

# ANNUAL REVIEW 2018



RUGBY PLAYERS  
IRELAND

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

## ROB KEARNEY

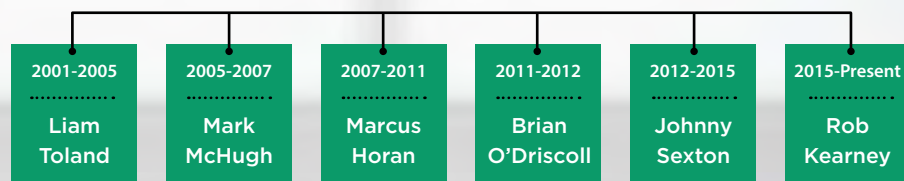
**When my rugby days are behind me, I will always look upon 2018 with great fondness. In addition to the Grand Slam at Twickenham, we came away with a historic series win in Australia, a first victory on home soil against the All Blacks, while our provincial sides continued to be the envy of Unions across Europe.**

However, the continued growth of Rugby Players Ireland has also been a source of great pride for me. As a players' association, we can now be considered amongst the best in the world of sport as it follows the trajectory of Irish performances on the field. It is something we are extremely proud of.

Throughout its lifetime Rugby Players Ireland has been led by the players, for the players. With a voice in the game, we can ensure that each generation finds Irish rugby in a better place. I must therefore take this opportunity to thank my predecessors for the respective roles that they have all played in bringing us to this place of strength.

With Simon Keogh now at the helm of what is a great team that includes former players Marcus Horan, also a former Chairman, and Denis Hurley, Rugby Players Ireland continues to put the player's interests at the core of its work. I look forward to seeing what lies in store in the years ahead. With the appropriate structures in place off the field, Irish rugby can only continue to prosper on it.

### PREVIOUS CHAIRMEN OF IRUPA/RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND



# MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

**SIMON KEOGH**

**I was hugely proud to have taken up the position as CEO of Rugby Players Ireland at the start of the 2017/18 season. I am fortunate to have played with and against some of our current membership and I feel privileged to now be able to act on behalf of all professional players in Ireland.**

Last season was the most successful in Irish Rugby history and whilst I cannot claim that my appointment is linked to this achievement, certainly the welfare support for players provided by Rugby Players Ireland and the IRFU has been a contributing factor.



My predecessor Omar Hassanein set solid foundations in positioning the players and Rugby Players Ireland as valued stakeholders in the game. We continue to build the organisation across three defined areas: Represent, Develop and Engage. Over the past twelve months there has been significant progress in a number of aspects.

Firstly, we have entered the final stages of our discussions and negotiations with the IRFU specifically in relation to the contractual environment as we continually strive to work toward the association's vision "to make Ireland the best place in the world to play rugby".

The Player Development Programme, in partnership with the IRFU, has seen the introduction of several new initiatives including a structured educational curriculum, the BDO Rookie Camp, the Goodbody Personal Development Bursary, corporate engagement through BNY Mellon and the development of scholarships through Setanta College and the Irish Management Institute.

Beyond the current stable, Rugby Players Ireland continues to provide a link between past players and the game through the development of our Clubhouse programme with our partners, Heineken. Through these engagements we ensure that players who have been inextricably linked to the sport, maintain their relationship with the game and with their many former teammates and opponents.

Many of those players were in attendance in May 2018 when, for the first time, we showcased our flagship event "The Zurich

“

**Rugby Players Ireland will continue to act in the best interests of its members to ensure that player welfare is paramount, and support is available from Academy level right through to our past player community.**

Irish Rugby Players Awards" on TV3. The continued success of our members on the field makes this occasion a highlight of the rugby calendar.

Towards the end of 2018, we reflected on the success of Tackle Your Feelings, our mental wellbeing initiative brought to the public in partnership with Zurich. Through an in-depth report of the campaign, it emerged that Tackle Your Feelings content was viewed more than 23 million times. We are proud that almost one third of the entire Rugby Players Ireland membership base acted as champions or ambassadors for the campaign, supporting those who helped to front it. We are hugely grateful to our members for investing their time and energy into such a worthwhile project.

**Rugby Players Ireland will continue to act in the best interests of its members to ensure that player welfare is paramount, and support is available from Academy level right through to our past player community. As we build towards the Rugby World Cup in 2019, we look forward to building upon the success of recent years, both on and off the pitch.**



SECTION 1

# REPRESENT-

#TEAMSTARS



When Rugby Players Ireland (formerly IRUPA) was founded in 2001, the predominant focus was to protect player welfare by providing an organised collective voice for its members. Since then, the functions of the association have grown to include an established player development programme, a community engagement programme and a calendar of player focussed events. However, the backbone of the organisation remains player representation.

## DENIS HURLEY

In May 2018, former Irish and Munster Rugby player Denis Hurley was appointed as Operations Manager to bolster the Represent department at Rugby Players Ireland. In his role, Denis works closely with Simon Keogh in all negotiations with the IRFU whilst establishing and developing the commercial relationships that help the organisation to carry out its extensive body of work.

Denis is a key point of contact for current players with regard to legal, insurance or contractual issues, helping to facilitate the flow and better use of information within the organisation. With Rugby Players Ireland's membership constantly evolving, Denis has also set about developing a 'Past Player Social & Business Network' across each of the four provinces. By connecting former players in a more structured and sustainable format in addition to the Player Development Programme, it is hoped that Rugby Players Ireland can help with the difficulties that can accompany the retirement process.



## THE RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND EXECUTIVE BOARD

We are fortunate to have some of the most experienced players in the country on Rugby Players Ireland's Executive Board which comprises of Eoin McKeon (Connacht), Peter O'Mahony (Munster), Johnny Sexton (Leinster) and chairman Rob Kearney, while Darren Cave (Ulster) has been recently appointed following the retirement of Andrew Trimble. The off-field balance is met with the experience of non-executive board of Shane Jennings, John Treacy and Peter McKenna. Through the engagement of the board we have been able take significant strides forward in how we engage and negotiate with the IRFU while ensuring that its decision-making processes are player-centred.

