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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN PETER O'MAHONY

When you're on or off the field, good communication will determine the quality of your work. Before we head out into a game, we will have a clear message to share with the squad, just as a business owner will motivate his team before a big project.

Through our Executive Board, we are given the opportunity to voice our opinion on matters in the game and receive regular updates on the work of Rugby Players Ireland. As Chair, it's always nice to hear that the players' association is seen as a well-oiled machine but I am of the belief that in order to remain at the top of our game we must keep moving.

Over the years Rugby Players Ireland has established a reputation for having one of the best player development programmes in world sport. On top of that, other organisations regularly come to us for guidance on how to deal with some of the issues they face. We also have a proud reputation for dealing with the mental wellbeing of our members and I'm proud of how the Tackle Your Feelings campaign continues to help shape the conversation.

World Rugby standings count for little if you cannot produce in a Rugby World Cup year, but they do tell us that we are doing things right on the pitch. However, we have to keep thinking of ways to make sure we stay there. The same applies to the work of Rugby Players Ireland.

In the coming weeks and months we will be monitoring the newly launched women's professional programme with great interest. I am excited by the impact that HERFORM (see page 27) will start to have. We will also be negotiating our latest Collective Bargaining Agreement which is the envy of most rugby-playing nations.

In short, there will be plenty to discuss and debate. We will acknowledge what has gone well and aim to address the things we need to correct. The game's various stakeholders will continue to have their own views but thankfully the most important voice is now at the table, a place where we were missing for so long.

We will not be bystanders in the decisions that affect our game. Just as we are open to change and improvement, I hope others will be too.

It's all about how we communicate our goals and ambitions.

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



ON THE UP - A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO SIMON KEOGH

When you land on a good formula it can be easy to sit back and expect things to keep ticking over. Similarly, with the opening of the country following the pandemic one might have assumed that people would take their time in getting back to their feet once again, simply happy to have pulled through.

Not so. After a difficult few years, businesses, sporting organisations, entrepreneurs and athletes were all quick off the mark in taking their learnings from a difficult few years to see how they might grow and develop into the future.

By now, Rugby Players Ireland is a well-oiled machine. Over the past year 398 players have engaged in our Player Development Programme, we had the return of the Rugby Players Ireland Awards, while we remain the first port of call for our members in need of advice on a range of issues.

Our vision – to make Ireland the best place in the world to play rugby – has us striving to create an environment that helps our members to flourish off the field whilst having a positive impact on performance. Although we cannot suggest that our work alone is responsible for the success Irish teams now enjoy, we do believe that as a key stakeholder we are an important cog in the wheel of Irish Rugby.

By now, other rugby nations throughout the world are looking to Ireland and seeing what it is that we are doing right. For one, they will see that our Player Development Programme has become a reference point in the personal development space. Thankfully, our members are also beginning to see the merits of their engagement and how a balanced life can enhance performance. In 2021/22 our Player Development Managers carried out 1395 consults.

Over the past year we have seen the establishment of the Women's High-Performance Pathway, following a historic tour to Japan. The Sevens programme continued to grow from strength to strength with both teams now a regular feature at the latter stages of the World Series. Our men's national XVs side have also consolidated their status as the best team in the world, with the world's best player in tow.

We are in a good place but we won't be resting on our laurels. Our national and provincial teams have immense aims and ambitions. It falls to us to match those aspirations and ensure that the environment that surrounds them continues to meet their needs and expand their horizons.

Rugby in Ireland is on the up again. At Rugby Players Ireland we are looking forward to playing our part in the next stage of an exciting journey.





ANNUAL REVIEW - REPRESENT RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND

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 21 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**

It has been something of a period of transition the Executive Board in recent seasons. As Rob Kearney's tenure came to an end, Peter O'Mahony was identified as the candidate to assume the role of Chairperson. Retirements dictated some change, while some felt it was the right time to give others the chance to represent their squad group.

Foremost amongst these additions has been Garry Ringrose, whose leadership qualities on the field have also been recognised of late. As an existing ambassador for LauraLynn, Ringrose was a key figure in establishing Rugby Players Ireland's partnership with Ireland's Children's Hospice this year. Ringrose replaces Johnny Sexton who has had a seat on the Board for many years.

Last year we welcomed Dave Heffernan (Connacht Rugby) and Amee-Leigh Murphy Crowe (Women's 7s) to the Executive Board following the respective retirements of Eoin McKeon and Louise Galvin. Billy Dardis (Men's 7s) was more recently introduced to take the place of Greg O'Shea. A determination on the Women's XVs representative will be made in the New Year.

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 stepped down as Chief Executive of the Institute of Directors in Ireland this year but continues to play an integral role for rugby players in this country.



Peter O'Mahony Chairman/Munster Rugby



TBC Women's XVs



Dave Heffernan Connacht Ruaby



lain Henderson Ulster Ruaby



Rob Kearney Former Chairperson



Amee-Leigh Murphy Crowe Women's 7s



Billy Dardis Men's 7s



Garry Ringrose Leinster Rugby



Peter McKenna Non-Executive Director



Maura Quinn



Simon Keogh Non-Executive Director CEO, Rugby Players Ireland



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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 XVs national squad prior to contracts being offered this year. 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 EXTREMELY PROUD OF OUR MEMBERSHIP AFTER WHAT HAS BEEN A DIFFICULT FEW YEARS. A LOT OF WORK HAS GONE ON IN THE BACKGROUND THROUGH THE LIKES OF RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND TO ENSURE THAT WE REMAIN AT THE TOP OF OUR GAME. I FEEL THIS SHINES THROUGH PERFORMANCES ON THE FIELD.

