

ANNUAL REVIEW

2021



RUGBY PLAYERS
IRELAND



TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Message from the Chairman	2
A Message from the CEO	4
REPRESENT	6
WHO WE ARE	8
THE RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND EXECUTIVE BOARD	8
MEMBERSHIP	10
AGENT REPRESENTATION	12
WOMEN'S RUGBY REVIEW	12
EU SPORT FORUM	13
RETIREMENT OF PHILIP BROWNE	13
INTERNATIONAL RUGBY PLAYERS	14
DEVELOP	16
THE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (PDP)	18
PLAYER DEVELOPMENT TEAM.....	20
PLAYER DEVELOPMENT REPRESENTATIVES	21
ANNUAL REVIEW 2021	22
MENTAL WELLBEING SERVICE	26
ROOKIE CAMP	28
TRANSITION	30
GOODBODY RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT BURSARY	32
IRISH MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE SCHOLARSHIPS.....	34
SMART MONEY HABITS LIA & RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND	35
ENGAGE	38
SEASON IN REVIEW	40
ZURICH IRISH RUGBY PLAYERS' AWARDS 2021	42
RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND ANNUAL GOLF CLASSIC.....	44
REBOOT WITH THE IRISH HEART FOUNDATION.....	46
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	48
TYF TIMELINE	50
To our Members	56
To our Sponsors & Partners	56

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN PETER O'MAHONY

When I was appointed as Chairperson of Rugby Players Ireland, I was taking on the role following what had been the busiest year from a player representative point of view. A lot of decisions were made within a relatively short window that affected a lot of people across the wider game. It was an immense responsibility for the Executive Board but I am very proud of how we worked our way through the issues and of what Rugby Players Ireland continue to build.

It's a very serious responsibility being the voice of the athletes and it's not one taken lightly. There has been a lot of anxiety in our industry but thankfully Rugby Players Ireland have been on hand to support its members through the various challenges we have faced. I know people perceive rugby players to be a privileged entity but we too face financial concerns or are in need of counselling or advice like anybody else. Rugby Players Ireland has shown itself to be a very important support system for players.

I have tremendous respect for Rob Kearney and all he achieved in his time as Chairperson of the players' association. Coming into this position after he decided to step away from the role was a privilege. It has also opened my eyes to the wide-ranging issues that rugby players experience during their careers.

Not everyone enjoys the trajectory of an international rugby player's career. I have seen many players come into the game and spend their careers fighting from contract to contract, forging out a modest livelihood that is always an injury away from ending. They are the backbone of professional rugby but many pay a significant price for their sporting aspirations.

Over the duration of my career, rugby has changed. I recall my first European game when Ronan O'Gara kicked a drop-goal after 41 phases against Northampton. That game pops up every now and then and it always strikes me how everything is so different today. The game has moved on in every single aspect. It waits for nobody.

Thankfully, Rugby Players Ireland are there to pick up the pieces.



PREVIOUS CHAIRMEN OF RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND

2001-2005 - Liam Toland

2011-2012 - Brian O'Driscoll

2005-2007 - Mark McHugh

2012-2013 - Johnny Sexton

2007-2011 - Marcus Horan

2013-2020 - Rob Kearney

2021-Present - Peter O'Mahony



A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

SIMON KEOGH

As I wrote this message last year, I don't think many of us could have anticipated another prolonged period of uncertainty and upheaval. While we have all become much better at adapting to the varying circumstances, it has nevertheless proved to be a challenging twelve months once again.

Rugby Players Ireland has experienced its own difficulties with a reduction in staff numbers and inability to run events initially compounded by a lack of access to our members. Thankfully the restrictive situation improved so as to allow our Player Development Team meet with our players in controlled environments. However, we are keenly aware that new threats continue to emerge.

Pencilled in for May, the Zurich Irish Rugby Players' Awards is a prime example of how we have been unable to rely on staple events in our calendar. A highlight of our year, the ceremony has been postponed on several occasions but thanks to the help of Barry Murphy and Andrew Trimble we produced a unique and enjoyable package to ensure that the 2020/21 season would not be forgotten.

As we looked back on that campaign, the sight of empty stadiums was a reminder of how far we have come when set against the capacity crowd at the Aviva for the recent visit of the All Blacks. I can't remember a more enjoyable day as an Irish Rugby fan. The excitement in the stadium was replicated on the field, with the boundless energy of the team proving too much for the best in the world.



On the men's side of the game in Ireland, it has been a hugely successful year. The national side go into 2022 unbeaten in eight games with over 50 players getting exposure to Test level rugby. Our Men's 7s qualified for our first Olympic Games, Leinster Rugby claimed yet another PRO14 title while we had numerous players selected to tour with the British & Irish Lions.

Frustratingly, it has been a trying few months for our members in the Irish Women's squad. Yet while the team may have failed to qualify for next year's Rugby World Cup, their year was bookended by a positive Six Nations campaign and two wins in November. With Greg McWilliams joining the fray and plenty of both youth and experience in the mix, I believe the team will ultimately benefit from the experience.

Upon their return from the World Cup qualifying tournament, we sought to be a source of support to the squad. Various conversations with the group brought home to me how integral Rugby Players Ireland can be to the overall wellbeing of rugby in this country. While we provide a range of services, our capacity to engage in open and honest conversation enables us to pave a way for the game. Through our participation in the IRFU review process, we will strive for a favourable outcome.

Elsewhere, our players continue to thrive in challenging circumstances. Having initiated the Goodbody Personal Development Bursary in 2018, we have been delighted to see the merits of our support come to fruition with the graduation of several recipients this year. Yet this is a mere snapshot of the overall Player Development Programme which saw 1218 individual consultations take place across the 2020/21 campaign.