“

QUITE SIMPLY, RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND COULDN'T EXIST WITHOUT THE PLAYERS BEING INVOLVED. AS A BOARD, WE GIVE AN INSIGHT INTO WHAT WE WANT AS PLAYERS. AN AWFUL LOT OF WORK GOES ON BEHIND THE SCENES FOR OUR BENEFIT, BUT SOMETIMES IT CAN BE HARDER TO APPRECIATE UNLESS IT DIRECTLY AFFECTS US, LIKE THE SOUTH AFRICAN DOUBLE-TAXATION ISSUE OR ONGOING COLLECTIVE BARGAINING NEGOTIATIONS. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT AS A BOARD WE KEEP THE PLAYERS IN THE LOOP AND MAKE THEM AWARE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING.

Eoin McKeon (Connacht Rugby)



**Rob Kearney**  
Chairman



**Eoin McKeon**  
Connacht



**Peter O'Mahony**  
Munster



**Johnny Sexton**  
Leinster



**Darren Cave**  
Ulster



**Shane Jennings**  
Past Player



**John Treacy**  
Non-Executive Director



**Peter McKenna**  
Non-Executive Director



**Simon Keogh**  
CEO

## IRFU COMMITTEE REPRESENTATION

In today's environment, we work to ensure that player welfare is at the forefront of all decisions. Rugby Players Ireland has appointed representatives on each of the professional welfare forums in the IRFU. Former player Dr Niall Hogan sits on the IRFU Medical Advisory Committee and has overseen a number of processes and protocols introduced to protect players' medical interests.

Meanwhile, Eoin Reddan holds a place on the IRFU National Professional Game Board ensuring that the contractual and professional environment remains player focussed. Both former international scrum-halves, they have used their vast experience in the game to futureproof the welfare for the next crop of professionals. Their time and dedication is hugely appreciated by the all professional players in Ireland.



## IRFU ENGAGEMENT

With the professional game generating 95% of the IRFU's revenue, we know how important it is to have success at the top of the game to drive this. However, it is recognised that the development of domestic and grass roots rugby is imperative for the future success of the game. The player group has always taken this into consideration in its collective negotiations.

Whilst Rugby Players Ireland and the IRFU do not necessarily agree on all matters, we believe that both parties are working in the best interests of Irish rugby. The relationship with our national governing body continues to develop as we work toward a progressive means of engagement. We are constantly looking at how the current system may be improved including a complete review of the current standard player contract which is currently ongoing. We believe that by creating a contractual environment where there is mutual respect between employers and employees, we can get the best results on and off the field.





## AGENT REGISTRATION

**Over the past four years Rugby Players Ireland has managed the Agent Registration Scheme. We continue to work with the IRFU, the RFU and the WRU to run a common set of agent regulations across Ireland, England and Wales.**

These Regulations sit within the IRFU Regulations and are overseen by a Rugby Players Ireland appointed registration board of Sarah O'Connor, Eddie Wigglesworth and Derek Hegarty. The scheme is designed to improve, protect and drive standards within the agency environment as well as safeguarding the players.

In February 2018, all 16 Irish registered agents as well as some UK registered agents attended the compulsory CPD workshop held in Rugby Players Ireland HQ. Rugby Players Ireland is committed to working with national unions agents and registration board to ensure that the agency environment is safeguarded for the betterment of the game.







**“ BETWEEN ALL THE UNCERTAINTY, THE TURBULENCE AND ALL THE THINGS GOING THROUGH YOUR HEAD, YOU NEED TO MAKE THINGS AS EASY AS POSSIBLE FOR YOURSELF. THERE IS NO NEED TO GO IT ALONE. RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND WILL GIVE YOU THE HELP YOU ARE LOOKING FOR.**

*Felix Jones (Former Player)*

**“ I WAS ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES. I GOT TO RETIRE ON MY TERMS AT 35 AND IT WAS STILL HARD...**

RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND ARE DOING PHENOMENAL WORK. LISTEN TO THEM, TAKE HEED OF WHAT THEY'RE SAYING BECAUSE THEY'RE DOING IT FOR YOUR BENEFIT.

*Brian O'Driscoll (Former Player)*





SECTION 2

# DEVELOP





# THE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (PDP)

The Player Development Programme (PDP) is a jointly funded initiative of Rugby Players Ireland and the IRFU. It is a person-centred approach, where the individual needs of each player are assessed, and personal development action plans are tailored to those needs. The PDP encompasses fundamental areas that contribute to the overall personal development and growth of players.



## RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND / IRFU PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

### CAREER ADVICE & GUIDANCE

- Career coaching, advice & guidance
- Work experience
- Mentoring
- Networking
- CV & interview preparation

### EDUCATION, TRAINING & SKILLS

- Academic & trade qualifications
- Flexible learning options
- General interest courses
- Coaching qualifications
- Life skills



### PLAYER WELLBEING

- Mental health
- Physical health & self-care
- Self-awareness & personal leadership
- Player representation
- Sport integrity

### SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

- Brand awareness & development
- Social media
- Media & public speaking skills
- Community & charity engagement
- Personal responsibility

### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING

- Basic financial education
- Long term planning
- Tax advice
- Pension advice
- Insurance advice

## PLAYER DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Each Player Development Manager works with emerging players (Academy and Sub-Academy) and currently contracted players, as well as past players in each province. Rugby Players Ireland also provides support to the Women's national 15s squad and 7s programme.