Peter O'Mahony

Chairperson, Rugby Players Ireland Executive Board



WOMEN'S RUGBY

This year saw the launch of the Women's XVs Programme which has seen ten players take up contract offers from the IRFU. In all, 29 female players are now fully contracted to the union and will train out of the High-Performance Centre in Abbottstown on a full-time basis. The deal will also see players receive additional bonuses for match appearances, wins, and tournament fees.

While 43 centralised contracts were on offer, a number of players already in the throes of full-time employment opted to continue on their respective career paths. At Rugby Players Ireland, we will work to ensure that players are not unduly affected by their choice and will continue to help them manage their workloads.

44

IT'S AN EXCITING TIME FOR US. AS A GROUP WE ARE CONSTANTLY TRYING TO LEARN MORE AND BE BETTER. IT MAKES SENSE THAT THE MORE HOURS WE HAVE, THE MORE WE CAN IMPROVE.

Dorothy Wall





44

YOUNG GIRLS GETTING UP ON A SUNDAY MORNING FOR TRAINING WILL SAY FROM DAY TO DAY THEY WANT TO BE THIS OR THAT. NOW THEY CAN SAY THEY WANT TO BE A PROFESSIONAL RUGBY PLAYER.

Maeve Óg O'Leary

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.

25 agents are currently registered in Ireland.

EU ATHLETES

Rugby Players Ireland are delighted to be involved on the SDE Pro Sports project with the German Sport University of Cologne and EASE - the European Association of Sport Employers.

The aim of the project is to collect information on social dialogue outcomes in various sporting jurisdictions and pave the way for professional sport across Europe.

COGNITIVE HEALTH STUDY

Rugby Players Ireland and Trinity College Dublin continued to be engaged in research into the general health and wellness of retired elite athletes, with a particular focus on impact sports and brain health.

Led by some of the foremost neuroscientists, psychologists and physiotherapists in the world, the study builds upon a small number other worldwide studies into the cognitive health of rugby union players. A bias of previous has been a focus on players self-reporting cognitive issues rather than objective measures. This study is also distinguished in its use of retired international rowers as a control/comparison group.



INTERNATIONAL RUGBY PLAYERS

Our colleagues at International Rugby Players have continued to make strides on behalf of players around the world, led by former RPI Chief Executive, Omar Hassanein.

Working with World Rugby, the laws of the game have been a priority area for the global player's body, convening its Players Council in recent months to collate views on topical issues ahead of World Rugby's "Shape of the Game" conference in November.

The discussions included focus areas such as the head-contact process, the scrum and maul, TMO influence, the advantage law and deliberate knock-ons. RPI were represented on the Players Council by CEO, Simon Keogh and Ulster's lain Henderson.

IRP also worked with medical experts to change the concussion return to play policy, extending the minimum stand-down period for players who show clear signs of concussion to 12 days.

International Rugby Players Head of Player Welfare and High Performance, Conrad Smith, said: "The key to this working – and the important part in changing the culture around concussion – is that players report their head knocks and any symptoms. Any protocol is only as good as the honesty and openness of players and this is what we're going to be stressing from this point on."

Elsewhere, International Rugby Players has worked extensively with the US Rugby Players Association over contractual issues with Major League Rugby in America, particularly around a recent draft.

Work is also continuing around the global calendar for both the men's and women's seasons in both the XVs and 7s codes

RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND FOUNDATION

The Rugby Players Ireland Foundation aims to provide financial and practical support for players and their families who find themselves in difficult situations such as career ending

injury, illness or disability. As a registered charity, the support provided by the Foundation will take many forms including financial assistance, help with medical treatment, rehabilitation equipment, counselling and education. The Foundation provides an emergency support for those who are struggling in various ways while also giving players the opportunity to be part of a 'players supporting players' community.

This year saw the return of the Ireland v England Legends game in aid of the Foundation and other rugby related charities. Taking place at the Twickenham Stoop, this year the fixture was also played in memory of the late Gary Halpin. Aided by the 'fresh' legs of lan Keatley, Billy Holland, Tommy O'Donnell and Ronan O'Mahony, the Irish ran out winners on the night – on the field at least.





I CANNOT SPEAK MORE HIGHLY OF THE WORK THAT RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND DO. MOST OF IT TAKES PLACE BEHIND THE SCENES WITH LITTLE FUSS BUT IT ALWAYS HAS AN IMPACT ON THE PLAYER.

Tommy Bowe



ANNUAL REVIEW - DEVELOP RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND

SECTION 02

DEVELOP.



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.



Rugby Players Ireland would like to thank the IRFU for their continued engagement and support of the Player Development Programme.

