**; however consideration should be made not to make it compulsory due to potential cost implications. <https://www.world.rugby/organisation/governance/regulations/reg-12>

Footwear

- Parents should consult with the Club/ School prior to purchasing boots and boots should fit properly with studs **complying with World Rugby regulations - Regulation 12**.
- Moulded rubber multi-studded soles are acceptable provided they have no sharp edges or ridges.
- It is recommended that clubs/schools ensure regular boot inspection takes place in order to ensure studs/ blades are safe and according to the regulations.

Mouth guards

- **It is recommended** Age Grade players wear a properly fitted mouth guard when participating in contact activities and/ or matches.

Wearing of glasses or sports goggles

- World Rugby has approved an amendment to the laws of the game that will allow the wearing of Raleri goggles at all levels of the game.
- The IRFU reminds all players, coaches, referees and parents that only the Raleri goggle is allowed to be worn, and in accordance with the laws of the game, no other eyewear will be permitted, for health and safety reasons, in contact forms of the game. Anyone wishing to purchase the goggles should go to www.raleri.com. There is a link to a local (based in Ireland) supplier on this website.

Child Welfare/Safeguarding

- Clubs/Schools must ensure players and volunteers are aware of and support the IRFU Safeguarding policy.
- Clubs/Schools to ensure they have followed the IRFU's safe recruitment procedures.
- All rugby activities must be conducted in a safe, responsible and enjoyable manner.
- All matters relating to safeguarding must be dealt with through the Club Welfare Officer and/or Spirit of Rugby Officer at Branch level.

For more information see: <https://www.irishrugby.ie/participation/spirit-rugby/safeguarding>

Concussion

World Rugby Law 3 relates to concussion in rugby. If a player (of any age) has suspected concussion, they should be removed from the field of play and take no further part in the training session or match.

For more information see : [Concussion protocols](#)

Reportable Injuries

It remains the responsibility of the club/school official to report any confirmed/suspected concussions or serious incidents to their branch as soon as possible. This can be done by completing an online Injury Report (see link below).

Reportable Injury Reports must be completed for the following injuries:

- Any confirmed/suspected concussions

- Any injury that requires the player to be transported directly from the ground to an emergency department, hospital or after-hours medical centre.
- Any injury that results in the admission of a player into hospital after a game.
- Any injury that is expected to prevent a player from playing for a period of 8 weeks or longer.
- Reportable injury forms **must** be completed within **48 Hours** of the injury coming to the notice of the referee or team management. Here is the link to the form: [Irish Rugby | Injury Reporting](#)

For more information and to download the Injury Report see:

<https://www.irishrugby.ie/irfu/medical>

Nutrition

Young players need constant fuelling. Their nutritional needs are of great importance to their overall health, growth and development as well as to their sporting performance. The well- nourished young player will be able to play better and for longer and recover quicker from training and matches. On the other hand, the young player who is not getting enough total calories will become tired and lethargic and will probably struggle to maintain their enjoyment in rugby. The amount of food and drink required will vary and will increase with age and greater training and match demands. Good hydration in young players is crucial, as they are not as efficient at regulating their body temperature as adults are.

Eat2Compete is the IRFU's Nutrition Programme aimed at young players. All the advice you need on healthy eating for rugby is contained within our videos and factsheets.

Supplements

Young rugby players should focus on good eating and drinking practices to support optimum performance.

- The use of protein supplements should not be recommended by schools, coaches, teachers or others involved in the training of young rugby players. The IRFU strongly advises against the use of nutritional ergogenic aids, in particular creatine, in young rugby players under 18 years of age.
- Young rugby players with medical conditions (for example diabetes, asthma, coeliac disease and nutritional allergies) should receive appropriate medical and nutritional advice to assist their optimum performance.

Anti-Doping

The Irish Rugby Football Union fully recognises the need and its responsibility to remain vigilant at all times to the threat of performance enhancing drugs in the sport and implements an anti-doping policy in line with Irish Sports Council (ISC), World Rugby and World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) regulations and guidelines. The IRFU works closely with Sport Ireland to deliver a comprehensive and robust anti-doping programme.

For more information see:

<https://www.irishrugby.ie/participation/spirit-rugby/anti-doping>