### STAFFING



**Dr Deirdre Lyons**

Head of Player Development Programme and PDM, Connacht Rugby



**Dr Ella McCabe**

Head of Player Wellbeing and PDM, Leinster Rugby



**Marcus Horan**

PDM, Munster Rugby



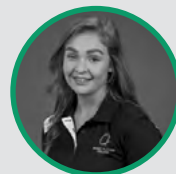
**Pam Gilpin / Ryan Mellon\***

PDM, Ulster Rugby



**Nancy Chillingworth**

PDM, Women's Programme



**Aoife Lane**

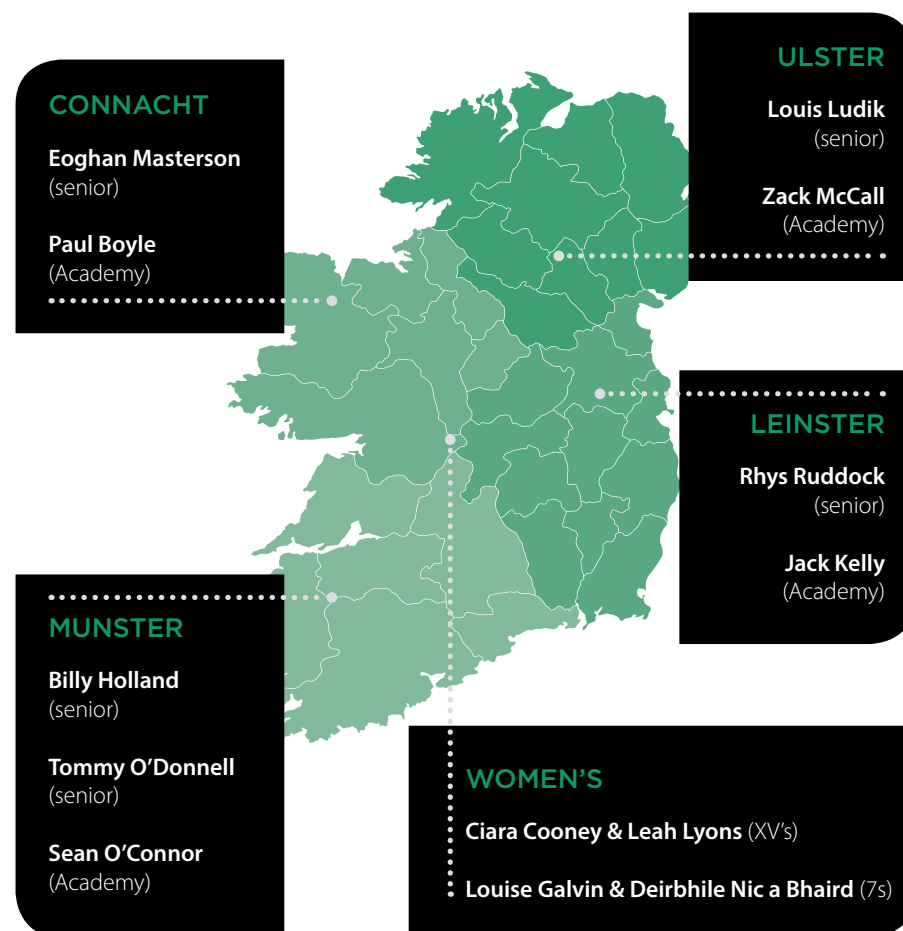
Player Services Manager

“ THE ROLE OF THE PDM IS TO PROMOTE THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING OF PLAYERS BY EMPOWERING THEM TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENT BOTH ON AND OFF THE SPORTING FIELD.

*World Players*

## PLAYER DEVELOPMENT REPRESENTATIVES

The role of the Player Development Representative is to provide an additional link between the PDM and players. Through educational sessions (group and individual), physical presence and active promotion of services and initiatives, the PDM will be known to the players, but the Player Rep will provide extra depth by gathering information directly related to the needs of the players in their province. Typically, each club will have a senior and an Academy Rep.





# 2017/2018 IN REVIEW

2018 was another year of significant achievement for the Player Development Programme. The strength of our programme lies in the individualised nature of our support. With one PDM based in each province and with the women's team, players are engaging with the programme in greater numbers than ever before:

## 397

PDMs engaged with approximately 397 players in the 2017/2018 season across our Academy, senior and past players, including the women's programme.

## 642

PDMs conducted 642 face-to-face meetings with players.

## 110

Over 110 workshops/activities including 33 different topics organised

## 1,494

43%

28%

13%

16%

Face to face meetings accounted for 43% of consultations with players, with players also contacting PDMs via email (28%), phone (13%) and text message (16%), totalling 1,494 consultations with players regarding their personal development.

Transition from Professional Rugby resource produced

First women's 15s two-day personal development camp

## 4

Presentations at 4 provincial roadshows



## 5

personal development bursaries awarded

# 2018/2019 IN FOCUS

Throughout the year, PDMs are responsible for organising and assisting the delivery of various workshops, activities and seminars. These are offered to all players and are based on the specific needs in that playing group. These activities are a great opportunity for players to learn general, employability and life skills while they are fulfilling their responsibilities as full-time professional players.

Below is a sample of the range of courses that are delivered nationwide:

- CV Development
- IRFU Level 3 Coaching course
- LinkedIn Assistance & CV Development
- Media & Communication training
- Board Governance: Roles and Responsibilities
- Behavioral Awareness
- Digital Marketing
- Email Etiquette
- Housing Market trends & advice
- Sleep Hygiene
- Butchery workshop
- DIY
- Goal setting
- Financial Advice: Pensions; Tax; Investments
- Mindfulness
- Microsoft Excel workshop
- Workplace visits
- Personal Responsibility and Leadership
- Gambling Education & Awareness
- Cooking skills
- Golf Taster session
- Personal Branding (incl. Social Media)
- Careers
- Preparing for college & CAO
- Networking
- Study Management skills
- Time Management
- Road Safety

“ THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO A MASTERS DEGREE CAME ABOUT WITH THE HELP OF RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND. BEFORE THE WORLD CUP LAST YEAR, I WAS TRYING TO ARRANGE A PLACEMENT. IT WAS PROVING VERY DIFFICULT TO APPROACH AN ORGANISATION AND THEN TURN AROUND TO ASK FOR A BLOCK OF TIME OFF TO PLAY IN THE TOURNAMENT.