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 EDUCATION. TRAINING & SKILLS · Career coaching, advice & guidance Academic & trade qualifications Work experience • Flexible learning options Mentoring · General interest courses · Coaching qualifications Networking CV & interview preparation · Life skills TRANSITION **WHO** AM I? **SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT** • Brand awareness & development **PLAYER WELLBEING** · Social media Media & public speaking skills Mental health · Physical health & self-care · Community & charity engagement Self-awareness & personal Personal responsibility leadership Player representation · Sport integrity FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING · Basic financial education · Long term planning

• Tax advice

Pension adviceInsurance advice

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT TEAM

The Player Development Prorgamme underpins the work of Rugby Players Ireland, in conjunction with the IRFU. 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 Playby)



Dr Emma Burrows

PDM
(Leinster Rugby)



Pamela Gilpin
PDM
(Ulster Rugby)



Marcus Horan

PDM

(Munster Bushy)



Carol Keenan
PDM
(Ireland Sevens)



Aoife Lane
PDM
(Ireland Women's XVs)

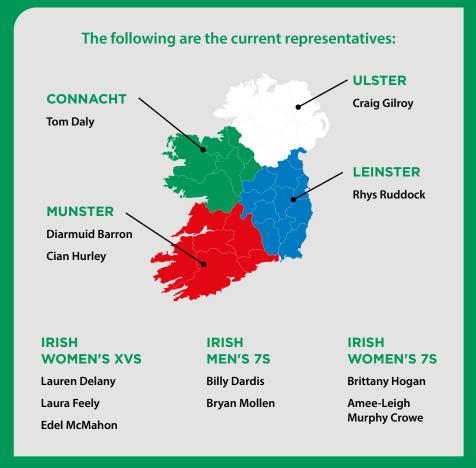


THE ROLE OF THE PDM IS TO PROMOTE THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING OF PLAYERS BY EMPOWERING THEM TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENT BOTH ON AND OFF THE SPORTING FIELD.

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.



ANNUAL REVIEW - DEVELOP RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND

A CLOSER LOOK

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. It was great to be back in front of players meeting them face to face, and the increase in interaction from last season is evident in the figures below.

398

PDMS ENGAGED WITH 398 PLAYERS IN THE 2021/22 SEASON ACROSS OUR ACADEMY, SENIOR, 7S, WOMEN'S AND PAST PLAYERS, A 12% INCREASE IN UPTAKE FROM LAST SEASON.

FACE TO FACE CONSULTATIONS MORE THAN DOUBLED FROM LAST SEASON AS COVID RESTRICTIONS LIFTED. PLAYERS ENGAGED IN 572 FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS WITH THEIR PDMS, WITH VIDEO CALLS STILL A POPULAR CHOICE FOR INTERACTIONS. (265 CONSULTAT

572

CHOICE FOR INTERACTIONS. (265 CONSULTATIONS, COMPARED TO 250 LAST SEASON).

1395

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.











41%

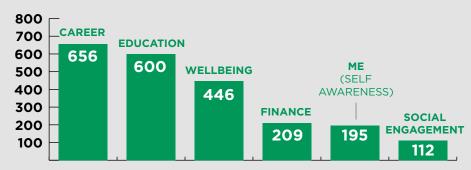
19%

17%

12%

11%

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.

Career and/or education were discussed in nearly half of all consults, with wellbeing arising in 32% of all consults. Player consultations can cover more than one area of personal development e.g., finance and wellbeing.

Who did we work with in 2021/2022?*



SENIOR & DEVELOPMENT (43%)

ACADEMY & SUB-ACADEMY (15%)

7s (10%)

PLAYER STATUS	NO. OF CONSULTATIONS	% OF CONSULTATIONS
SENIOR & DEVELOPMENT	602	43
ACADEMY & SUB-ACADEMY	204	15
75**	136	10
WOMEN'S 15s***	142	10
RETIRED AND RELEASED	174	12
OVERSEAS**	137	10

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

***Includes some dual players (7s and 15s)

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ANNUAL REVIEW - DEVELOP - RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND



IF YOU CAN'T AFFECT THE PRESENT, YOU CAN'T AFFECT THE FUTURE. FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN DO BETTER EVERY DAY BOTH ON AND OFF THE FIELD.

Ryan Baird

Computer Science & Business, Trinity College



IF YOU INFATUATE ON ONE THING, YOU CAN BECOME OBSESSIVE AND THAT ULTIMATELY GOES AGAINST YOUR ENJOYMENT OF THE GAME. IT'S ABOUT STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE. WHEN YOU TAKE A BREAK AND SWITCH FOCUS, YOU START LOOKING FORWARD TO GETTING BACK OUT ONTO THE PITCH AGAIN.



GRIFFITH COLLEGE

2022 saw the launch of a new discount scheme that has been made available to Rugby Players Ireland's members through Griffith College.

Based in Dublin, Cork and Limerick, Griffith College is Ireland's largest private third level institution. Offering over 200 blended and online courses with ample flexibility for full-time athletes, it enjoys a growing international reputation for student success.



WORLD PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE 2022

Rugby Players Ireland's members were strongly represented at the World Players Association's Player Development Conference 2022 in Nyon, Switzerland in June.



The World Players Association is the leading voice of organised players in the governance of world sport, bringing together 85,000 athletes from more than 100 player associations in over 60 countries.

Over 100 player development managers, including 5 from Rugby Players Ireland – attended the three-day event which focused on planning for the future of player development and wellbeing.

SETANTA COLLEGE

Rugby Players Ireland are affiliated with Setanta College who offer scholarship(s) to members of Rugby Players Ireland. Members are eligible for a scholarship once they have completed a module. Furthermore, discounts are also available to Rugby Players Ireland's members.

