



# Irish Rugby Football Union Annual Report 2019/20



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In line with the financial constraints in which the IRFU finds itself, as a result of COVID-19, this year's Annual Report has been designed in-house to ensure minimum costs.

Thank you for your understanding.

## Office Bearers and Committee

President	N. Comyn		
Vice Presidents	D. Kavanagh	J. Robinson	
Hon. Treasurer	T. Grace		
Immediate Past President	I. McIlrath		
Chairman Management Committee	D. Madden		
Committee	G. Barrett M.P. Coghlan K. Dinneen T. Hennessy J. McDermott D.C. Millar T. O'Beirne N. Rynne S. Carty	S.W. Black M. Collopy J. Gibson A. Leddy J.D.H. McKibbin M. Orr M. Quinn J. Sheerin J. O'Driscoll	
World Rugby Board	J. O'Driscoll	P.A. Orr	S. Carty
Six Nations Committee	P. Browne	P. Whelan/J. O'Driscoll	
EPCR	P. Browne	M. Kearney	
Celtic League	P. Browne	K. Potts	
Lions	T. Grace	P. Browne	
FIRA	J. O'Driscoll	D. Nucifora	
Trustees	A.R. Dawson J.D. Hussey	D.V. Healy S.R. Hilditch	
Chief Executive	P. Browne		
National Coach	J. Schmidt/A. Farrell		

## Standing Committees

### Management

**D. Madden - Chairman**, T. Grace, J. O'Driscoll, G. Barrett, T. O'Beirne, D. Devaney, N. Comyn, D. Kavanagh, J. McKibbin, P. Browne, K. Potts, D. Nucifora and S. McNamara.

### National Professional Game Board

**T. O'Beirne** – Chairman, P. Browne, D. Nucifora, G. Keegan, G. Barrett, F. Sowman, K. Dinneen, K. Keane, B. Gavin, D. Madden, M. Kearney and E. Reddan.

### Rugby

**G. Barrett - Chairman**, N. Comyn, M. Quinn, J. Robinson, D. Kavanagh, J. McKibbin, K. Dinneen, N. Rynne, M. Collopy and C. McEntee.

### Finance

**T. Grace - Chairman**, D. Madden, A. Leddy, J. Gibson, M.P Coghlan, J. Robinson, P. Browne, K. Potts, C. O'Brien, F. O'Rourke (co-opted) and L. Quinn (co-opted).

### Commercial and Marketing

**D. Devaney - Chairman**, T. Grace, T. O'Beirne, M. Collopy, P. Browne, P. Power, S. McNamara, F. Sweeney (co-opted) and P. Dean (co-opted).

# President's Report

## Nicholas Comyn

It was a great honour to be elected as the 132<sup>nd</sup> President of the IRFU for the 2019/20 season and the first President from my club, Sunday's Well RFC, since their foundation in 1906. This season started with the first ever Rugby World Cup in Japan and ended with a pandemic.

There is no doubt that the season from the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020 has been overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic which has so affected society. Many people have become ill and have passed away, while businesses and towns have been decimated. Our thoughts and support go to all those affected. On behalf of the IRFU, I wish to congratulate the wonderful and unstinting work of our frontline health workers. Including those who came out of retirement or returned from abroad and every arm of the State. Thank you for your sacrifices and continuing assistance and support of our country. The effect of the Coronavirus on rugby has been dramatic and far out-weighs Foot and Mouth and SARS in its effects on all levels of the game. The domestic and professional rugby season came to an end as the IRFU adhered to government guidelines.

While our CEO, Philip will cover the impact of COVID-19 in more detail I want to acknowledge that the premature ending of the season was a great blow to all the clubs and schools. To see no school cup finals, no cup or medal presentations, no play-offs and no crowds of supporters to enjoy the games was severe and also a loss of badly needed revenue. All clubs accepted it was the right thing to do. The IRFU are doing what they can to support the clubs and Irish rugby in these extraordinary times.

It was also with regret that the International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament, which all were looking forward to, was postponed to 2021.

My time as President has been very rewarding. The Rugby World Cup in Japan was a unique and outstanding occasion as our hosts were most welcoming and helpful and after Ireland lost to Japan our hosts became serious supporters of the Irish team. Laura and I were invited to many receptions, particularly by the Irish Ambassador, Paul Kavanagh. On the rugby side it was disappointing for the Irish team in the end but some of the conditions were very humid, especially in Kobe, but undoubtedly

our best game was against Scotland. We also attended the various assemblies and seminars held by World Rugby in the last weeks of our stay.

I have tried to get to as many clubs and matches that I could and I attended the Wanderers 150<sup>th</sup> Centenary Ball, five pre-matches, the Munster Senior Cup Final, six club dinners and probably one of the best All Ireland Junior Cup Finals, held in Coolmine RFC, which was won by Kilfeacle and District RFC.