**I'M VERY LUCKY TO HAVE HAD SOME EXCELLENT MENTORS. PEOPLE WHO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT AND DEVELOP PLAYERS ON THE FIELD WHILE INSPIRING THEM TO BECOME BETTER PEOPLE OFF IT.**

*Ciara Cooney (Ireland Women's XVs)*



“ **THEY'RE BRILLIANT AT RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND FOR THE OLDER GUYS. THEY MIGHT GET YOU INTO WORK PLACEMENTS, SET YOU UP WITH MENTORS. THEY SEE WHAT YOU LIKE AND WHAT YOU DON'T LIKE AND STEER YOU FROM THERE.**

*Devin Toner (Leinster Rugby & Ireland)*





## LEARNING FROM OTHER PLAYER ASSOCIATIONS AND REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

**Following a very successful World Players Player Development Manager Conference in Paris, a sport specific rugby PDM conference was hosted by International Rugby Players and Rugby Players Ireland at our Dublin offices. Representatives from all the major rugby player associations were in attendance – Ireland, England, Wales, France, Pacific Rugby, Australia and New Zealand.**

Topics discussed included programme curriculums, staffing structures, mental health, data capture and management, transition, alumni and women's rugby. The meeting was a fantastic opportunity for PDMs to network with the international counterparts, and to share best practice.

In order to truly provide a world leading Player Development Programme to our members, Rugby Players Ireland regularly meet with other player associations and representative bodies, both at home and abroad. In Ireland, Rugby Players Ireland has a close and collaborative association with the GPA (Gaelic Players Association), the WPGA (Women's Gaelic Players Association), Sport Ireland – Institute, the PFA Ireland (Professional Footballers' Association) and the Irish Jockeys Association.

Rugby Players Ireland PDMs also attend the PPF (Professional Players Federation, UK) Education and Training Committee meetings which allows us to develop close links with the sports of Cricket, Rugby Union, Football, Horse Racing, Rugby League, Golf and Olympic Sports in the UK.

At European level, Rugby Players Ireland are actively involved with EU Athletes, where we have worked on initiatives such as PROtect Integrity (dealing with match-fixing) and mental health awareness. Rugby Players Ireland are also involved with FIFPro (the world footballer's players association) as an expert partner on their "Mind the Gap" project, helping professional footballers transition from the game. Finally, Rugby Players Ireland are a major contributor to the World Players Player Development Committee which launched the Player Wellbeing, Development, Transition and Retirement Standard in 2017, following a very successful PDM Conference in Paris.

**“ IN ORDER TO TRULY PROVIDE A WORLD LEADING PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME TO OUR MEMBERS, RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND REGULARLY MEET WITH OTHER PLAYER ASSOCIATIONS AND REPRESENTATIVE BODIES, BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD.**





# HIGHLIGHTS

## WOMEN'S XVS CAMP

**Towards the end of the 2017/18 season, members of the Irish Women's XVs squad were hosted by Rugby Players Ireland for the first Women's XV Personal Development Camp.**

Supported by Keeling's, the camp was held at the Glenroyal Hotel in Maynooth. A number of workshops were delivered while players were also provided with thorough information as to the work that takes place at Rugby Players Ireland. Members of staff also participated in some team-building exercises over the course of a most enjoyable and productive weekend.



## ROOKIE CAMP

**Prior to the 2018/19 season, Rugby Players Ireland hosted new Academy players from the four provinces for an induction programme held at Druids Glen Hotel & Golf Resort. The two-day camp introduced players to various aspects of a career in the game.**

Off-field development was a recurring theme throughout with modules on financial planning, media engagement, behavioural attitudes and leadership all featuring. Irish Head Coach Joe Schmidt and former Irish captain Jamie Heaslip were also in attendance to share their own experiences of life in professional rugby.



## GAMBLING AWARENESS

Sports people are amongst the most susceptible factions to high risk betting given their dedicated and compulsive disposition and constant pursuit of adrenaline. Rugby Players Ireland have been addressing this issue through a number of modules that have been rolled out in the provinces through Paul Buck of EPIC Risk Management.



## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

**Andrea Montgomery of Terra Nova Productions was at the helm for several small group workshops that were delivered to both Players and Coaches during the season.**

Having a theatrical background, Andrea's innovative and engaging workshops push participants to rethink body language and physical presence focusing on the finer details of communication, especially in situations that are perceived as stressful or unnatural. The workshops were designed to increase personal awareness in what might be perceived as stressful or unnatural situations. They also challenge the individual to actively manage their physical communication whilst providing the opportunity to practice various ideas that may seem out of their comfort zone.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND MEDIA SKILLS

**The demands of the media can place great strain on those who might not be comfortable before microphones and cameras.**

Others struggle to realise that their various social media accounts represent their 'brand'. This year, Kieran File of Reactive Sports Media provided the players with media training that encompassed a range of skills to ensure competent and fluid interactions. Workshops also evaluated individual players' online presence.

## MANDATORY WORKSHOPS

**From the start of the 2018/19 season, a number of mandatory workshops have been integrated into player schedules across the four provinces and the women's programme.**

These workshops cover important topics on mental health and wellbeing, social media use, awareness and behaviours, transition from the game, and addiction education and awareness.

Over the course of 2018, the Player Development Team has continuously reviewed existing material and developed fresh modules designed to support our members beyond the game. This is a joint initiative between Rugby Players Ireland and the IRFU to support players and empower them to make healthy and positive decisions on and off the field of play.

**“ BECAUSE I CAME SO CLOSE TO FINISHING, I COULD SEE AT FIRST-HAND WHAT SERVICES RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND OFFERS AND ITS IMPORTANCE.**

I GOT THAT PART OF MY LIFE IN ORDER SO THAT IT DIDN'T BECOME ANOTHER WORRY ON TOP OF EVERYTHING ELSE.

*Tadhg Beirne (Munster Rugby & Ireland)*



## FINANCIAL PLANNING

**Long term financial planning is an important life skill to learn for our members.**

Through our partners BDO, players were provided with budgeting, taxation and general planning information. Our partners at Ulster Bank were also at hand to provide players with personalised financial advice and health checks. Furthermore, with the help of Smith & Williamson (Dublin) and Cunningham Coates (Belfast), a number of financial planning workshops took place throughout the provinces dealing with the basics of a payslip, the importance of setting up a pension, to the intricacies of investment management.

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT BURSARY

**In 2018, the Goodbody Rugby Players Ireland Personal Development Bursary was launched.**

The programme will aid the development and progression of 12 players' off-field careers and academic studies. Recipients of the bursary were chosen on the basis of their submissions to the Board of Trustees which comprises Professor Roger Downer (Professor Emeritus UL), Denis Hurley (Rugby Players Ireland), Sarah Moriarty (Goodbody) and Finbarr Griffin (Goodbody).