Players' willingness to get involved in charitable causes has been a key feature of these conversations. Through facilitation by Rugby Players Ireland, Tackle Your Feelings or of their own accord, our members have been very active in their communities in 2021. A key highlight was our campaign in partnership with the Irish Heart Foundation. Following the passing of Gary Halpin and the fifth anniversary of Anthony Foley's death we urged our past players to ensure they are keeping things ticking over.

Sadly, a number of players now join our past player membership. 2021 has seen almost 20 players take their leave of the game for various reasons. Notably, two of our Executive Board Members have opted to step away – my thanks to Greg O'Shea and Ciara Griffin for their valued impact.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge Philip Browne's contribution to the Irish game. During his tenure, Irish Rugby scaled the heights of the game. Throughout that time, the interests of the players remained a central concern. I hope this remains the case in his absence.

Philip can reflect upon a legacy of growth and stability for the game at large. It is my ambition to ensure that the voice of its key stakeholders, the players, remains at the heart of our continued evolution and development. Working closely alongside my hard-working team at Rugby Players Ireland, I look forward to 2022 with continued optimism.

SECTION 01

REPRESENT.



01



WHO WE ARE

Now seen as one of the leading player representative organisations in sport, Rugby Players Ireland was formed in 2001 as the Irish Rugby Union Players' Association (IRUPA). It is committed to making Ireland the best place in the world to play rugby.

Following discussions between Donal Spring, Peter McKenna, Liam Toland and the IRFU, Rugby Players Ireland came into being with the remit of promoting and protecting the welfare of all professional players across the four provinces. The association has evolved considerably over the past 20 years and its membership now encompasses female international players in addition to former professionals.

While the functions of the association have grown to include a world-leading player development syllabus and a dedicated community engagement programme that includes a public mental wellbeing campaign in 'Tackle Your Feelings,' the backbone of the organisation remains in the representation of its membership on issues of importance in the game.

THE RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND EXECUTIVE BOARD

Having successfully navigated a way for the sport through the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been something of a changing of the guard on the Executive Board at Rugby Players Ireland.

Following Rob Kearney's move to Australia in late 2020, Peter O'Mahony was appointed as Chairperson by his fellow peers. O'Mahony first joined the group in 2015 when Paul O'Connell retired from the game and he has continued to grow in influence throughout his tenure. He is joined on the Executive Board by an array of provincial captains and national leaders.

Both Dave Heffernan (Connacht Rugby) and Amee-Leigh Murphy Crowe (Women's 7s) bring fresh voices to the mix having been appointed following the respective retirements of Louise Galvin and Eoin McKeon last year. Further change is also afoot with Ciara Griffin (Women's XV's) and Greg O'Shea (Men's 7s) having recently retired.

Having been named as captain of the Irish Women's Rugby team, Ciara Griffin joined Louise Galvin in becoming the first female representatives on the Executive Board. Their appointments reflected the growing remit of Rugby Players Ireland and have paved the way for their successors to ensure that the women's game remains at the core of the agenda. Just 27, Griffin will step aside to concentrate on her family, her teaching and personal fitness business.

Appointed in 2019, Greg O'Shea has been a valued member of the Executive Board throughout his three-year term. Even as his profile outside of the sport took on a new dimension, O'Shea remained committed to his role and to his teammates. O'Shea retires as an Olympian and will now place his focus on a career in the media.

The off-field experience continues to be met by the Board's Non-Executive Directors - former Irish international Peter McKenna of McKenna Durcan Solicitors and Maura Quinn, who is to step down as Chief Executive of the Institute of Directors in Ireland in 2022.



Peter O'Mahony
Chairman/ Munster Rugby



Ciara Griffin
Women's XV's



Dave Heffernan
Connacht Rugby



Iain Henderson
Ulster Rugby



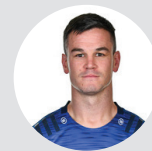
Rob Kearney
Former Chairperson



Aimee-Leigh Murphy Crowe
Women's 7s



Greg O'Shea
Men's 7s



Johnny Sexton
Leinster Rugby



Peter McKenna
Non-Executive Director



Maura Quinn
Non-Executive Director



Simon Keogh
CEO, Rugby Players Ireland



“
I'VE GIVEN MY LIFE TO THIS GAME, LITERALLY
GIVEN EVERYTHING TO IT. I'LL STILL BE THERE
FOR PLAYERS IF THEY NEED TO REACH OUT OR
NEED ME FOR ANYTHING. IT'S JUST TIME NOW
TO LET OTHER PLAYERS COME IN AND PUT
THEIR HANDS UP TOO.

Ciara Griffin

Rugby Players Ireland Executive Board Member 2019-2021

MEMBERSHIP

Since 2018, Rugby Players Ireland has expanded its offerings to cater for all professional rugby programmes in the country, in addition to the Women's XV's national squad. This has been achieved through discussion and collaboration with the IRFU and includes the provision of representation, personal development services and corporate engagement opportunities. A dedicated Player Development Manager has also been assigned to assist each player group.



“

I'M VERY PROUD OF WHAT WE HAVE BUILT AT RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND. BEING THE VOICE OF ATHLETES IS A SERIOUS RESPONSIBILITY AND IT'S NOT ONE WE TAKE LIGHTLY.

Peter O'Mahony

Chairperson, Rugby Players Ireland Executive Board



AGENT REPRESENTATION

Since 2015, Rugby Players Ireland have administered the Agents Registration Scheme on behalf of the IRFU. Designed to safeguard the players in addition to improving the agency environment, the scheme is also on a similar footing in both Wales and England.

