



RUGBY FOR PLAYERS WITH A DISABILITY - FAQs

INTRODUCTION

In order to support the development of disability rugby and to promote opportunities for people with a disability to access the game, the IRFU aims to integrate as many players as is safe and practicable into existing rugby clubs, as well as partner with related disability organisations to provide rugby to players with a disability. The plan for this is outlined in the Disability Framework 2019.

The focus is on the development of tag rugby for players with intellectual disabilities who are new to the game. Mixed ability rugby is available for players over 18-years of age in a selection of clubs approved by the IRFU. IRFU is also working with Irish Wheelchair Association and Deaf Sport Ireland to promote participation in rugby for players with a sensory and physical disability.

The IRFU are committed to make the game as inclusive as possible. It is also imperative that our sport is enjoyed in an environment that is safe for everybody involved. Below is some information to guide players, parents and clubs. The FAQ's are set out in 4 sections: Tag Rugby / Wheelchair rugby / Players with other Disabilities / Club development.

SECTION ONE: TAG RUGBY

WHAT IS TAG RUGBY

Tag rugby is a fast and exciting non-contact sport that encourages the positive development of running, balance and handling skills. It is also an enjoyable way to keep healthy and fit.

Tag rugby can be played by men, women and children of all ages and abilities. The sport caters for those aged 6 years with no upper age limit (This may vary between clubs - please check age groups with your local club).

IS THERE A CLUB NEAR ME?

For details of a club here you with a disability tag rugby section please contact your Spirit of Rugby Officer in your area, <https://www.irishrugby.ie/playing-the-game/spirit-of-rugby/what-is-spirit/>

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THE PLAYER WEARS GLASSES

As tag rugby is non-contact players who require glasses can wear prescription sports goggles that can be purchased from most opticians.

THE PLAYER USES A WHEELCHAIR

Disability tag rugby is fully inclusive and caters for wheelchair users with additional needs. That said, tag rugby is largely played on grass and as the typical disability tag rugby season runs between September – December and March – June; unless indoor facilities are available the use of a wheelchair on grass will be dependent upon weather/pitch conditions.

THE PLAYER HAS OTHER MEDICAL NEEDS

Player safety is paramount and communication between coaches and parents/carers is vital to the management of player safety. All players should be registered with the club through a Player Registration Form (speak to the club registration secretary for further details). Players/carers/parents should also complete an information form for the club with relevant player information. This provides the opportunity to outline/explain any medical/health/behavioural issues that you feel may influence/affect the player's experience/ability to participate. Coaches will discuss any issues raised in the registration form with parents/carers and this information will be used to ensure the club/coaches can meet the needs of the player.

See Appendix 1 for information on Atlanto-Axial Instability

SECTION TWO: WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

WHAT IS AND WHO CAN PLAY?

Wheelchair Rugby is a mixed team sport created by athletes with a disability, it combines elements of rugby, basketball and handball. Players compete in teams of four to carry the ball across the opposing team's goal line. Contact between wheelchairs is permitted and is in fact an integral part of the sport as players use their chairs to block and hold opponents.

The world governing body, International Wheelchair Rugby Federation (<http://www.iwrf.com>) state that in order to be eligible to play wheelchair rugby, individuals must have a disability which affects the arms and legs.

Most players have spinal cord injuries with full or partial paralysis of the legs and partial paralysis of the arms. Other disability groups who play include cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, amputations, polio and other neurological conditions. Men and women compete on the same teams and in the same competitions.

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In Ireland there is a more relaxed approach around eligibility. The Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA), which is based in Clontarf, Dublin, is the national governing body (www.iwa.ie). They wish to make the sport as inclusive as possible and welcome all wheelchair users to come and participate at a local level. For details of your local wheelchair rugby club visit: www.irishwheelchairrugby.com and/or <https://www.facebook.com/IrishWheelchairRugby/> and <https://iwasport.com/clubs-sport-sections/>

THE IWA AND IRFU

The IRFU has a memorandum of understanding between IRFU and IWA that outlines a partnership and areas of cooperation between both organisations; specifically, in promotion and marketing, providing opportunities for training and development for volunteers and reviewing activities on a regular basis for both parties.