**Recipients for the 2018/19 academic year:**

**Azur Allison**  
(Ulster)

**John Andrew**  
(Ulster)

**Claire Boles**  
(Ireland  
Women's 7s)

**Tom Daly**  
(Leinster)

**Ciara Griffin**  
(Ireland  
Women's XV's)

**Claire Keohane**  
(Ireland  
Women's 7s)

**Alex McHenry**  
(Munster)

**Eoin McKeon**  
(Connacht)

**Hugh O'Sullivan**  
(Leinster)

**Darren Sweetnam**  
(Munster)

**Dylan Tierney**  
(Connacht)

**Dorothy Wall**  
(Women's 7s)



“

**WITH RUGBY, YOU  
OBSVIOUSLY HAVE TO  
FOCUS ON GIVING IT  
YOUR ALL TO BE THE  
BEST PLAYER YOU CAN  
BE, BUT I ENJOY HAVING  
SOMETHING ELSE.**

BEING PART OF THE  
GOODBODY RUGBY  
PLAYERS IRELAND  
BURSARY IS A GREAT  
OPPORTUNITY FOR ME  
AS LIVING AWAY FROM  
HOME IN DUBLIN WHILE  
BALANCING RUGBY AND  
COLLEGE CAN PRESENT  
ITS CHALLENGES.

*Hugh O'Sullivan (Leinster Rugby)*





## PLAYER WELLBEING

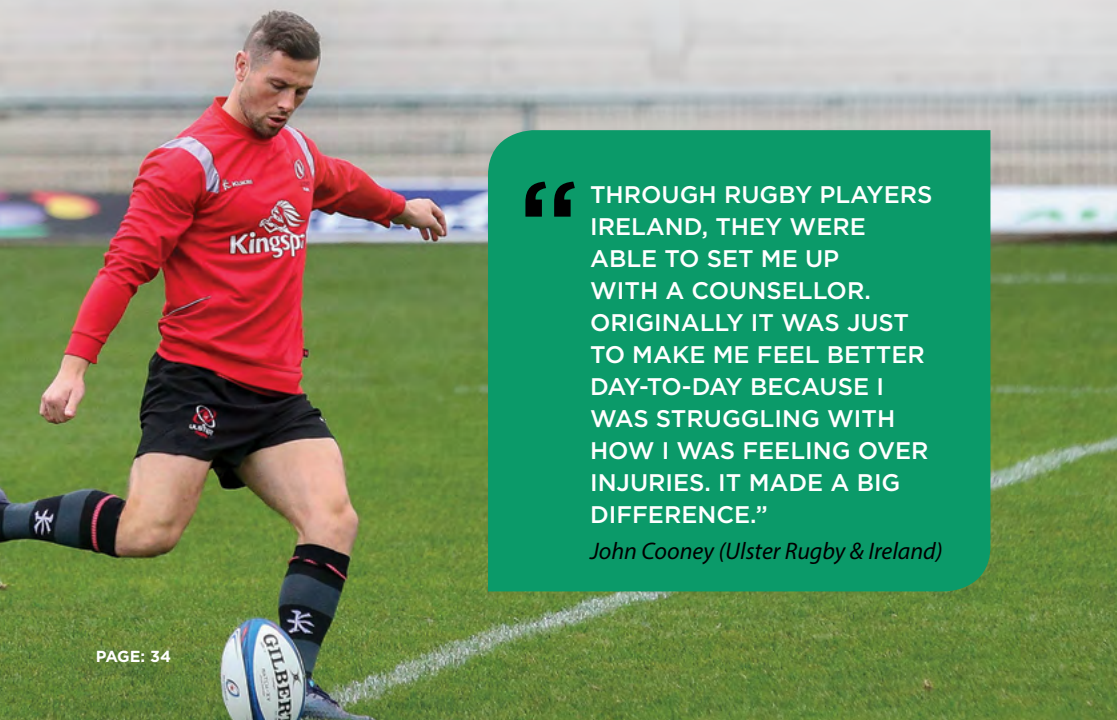
**This year the Player Wellbeing Service provided help to players, their partners and past players who were experiencing stress, worry, low mood, relationship difficulties, mental health, addiction or related issues.**

Players can get in touch via their PDM, provincial staff or can self-refer ([wellbeing@rugbyplayersireland.ie](mailto:wellbeing@rugbyplayersireland.ie)) and get access to screening, assessment, consultation and tailored mental health intervention from our network of counsellors and psychologists.

We also provide information to players (via workshops, print and social media) about topics such as mental health, addiction and healthy relationships. This included workshops and infographs on gambling, mental health and mindfulness to various player groups as well as awareness raising sessions with players' partners, provincial medical staff and coaches.

We survey and / or meet with players, staff, counsellors and continually consult the evidence base to ensure the service we provide an effective service of the highest quality.

In the year ahead we are focusing on creating a dedicated phone line for our members to be able to access confidential, tailored support 24/7 and on collaborating with our fellow Players Associations in other elite sports to pool resources and create the best possible service for our members.



“THROUGH RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND, THEY WERE ABLE TO SET ME UP WITH A COUNSELLOR. ORIGINALLY IT WAS JUST TO MAKE ME FEEL BETTER DAY-TO-DAY BECAUSE I WAS STRUGGLING WITH HOW I WAS FEELING OVER INJURIES. IT MADE A BIG DIFFERENCE.”

*John Cooney (Ulster Rugby & Ireland)*

## TRANSITIONING AND ALUMNI

**There is a continued focus on players leaving the game at Rugby Players Ireland.**

Through the facilitation of gatherings such as provincial breakfast meetings and Clubhouse events, we are reconnecting former players on a more regular basis.

The end of a playing career will present challenges. Such social engagements allow former teammates and opponents to share some of their experiences of the transition, whilst encouraging them to engage with Rugby Players Ireland who can help with the management of the retirement process.

Some helpful advice and support guidelines can be found in our Transition Booklet which was published this year.