Owing to the continuing lockdowns across all jurisdictions party to the scheme, this year's compulsory CPD session was held virtually in Twickenham with the Covid-19 landscape and the mental wellbeing of players being a key point of interest.

WOMEN'S RUGBY REVIEW

Rugby Players Ireland have been participating in the review process initiated by the IRFU following the failure of the Irish Women's team to qualify for the Rugby World Cup in New Zealand in 2023. Representatives have met with the group both individually and collectively on several occasions. We will continue to endeavour to reach a favourable outcome for women's rugby in Ireland through the presenting of the players' views to the independent review group appointed by the IRFU.



“

**IN ANY TEAM SPORT YOU MUST
ACCEPT WHO PEOPLE ARE AND
EMBRACE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION
BECAUSE THAT'S HOW YOU ALL MOVE
FORWARD TOGETHER.**

Anna Caplice



EU SPORT FORUM

As the sporting world continued to navigate a way through lockdown, CEO Simon Keogh was invited by the European Commission to participate in a discussion on how the pandemic has changed our sporting habits. Attendees were keen to learn how Rugby Players Ireland dealt with the crisis.

"After the first lockdown we thought things would come back to normal," Keogh acknowledged. "When they didn't we had to buy ourselves some time. We showed support to our members by focusing on their health and increasing our mental health services."

RETIREMENT OF PHILIP BROWNE

In his role as CEO, Simon Keogh responded to the news of Philip Browne's impending retirement. Acknowledging Browne's immense contribution to the game over several decades, Keogh also gave an insight into the co-operative relationship that exists between the IRFU and Rugby Players Ireland.

"We have faced many challenges since Rugby Players Ireland was first established in 2001. While we have not always been in agreement, Philip approached our discussions with the greatest respect at all times and ensured that the best interests of the players remained at the very heart of those conversations."

Chairperson Peter O'Mahony added that "as we emerge from the pandemic we must build on Philip's legacy of growth and stability to map out the future of rugby in Ireland."



INTERNATIONAL RUGBY PLAYERS

Irish international Sene Naoupu has joined the staff at International Rugby Players. From New Zealand, Naoupu has been an increasingly influential figure on the Irish Rugby scene – not least on the field where she has amassed 46 caps for the Irish Women's XVs. Naoupu, who has experience in sports strategy consulting having worked with several unions and federations takes up the position as Head of Strategic Projects and Research. Part of her work this year involved shaping new guidelines for contact in training.

In addition to the appointment of Naoupu, Rugby Players Ireland continued to have a significant voice on issues of importance in the game through International Rugby Players. Over the past year, the representative body on issues of importance to professional rugby players throughout the world, continued to strengthen their foothold at the table where key decisions are made.

In 2021, representatives including Brian O'Driscoll were to the fore of discussions that will now see three and four-day match turnrounds removed from the next Rugby World Cup. Furthermore, eligibility rules changed to allow certain players to transfer to a different country. The player needs to demonstrate 'a close and credible link' via birthright and may only transfer once in their career.





RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND HAS DEVELOPED INTO A WORLD LEADING PLAYERS' ASSOCIATION. OUR VOICE IS BEING SOUGHT OUT AND CLEARLY HEARD ON BOTH NATIONAL AND GLOBAL MATTERS. LONG MAY THAT CONTINUE.

Rob Kearney



SECTION 02

DEVELOP



02



THE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (PDP)

The aim of the Personal Development Programme is to foster the personal growth and development of players while they are still playing and ultimately prepare and support them for life after rugby.

The Player Development Programme (PDP) is a jointly funded initiative between 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 six fundamental areas that contribute to the overall personal development and growth of players and contribute to a positive transition from the game.



**UNDERSTANDING WHO YOU ARE
- NOT JUST AS A PLAYER, BUT
AS A PERSON, IS ONE OF THE
MAIN GOALS OF OUR PLAYER
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME.
HELPING PLAYERS TO UNCOVER
THEIR VALUES, STRENGTHS,
MOTIVATORS AND PASSIONS
ALLOWS THEM TO MAXIMISE THE
OPPORTUNITIES THEY HAVE OPEN
TO THEM AS PROFESSIONAL AND
ELITE PLAYERS, AND ALSO EASE
THE TRANSITION INTO THEIR
NEXT CAREER.**

Dr Deirdre Lyons

*Head of Rugby Players Ireland's
Player Development Programme*





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

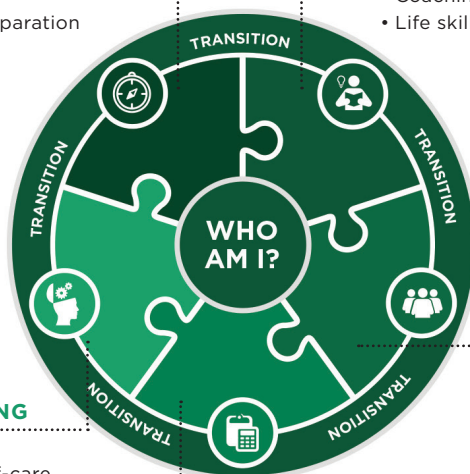
- Mental health
- Physical health & self-care
- Self-awareness & personal leadership
- Player representation
- Sport integrity

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING

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

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

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



PLAYER DEVELOPMENT TEAM

The Player Development Programme underpins the work of Rugby Players Ireland. Each Player Development Manager (PDM) works with emerging players (Academy and sub-Academy) and currently contracted players, as well as retired players in each province.