Scholarships on offer include:

- 3 module scholarships on Undergraduate programme for male members
- 3 modules scholarships on Undergraduate programme for female members
- 1 module scholarship on Diploma in PT and S&C for a male member
- 1 module scholarship on Diploma in PT and S&C for a female member



COMPLETING MY DIPLOMA WITH SETANTA COLLEGE WAS A GREAT EXPERIENCE. THEY WERE SO ACCOMMODATING WHEN HELPING ME JUGGLE MY SPORTING CAREER WITH MY STUDIES. THEY HAVE A GREAT UNDERSTANDING OF THE DEMANDS PLACED ON ATHLETES.



Brvan Mollen

PROPERTY SERVICES AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

The Higher Certificate in Property Services and Facilities Management course in ATU Sligo enables graduates to apply to the Property Services Regulatory Authority (PRSA) to be granted A, B, C and D licenses. In brief, these licenses ensure lawful practices in the following areas: Auctioneers, Estate Agents, Letting Agents and Management Agents.

Normally, this qualification in Sligo IT is 2 years (including 50 credits work experience). However, Rugby Players Ireland have negotiated a change to the structure of the course:

- Year 1- 35 credits non work based online learning
- Year 2- 35 credits non work based online learning
- Year 3 50 credit work based learning this can be part-time or done in a block, we just need to find an auctioneer to be flexible with them.

HERFORM

In 2022 Rugby Players Ireland was successful in our application for European Commission Erasmus funding. This is the first time RPI applied as an Erasmus program co-ordinator and the association will manage the HERFORM project for the next 36 months.

Together with our partners, Spanish Women Futsal Players Association, NYFA Sweden, South African Cricketers' Association, Tw1n and the German Sport University Cologne, Rugby Players





HERFORM's content will be based on the results of detailed research conducted with European female athletes over the coming months, including members of the Irish Women's XVs and Irish Women's 7s rugby squads. The aim of the platform is to create personal development modules that will help athletes balance life and sport, allowing them to excel at both.

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ROOKIE CAMP

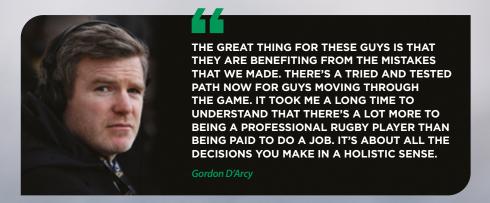
For the first time in three years our Rookie Camp was able to take place in person. Hosted at the Midland Park Hotel in Portlaoise, over 50 academy members attended several workshops and modules designed to give them an insight into life as a professional rugby player. Run in partnership with the IRFU and with the support of the Tom Maynard Trust, the players also had the opportunity to get to know their Player Development Manager who will be an integral part of their professional rugby journey.

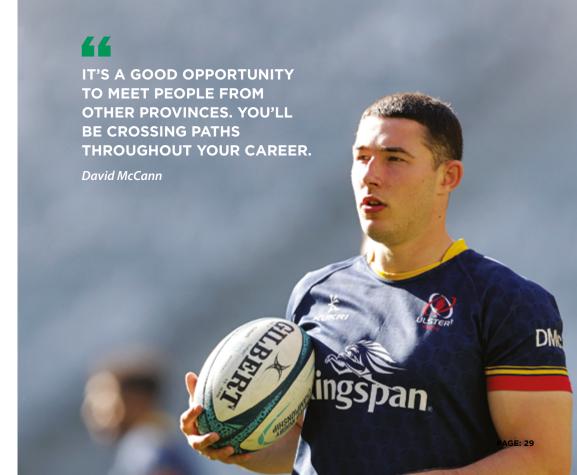
Modules included:

- Doing what Matters PDM team & Aidan O'Flynn
- Sleep & Self Care: A Wellbeing Workshop Dr Hannah McCormack & Aoife Lane
- Attitude & Behaviours Active Consent NUIG
- Leadership in Action Rossa O'Donnell
- Catfishing Active Consent NUIG
- Life as a Professional Rugby Player Sean O'Brien & Devin Toner with Marcus Horan

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







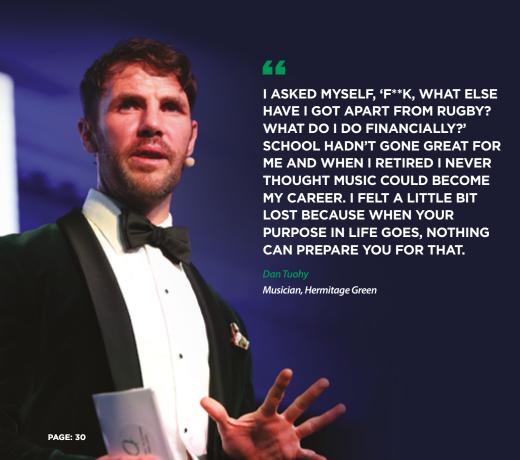
ANNUAL REVIEW - DEVELOP RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND

TRANSITION

The remit of Rugby Players Ireland extends beyond those currently in the game. As the network of retired professional rugby players in the country grows with every passing year, we have sought to expand our Player Development services further. Regular communications have also meant that past players are kept informed of various events, networking opportunities and roles that may be of interest.

In recent months there has been added focus on a former player's experience of the transition. This has been compounded by Covid-19 which saw several players take their leave of the game. Media coverage has tended to focus on the frustrations, the anger, the bitterness, loneliness, panic, and depression that retired athletes can encounter. However, it should be noted that retirement can also bring about but a sense of relief, gratitude, optimism, a readiness to move on, and excitement for a new role.

Whether their experience is positive or negative, Rugby Players Ireland is here to help.