### ONCE A MEMBER, ALWAYS A MEMBER

## Irish Management Institute Scholarships

The Irish Management Institute (IMI) is dedicated to improving the standard of management practice in Ireland and has pioneered executive education for the past 60 years. Rugby Players Ireland members are invited to further develop their leadership and management skills and apply them to their respective growing businesses and careers.





## Inner Winner Institute

Former Galway dual-star Alan Kerins offers Rugby Players Ireland members transformative and authentic experiences for professional development and performance management. Through a series of workshops, participants are taught the tools and techniques to achieve optimal results. Holistic and experiential programmes are hosted throughout Ireland and beyond.



“COMING OUT OF PROFESSIONAL SPORT, YOUR IDENTITY IS IN QUESTION. BEING OUT THERE, IT ANSWERED A LOT OF QUESTIONS AND GAVE ME A BIT OF CLARITY ON WHERE I WANT TO GO WITH MY CAREER. I'D HIGHLY RECOMMEND THE COURSE TO ATHLETES AND BUSINESS PEOPLE ALIKE. IT GIVES YOU THAT SENSE OF PURPOSE THAT PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR.

*James Downey (Zambia 2018)*

“THE WORK RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND DID FOR ME IN HELPING ME TO EASE INTO RETIREMENT IS SOMETHING I'M HUGELY APPRECIATIVE OF. RETIRING AFTER PLAYING RUGBY FOR 14 YEARS IS A BIT OF A SHOCK!

*Tommy Bowe (Former Player)*





SECTION 3

# ENGAGE





## SEASON IN REVIEW

# 11

Total number of events hosted

# 35

(75 individual players)

Total number of player appearances organised by Rugby Players Ireland for Sponsors and Partners

# 1,206

Total number of guests hosted by Rugby Players Ireland

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**In the past twelve months players and teams were actively involved in a range of activities in their communities.**

Rugby Players Ireland would like to acknowledge the work that players do in their local communities, either through their own initiative, with their clubs or through Rugby Players Ireland supported activities. Some of these activities included:

- Boardmatch
- Feed our Homeless
- Hand In Hand Kids Camp
- Hand in Hand Movember challenge
- Homelessness charities
- Galway Hospice
- Mission Christmas
- Christmas Toy Dash
- Mid-West Simon Community
- Temple Street Christmas visit
- Christmas Day event in Blackrock Rugby Club – Homeless
- Galway Hospice – Valentine's Day visit
- LauraLynn Player Visit

# “

**RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND SUPPORT US AS PLAYERS MASSIVELY THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. IT'S EVENTS LIKE THE GOLF DAY THAT WE ALL LOVE TO COME AND PLAY IN, MEET NEW PEOPLE AND THANK THOSE WHO SPONSOR THE WORK OF OUR ASSOCIATION.**

*Luke McGrath (Leinster Rugby & Ireland)*





Rugby Players Ireland is aware that as key role models, our members have a responsibility to contribute to society in meaningful ways and become valued members of the community. With many corporate and social engagement opportunities, the association helps the players to become more rounded individuals.

Over the past twelve months Rugby Players Ireland has hosted 11 events, including the Zurich Irish Rugby Players Awards, the Annual Golf Classic, Past-Player reunions and social gatherings for wives and partners. Over the course of the season, in excess of 1,200 people were hosted by the association.

## ZURICH IRISH RUGBY PLAYERS AWARDS

**This year's Zurich Irish Rugby Awards was a unique celebration of all that our members achieved both on and off the field during the 2017/2018 season.**

Held on May 16th at the Clayton Hotel on the Burlington Road in Dublin, the night was attended by over 800 people. Players from the four provincial teams joined members of the Women's XV's and 7s squads to support the association. The Six Nations Championship, Triple Crown and Champions Cup were also in attendance - much to the delight of our guests. The night also represented a first for Rugby Players Ireland in that it was televised by TV3 bringing an unprecedented audience to the biggest awards night in the Irish rugby calendar.



### **Zurich Irish Rugby Players' Player of the Year:**

Keith Earls

### **Nevin Spence Young Player of the Year:**

Jacob Stockdale

### **BNY Mellon Women's XV's Player of the Year:**

Claire Molloy

### **Vodafone Medal for Excellence:**

Duncan Casey

### **Mason Alexander Supporters' Player of the Year:**

Bundee Aki

### **Rugby Players Ireland/IRFU Women's 7s Player of the Year:**

Lucy Mulhall

### **Volkswagen Try of the Year:**

CJ Stander v England

### **Druids Glen Hotel & Golf Resort Moment of the Year:**

The Grand Slam

### **Zurich Contribution to Society:**

Jack McGrath

### **BNY Mellon Hall of Fame:**

Brian O'Driscoll

## HEINEKEN PAST PLAYER CLUBHOUSE

**With four Heineken Past Player Clubhouse events taking place in 2017/2018, Rugby Players Ireland had the opportunity to bring past players now situated across the country back together. Taking place in each of the four provinces, the Clubhouse enables former teammates to reconnect, reminisce and enjoy being back in the rugby environment.**

On November 17th Rugby Players Ireland, along with our partners Heineken, welcomed over 100 guests to The Clayton Hotel in Ballsbridge for our annual pre-match Clubhouse event. Past Ireland and New Zealand legends Andrew Trimble, Conrad Smith and David Wallace were on hand to entertain our guests with a lively Q&A which got everyone present in the mood for the game ahead.

The Past Player Clubhouse is open to anyone who played professional rugby in Ireland or abroad. Please contact Denis Hurley for more information: [denis@rugbyplayersireland.ie](mailto:denis@rugbyplayersireland.ie).

## PARTNER & FAMILY EVENTS

**In recognition of the contribution made by the partners and parents of our professional rugby players, a number of initiatives were held in the past 18 months. These included:**

### Partner and Parent Event

Women's Rugby  
World Cup

### Employer recognition event

Women's Rugby  
World Cup

### Partner Event

Connacht, Leinster,  
Munster & Ulster

## RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND ANNUAL GOLF CLASSIC

The Rugby Players Ireland Annual Golf Classic provides an opportunity for our commercial partners to interact with our members on an informal basis. Hosted at Druids Glen Hotel & Golf Resort, the event is a highlight of the Rugby Players Ireland calendar with many current and former players in attendance. It represents a chance for them to say thank you to those who help the organisation to run, operate and grow in a direction that best serves the players.