STAFFING:



Dr Deirdre Lyons

*Head of Player Development
Programme and PDM
(Connacht Rugby)*



Dr Emma Burrows

*PDM
(Leinster Rugby)*



Pamela Gilpin

*PDM
(Ulster Rugby)*



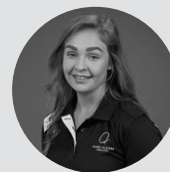
Marcus Horan

*PDM
(Munster Rugby)*



Carol Keenan

*PDM
(Ireland Sevens)*



Aoife Lane

*PDM
(Ireland Women's XVs)*



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 a Player Development Representative is to provide an additional link between the PDM and players. Whilst the PDM will be known to the squad, the Player Representative will provide extra depth by gathering information directly related to the needs of the players in their province or team. The role of the Player Representative has been made all the more integral to the workings of the PDM with access to players (in person) limited owing to Covid-19 regulations.

The following are the current representatives:

CONNACHT

Eoghan Masterson
(Senior)

MUNSTER

Jake Flannery
(Development)

Kevin O'Byrne
(Senior)

Eoin O'Connor
(Academy)

ULSTER

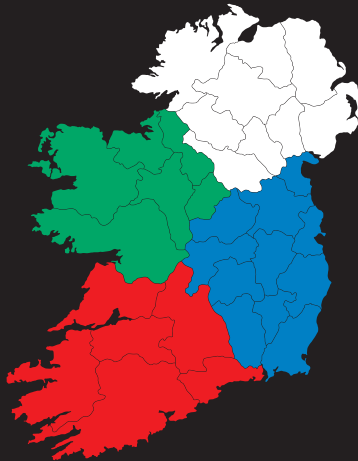
Craig Gilroy
(Senior)

LEINSTER

Marcus Hanan
(Senior)

Rhys Ruddock
(Senior)

Charlie Ryan
(Academy)



IRISH WOMEN'S XV'S

Lauren Delany

Laura Feely

Edel McMahon

IRISH MEN'S 7S

Billy Dardis

IRISH WOMEN'S 7S

**Amee-Leigh
Murphy Crowe**

ANNUAL REVIEW 2021

At the heart of the Rugby Players Ireland/IRFU Player Development Programme is our individual interaction with players. When conversations with players around off-pitch development are individualised, holistic and meaningful to them, engagement increases, and players feel motivated for action. Due to Covid-19 restrictions that continued throughout the 2020/2021 season PDMs were limited in the individual contact they could have with players face to face, and so many meetings were conducted online using video calls. Informal meetings were heavily limited, leading to less engagement in personal development that had been increasing steadily over previous years.

356

PDMS ENGAGED WITH 356 PLAYERS IN THE 2020/2021 SEASON ACROSS OUR ACADEMY, SENIOR, 7S, WOMEN'S AND PAST PLAYERS.

250

PDMS CONDUCTED 250 VIRTUAL INDIVIDUAL VIDEO CONSULTATIONS WITH PLAYERS, IN ADDITION TO 237 FACE TO FACE MEETINGS,

1218

FACE TO FACE MEETINGS ACCOUNTED FOR JUST 19% OF CONSULTATIONS DUE TO COVID-19. TO ENDEAVOUR TO KEEP CONNECTED WITH PLAYERS WHILE OFF-SITE, PDMS CONDUCTED 250 VIDEO CALLS WITH PLAYERS, AND ALSO ENGAGED WITH PLAYERS VIA EMAIL (15%), PHONE (17%) AND TEXT/WHATSAPP MESSAGE (26%). THIS TOTALLED 1218 CONSULTATIONS.



21%



19%



26%

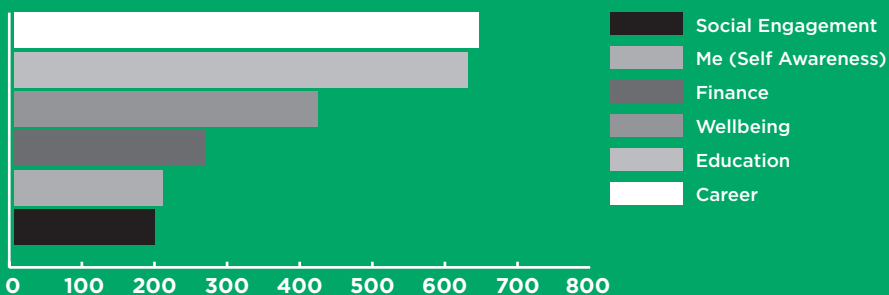


15%



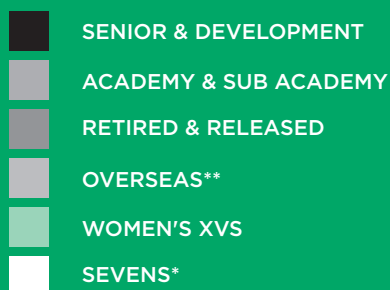
17%

What do players want to talk about?



Based on the main pillars of the Player Development programme, RPI have developed a database to help track what areas players are being supported in by their PDM.

Who did we work with in 2020/2021?*



PLAYER STATUS	NO. OF CONSULTATIONS	% OF CONSULTATIONS
SENIOR & DEVELOPMENT	568	47
ACADEMY & SUB-ACADEMY	248	20
7S**	200	16
WOMEN'S 15S	79	7
RETIRED AND RELEASED	76	6
OVERSEAS**	47	4

*Percentage of players met

**Includes players from the men's and women's game.

“

IT'S A BUMPY ROAD WITH A LOT OF UPS AND DOWNS SO BEING ABLE TO SWITCH OFF WILL STAND TO YOU. THE BEST PLAYERS ARE THOSE WHO CAN SWITCH BETWEEN RUGBY AND OTHER INTERESTS LIKE THEIR FAMILY OR STUDIES.

