

Covid-19 and Rugby

An overview

Who are we?

The IRFU Youth Council was set up in 2017 to offer a voice to youth players within the IRFU.

We represent each of the four provinces and we are involved in clubs, schools and universities.

We are all passionate about rugby and want to ensure that other people get to enjoy rugby as much as we do.

<https://www.irishrugby.ie/playing-the-game/spirit-of-rugby/youth-council/>



Introduction

There is no doubt that Covid-19 has, and continues to be a major challenge to the rugby community. Whether it is long periods without games or concerns about the spread of Covid-19, people are having to adapt to these new challenges.

The good news is that people were looking forward to getting back on the pitch and to be involved with their clubs again.



What did people love about rugby?

Diverse and
Inclusive

Physicality

Team bonding
and friends

Respect

Camaraderie

Sense of
Belonging

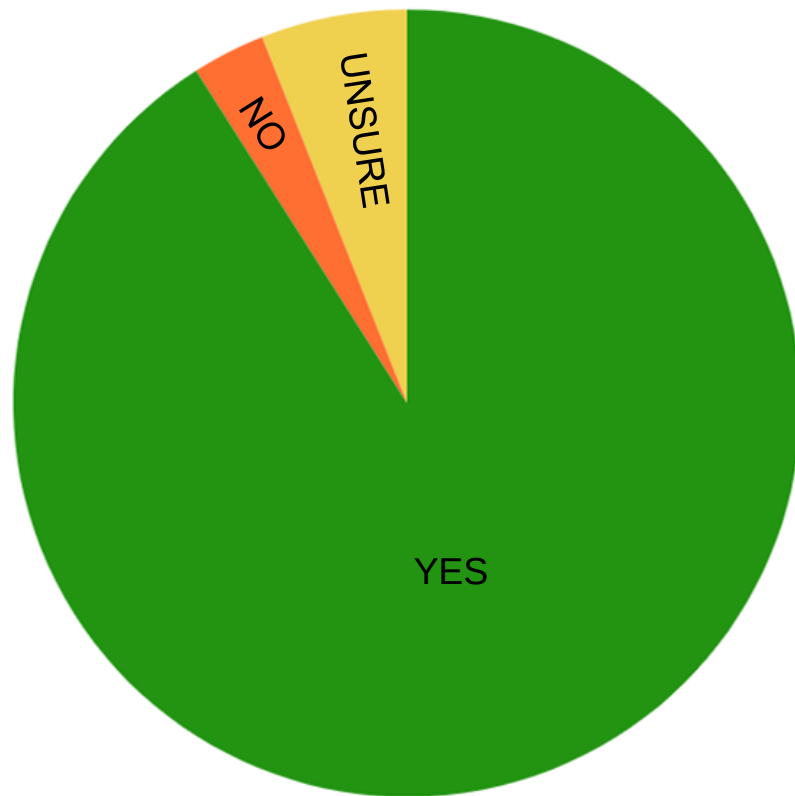
Rugby
accommodates
everyone

The Craic

Returning to Rugby

The vast majority of respondents want to return to rugby with some players feeling unsure

IRFU Youth Council Covid-19 Survey



Why did people return to rugby?

They love it.

Fun

They enjoy playing

Mental Health

They want to
get back to
matches or
compete

What were they looking forward to when they returned post Covid-19?



Why were people unsure about returning to rugby?

Wary of the jump
from one age
grade to the next

Other sports

Less interested
after time out

Academics or
work

Concerns about
fitness or
strength

Why did people not want to return to rugby?