## TACKLE YOUR FEELINGS

# TACKLE YOUR FEELINGS

**The predominant focus of Tackle Your Feelings throughout the year was to show people how they can enhance their enjoyment and satisfaction on a daily basis, by being proactive in looking after their mental wellbeing.**

Over the past year, the campaign shifted from breaking down stigma to providing people with the necessary tools and resources to take action. Through various activities we also aimed to create space for people to reflect on where they might place themselves on a scale ranging from surviving to thriving, before having them consider the strategies that might work for them. This was achieved through the followings means:

### ULSTER AMBASSADOR VIDEO

In September 2017 we released a Tackle Your Feelings Ambassador video featuring Darren Cave, Craig Gilroy, Stuart McCloskey and Andrew, the clip saw the players discuss the different challenges that they face on and off the field, and the strategies that they use to deal with them. Set in Guilt Trip Coffee + Donuts in Belfast, Callum Black (who owns the business alongside Cave) also made a brief cameo appearance. The video was positively received throughout Northern Ireland, helped by BBC Northern Ireland's coverage of the campaign.



## TACKLE YOUR FEELINGS APP

The Tackle Your Feelings App aims to encourage users to be proactive about their mental wellbeing using sport and positive psychology principles. It encourages users to prioritise their mental wellbeing in the same way as their nutrition and taking exercise, instead of waiting for a problem to manifest before taking action. Users are guided through an engaging 'Training Camp' programme by 25 professional players, which will help to develop their self-awareness while offering a chance to try out different strategies to improve their mental and emotional wellbeing.

The tools and techniques featured in the Tackle Your Feelings App specifically help users to improve their optimism, resilience, confidence, satisfaction, relaxation, happiness and relationships. Users can then go on to explore some of the techniques that work best for them, taking positive steps towards safeguarding their mental wellbeing into the future. Through setting goals and reflecting on their progress, users can expect to learn how to maximise their mental wellbeing and gain confidence in using practical strategies to help them do so.

In the week leading up to Ireland's Six Nations clash with Wales, the Tackle Your Feelings App was launched by Rhys Ruddock and his Welsh counterpart, Rhys Priestland. A press launch was followed by a Facebook Live broadcast from Facebook HQ in Dublin.



Subsequently, on February 24th there was also a public celebration of the launch on February 24th for almost 200 guests at Wanderers FC in Ballsbridge. Throughout the day participants competed in a Tag Rugby tournament and a range of fun challenges, which included taking on The Beast made famous by BT Sport. Before a live-feed of Ireland v Wales, former Wasps flanker Will Matthews hosted a panel featuring Sophie Spence, Adam Byrne and James Tracy. Catering on the day meanwhile was provided by former Leinster winger Darragh Fanning and the Zambrero team!



The Tackle Your Feelings App is free to download on iOS and Android.



## APP AMBASSADOR VIDEO

To promote the new Tackle Your Feelings App, Ian Keatley, Marcus Horan and Zurich Farmers of the Year Peter and Paula Hynes featured in a new ambassador video. Filmed on location at Thomond Park and at the Hynes' farm in Aherla, Co. Cork, the video's purpose was to prompt people to establish what works for them when faced with challenges, before putting these strategies into practice.

With contributors from beyond the rugby world, the clip sought to bring the Tackle Your Feelings message to communities where stigma remains prevalent.



## ACTIVATIONS

Last year Tackle Your Feelings hit the road with a series of public activations, beginning with the Guinness November Series. On the eve of Ireland's game against South Africa, the team took to Dublin's Grafton Street armed with tackle bags and limited-edition donuts provided by The Rolling Donut. People told us about the different ways that they relax, build their confidence and de-stress. A number of Irish rugby players, based around the corner, also passed by and offered their encouragement for the campaign.

A number of activations also occurred in a number of fanzones prior to Pro14 fixtures throughout the season. These involved match-goers tackling The Beast, sampling our TYF cupcakes and entering competitions to win signed jerseys, while hearing more about the campaign.



## WORKSHOPS

In line with the aim of 'changing behaviours', the Tackle Your Feelings Workshop has been a key feature of our activity this year. The workshop is designed to bring the messages of the campaign to life in an interactive 90minute session.

Drawing on sport psychology and positive psychology principles, the workshop aims to (1) create space for people to pause and reflect on whether they are surviving or thriving; (2) spark conversation around self-awareness and marginal gains that can be made everyday to optimise enjoyment of life and (3) offer a practical toolkit to help people to take immediate action to boost their mental wellbeing.

The Tackle Your Feelings workshop has been made available to many companies and supporters of the campaign for free. For instance, Zurich employees attended a workshop that was delivered by Dr Eddie Murphy (advisor to the Tackle Your Feelings campaign) with the aim of enhancing a culture of mental wellbeing within the company and to teach employees how to maintain optimal personal mental wellbeing. If you wish to host or attend a Tackle Your Feelings workshop, please consult our website: [tackleyourfeelings.com](https://tackleyourfeelings.com).





## PUBLIC TALKS & PRESENTATIONS

Wherever possible, the Tackle Your Feelings team sought to raise awareness of the campaign and increase overall engagement. Public talks and presentations were delivered at a number of events that took place including the Mental Health & Wellbeing Summit, Wellfest and to the members of the Psychological Society of Ireland, while Tackle Your Feelings also had a presence at Outdoor Revolution at the RDS in November.

Furthermore, two secondary schools proudly wore the Tackle Your Feelings logo on their Senior Cup gear, with RBAI in Belfast donning bespoke training tops while St. Mary's College in Rathmines took to the field with the logo on their jerseys. Both schools also ran brief and appropriate Tackle Your Feelings workshops.