Will Connors

Computer Science, UCD



“

SWITCHING MY FOCUS ALLOWS ME TO POUR MYSELF INTO EACH PURSUIT AND DO THEM ALL TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY. IT COMES BACK TO THOSE PEOPLE AROUND ME, THE PEOPLE WHO TOLD ME I WAS CAPABLE OF THESE THINGS, BECAUSE WITHOUT THEM I'D NEVER HAVE THROWN MY HAT INTO THE RING FOR THESE OPPORTUNITIES.

Kathryn Dane

PhD Student, Trinity College



MENTAL WELLBEING SERVICE

Promoting Player Wellbeing is integral to the work that we do at Rugby Players Ireland. We deliver our wellbeing support using a three-pronged approach of:

- **Individualized Support**
- **Education & Awareness seminars**
- **Stigma reducing Campaigns (Tackle your Feelings)**



Rugby Players Ireland provide support to current and former players mainly through the Player Development Managers that are based at each professional club and the women's and 7s national squads. Our PDMs signpost players to specialist support via the Mental Wellbeing Services network, where they can access a large network of experienced counsellors, psychotherapists, psychologists and psychiatrists. Some of the issues that players may need support with include stress and anxiety, burn out, adjustment and relationship difficulties, bereavement, addictions, coping with long-term injury and depression.

Players can also access support by emailing **wellbeing@rugbyplayersireland.ie**

Mark Smyth

Mark Smyth is the lead Clinical Psychologist for Rugby Players Ireland Mental Wellbeing Service and Clinical Consultant for the Tackle Your Feelings campaign. In 2020 he was the 50th President of the Psychological Society of Ireland. He is a Chartered Senior Clinical Psychologist with over 18 years' experience.

Mark specialises in working with clients with difficulties in the areas of anxiety, trauma and self-harm. He has a deep interest in the psychology of social media, politics & policing. Mark is a frequent contributor in the media on mental health and psychology matters.

Since October 2020, our Mental Wellbeing Service has been supported by Sporting Chance, a UK charity dedicated to current and former professional athletes. Sporting Chance operate a 24-hour helpline for players and are working with Rugby Players Ireland on expanding our existing referral network and providing professional advice to create a clinically excellent service tailored to players' needs.



“

PRESSURE OF EXPECTATIONS AND ANXIETY WOULD PROBABLY BE THE MOST COMMON ISSUES THAT PLAYERS REPORT. AS PART OF THEIR ROLE AS A PROFESSIONAL RUGBY PLAYER THEY ARE EXPECTED TO ACHIEVE TO A REALLY, REALLY HIGH STANDARD AND THERE IS A CONSTANT PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE. SOMETIMES A PLAYER BRINGS THOSE STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF PERFECTION INTO OTHER ASPECTS OF THEIR DAY TO DAY LIVES OR INTO THEIR RELATIONSHIPS. THAT CAN BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE.

Mark Smyth

“

MODERN SPORT IS ALL ABOUT WINNING. THE HIGHER THE STAKES ARE, THE MORE WE ARE BLINDED BY ITS PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE. AS IMPORTANT AS SPORT MAY BE, IT IS NOT MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO ARE LUCKY ENOUGH TO PLAY IT.

Niall Breslin



ROOKIE CAMP

For the second consecutive year, our Rookie Camp took place in a virtual setting. Over the course of a week, our newest members attended several workshops and modules designed to give them an insight into life as a professional rugby player. Run in partnership with the IRFU and with the support of the Tom Maynard Trust, the players were also encouraged to establish a good relationship with their Player Development Manager.

Modules included:

- **Creating Good Habits** – Dr Deirdre Lyons & Pamela Gilpin
- **Smart Consent** – Siobhán O'Higgins & Theresa O'Rourke
- **The Importance of Staff Self Care** – Dr Hannah McCormack
- **Digital Intimacy and Online Reputations** – Caroline West
- **Savour the Moment** – Making the most of your Academy Experience – Paul O'Connell & Andrew Porter

Over the coming years, our PDMs will offer every player the opportunity to develop the skills, competencies, behaviours and relationships that a rugby career can nurture so that they can maximise their time in rugby, however long that may be.





“

BE PRESENT IN WHAT YOU'RE DOING AND ENJOY IT. BREAK IT DOWN AND GIVE IT YOUR BEST EVERY DAY INSTEAD OF FOCUSING ON CONTRACTS OR SENIOR APPEARANCES.

Luke Carty

“

IT'S VERY EASY TO GO INTO YOUR SHELL AND HOLD BACK FROM DOING WHAT YOU NORMALLY WOULD. YOU GIVE THE SENIOR LADS THE UTMOST RESPECT BUT YOU'VE TO GO OUT THERE AND BE YOURSELF.

Jack Crowley



“

ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES HAS BEEN BALANCING MY COLLEGE WORK WITH FULL-TIME TRAINING. I MADE SURE I BUILT A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LECTURERS IN EACH MODULE TO LET THEM KNOW MY SITUATION EARLY.

Tom Daly



TRANSITION

During the lockdown of 2020/21, many players took stock of their sporting careers. Life outside of rugby took on a new focus as the precarious nature of the profession became more pronounced. Left to source options at a time when the game itself was vulnerable prompted almost 20 players to take their leave of the game - most having to make do with a phonecall home to loved ones as their voices echoed around an empty stadium.

The end of a playing career can present many challenges. The remit of Rugby Players Ireland extends beyond those currently in the game. Over the past number of years there has been a focus on those who have moved on. While opportunities for in-person consultations were limited this year, Rugby Players Ireland staff members were in constant contact with those finding their feet outside of the rugby bubble.