The two home Internationals were very important wins with full houses and victories for the U20s, the Women's and Club International teams. The men's senior game against England was a disappointment but the U20s win against England U20s gave them a well-deserved Triple Crown.

During the season Tom Grace our Honorary Treasurer indicated he was retiring at the end of this season after 13 years in office. Tom has been an outstanding, straight forward and energetic Honorary Treasurer, keeping the Union on an even keel for so many years. We will miss him and wish him well in retirement.

From the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 I was unable to attend functions due to the COVID-19 restrictions and I apologise to all those clubs and Provinces who invited me to their outings and wish them every success in their coming season.

The immediate effect of the COVID-19 pandemic for rugby meant the immediate closure of the IRFU offices and of clubs. Within the IRFU many important committees and sub committees continued to work, mainly from home, to monitor the effects on all aspects of the game from critical financing to World Rugby. Ongoing discussions at World and European Rugby continued and agreements that had been in negotiation at the time of the "shutdown" continued mainly by Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Webinar and other mediums. Speaking for myself, many of the virtual meetings were new to me, but adept training made the Committee members proficient.

Throughout the summer months protocols were being put in place, not just for the Professional game but especially for the Domestic game and I congratulate all those involved for their hard work and commitment.

For the foreseeable future the changes brought about by COVID-19 will have a significant effect on rugby as well as other sports.

The pressure on the Executive, the directors, staff, support workers, the IT personnel, the ticket office and many others has been enormous, and I would like to thank them all for their positive approach to the tasks they are given and their courtesy. I would also like to thank all the staff who supported me during my year as President. Throughout the last few months I realise how lucky the IRFU are to have a CEO of the calibre of Philip Browne and his executive staff.

On the positive side rugby has at last recommenced, behind closed doors, with four very competitive Inter Pros which were made possible by the preparation work which required amazing attention to detail at all levels.

Finally, I thank my wife Laura for all her help, organisation and patience during the year. I thank my family and my club for their support. I also thank my colleagues in the Union Committee, my fellow Officers, the Executive and staff of the IRFU for their assistance throughout this difficult year in rugby.

# Chief Executive's Report

## Philip Browne

The adjective “unprecedented” has been overused over the past six months but our experience to date and history will show that if anything the description of the 2019/20 season as being unprecedented is significantly understated.

The season was thrown into chaos by the COVID-19 pandemic when our Ireland v Italy Six Nations fixtures became the first mass gathering to be cancelled. Postponement of the last round of Six Nations matches followed, as did the cessation of all rugby as countries around Europe went in to “lockdown” to try to mitigate the impact and spread of the COVID-19 virus.

I will return to the impact of COVID-19 on our game but first a brief summary of the earlier part of the 2019/20 season which was marked by the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan.

## Ireland Teams

The Irish Squad prepared well and had four warm-up fixtures against Italy (h), England (a), Wales (a) and Wales (h). Outgoing coach, Joe Schmidt, used these fixtures to ensure that all players got some game time before heading to Japan for Rugby World Cup 2019 in September. The initial fixture against Italy was won by Ireland. The schedule involved a camp in Portugal prior to the England match which meant insufficient match preparation and resulted in a heavy defeat, not good for confidence. The remaining away and home fixtures against Wales were both successfully completed by the Irish teams selected and the squad departed to Japan with what was deemed to be good preparation under the belt.

Hosting a Rugby World Cup in Japan, whilst a risk for World Rugby, turned out to be a great success on and off the pitch, despite interruption by a typhoon which caused some fixture postponements and cancellations.

For Ireland the tournament started with a promising victory (27-3) over a tough Scotland team that never really got to grips with the match. There was a six-day turnaround to play the hosts, Japan, and in this match, Ireland were out played and out thought by an excellently prepared Japan team who



played with skill and pace. Ireland lost the match (19-12) much to the delight of the host nation. Two victories against Russia and Samoa saw Ireland through to a quarter-final against New Zealand and there our tournament ended in a disappointing showing against a team that overpowered Ireland, winning by 46-14.

It ultimately was yet another disappointing Rugby World Cup tournament for Ireland and a thorough review was carried out of the pre-tournament preparations and then the tournament itself. There were various learnings but in general the preparation pre-tournament was first class.

In terms of the tournament itself, there were a number of underlying reasons for the failure to progress beyond quarter-final stage, this including the timing in relation to Rugby World Cup in the context of evolving the game plan. International teams were very focused on Ireland given the success in 2018 and the Irish game had not evolved sufficiently to prevent opposing teams neutralising what had been a very effective game plan. Other contributory factors included injuries and over focus on what was seen as key match against Scotland.

With the completion of Rugby World Cup, the coaching baton passed to Andy Farrell who made some changes to his coaching team in preparation for the 2020 Guinness Six Nations.