Earlier this year, the Tackle Your Feelings team travelled to Zurich, Switzerland to host a panel discussion with Zurich Corporate Centre employees. The panel included Shane Keating (Zurich ambassador), Hannah Tyrrell and Dr Ella McCabe (Head of Player Wellbeing for Rugby Players Ireland). Anthony Brennan, CEO of Zurich in Ireland, led the discussion. A second panel also discussed the impact that the campaign has had on various stakeholders in the campaign. This featured Simon Keogh (Rugby Players Ireland CEO), Anthony Brennan, David Nash (Head of the Z Zurich Foundation) and Z Zurich Foundation Board member, Gary Shaugnessy.

## FACEBOOK

To help amplify the reach and impact of the campaign, Facebook came on board to provide consultancy support around digital marketing, whilst they also provided €10,000 in Facebook advertising credit. Additionally, upon the launch of the Tackle Your Feelings App, an interview with Rhys Ruddock and Rhys Priestland was broadcast from the Facebook Live studio at the Facebook HQ in Dublin's docklands.

## GOING GLOBAL

Following the success of the Tackle Your Feelings campaign, moves are afoot to replicate the initiative in Australia. Zurich Australia are set to partner with AFL Coaches and Players' Associations to mobilise a five-year campaign called Mind Fit, also funded by the Z Zurich Foundation.

In May, campaign manager Créde Sheehy-Kelly travelled alongside Zurich's TYF lead and Leadership Development & Talent Management Consultant to Australia. Together they participated in the planning of the Mind Fit campaign, sharing their learning and experiences with their Australian colleagues.

# RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND STAFF

## Simon Keogh CEO

Simon is a qualified solicitor and provides assistance to members in areas including employment, taxation and insurance, whilst also dealing with a range of general member services enquiries. As CEO, Simon leads all negotiations and is responsible for the management of all areas of Rugby Players Ireland's business. During his career, Simon played for Harlequins and Leinster, with whom he won a Heineken Cup in 2009.

E: [simon@rugbyplayersireland.ie](mailto:simon@rugbyplayersireland.ie)



## Denis Hurley Operations Manager

Denis works across the three areas of the organisation - Represent, Develop and Engage - to ensure that the needs of our current/ past player members and partners are being met. A Heineken Cup winner with Munster in 2008, Denis works closely with the CEO and managers of each of these three areas, assisting with IRFU negotiations, building the commercial network and liaising with the Events Manager to assist with corporate entertainment.

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## Dr. Deirdre Lyons Player Development Manager – Connacht

Deirdre works with all Connacht based current and past players on their personal development and in preparing them for life after rugby. Deirdre is the Head of Rugby Players Ireland's Player Development Programme.

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## Dr. Ella McCabe Player Development Manager – Leinster

Ella works with all Leinster based current and past players on their personal development and in preparing them for life after rugby. Ella is a senior clinical psychologist and leads Rugby Players Ireland's Player Wellbeing Programme.

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## Marcus Horan Player Development Manager – Munster

Marcus works with all Munster based current and past players on their personal development and in preparing them for life after rugby. He also led the inaugural Rookie Camp for all Academy players in 2018. Over the course of a 14 year professional career in the game, Marcus won the Heineken Cup (twice) with Munster and was also part of Ireland's Grand Slam success of 2009.

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## Pamela Gilpin Player Development Manager – Ulster

Pamela works with all Ulster based current and past players on their personal development and in preparing them for life after rugby. Pamela also works with the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) as a Player Development Manager with GAA players based in Ireland's North-East.

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## Nancy Chillingworth Player Development Manager – Irish Women's Programme

Pamela works with all the female players in the Irish XV's and Sevens programmes. Nancy helps the players balance rugby, work and personal development. Nancy previously worked as the Performance Director at Paralympics Ireland.

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**Finola Roache****Events & Branding Manager**

Finola organises all of Rugby Players Ireland's events including the annual Zurich Irish Rugby Awards, the Rugby Players Ireland Golf Classic and internal events such as this Rookie Camp. Finola also liaises with Rugby Players Ireland's sponsors to ensure their continued support of the association.

**E:** [finola@rugbyplayersireland.ie](mailto:finola@rugbyplayersireland.ie)

**Aoife Lane****Player Services & Foundation Manager**

Aoife manages the Rugby Players Ireland Foundation. The Foundation offers financial support to players who have sustained a career ending injuries or find themselves in difficult situations. Aoife also works alongside the Player Development Managers in the administration of the Player Development Programme.

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**Richard McElwee****Communications Manager & Legal Counsel**

Richard manages all Rugby Players Ireland internal and external communications including the execution of an integrated strategy in support of Rugby Players Ireland's key goals. A qualified barrister, Richard is also Rugby Players Ireland's legal counsel and heads up the Agents Registration Scheme.

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**Christina Mahon****Community Engagement Manager**

Christina is the Community Engagement Manager at Rugby Players Ireland. In linking players with charitable organisations, Christina's work ensures that our members are viewed as valuable contributors to their communities. Christina also assists the Rugby Players Ireland Foundation and the Tackle Your Feelings campaign.

**E:** [christina@rugbyplayersireland.ie](mailto:christina@rugbyplayersireland.ie)



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**THE GUYS ARE SO LUCKY TO BENEFIT FROM THE WORK OF SUCH AN ENERGETIC AND PROACTIVE ASSOCIATION IN RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND. THEY ARE LEADING THE WAY IN PLAYER REPRESENTATION AND I LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING THEM CONTINUE TO PROGRESS FROM AUSTRALIA.**

*Christian Lealiifano  
(Brumbies Rugby – Australia)*







**RUGBY PLAYERS  
IRELAND**

## MEMBERSHIP

A special thank you to our members who have attended and participated in events throughout the season. Rugby Players Ireland is a player-led body. Without your involvement, we would not be here to represent you. Working together, we can realise our ambition of having Ireland be the best place in the world to play rugby.

## RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND SPONSORS & PARTNERS

The work that has been done at Rugby Players Ireland in the past 12 months would not have been possible without the support and assistance of our corporate partners. Rugby Players Ireland would like to thank all of our sponsors, particularly Zurich, BNY Mellon and Goodbody, for their continued support. Through their backing of Rugby Players Ireland, these companies ensure that every professional rugby player in Ireland has a strong independent body that prioritises their welfare.







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