



IRFU Club Competitions Season Outline 2020/2021

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Foreword: Greg Barrett, Chair of IRFU Rugby Committee



The IRFU reached out to all clubs in May to gather feedback on structure for the 2020/2021 season. This stakeholder engagement was fundamental to the direction of travel for central and provincial staff as well as the decision making of provincial and IRFU rugby committees.

Our Return To Rugby Guidelines For Clubs mapped out a 'safety first' approach for clubs and we continue to be guided by this and the work of IRFU Medical Director Rod McLoughlin as we build towards a resumption of competitive rugby in 2020.

While there are many factors which helped shape this season outline, you will see that player welfare and COVID-19 risk mitigation are by far the biggest consideration.

We are also hopeful that a focus on keeping rugby at a localised level in the first stage of the season brings with it an opportunity for clubs to reenergise their membership.

As club rugby people, we all love to see meaningful games against our neighbours and provincial challengers for silverware. This can serve to kickstart cashflow once again in clubs after a very difficult period.

We remain grateful to our partners in Energia who have stood by us throughout this process. It is only fitting that we work towards an Energia All-Ireland League in the second half of the season and a fully fledged All-Ireland competition thereafter.

Foreword: Gary Ryan, Managing Director, Energia

We are once again proud to be the power behind the Energia All-Ireland League and its constituent cup competitions for the 2020/21 season.

Energia supports any competition which places player welfare at the heart of its format and we are fully behind the IRFU in their need to put a modified season in place as we all look forward to a return to rugby.

We welcome the inclusion of the Energia Community Series in Stage 1 of the season and understand the need for clubs to focus on their role in the community in the continued reopening of our society.

When the time comes, we also eagerly await the return of the Energia All-Ireland league in January 2021 and the 30th anniversary of the competition.

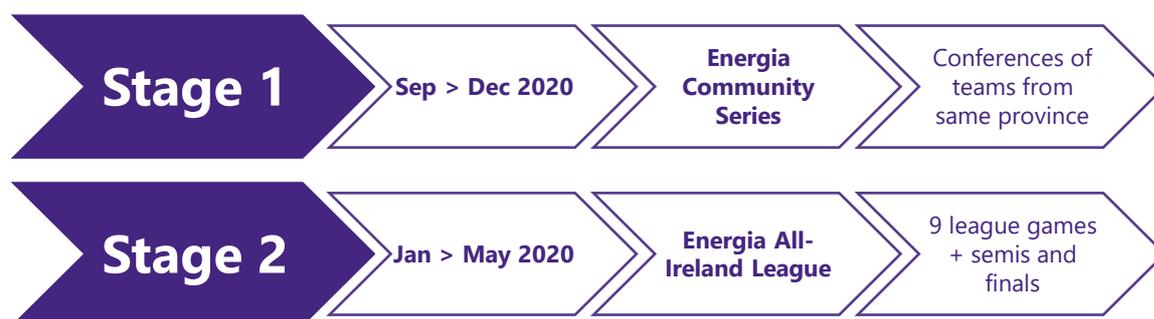


Executive Summary:

The IRFU Rugby Committee have voted to proceed with a one-off season plan for the Energia All-Ireland League in the 2020/21 season. This vote concludes a lengthy stakeholder engagement process with clubs, central and provincial staff and provincial rugby committees.

Player welfare and COVID-19 risk mitigation are the primary drivers in arriving at this format.

Energia All-Ireland League 2020/2021 Season Outline:



Stage 1: Energia Community Series – September > December 2020

- The Energia Community Series will be a bespoke IRFU competition for Energia All-Ireland League Clubs for the 2020/21 season only.
- It will be administered at provincial level in a league format where clubs may only compete against clubs from within their conference.
- Each conference will only contain clubs from the same province.
- The men's conferences will be contested only by Energia All-Ireland League clubs.
- The women's conferences will also be open to clubs who do not compete in the Energia Women's All-Ireland League.
- The first placed team in a conference will receive a trophy as conference champions.
- Conference placings will also determine which three teams qualify for All-Ireland cup competitions to be played during Stage 2.
- Connacht conference will see the top three finishing teams qualify. Leinster, Munster and Ulster conferences will see the top two teams from Conference 1 and the top team from Conference 2 qualify
- The make-up of conferences shall be decided at provincial level and confirmed in due course.
- Each conference will commence on September 26th and conclude no later than 12th December with a reserve date of December 19th

Stage 2: Energia All-Ireland League – January > May 2021

- The Energia All-Ireland League will commence on January 9th 2021
- The size and make-up of each 10-team division remains unchanged from the finishing positions of 2019-20
- The Energia ALL season will consist of 9 games plus semi-finals and finals.
- Semi-finals and finals remain in place for all divisions in both Men's and Women's ALL
- As this is a truncated season, no promotion or relegation will take place
- The Energia All-Ireland Provincial League Championship Round Robin Qualifiers will not take place
- The following Energia All-Ireland cup competitions will take place:
 - Energia Bateman Cup
 - Energia Bateman Plate*
 - Energia Bateman Shield*
 - Energia All-Ireland Women's Cup
 - Energia All-Ireland Women's Plate
 - Energia All-Ireland Women's Shield
 - Energia All-Ireland Junior Cup

*The Energia Bateman Plate and Shield are new competitions which have been introduced for the 2020/21 season only.