“

**WHETHER YOU HAVE
PLAYED 20 GAMES FOR
YOUR PROVINCE OR 200
GAMES FOR YOUR COUNTRY,
YOU SHOULD BE JUDGED ON
THE PERSON YOU ARE AND
NOT THE CAREER YOU HAD.**

Dan Tuohy

Owner, Belfast Mask Company



“

HAVING GOOD PEOPLE TO TALK TO LIKE THE TEAM AT RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND, PEOPLE YOU KNEW WERE ALWAYS GOING TO PUT YOU FIRST, WAS A HUGE HELP IN MY RETIREMENT.

John Andress

IRFU Registered Agent, Edge Rugby Management



“

IT HAS BEEN AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY FILLED WITH MANY HIGHS AND LOWS AND I AM VERY GRATEFUL FOR ALL THE LIFE SKILLS I HAVE DEVELOPED THROUGH MY INVOLVEMENT IN HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORT. IT IS NOW TIME FOR ME TO TURN MY FOCUS TO MY LIFE OUTSIDE OF RUGBY AND BEGIN A NEW CHAPTER.

Ciara Griffin

Teacher & Owner, CG Fitness



“

PEOPLE ALWAYS ASK ME IF THERE IS ANYTHING I'D CHANGE IF I WENT BACK. THERE ISN'T. YOU HAVE TO BE WHO YOU ARE.

Peter Claffey

Actor



GOODBODY RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT BURSARY

Our partnership with Goodbody symbolises everything we strive to achieve for our members, as both professional athletes and successful individuals. Our mission at Rugby Players Ireland is to give our members every opportunity to be the best they can be and a core aspect of this goal has always been in aiding the progression of their off-field pursuits.

Recipients for the 2021/22 Academic Year

Mia Alcorn

Stephen Archer

Judy Bobbett

Cathal Forde

Marcus Hannan

Ed Kelly

Conor Phillips

Harry Sheridan

“

WITH RUGBY, YOU OBVIOUSLY HAVE TO FOCUS ON IT AND GIVE YOUR ALL TO BE THE BEST PLAYER YOU CAN BE, BUT I ENJOY HAVING SOMETHING ELSE LIKE WORKING ON A DUAL CAREER THAT THE STAFF AT RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND ARE ALWAYS TALKING ABOUT.

Hugh O'Sullivan

Bursary Recipient 2018/2020

Philosophy, Political Science, Economics and Sociology (PPES)



“

I NEVER WOULD HAVE THOUGHT I WAS CAPABLE OF DOING SOMETHING LIKE A POSTGRAD BUT MY PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MANAGER DIDN'T SEE ANY REASON TO HOLD BACK. 'YOU PLAY FOR IRELAND,' HE'D SAY, 'OF COURSE YOU CAN DO THIS!' IT GAVE ME THE NUDGE I NEEDED.

Katie Heffernan

Bursary Recipient 2020

Financial Analytics, Dublin Business School



IRISH MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE SCHOLARSHIPS

Founded by business leaders for business leaders, the Irish Management Institute (IMI) has been empowering executives for over sixty years. Last year, the IMI became the first in Ireland to enter the elite Top 50 in the World for Executive Education, as published by the Financial Times.

Rugby Players Ireland is proud to work with the IMI in providing scholarship opportunities to former rugby players to help to bridge the gap between the end of their sporting life and their next career. The IMI/Rugby Players Ireland Scholarships, valued at €10,000 each, have been open to Rugby Players Ireland's members since 2014. This year, places were awarded to Marcus Horan, Aidan McCullen and Nora Stapleton.



WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF CONSTANT CHANGE, WHERE EXPERTISE IS FLEETING. HAVING THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPAND MY KNOWLEDGE IS AN HONOUR AND A PRIVILEGE. I AM GRATEFUL TO RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND AND THE IMI.

Aidan McCullen

Change and Innovation Advisor, Executive Coaching and Author



AS A STRATEGIC LEADER FOR WOMEN IN SPORT IN IRELAND, THIS DIPLOMA CAN ENHANCE THE TOOLS, TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES I USE TO SUPPORT STAKEHOLDERS IN MY ROLE AND IMPROVE HOW I GO ABOUT MY WORK. I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING AND LEARNING FROM OTHERS IN AN ENVIRONMENT THAT WILL CHALLENGE MY OWN THINKING AND BENEFIT MY CAREER IN THE FUTURE.

Nora Stapleton

Women in Sport Lead, Sport Ireland



SMART MONEY HABITS LIA & RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND

Good levels of financial awareness, knowledge and skills are necessary to make effective financial decisions and are important preconditions for wider financial wellbeing. Money, and the way you use it, can have a positive or negative impact on your health and wellbeing. Therefore, financial management and wellbeing is a key focus of conversations that PDMs will have with players.

Through Rugby Players Ireland's new partnership with LIA, the centre of excellence for the education and development of Finance Professionals, a financial wellbeing programme is being provided to professional and elite rugby players across the country.

Built around five core modules, Smart Money Habits will provide our members with a sound introduction to understanding their finances and ultimately allow players to take their first steps in planning for their financial future. Smart Money Habits will be fundamental in future-proofing a player's overall wellbeing throughout their career and beyond.

The five core modules include:

- **Money goals and budgeting**
- **Understanding your payslip and tax contributions**
- **Loans, credit cards and mortgages**
- **Savings and investment goals**
- **Being self-employed**



GETTING A BIT OF MONEY AT A YOUNG AGE CAN BE VERY EXCITING BUT PLAYERS NEED TO BE THINKING ABOUT HOW THEY USE IT AND THE LIA CAN ENCOURAGE FINANCIAL MODELS THEY CAN BENEFIT FROM. IT'S ALSO REALLY IMPORTANT FOR OLDER GUYS LIKE MYSELF WHO'LL BENEFIT FROM AN ADDITIONAL LAYER OF SUPPORT AS THE END OF OUR CAREERS GETS NEARER.

