

English Rugby Set for a New Approach under the Men's Professional Game Partnership



- **RFU, Premiership Rugby and The RPA agree new deal to stabilise and transform the professional game and have a long-term positive impact on community rugby**
- **Ambition to create world-leading English teams, thriving professional leagues and an optimised performance system in partnership with players**
- **First ever Joint Marketing Agreement to drive more fans to the game as well as increase attendances and viewership**
- **The RPA are co-signatories for the first time - putting players at the heart of the partnership**

The Rugby Football Union, Premiership Rugby and The Rugby Players Association have co-created a new Men's Professional Game Partnership (MPGP) after 18 months of collaboration.

The eight-year partnership aims to create world-leading English teams and thriving professional leagues with players and fans at the heart of it.

Improved Governance, Funding, Stabilisation and Cost Alignment

To lead this partnership into the next era, a new Professional Rugby Board (PRB) has been established to replace the Professional Game Board so that all rugby decisions are brought under one roof to oversee the strategy. The PRB will have an independent chair and two further independent members.

The RFU and Premiership Rugby will each have three voting members including the RFU's newly appointed Board Member Wayne Barnes. The RPA will have two seats on the new Board (one voting and one observer) to ensure that players are central to decision making for the professional game. The funding deal is across two four-year cycles with a guaranteed £33m per season for the first cycle, moving to a profit share in the second cycle of 26% of the RFU's Profit Before Rugby Investment (PBRI).

A number of joint initiatives to grow revenues and manage costs in the overall system, include;

- Commercial growth through a landmark Joint Marketing Agreement, driving club attendances and growing respective TV audiences and social following.
- A commitment to implementing a salary cap formula from 25/26 aligned to key central financial metrics, which will include a review of the salary cap credit system.
- Closer alignment and sharing of information to aid player welfare and management across the professional game.
- Implementation of an independent Financial Monitoring Panel (FMP) to monitor financial stability across Premiership Rugby and provide confidence to clubs playing in any given season. The FMP is currently chaired by Sir Nigel Boardman and is already in operation for the 24/25 season.

World-leading English teams

The Men's Professional Game Partnership has a vision to create *'World-leading English teams and thriving professional leagues delivered through a fully optimised performance system in partnership with our players'*. Fundamental to this vision are the changes to professional rugby system that have been agreed:

Enhanced England Playing Squad (EPS): the England Head Coach will be able to select up to 25 players into the Enhanced EPS, ensuring optimum preparation for key international fixtures, and will have the final say on all sports science and medical matters relating to the management of Enhanced EPS players.

England performance pathway: to provide improved international playing opportunities and a link to the senior men's team, the U20s EPS squad will be expanded to 50 players and there will be up to four England A matches per season, with the squads drawn from the Senior and U20 EPS squads, with the opportunity to bring in additional U23 players if required.

Player welfare and management: there is a continued commitment to world-leading player welfare initiatives through collaboration and joint investment, including the use of aligned welfare and performance data systems for all players, clubs and England teams, underpinned by audited and sanctionable minimum standards/regulations. A jointly implemented Athlete Management System (AMS) will be introduced across clubs and England to better integrate, standardise and report on welfare and performance data.

Academy structure: reflecting the new structure of the Gallagher Premiership, the academy boundaries have been redefined, aligned to the Premiership clubs alongside a Yorkshire academy which will continue to be RFU operated under authority of the PRB. These academies will work with and utilise central data to establish satellite sites to ensure regional coverage with an ambition for access with reduced travel time for players.

Pathway changes: the academies will deliver a redefined phased approach to the player development system, starting at U15 and encompassing three phases: Foundation (ages 15 to 16), Development (ages 17 to 18) and Confirmation (ages 19 to 20). Each Academy will ensure that at least two State School / College partnerships are established, developed, and appropriately resourced to be able to participate in the RFU schools' competition.

Community: All parties are working together to co-create a joint community game programme that will align with the priorities emerging from the RFU's Community Game Future strategy and will build on the success of Project Rugby to continue to make the game more inclusive (the joint initiative from Premiership Rugby, in collaboration with the RFU and Gallagher that focused on engaging disadvantaged young people with Rugby Union).

Player Support Fund: All three parties will establish a Player Support Fund, which will be administered and supported by Restart, the official charity of the RPA. The fund will initially focus on medical support for retiring players, mental wellbeing support for current and retired players, as well as providing a safety net for players and staff affected by unforeseen club situations.