44

DURING YOUR CAREER THE GLASS IS ALWAYS HALF FULL. EVEN WHEN YOU'RE IN THE DOLDRUMS YOU CAN GET BACK ON TOP; BUT NOT WHEN YOU'RE RETIRED. IT HELPED KNOWING IT'S NORMAL TO FEEL LOSS AND A LITTLE ENVY TOWARDS THOSE STILL PLAYING.

Brian O'Driscol

3 Rock Productions



I'VE GONE FROM SHARING A CHANGING ROOM WITH 40 GUYS TO SPENDING THE MAJORITY OF THE WEEK ON MY OWN. IT'S A TOUGH ADJUSTMENT TO MAKE AND SO FROM THAT BEING KEPT BUSY HAS BEEN HELPFUL. I'M NOT TWIDDLING MY THUMBS THINKING I SHOULD BE BACK IN THERE.

Jonny Murphy

The Hungry Hooker

44

I AM BOTH HUGELY PROUD AND SAD AND IN EQUAL MEASURE [TO RETIRE] BUT ULTIMATELY I HAVE AN OVERRIDING SENSE OF EXCITEMENT FOR WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS.

Lindsay Peat

Clerical Officer, Health Service Executive



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. Players can also email the service directly to *wellbeing@rugbyplayersireland.ie* Referrals can also come via Team Doctors or Physios. 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 phone: 1800 832 284

The most important piece of information to know about the service is that there is no minimum threshold to access the service. The core principles behind the service are one of early intervention. As a player if you feel you might benefit from talking then you meet the threshold.

Since 2017 we have had 192 people use the service 59% of these were current players from the men's game across academy (19%), Senior (36%) and 7s (4%). Our services were also used by our women's teams (36%: XVs and 7s).

Our PDMs signpost players to specialist support via the Mental Wellbeing Services network, where following an initial screening process with the they can access a large network of experienced counsellors, psychotherapists and psychologists. 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. Sessions can be facilitated face to face or via zoom.

Mark Smyth

Mark Smyth is the lead Clinical Psychologist for Rugby Players Ireland Mental Health 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 also a Chartered Senior Clinical Psychologist with over 20 years' experience.

Mark specialisies 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.





44

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.

WHAT I'VE NOTICED SINCE I STARTED WITH RPI IS A MUCH INCREASED WILLINGNESS AND CONFIDENCE FROM PLAYERS FROM ACADEMY ALL THE WAY TO SENIOR PLAYERS TO BE MORE OPEN ABOUT WHEN THEY HAVE STRUGGLED WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH & THE BENEFITS OF SEEKING SUPPORT. RUGBY PLAYERS IN IRELAND HAVE BEEN EXCEPTIONAL ROLE MODELS FOR MENTAL HEALTH HELP SEEKING, BOTH WITHIN RUGBY AND WITHOUT.

Mark Smvth



44

THERE IS NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOUR MENTAL HEALTH.

Ronan O'Gara





44

YOUR MIND CAN BE YOUR MOST POWERFUL ALLY OR YOUR MOST DESTRUCTIVE ENEMY. TO BECOME UNSTOPPABLE YOU MUST LEARN TO WITNESS IT AND DIRECT IT.

Damian Browne

EVERYONE HAS SOMETHING THEY'VE TO DEAL WITH. SOME LADS ARE BETTER AT GETTING IT OUT THERE AND UNDERSTANDING IT.

Keith Earls

SMART MONEY HABITS LIA & RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND

Good levels of financial awareness, knowledge and skills are necessary to make effective financial decisions nd 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 the Action Plan.

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 seven 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 seven core modules include:

- 1. Money goals and budgeting
- 2. Understanding your payslip and tax contributions
- 3. Loans and credit cards
- 4. Pensions
- 5. Mortgages
- 6. Savings and investment goals
- 7. Being self-employed

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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.



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WHEN YOU'RE INJURED OR GOING THROUGH A ROUGH PATCH, EVERY EVENTUALITY PLAYS OUT IN YOUR MIND AND THE SCARIER THOUGHTS ARE THE ONES THAT TEND TO STICK. I DIDN'T KNOW IF RUGBY WAS SHELVED FOR MONTHS, FOR YEARS OR FOR GOOD SO I NEEDED SOMETHING TO POUR MYSELF INTO."