As we know, the Six Nations was abandoned in mid-March due to the COVID-19 pandemic but not before Ireland registered two home wins against Scotland (19-12) and Wales (24-14) and a bruising defeat to England away (24-12) where the home team dominated, particularly in the first half. At the time of writing the postponed fixtures against Italy and France have been rescheduled for 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> October respectively, COVID-19 regulations permitting.

Similarly, the Ireland Women's fixtures and Ireland U20 fixtures in the Six Nations were impacted by COVID-19, particularly disappointing for the impressive U20s who had a Grand Slam title in their sights. The U20s Six Nations has been abandoned for 2020.

The Women's Six Nations is still to be completed with fixtures against Italy (home) and France (away). An improving set of performances with new players introduced by coach Adam Griggs saw Ireland Women beating Scotland (19-12) and Wales (31-12) before coming up against the professional players of England. Whilst they lost the fixture (27-0), they put in an improved and abrasive performance against the superior England team. Definite progress has been achieved, which will hopefully be built

on in the rescheduled Six Nations fixtures in October and before the team participates in the 2022 Women's Rugby World Cup qualifying tournament in December.

On the 7s front, Ireland Women's 7s team failed in their bid for Olympic qualification whilst the Men's 7s team is still in with a chance of qualification through the final qualifying tournament which will now take place in 2021 assuming the postponed Tokyo Olympics goes ahead.

### Investment in Premises

There are several other notable items to report including the purchase of the IRFU office at 10-12 Lansdowne Road in Autumn 2019. Specialist advice was taken and the decision to purchase the building ensures that the proceeds of the 2018 sale of IRFU lands at Newlands Cross are protected in the form of a bankable asset and the considerable annual savings in rent, which will be set aside for the amateur game on an annual basis.

The High-Performance Centre at the National Sports Campus has been completed and became operational just prior to the COVID-19 lockdown. The indoor facility is leased from Sport Ireland and the fit out, significantly funded by the IRFU, provides state of the art training and gym facilities for our international teams and a new base for some of our key technical staff.

The IRFU has also significantly funded the investment in the outdoor rugby facilities at the National Sports Campus which include three high quality pitches with floodlighting and a pavilion for use by teams training. Thanks are due to Sport Ireland and the Government for their investment in the National Sports Campus facilities which are world class additions to the sporting infrastructure in Ireland.

### Private Equity

The interest shown by private equity firm, CVC, in the sport of rugby has been well documented and reported on. CVC have been engaged in discussions with PRO14 to purchase a 28% equity stake in the commercial rights of the competition.

The IRFU took appropriate advice, independently of PRO14, and based on that advice agreed to support the proposed sale of equity to CVC, which was also supported by the other shareholders in

PRO14. The final agreement was completed in May 2020 and first payment has been received from CVC. Considering the COVID-19 crisis, the completion of this deal was particularly welcome. It is important to note that all sporting and regulatory matters remain under the control of the four shareholder Unions.

CVC's interest in rugby extends to the Six Nations and discussions continue between CVC and Six Nations to see if a similar investment for a  $\frac{1}{7}$ th equity stake in tournament can be agreed.

### COVID-19 Impact

It goes without saying that the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on all aspects of Irish society, businesses and how we live our lives, and sport is no exception. We must spare a thought for those across society that have been directly impacted through the loss of loved ones or who have had their health compromised by the virus. A huge 'thank you' goes to all those front-line workers who stepped up to help us at this time of crisis.

From the perspective of Irish rugby, a season that was following a normal pattern ended abruptly. For all our units - clubs, provinces and the IRFU - rugby simply stopped as the country went into "lockdown" with huge financial consequences at all levels as all revenue generating activities ceased. From an IRFU perspective our finances were tracking according to budget and there had been a successful launch and sale of over 5,000 ten-year premium seats. The IRFU's financial situation was looking quite positive. That situation has changed dramatically and the IRFU is facing an unprecedented cashflow crisis as we try to work towards the objectives of preserving our National Teams and four professional provincial teams, ensuring that we preserve the amateur club game and that we protect our employees and their jobs to the extent that we can.

The situation is mirrored in the four provinces and is exacerbated by the overwhelming reliance on spectators and gate receipts at that level. Even at club level there is a similar crisis where clubs have seen revenue generating activities dry up.

The key to resolving the crisis for Irish rugby is to buy time to the extent that we can while we firstly await the restart of the professional game and secondly await the lifting of restrictions on spectators attending major sporting events.

A number of strategies have been adopted to assist in “buying time” including an initial 20% salary deferral scheme adopted by all staff which was replaced with the introduction of a four-day week, from July, for all non-playing staff, to be reviewed in December. Following negotiations with Rugby Players Ireland, the players agreed to a 10% salary reduction with scope to increase that to 15% if certain financial markers are not met, along with 5% salary deferral up to December.