Environment:

- Unhappy with Coaching
- Too great a jump in age grades
- Stressful training environment
- Friends no longer going

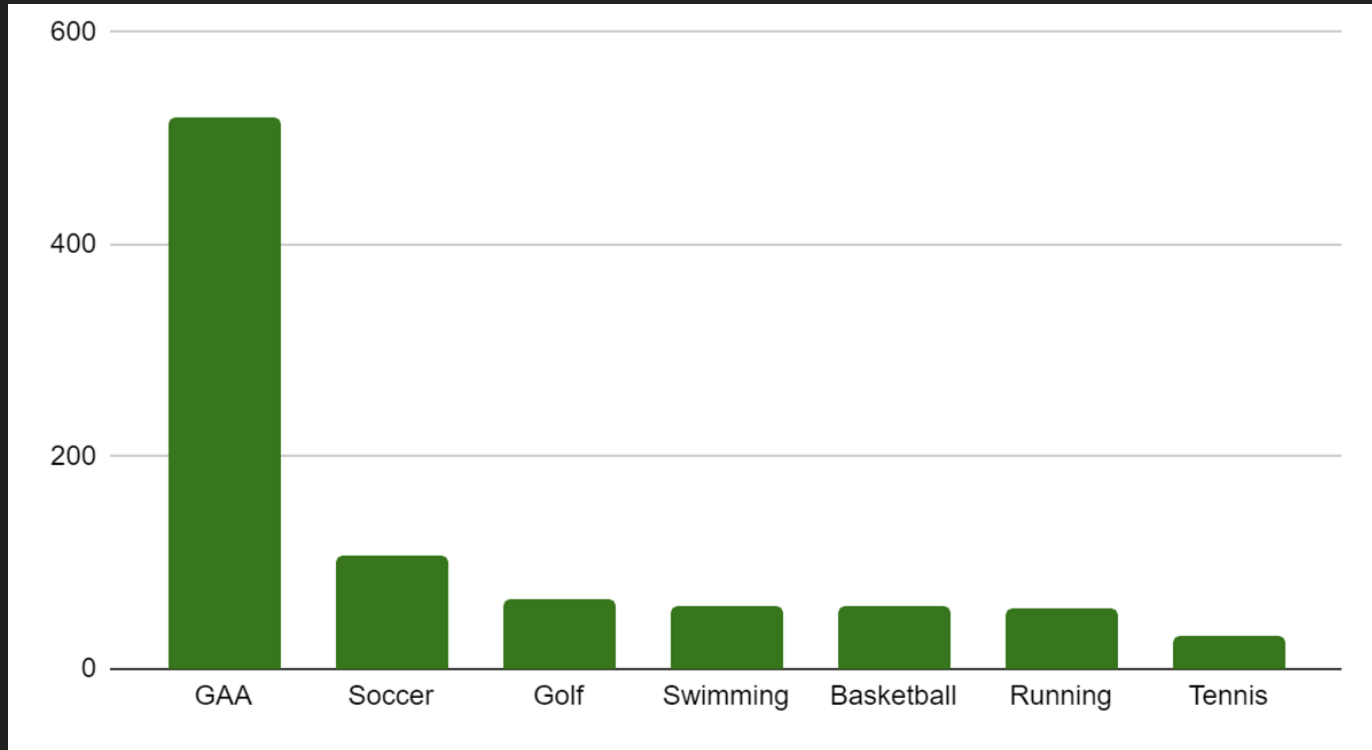
Risk of injury or Covid-19:

- People feel unfit.
- Many have not had access to a gym with lockdowns
- Fear of Covid-19
- Fear of another lockdown

Personal Reasons:

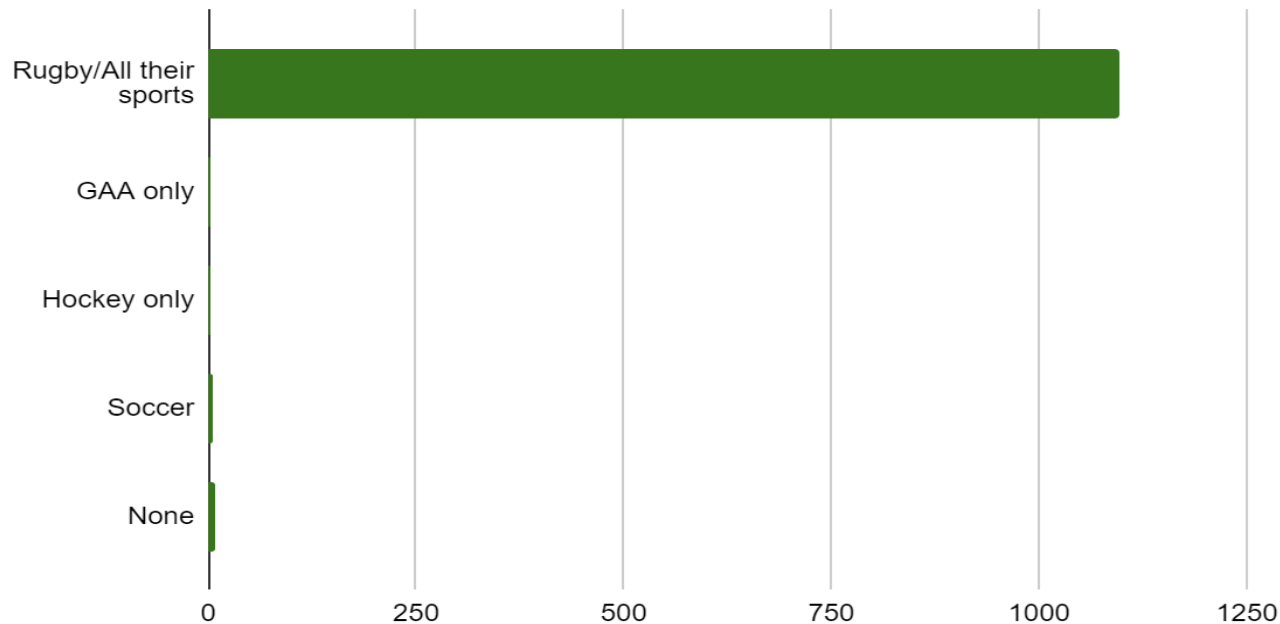
- Work commitments
- Other sports
- Time commitments