Please note this document pertains only to IRFU adult competitions sponsored by Energia. Details on all other club competitions will be finalised and published in due course.

Background:

The coronavirus pandemic forced the premature conclusion of the 2019/2020 season on March 19th 2020. No teams in the Energia All-Ireland League were promoted, relegated or crowned champions for that season.

After the establishment of a Club Continuity Fund, the announcement of government roadmaps and plans to ease restrictions from May 2020 allowed the IRFU to plan for a graduated return to rugby for the 2020/21 season.

The IRFU Return To Rugby Summary Roadmap was issued to clubs on May 29th 2020. It outlined a process for clubs to move through a COVID-19 Safety Planning Stage and onwards to reduced activities, non-contact and contact stages.

Timeline To Date:

March 19 th	Conclusion of 2019/2020 Domestic Season
April 1 st	Launch of IRFU Club Continuity Fund
May 8 th	Clubs engaged on 2020/21 Season Structure
May 18 th	Ban on rugby during Phase 1/Step 1 of Govt Roadmap
May 21 st	Strategic support for clubs – online fundraising webinar
May 29 th	IRFU Return To Rugby Summary Roadmap issued
June 5 th	IRFU Return To Rugby Guidelines For Clubs Issued
June 9 th	Training & Education Supports established for clubs
June 11 th	Competition Stage added to summary roadmap
June 25 th	Details of Contact & Non-Contact Stages issued
June 29 th	Supplementary PPE Kits issued to all clubs

IRFU Return To Rugby Guidelines For Clubs were issued on June 5th 2020. This provided clubs with a framework to create and implement COVID-19 Health & Safety Plans and Risk Assessments to resume rugby in a controlled and responsible manner.

A Competition Stage was added to the summary roadmap on June 11th and as government roadmaps evolved, the IRFU realigned their planning and gave clear guidance on permitted activities on a graduated return.

Clubs have demonstrated their commitment to a safe and responsible return to rugby by adhering to the IRFU's *no plan – no play* policy.

Energia All-Ireland League clubs have indicated that they will all have operational COVID-19 Health & Safety Plans by July 20th 2020.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the IRFU's priority has been keeping the Irish Rugby community safe.

As we look toward the 2020/21 season, we will continue to demonstrate this principle by adhering to a controlled and graduated return to rugby.

Upcoming Dates:

July 9 th	Launch of Energia All-Ireland League 2020/21 Season Outline
July 20 th	Contact Stage – Building Foundations Phase
August 1 st	Contact Stage – Contact Prep Phase
August 29 th	Contact Stage – Pre-Season Friendly Fixtures (TBC)
September 5 th	Competition Stage – Provincial Fixtures (TBC)
September 26 th	Start of IRFU Domestic Competitions sponsored by Energia
January 9 th	Start of Energia All-Ireland League

Primary Principle: Player Welfare & COVID-19 Risk Mitigation

Player welfare and COVID-19 risk mitigation are the primary drivers in arriving at this format. It is based on the following guidance from the IRFU Medical Director.

- Government guidance on a return to sport is based on a graded return model
- Experiences in other countries inform us that the development of localised clusters is a real concern
- Keeping rugby matches local for longer will minimise the risk of disruption to meaningful competition
- Rugby will remain safe by maintaining the approach outlined

The IRFU Rugby Committee unanimously support this guidance from the IRFU Medical Director and have voted to create a one-off season format that will adhere to these principles.

COVID-19 Ordinance:

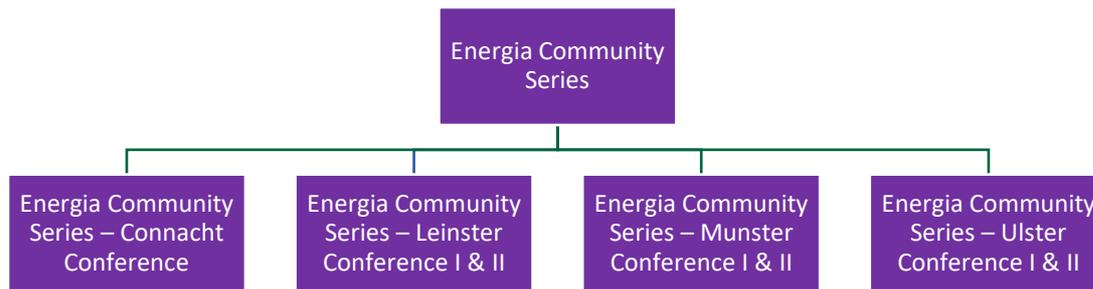
1. Clubs cannot play matches against anyone outside their province during Stage 1 of the season. In the event that COVID-19 disrupts competition, we will facilitate unaffected games to go ahead where possible. This includes friendly matches.
2. Progress into Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the 2020/21 season will only take place under the following criteria:
 - a. Continued government guidance that field sports are allowed
 - b. Continued low presence of COVID-19 in the community
 - c. Lack of clusters or any other resurgence of the virus
 - d. Willingness of players to participate in an expanded competition
3. Clubs will continue to implement their COVID-19 Health & Safety Plan including but not limited to operating procedures on Health Self-Declaration, Suspected Case Response Plan and Return to Play After Illness.
4. The IRFU awaits clarity from government on the definitions of close & casual contacts in terms of sport. Regulations to determine match cancellations and other matters will be determined by public health in line with this information and shared in due course.

At present, clubs should note that all close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 case are required to self-isolate for 14 days.

Anybody who is a close contact of a suspected case of COVID-19 must isolate for 14 days or until that suspected case has been cleared.

5. Where the presence of COVID-19 in a club forces the cancellation of a match in Stage 1 or Stage 2, the result shall be declared a draw and teams will be allocated two match points each and no score registered. No bonus points will be awarded.

Energia Community Series: Men's Participants & Structure



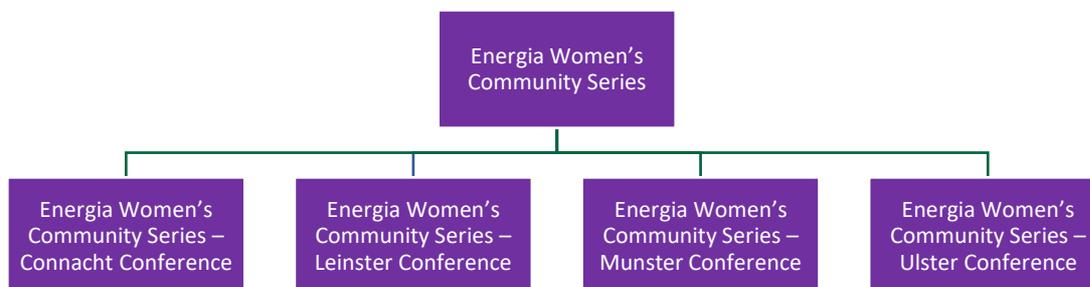
Connacht Conference: Ballina, Buccaneers, Galway Corinthians, Galwegians, Sligo.

Leinster Conference(s): Blackrock College, Clontarf, Dublin University, Enniscorthy, Greystones, Lansdowne, Naas, Navan, Malahide, MU Barnhall, Old Belvedere, Old Wesley, Skerries, St. Mary's College, Terenure College, Tullamore, UCD, Wanderers.

Munster Conference(s): Bruff, Cashel, Clonmel, Cork Constitution, Dolphin, Garryowen, Highfield, Midleton, Nenagh Ormond, Old Crescent, Shannon, Sundays Well, UCC, UL Bohemian, Young Munster.

Ulster Conference(s): Bangor, Ballymena, Ballynahinch, Banbridge, Belfast Harlequins, City Of Armagh, City Of Derry, Dungannon, Malone, Omagh Academicals, Queen's University, Rainey Old Boys.

Energia Community Series: Women's Structure



10 teams were confirmed to participate in the Energia Women's All-Ireland League for the 2020/2021 season. All 10 will participate in their conferences with the addition of other teams to be determined where necessary.

Connacht Conference: Galwegians and any other teams to be determined

Leinster Conference: Blackrock College, Old Belvedere, Railway Union, Suttonians Wicklow and any other teams to be determined

Munster Conference: UL Bohemian, Ballincollig and any other teams to be determined.

Ulster Conference: Cooke, Malone and any other teams to be determined.

The IRFU recognises that Energia Women's All-Ireland League clubs will be restricted to playing clubs within their conference. This is to ensure the primary principle of player welfare and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation applies to all club rugby players.

The IRFU will work with provinces to ensure that creative solutions are found so that all participating clubs can continue to develop their pathways both to and through the Energia Women's All-Ireland League.

Match Officials:

The IRFU will liaise with provincial associations/societies regarding match official appointments.

Regulations:

Regulations, season plan and fixtures will be communicated to all clubs as soon as practicable.

Advisory:

This outline remains subject to change in line with public health measures in place throughout the season. The IRFU will be flexible in our approach in this regard.

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