Vakh Abdaladze

Co-Founder, Taste of Georgia



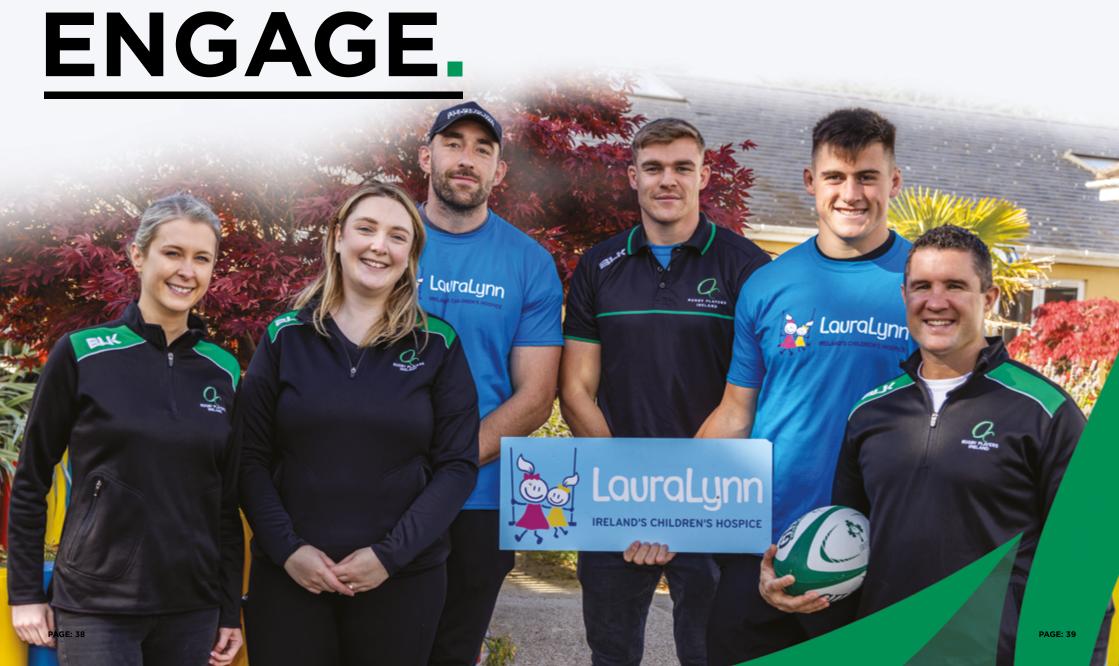
THERE'S A LOT OF SHORT-TERM GAIN BY PLAYING PROFESSIONAL RUGBY BUT YOU HAVE TO CONSIDER WHAT THE BENEFITS MIGHT BE IN THE LONGER TERM? I WASN'T GOING TO PLAY FOR IRELAND. I BEGAN TO STEP AWAY AND SEE THINGS A LITTLE BIT MORE OBJECTIVELY. MOST LADS WILL ONLY DO THAT WHEN THEY'RE GETTING ON AND THE END IS IN SIGHT. I BUCKED THE TREND A LITTLE BIT.

Cian Bohane

Teacher



SECTION 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.

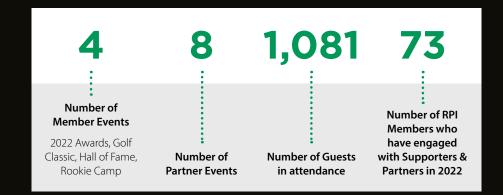
While it has been a difficult number of years for our association, the pandemic has also taught us to be adaptable with our offerings. Thankfully our corporate partners have also been very understanding of new considerations and working arrangements. Nevertheless, it was with great pleasure that 2022 allowed for greater opportunity to facilitate in-person networking events, meet-and-greets as well as a number of pre-match functions.

For the first time in three years we were back at The Clayton Hotel on the Burlington Road for the Rugby Players Ireland Awards supported by Accenture. Having brought the event to virtual life the previous year, Barry Murphy and Andrew Trimble were faced by a live audience this time around and earned great praise for their handling of proceedings. It was also humbling to see so many of our members in the room.

Our Annual Golf Day proved to be another successful day whilst a standalone Hall of Fame event to celebrate the careers of Fiona Coghlan and Tommy Bowe became the latest feature of our calendar. All events proved to be a great opportunities 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. This year our Executive Board decided that we should engage with a charity on a more formal basis. As an ambassador for LauraLynn, the Board felt it appropriate to support Garry Ringrose's proposal to engage with Ireland's Children's Hospice.

Furthermore, a number of players got behind the Tackle Your Feelings campaign in various capacities. 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.





accenture



















ACCENTURE IRISH MEN'S XVs PLAYERS' PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Josh van Der Flier

ACCENTURE IRISH WOMEN'S XVs PLAYERS' PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Sam Monaghan

NEVIN SPENCE MEN'S YOUNG PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Cian Prendergast

WHOOP WOMEN'S YOUNG PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Eve Higgins

DRUIDS GLEN HOTEL & GOLF RESORT MOMENT OF THE YEAR

Irish Men's XVs Triple Crown

ZURICH CONTRIBUTION TO IRISH SOCIETY

Andrew Porter

TRITON LAKE IRISH WOMEN'S 7s PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Amee-Leigh Murphy Crowe

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

Terry Kennedy

MSL MERCEDES BENZ
DEALERSHIPS MEN'S TRY OF YEAR

Caelan Doris v New Zealand

IZEST MARKETING WOMEN'S TRY OF YEAR

Eve Higgins v France

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RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND ANNUAL GOLF CLASSIC

Hail, rain or shine, the Rugby Players Ireland Annual Golf Classic always proves to be a highlight of our year. Providing an opportunity for our partners to mingle with the players for 18 holes, many lasting memories are created as they test themselves against the best elite athletes in the country... albeit on the golf course!

Events such as our Golf Classic form a central part of our calendar. It is important for players to recognise the significant role our corporate partners play in supporting Rugby Players Ireland to run, operate, grow and develop in the direction that best meets their needs.













RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND

HALL OF FAME

In early November, Fiona Coghlan and Tommy Bowe were inducted into the prestigious Rugby Players Ireland Hall of Fame. At the first event of its kind, Bowe and Coghlan were joined at the InterContinental Dublin hotel by family and friends as they joined a prestigious list of Irish Rugby greats including Keith Wood, Ronan O'Gara and Brian O'Driscoll.