Most popular sports other than rugby

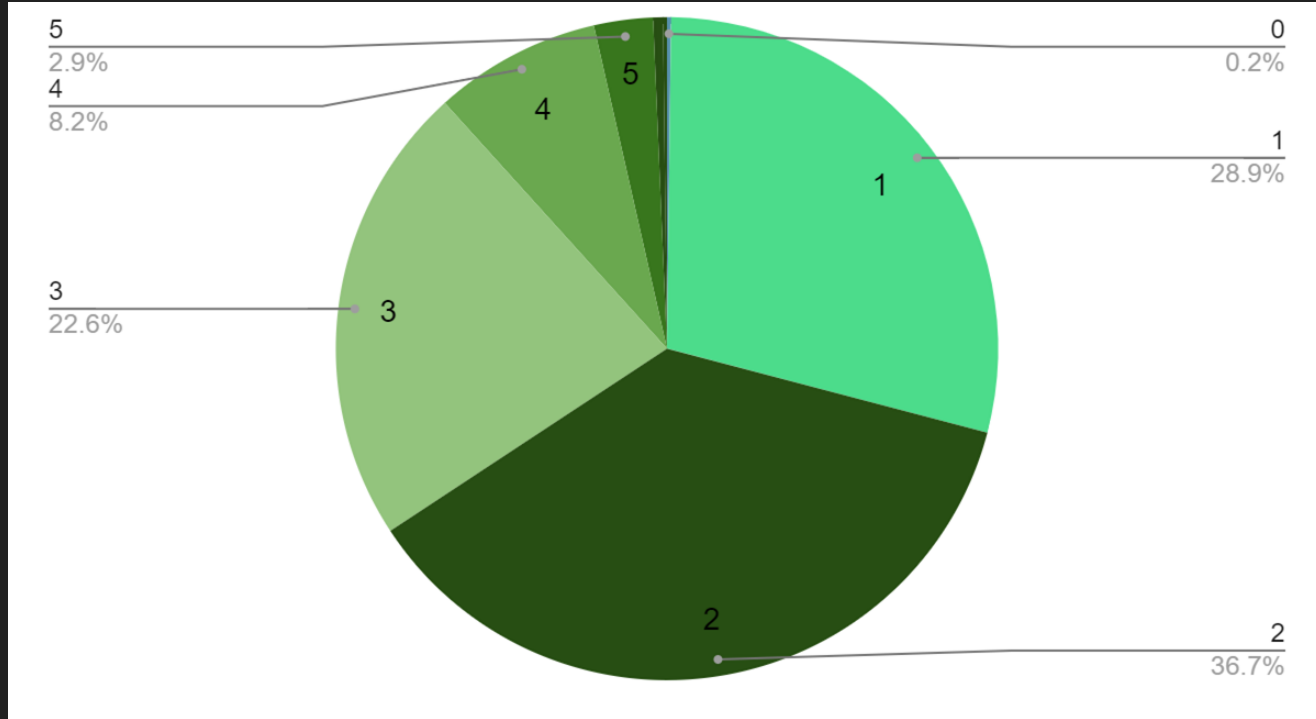


Planning to return to rugby

Points scored



How many sports people played before Covid-19



Key points

Fitness is a
concern

Skills as a
priority

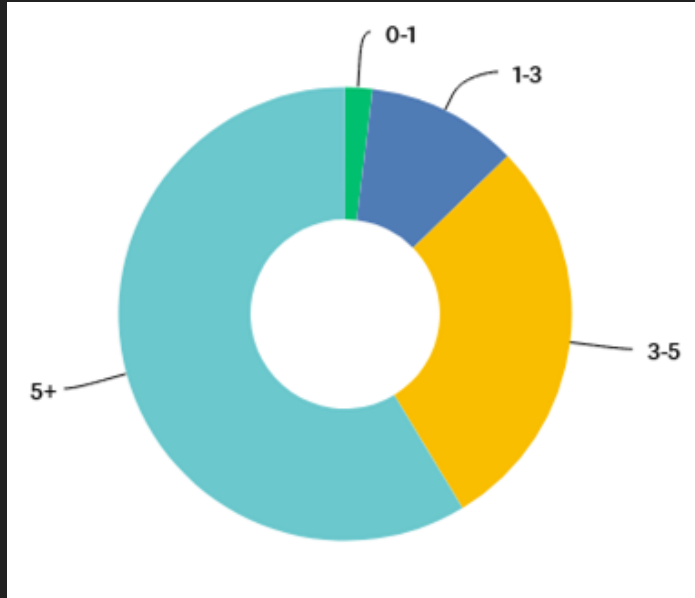
Keep it fun

Club
engagement

Moving up
age grades

Mind your
mental health

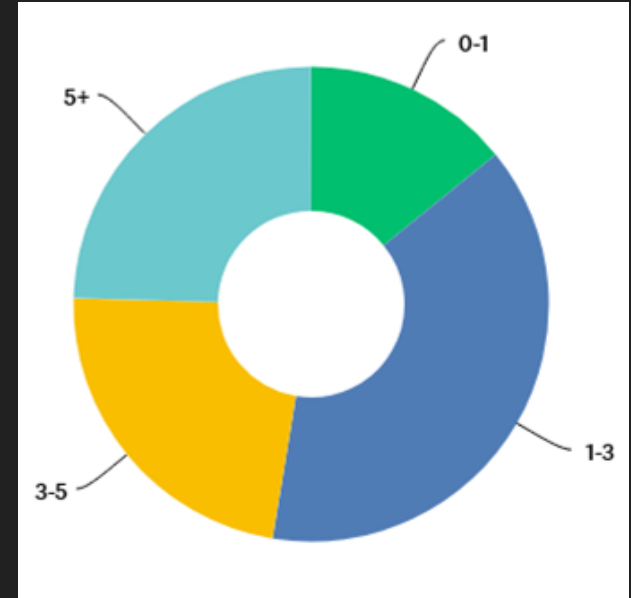
Fitness is a major concern for players.