Sean Cronin



“

IT HAS BEEN A TOUGH YEAR. THE STUDY HAS BEEN PRETTY RELENTLESS WHILE THE UNCERTAINTY AROUND THE RUGBY WAS FRUSTRATING. THEN I LOOK AT IT ON THE WHOLE AND I CAN SEE THAT WHEN THE RUGBY WASN'T GOING WELL I COULD SWITCH MY FOCUS INTO SOMETHING PRODUCTIVE. THAT ULTIMATELY BENEFITTED MY RUGBY TOO BECAUSE I WAS ABLE TO SWITCH BACK INTO GEAR WHEN I NEEDED.

Jack O'Sullivan

Finance, UCC (2017-2021)



“

THANKFULLY MY RUGBY CAREER TOOK OFF IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. I WAS JUST HAPPY TO PLAY AND SO I DIDN'T STEP OUTSIDE MY COMFORT ZONE TOO OFTEN. I SEE THAT NOW. MY CAREER HAS BEEN GOOD TO ME BUT I CAN DEFINITELY SEE HOW I WASTED A FEW YEARS AS A YOUNG PLAYER.

Jack McGrath

Founder, Collective Fitness



SECTION 01

ENGAGE.



03



SEASON IN REVIEW

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. Through corporate and social engagement opportunities, the association helps the players to become more rounded individuals.

It has been a difficult two years for our association and our connection with our corporate partners. As we became more accustomed to new working arrangements we sought to support our partners by providing engaging virtual webinars for staff and clients. This included virtual meet-and-greets with our members and informative discussions prior to some key fixtures. Thankfully, some in-person events were able to take place prior to the Autumn Nations Series games.

Having been pencilled in for the 2020/21 season's end in June, we were forced to postpone the Zurich Irish Rugby Players Awards until late in the year. However, amidst heightened restrictions we were once again precluded from hosting a gala event and instead turned to some of our past player members in Barry Murphy and Andrew Trimble to bring the event to virtual life.

With our current members committed to their bubbles, our past players were also prominent at our Annual Golf Day which took place at Druids Glen Hotel & Golf Resort in August. It proved to be a great opportunity to touch base with the faces of many friends and partners whom we had been unable to meet for some time.

With a dedicated focus on community engagement, Rugby Players Ireland has continued to facilitate relationships between players and charity organisations while many of our members have been on hand to support our Tackle Your Feelings campaign. We are immensely proud of the initiative and believe that through our members' encouragement, more people have been open to prioritising their mental wellbeing and sharing openly.

Despite the obvious difficulty in running events to support the Rugby Players Ireland Foundation, generous donations have ensured that the Rugby Players Ireland Mental Wellbeing Service and the support of our vulnerable membership has remained consistent despite the challenges presented by the pandemic.

“

I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE GET OUT THERE AND DO WHAT THEY WANT TO DO. THE NUMBER ONE THING IS BEING A GOOD PERSON.

James Lowe





**ZURICH IRISH MEN'S PLAYERS'
PLAYER OF THE YEAR 2021**

Robbie Henshaw

Leinster Rugby

**IZEST MARKETING IRISH
WOMEN'S 7s PLAYER OF
THE YEAR 2021**

Lucy Mulhall

**ZURICH IRISH WOMEN'S PLAYERS'
PLAYER OF THE YEAR 2021**

Dorothy Wall

Munster Rugby

**AIB CORPORATE BANKING
IRISH MEN'S 7s PLAYER OF
THE YEAR 2021**

Terry Kennedy

**NEVIN SPENCE YOUNG PLAYER OF
THE YEAR 2021**

Gavin Coombes

Munster Rugby

**MSL MOTOR GROUP MEN'S
TRY OF YEAR 2021**

JJ Hanrahan

Munster v Cardiff Blues

**WHOOPE WOMEN'S YOUNG
PLAYER OF THE YEAR 2021**

Dorothy Wall

Munster Rugby

**MSL MOTOR GROUP WOMEN'S
TRY OF YEAR 2021**

Béibhinn Parsons

Wales v Ireland

**ZURICH CONTRIBUTION TO
IRISH SOCIETY 2021**

Tommy Bowe





RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND ANNUAL GOLF CLASSIC

Having nervously waited for government guidelines, it was to our great relief when the lifting of restrictions enabled the Rugby Players Ireland Annual Golf Classic to take place in August in Druids Glen.

Throughout the morning, social distancing guidelines were stringently adhered to and expertly managed by the Druids Glen team as players joined our partners for a four-ball scramble. A highlight of Rugby Players Ireland's social calendar, the morning provides our partners and their guests with the opportunity to interact with our members on an informal basis, while also giving our players an insight into life beyond professional sport.

Our sincerest thanks to Heineken and Druids Glen for their support!





REBOOT WITH THE IRISH HEART FOUNDATION

A survey carried out by Ipsos MRBI on behalf of the Irish Heart Foundation has found that more than one in four (28%) men do not consider the health of their heart a priority, even though males account for almost three quarters of those who die prematurely of cardiovascular conditions in Ireland.

Data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) shows that almost 30% of all premature deaths (younger than 65) in 2018 were from cardiovascular conditions such as heart attacks and strokes and the vast majority (73%) of those affected were men.

In response to the findings, the Irish Heart Foundation launched a 'Reboot Your Life' campaign which ran through the month of September to encourage men to review their lifestyles and make vital, sustainable changes to improve their heart health.

The campaign was supported by Rugby Players Ireland and fronted by a number of former Ireland internationals – Tommy Bowe, Malcolm O'Kelly, Peter Stringer and Paul Wallace, while current Irish Women's player and Clinical Research nurse Aoife McDermott also rowed in behind the initiative.