SECTION THREE: SENSORY

THE PLAYER IS DEAF, CAN THEY PLAY RUGBY?

Yes. There are quite a few people who have a hearing loss playing tag and contact rugby. However, it may in certain circumstances be best to seek medical advice e.g. those players who cannot fully remove their hearing aids. For further information visit the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS): A Guide to Deaf Friendly Rugby Union: www.ndcs.org.uk/document.rm?id=8876 and <http://www.deafsportsireland.com/contact-us/>

ARE THERE CLUBS FOR DEAF PLAYERS?

No. IRFU coaches have delivered tag rugby coaching sessions to a number of groups such as Action Deaf Youth (formerly Northern Ireland Deaf Youth Association); NDCS and Deaf Sports Ireland. The IRFU is investigating the possibility of working with a number of organisations to develop rugby for the deaf community. The vision is that players who have a hearing loss would be a part of existing rugby teams i.e. participate in minis; age grade and senior rugby.

IS THERE RUGBY FOR BLIND OR PARTIALLY SIGHTED PLAYERS?

IRFU coaches have delivered sample sessions to blind and partially sighted players, however more research is required to be in a position to fully engage with players. The IRFU will explore working with expert organisations in this area in order to investigate how best to create opportunities and develop rugby for blind or partially sighted players. An update will be provided when more information becomes available.

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SECTION FOUR: CLUB DEVELOPMENT

MY CLUB IS INTERESTED – WHAT DO I DO?

- If your club has no disability team but would like to open your rugby activities to schools or services in the community then you can contact the Spirit of Rugby Officer, <https://www.irishrugby.ie/playing-the-game/spirit-of-rugby/>. They will work with you to establish if the club can host a sustainable project
- Sport Inclusion Development Officers (SIDOs) exist within most Local Sports Partnerships in Ireland and they can assist you with making links with local schools and disability services, [http://www.irishsportscouncil.ie/Participation/Sports Inclusion/SIDO Contacts/](http://www.irishsportscouncil.ie/Participation/Sports%20Inclusion/SIDO%20Contacts/)

WHAT TRAINING IS THERE?

- The Stage 1 coaching course is suitable for those introducing the game; a course can be arranged at the local rugby club once you have 15 people who wish to complete the course. Contact your coach development officer who will assist you with this.
- A Stage 3 coach must be available to your club to engage in mixed ability rugby.
- The IRFU Spirit of Rugby Officer can deliver a rugby specific 'disability inclusion' course that will give coaches the necessary skills to make the game more inclusive and accessible to a number of players with a disability.
- A coaching resources is also available on the website
- Cara also run a Disability Inclusion Course which IRFU Branch staff have completed; Branch staff can assist you with sessions.
- Disability Sport Northern Ireland also run courses, <https://www.dsni.co.uk/>

WHAT OTHER SUPPORT IS THERE?

The IRFU provide a number of web-based resources for clubs and their coaches/volunteers for setting up and developing a disability section. The Spirit of Rugby Officer can also provide support and information.

WHAT SHOULD A CLUB TELL PARENTS?

It should be made clear to parents what your club offers and in some cases you may be signposting players and parents to other clubs in your region. At the moment the offering is tag rugby for young people with an intellectual disability and mixed ability rugby for players over 18 who wish to play contact rugby. Not every club will have a disability team and where some players may have started the game at

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mini level they might need to switch to another club to access disability rugby in order to remain playing in a safe environment.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Each Branch has a Spirit of Rugby Officer who can assist you to get involved in one of the existing clubs and/or assist if you wish to set up a disability section in your club.

You can make contact with the Spirit of Rugby Officer in your area for further information.

IRFU Contacts:

- Connacht – Luke Murphy luke.murphy@connachtrugby.ie and Lyndon Jones (lyndon.jones@connachtrugby.ie) as participation manager
- Leinster – Stephen Gore - stephen.gore@leinsterrugby.ie
- Munster – Emily O’Leary – emilyoleary@munsterrugby.ie
- Ulster – Kerry Spence – kerry.spence@ulsterrugby.com

Other Contacts

Irish Wheelchair Sport - <https://iwasport.com/>

Deaf Sport Ireland - <http://www.deafsportsireland.com/>

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