Bill Sweeney, Rugby Football Union CEO said; "This eight-year commitment will reshape the rugby landscape and reset the professional game to support, showcase and fund our game for the next decade and beyond.

"We have spent the last two years interrogating the data and listening to all parts of the game to understand what we need for rugby to grow in the future, how all parts of the system interact and support each other, and where we need to focus and allocate our investment for the best outcome.

"Despite the RFU having £150m revenue losses through Covid, and a £30m increase in operating costs over the last four years due to inflation, we are in a stable financial position. Today we have reached a significant milestone in turning our spend into the professional game into a true investment partnership with shared strategy, goals, and risks.

"The England national team benefits by having control over the IDPs, Medical and S&C of the best players in England at the peak of their form and in the best shape to play for their country. And the community game benefits from well run and funded academies to allow every young player to fulfil their potential and winning England teams that generate money to reinvest into the whole game.

"This is not only a Men's Professional Game Partnership, but also part of a broader partnership we have created together that joins and supports all parts of the game, international, domestic, community, players and investors, men and women, boys and girls."

Simon Massie-Taylor, Premiership Rugby CEO said: “The new Professional Game Partnership is fundamental to the next phase of English club rugby. We have worked hard with the RFU and RPA to provide more financial stability, better governance and a joint high-performance plan that will help make the Men’s England Team and the Premiership clubs as successful as possible.

“What we have learnt from the challenges of the last few years is how important healthy clubs and a successful men’s England team are to the rugby eco-system - and also how important it is to work in partnership with the players, the governing body and other rugby stakeholders.”

Christian Day, RPA General Secretary said: “The Rugby Players Association's inclusion as signatories to the Men’s Professional Game Partnership is a landmark day for our organisation, but most importantly for the players. The RPA will always exist to support, promote, and protect our members. Building an adequate safety net and striving to make England the best place to play rugby in the world. We are progressing through a time of what we believe to be positive change and unity for rugby union in England after a period of collective challenge. This new agreement should start to give players a feeling of real value, and in doing so can only improve their value add back into the game that they love.”

Promotion and Relegation

The RFU Council agreed there would continue to be a two-match home and away play-off between the bottom placed Gallagher Premiership club and the winner of the Championship/Tier 2, provided that that latter club meets the Minimum Standards Criteria in place at the relevant time. This continues to allow for promotion and relegation, but also balances the careful financial challenges of clubs in those leagues and ensure that promoted clubs can sustainably compete.

PGB agreed to increased flexibility in the Minimum Standards Criteria (MSC) for entry into the Premiership. The new MSC will allow a longer period for a promoted club to achieve required ground capacities. Clubs may move from 5,000, to 7,500 and finally 10,001 at the start of their fourth season in Premiership at the latest. This should enable aspirational clubs who gain promotion longer to embed into the Premiership a smoother transition in terms of investment into their stadium. From the start of the 2024/25 season, the responsibility of determining the MSC will transfer to the Professional Rugby Board.

Championship clubs have again been invited to play in the Premiership Rugby Cup and this invitation has already been extended for the 2025/26 season.

All parties want a viable, sustainable, and valued 2nd Tier that can produce clubs capable of competing in the Premiership and providing the jeopardy and competition that keeps the league vibrant. However, there is currently a major gap in competitiveness and playing budgets between the Gallagher Premiership and Championship clubs and the financial requirements needed to compete in the Premiership.

For imagery, visit [here](#):

About Premiership Rugby:

Premiership Rugby is the organisation that manages the top league in English club rugby – Gallagher Premiership Rugby.

It acts for its shareholder clubs in all major commercial and strategic negotiations with media and sponsorship partners of the league, as well as with other rugby governing bodies.

Premiership Rugby is also responsible for key areas of governance of the top-flight competitions, including the Salary Cap Framework, Minimum Standards Criteria and Code of Conduct, as well as managing the Gallagher Premiership Rugby competition and the Premiership Rugby Cup, both of which are televised live by TNT Sports.

Partners for the 2023-24 season are: Gallagher, Defender, London Pride, eToro, Funding Circle, Ocean Outdoor, Ticketmaster, Christopher Ward, Gilbert, and TNT Sports.

Premiership Rugby runs more than 90 local and national community rugby programmes. Each season Premiership Rugby and its clubs, working together with our players, coaches and impressive list of private, public and third sector partners, invest over £3.3million in a variety of community programmes that aim to grow grassroots participation and tackle core issues.