In a career that was littered with unprecedented achievement, Coghlan became the first female to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. From playing an integral role in Ireland's first victory over France, Coghlan would go on to lead her country to a similarly historic success over England en route to a first-ever Grand Slam title in the Women's Six Nations of 2013. The following year Coghlan was widely lauded as Ireland claimed a sensational New Zealand scalp at the 2014 Rugby World Cup. Though she retired after the tournament, Coghlan would make a return in 2017 as captain of the Barbarians in the invitational team's first women's match.

Having played her part in the development of women's rugby in Ireland over the course of 85 international appearances and in the years that have followed, Coghlan has become a much-respected voice in the game and a key advocate for women's rugby both in Ireland and beyond. She is also a regular contributor to RTÉ Sport's rugby coverage. A PE and maths teacher, Coghlan is an ambassador for LauraLynn, Ireland's Children's Hospice, and Rugby Players Ireland's charity partner.

Upon hearing of her induction, Coghlan said: "I never set out to be a rugby player and yet it became all I ever wanted to be. Today's induction has given me the opportunity to reflect on a special time in my life, when experiences both good and bad were shared with the best of friends. To be recognised by them in this way is incredibly humbling.

"Once you retire it can be difficult to feel like you can have a tangible impact on the game," Coghlan added. "Thankfully, women are finding new ways to find their voice. I'm grateful for the career I had and how it has given me the platform to help the generations to come."





Meanwhile, Tommy Bowe inspired a generation as he sprinted clear at the Millenium Stadium in 2009. Despite a difficult introduction to his international career, the Monaghan born winger endeared himself to Irish fans through a series of instrumental performances on the field. In addition to the Grand Slam of 2009, he also played an integral role in Ireland Six Nations success of 2015 having returned from injury which forced him to miss the 2014 campaign.

Over the course of a 14-year professional rugby career, Bowe was capped 69 times by his country, appearing at Rugby World Cups in 2011 and 2015. He was named the IRUPA Players' Player of the Year in both 2008 and 2010. Bowe made over 100 appearances in two separate spells for Ulster Rugby, sandwiching a four-year stint with the Ospreys, while he was also started five Tests as the British & Irish Lions toured South Africa and Australia.

Reacting to the announcement, Bowe said: "I'm hugely honoured to be inducted into the Rugby Players Ireland Hall of Fame. I could never have imagined that one day my name might join some of the greatest names our sport has seen. Some of my teammates made it in before me and their presence goes some way to demonstrating how fortunate I was to play for Ireland when I did.

"Thankfully, through my young family and my work, I have found new inspirations in my life," Bowe continued, "but now and then it's nice to remind myself of the days when rugby was my main motivation. They were special times and while it's impossible to recreate the bond you shared with your teammates in the changing room after a hard-fought win, I'm one of the lucky few to have been in there for the most historic of occasions."

LAURALYNN

Through charitable engagement, Rugby Players Ireland has always supported our members in becoming valued members of the community. Throughout the year we are delighted to see players connect with organisations and go about making a difference on an individual level.

While continuing to support our membership in the management of these relationships, our Executive Board also expressed that in order to make a sustainable impact as a collective, Rugby Players Ireland should seek out a long-term charitable partner. LauraLynn proved to be a popular choice.

The 'Little Moments...Big Impact' campaign focuses on creating special moments and experiences for children and families who avail of LauraLynn's specialist care and supports as well as raising awareness for LauraLynn. It will be followed by several activations throughout the season.

The partnership aims to shine a light on children's palliative care and showcase how it can stretch so far beyond medical care, it's about living, it's full of colour, laughter, and joy and LauraLynn is a place that families can make the most of every little moment.

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The collaboration kicked off in October with two fully accessible rugby games against some of Ireland's top stars. Before the side's big interprovincial URC clash, players from both Munster and Leinster came together off the pitch to create two very special events for LauraLynn children and their families.

The first of the two games took place in LauraLynn in Dublin with LauraLynn Ambassador and Rugby Players Ireland Executive Board member, Garry Ringrose, joined in alongside his culb and country teammates Jack Conan and Dan Sheehan.

The second game took place in Cork, where LauraLynn have recently launched a Community Based Satellite Service operating out of Mallow, with Peter O'Mahony, Liam O'Connor, Jack O'Sullivan and Stephen Archer taking part in the fun. The players faced tough opposition from the LauraLynn Legends in both games and lots of special little moments were made for all involved.

For children with life-limiting conditions, being part of a team sport is not something they often get to enjoy and experience, these games allowed them to take part, be on a team and have fun alongside their parents and siblings, creating special little moments and memories.









THROUGH RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND, WE WANT PLAYERS TO BE SEEN AS VALUED MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY. HELPING CREATE SOME SPECIAL 'LITTLE MOMENTS' WITH THE FAMILIES OF LAURALYNN IS ONE SMALL WAY THAT WE CAN GIVE BACK.

Peter O'Mahony

Chair, Rugby Players Ireland Executive Board

TACKLE YOUR FEELINGS

TYF TIMELINE





BETTER TOGETHER

Wexford GAA unveiled its new home jersey with Tackle Your Feelings (TYF) given pride of place on the sleeves. It marks the second season in succession that TYF has featured on Wexford GAA kit.



EBRUARY 2022



YOU'RE NOT A BURDEN

Joey Carbery became the latest addition to the TYF crew. In an animated clip from Kavaleer Productions, the Irish out-half discusses the long road to recovery after injury and how countless setbacks impacted his mental wellbeing. Joey hopes his participation in the campaign will encourage others to take a proactive approach to looking after their mental health, whether it's on or off the pitch.