Weekly hours
active before
Covid-19



Weekly hours
active during
Covid-19



Fitness concerns:

Many players identified their fitness as a major cause for concern, with some people even considering delaying their return to rugby because of it.

On a similar note, many players are also wary of going straight back to intense fitness training.

Most people had limited access to gyms due to public health restrictions and feel that this has impacted their health and overall fitness.

A good way to deal with this is to try and make any conditioning and fitness as match-realistic as possible.

Skill Concerns

People are coming back to rugby after a significant time away.

This is a great opportunity to go back to basics and ensure all players, referees and coaches are up to scratch with these key skills.

Lots of teams are also welcoming new players into the fold, or past players back so time should be allocated to help them learn or brush up on skills.



Keep it fun!

The most popular reasons people had for going back to rugby all centered around:



Having fun

Social or
Friends

The team
environment

While many are keen to get back to the levels of competition they were at before Covid-19, it is important to remember the role of rugby in our communities and our members lives.

There should be a focus on creating a positive club culture, integrating and reintegrating players onto the team and ensuring all club members enjoy their rugby

Club engagement

Some respondents felt that their clubs did not engage sufficiently with their members during the public health restrictions. Others felt their club had done well.

Depending on public health restrictions, events such as club clean ups, fun days, and in-person or virtual social events can go a long way to improving this.



Moving up age grades



For some players, already difficult moves have been made harder by such a long break from rugby.

Clubs should make an effort to identify and support players who are making these transitions.

An example of this would be a player who is moving up to senior rugby having missed their final year at underage level.

This point was also raised by players in the 2019 youth consultations but the pandemic has heightened anxiousness around transition to senior level, see Youth Council Booklet for further information, <https://d19fc3vd0ojo3m.cloudfront.net/irfu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/30135739/IRFU-Youth-Council-Resource-Booklet-2020.pdf>

Efforts should also be made to create a club-school link to ensure that schools players have a defined pathway into senior club rugby.

Mental Health

Sport is an excellent way for us to keep fit and healthy both physically and mentally. Over the past 18 months it's been difficult with the effect the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown has had on our ability to meet, train and play. Here is some helpful information below on maintaining positive mental health with sport;

[Be Well](#) (Sport Ireland)

[Health and Wellbeing](#) (IRFU -
Includes contacts for both regional
and national supports)



Personal Development and Opportunities in Rugby



Many people will have ambitions to make it to the very top of the sport.

Whether you are a coach, referee, player or volunteer, there are lots of opportunities to progress.



[Opportunities](#) (IRFU)

[Develop](#) (Rugby Players Ireland)

[Playing Opportunities and Talent ID](#) (IRFU)

Newcomers

- Newcomers to rugby are always welcome!
- There is plenty of information available online and within your local club.

Here are some helpful links for you;

[Playing the game - Schools rugby](#) (IRFU)

[Beginners guide](#) (World Rugby)



Want to switch things up a bit?

Some respondents want to try out new areas of the game.

[Try Coaching](#)

Or

[Try Refereeing](#)

Or

[Get in touch with your club](#)



Looking for a club?

[Club Contacts](#) (IRFU)



Thank you to all the people who completed our survey. We had 1592 respondents in total and this helped us gain a broader understanding of the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on rugby players, referees, coaches and volunteers.

Thank you to Anne Marie and Meadhbh and all within the Spirit Programme for making this report possible and always ensuring that we have the support to represent the voices of youth players across the IRFU.

Finally, please ensure that you keep up to date with current government guidance regarding Covid-19 and organising events or playing matches etc. Any and all in-person interactions must follow the most recent government advice.