In the past five years, two of the players' friends and former teammates, Anthony 'Axel' Foley and Gary Halpin, passed away suddenly due to heart issues at the ages of just 42 and 55.

Led by their players' association, the former players came together to urge men of all backgrounds and fitness levels to take control of their health and Reboot their Lives throughout September.

CSO data shows that 999 men died of a heart attack in 2020, compared to 642 women. In the same year, in the 45 to 54 age group, 217 men died of heart disease and stroke compared to only 75 women.





Rugby Players Ireland continues to encourage its members, particularly former players, to prioritise their heart health.

“Over the course of their careers, our members have access to the best facilities and medical supports to ensure they maintain peak physical performance,” said Simon Keogh, CEO of Rugby Players Ireland.

“It’s only natural that some of these habits and activities take a back seat when the time comes to retire from the game.

“We are therefore encouraging all our past players to stay fit, healthy and to get medically screened at least every two years.”

“

Sadly in 2016, we lost Anthony Foley. He was not just my teammate – he was my friend. At only 42 years of age, heart disease took him away from his family and friends far too young. Nobody would have expected this to happen to a former athlete, coach and such a young man.

Often there are no warning signs, and currently 1 in 4 men within will lose their lives to heart disease or stroke in Ireland. We all know someone who has lost their life, or nearly lost their life, to this disease.

The good news is that 80% of cases are preventable. We just need to make a commitment to Reboot our lives by making positive lifestyle changes. This could be exercising, eating healthier, taking up a hobby that gets you outdoors or giving up a bad habit. And importantly go in for a check-up. Your body needs an NCT at our age too.

Peter Stringer



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Inherent in much of Rugby Players Ireland's activity is the goal to have our members seen as valued members of their communities. Through corporate and social engagements, we believe that players can not only contribute to their society in meaningful ways, but also become well-rounded individuals. While interactions have been impacted by the lockdown, as the country began to emerge from the lockdown Rugby Players Ireland facilitated several partnerships between our members and charitable organisations.





“

CHARITY ISN'T ABOUT THE PLAYER. IT'S ABOUT RAISING AWARENESS ALLOWING THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN DEALT A REALLY ROUGH HAND TO SHOWCASE WHAT THEY GO THROUGH AND HOW INCREDIBLY THEY GO THROUGH IT.

Rory Best



TACKLE
YOUR
FEELINGS

TYF TIMELINE



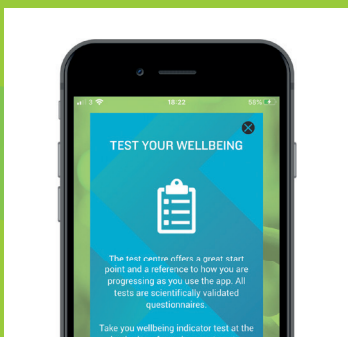
MARCH 2021

ANNA CAPLICE & BE KIND

Following a torrent of abuse directed at players online during the Six Nations, Tackle Your Feelings were to the fore of a national conversation concerning online attitudes and behaviours. Irish international Anna Caplice was joined by former Harlequins, England and Lions winger Ugo Monye as part of TYF's #BeKind initiative.



APRIL 2021



MILESTONE

Tackle Your Feelings reached a significant milestone with the recording of 10,000 downloads of the TYF app in just 14 months.

MAY 2021

ROBIN COPELAND & THE BIG RUGBY RUN

Teams and communities across Ireland participated in The Big Rugby Run which raised funds for wellbeing initiatives in the community.



JUNE 2021

WEXFORD GAA

Ahead of the Championship season, Wexford GAA announced that it would be carrying the message of Tackle Your Feelings on their kit for the 2021 campaign.



JULY 2021

JACK, JOHN AND RESPECTING OTHERS

Jack Carty & John Cooney may be rivals on the field but away from the game they are great friends. They continued their commitment to Tackle Your Feelings by encouraging others to join the conversation.



AUGUST 2021

CIARA AND JAMES BACK TYF SCHOOLS

With schools set to return after the summer holidays and under the prevailing cloud of Covid-19, Ciara Griffin and James Lowe joined forces to encourage schools to participate in the TYF Schools programme.

By December 2021, 837 information packs were distributed to schools throughout the country with 140 schools expressing an interest in participating in the programme in 2022.



“

HAPPINESS IS HAVING FUN
AND GETTING LOST IN TIME,
NOT REALISING YOU HAVEN'T
CHECKED YOUR PHONE. THE
BEST TIMES ARE THE ONES
WITHOUT PICTURES.

Eimear Considine



WORKPLACE WELLBEING

As restrictions on the working world continued, Tackle Your Feelings provided bespoke workshops to companies and enabled them to explore new ways to strengthen the mental health supports for their employees.



“

**WE ALL HAVE SETBACKS BUT
NOT EVERYBODY SEES THEM
AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET
STRONGER.**

Jack Carty

**TACKLE
YOUR
FEELINGS**

DOWNLOAD THE FREE APP

Download on the
App Store

GET IT ON
Google Play

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
TACKLEYOURFEELINGS.COM



**RUGBY PLAYERS
IRELAND**

TO OUR MEMBERS

A special thank you to our members who have participated in events throughout the year. 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 become the best place in the world to play rugby.

TO OUR SPONSORS & PARTNERS

Without the support and assistance of our corporate partners much of what we have been able to achieve at Rugby Players Ireland in 2021 would not have been possible. We would like to thank all of our sponsors, particularly Zurich Ireland and Goodbody for their continued support. Through their backing of Rugby Players Ireland, we can ensure that our members have a strong independent body that prioritises them as individuals.







RUGBY PLAYERS
IRELAND

WWW.RUGBYPLAYERSIRELAND.IE