MARCH 2022

BETTER TOGETHER

Kathryn Dane formed part of TYF's contribution to the #ChoosetoChallenge theme which marked International Women's Day 2022 via the pen of Matt McKnight. Meanwhile, as Ireland geared up for St Patrick's Day, McKnight also helped portray Bundee Aki's time in Ireland and how the Galway community rallied around him.



APRIL 2022

SISTER ACT

Sisters Eimear and Ailish Considine are an accomplished duo across several sports. Despite spending their childhood under the one roof, they grew up to be different people who faced different challenges in their youth. To highlight the TYF Schools Programme, they discuss how the different challenges they faced as youngsters helped to shape their adult selves.



MAY 2022

TAKE A BREATHER

Since he first burst onto the scene in 2017, James Ryan has been called on by club and country on a regular basis. Speaking to TYF, the Leinster and Ireland lock shared how he tries to find time in the day to meditate and take some time for himself.



HAVING THE MENTAL RESILIENCE TO COPE WITH WHAT LIFE THROWS AT YOU IS CRUCIALLY IMPORTANT.

Joey Carbery

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JUNE 2022



SELF-CARE WITH TADHG

To mark the end of the domestic season, Tadhg Beirne shared his approach to rest and recovery – which includes plenty of delicious baking! July also marked another milestone in the campaign through the funding of TYF for a further two years by the Z Zurich Foundation.

From 2023 the initiative will place greater focus on schools throughout Ireland, providing new and exciting opportunities for Rugby Players Ireland's members.

iii JULY 2022



THE BEST OF FRIENDS

It seems that Aoibheann Reilly and Béibhinn Parsons have been teammates ever since they shared the same childminder. The Galway duo spoke about how their relationship has helped them both to progress in their rugby careers.

March 2022

JORDAN THE SCHOOLBOY

Jordan Conroy was probably not your model student but not everybody is. We had the Irish Sevens flyer reflect on his time back at school in Tullamore and explored how those years helped him find the person he is today.



PEOPLE DO CARE BUT YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO PULL DOWN THOSE WALLS FOR THEM TO SEE YOU.

Linda Djougang



SURROUND YOURSELF WITH GOOD PEOPLE, BECAUSE ANYONE THAT CARES FOR YOU WANTS THE BEST FOR YOU.

Nick McCarthy

A LIFE OF MESSAGES

Linda Djougang's story in an inspirational one. Growing up in Cameroon, the Irish international prop landed in Ireland as a 9-year-old and faced a very different future. As she joined TYF's growing community, Linda describes how playing rugby helped her to discover her true identity.



OCTOBER 2022

TAKING TO THE AIRWAVES

As children throughout the island settled back into school, we hit the national airwaves with a campaign to highlight the TYF Schools programme. For several weeks the voices of lain Henderson, James Lowe, Hannah O'Connor and Simon Zebo were heard regularly across numerous stations. We brought the undertaking to a close with an Off the Ball panel discussion featuring Eimear Considine, Billy Dardis and Andrew Porter.

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iii NOVEMBER 2022



BE KIND BY BEING SOUND

To mark World Kindness Day, James Lowe spoke about how important and easy it is to simply be a sound person.

March December 2022

ROLE MODEL

John Cooney was nominated for the BKT URC Difference Maker of the Year Award for his continued involvement with the Tackle Your Feelings campaign.



MY MENTAL WELLBEING WAS SOMETHING I PUT ZERO EMPHASIS ON BUT NOW I UNDERSTAND HOW MUCH MORE THERE IS TO BE GAINED FROM HOW YOU FEEL.

John Cooney

TYF SCHOOLS

The Tackle Your Feelings Schools Programme is a classroom-based programme, centred on the use of the bespoke TYF Schools App. Students are guided through resources where they are tasked with completing exercises designed to make them more aware and knowledgeable about their own mental health and wellbeing, and enable the students to Take Control. Each section is augmented by the experiences of some of Ireland's best rugby players.

Almost 2,000 students are currently participating in the programme across Ireland. In all, 84 schools have signed up since TYF Schools was first launched in 2020. Working alongside teachers, students and a team of experts, TYF continues to grow and evolve in line with demand. The 2022/23 academic term to date has seen a further 500 schools registering an interest in rolling out the TYF syllabus.

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AS A SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHER, I CAN REALLY SEE
HOW STUDENTS CAN BENEFIT
FROM A PROGRAMME LIKE
TACKLE YOUR FEELINGS. IT
IS IMPORTANT FOR THEM
TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR
FEELINGS WITHOUT BEING
CONSUMED BY THEM. BEING
IN A GOOD PLACE MENTALLY
AND EMOTIONALLY ENABLES
YOU TO EXCEL IN ALL
ASPECTS OF LIFE.

Eimear Considine

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WHEN I WAS 16 I
NEVER ASKED FOR
HELP. I THOUGHT I
WAS SUPERMAN AND
HAD EVERYTHING
SORTED. BUT IF YOU
KEEP BOTTLING
THINGS UP, THEY'RE
ONLY GOING TO
EXPLODE LATER ON.

James Lov

TACKLE YOUR FEELINGS



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 2022 would not have been possible. We would like to thank all of our sponsors, particularly Zurich Ireland, Accenture, Goodbody and the IRFU. Through the backing of Rugby Players Ireland, we can ensure that our members have a strong independent body that prioritises them as individuals.



















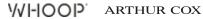
















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