The IRFU has availed of all state supports including the emergency wage subsidy schemes, furlough schemes in Northern Ireland, and PAYE deferrals. Application is also being made to a special emergency fund of €40m to be used to support the GAA, FAI and IRFU and their clubs. What this does is buys the IRFU sufficient time up to December 2020 at which point we may have a clearer line of sight as to what the outlook is in terms of returning spectators to matches and some semblance of normality. There will need to be a careful review in December to assess whether we can continue with the current level of activity.

As you can imagine there has been a huge focus on the financial challenges both at IRFU and Provincial level and it is clear that the IRFU will have to provide central support to ensure that the Provinces remain solvent whilst ensuring that the IRFU also remains solvent.

External advice has been sought and the IRFU Committee has been kept fully informed of the situation, one that is open to change depending on government regulations around COVID-19.

Whilst the provinces and the IRFU are currently solvent, that ultimately is a time limited situation and unless there is a return to some level of normality within the next 12 months, with matches being played in front of some reasonable level of paying spectators, the IRFU and the Provinces will have to drastically cut their budgets to ensure costs are covered by the lower revenues.

There has equally been a huge focus on getting the professional and amateur games up and running again. Planning against a set of moving targets is at best frustrating and at worst futile but all the professional tournaments have put in place plans covering multiple scenarios to try and finish off the 2019/20 season to the extent that we can. This is vital to ensure that contractual obligations with sponsors and broadcasters can be met or mitigated to the maximum extent possible.

There has also been a huge amount of work on planning the 2020/21 season which by necessity is somewhat compromised by a later than normal start and also the need to complete the postponed

Six Nations fixtures, and to put in place an Autumn International Tournament to replace the normal World Rugby Fixture list, as SANZAR Unions will not be travelling this Autumn. Critical to all this has been the need to draw up “return to train” and “return to play” protocols that minimise the risk to players and staff in terms of COVID-19 so that we can start playing the game again. It is gratifying to see at the time of writing that we have successfully completed the PRO14 with victory for Leinster over an Ulster team that continue to show signs of improvement. Congratulations to both teams on getting to the final, and to Leinster for lifting the trophy.

The hosting of these fixtures in the Aviva Stadium was possible thanks to our medical, operations and high-performance staff who have led the way in terms of drawing up appropriate medical and operating protocols. Their work was mirrored by the staff at the Aviva Stadium who have applied best practice in terms of stadium operational protocols and to IRFU and Provincial operational staff who have ensured that there is an appropriate regime in place to monitor adherence to protocols.

The return of the game is in a fragile state and a major outbreak of the COVID-19 virus could set us back.

At amateur club level there has been a huge amount of work done to ensure that there is ongoing contact and dialogue with our clubs, albeit by remote working technology. Regular webinars to assist clubs with all aspects of the impact of COVID-19, from fund-raising to preparing the club for return to training have garnered large participation numbers and it is good to see that some “friendly” matches have already taken place and plans are well established for the relaunch of the club game over the autumn.

The IRFU put in place a Club Sustainability Fund of €500,000 to which clubs suffering financial hardship could apply to for assistance. With the opening of clubs to training the IRFU also spent some €100,000 in putting a pack together for every club in the country which contained materials and supports to help clubs with the initial reopening of their facilities.

The IRFU is gathering information through the Provinces in respect of the financial situation across clubs so that it can access state funding for clubs most in need as part of the IRFU application to the Emergency Sports Fund of €40m to cater for the GAA, FAI and IRFU organisations including their clubs.

## Acknowledgements

So, all in all challenging times but I must extend my thanks to the IRFU Committee and sub-committees who have adapted to working remotely and have been very supportive. Similarly, our volunteers at Branch and Club level have had to adapt and their efforts in these difficult circumstances are appreciated. My thanks also to the IRFU Senior Management team and Staff who have also adapted to the changed working circumstances and who have been prepared to do their bit in taking a salary reduction. They have in many cases been working from home remotely for six months in a situation which is uncertain and stressful. My thanks also to the Provincial Chief Executives who have worked closely with the Senior Management Team at the IRFU to ensure a coherent and aligned approach to the challenges that we are collectively facing.

It is unlikely that the IRFU Office will return to normal for some time yet given the current regulations. Despite the success of our IT Department in moving us all to remote tele-working there is no doubt the social contact arising in a normal office environment is sorely missed.

## 2019/20 in Detail

### IRFU High-Performance Centre at the National Sports Campus

The IRFU High-Performance Centre at the National Sports Campus was officially opened by An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, on 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2019. The HPC is the new home of Irish Rugby for all National Teams and for Elite Player Development. Team operations commenced on June 28<sup>th</sup> with the 7s Team being the first team on site to avail of the new facilities.

The 7s teams are the anchor tenant at the HPC training at the facility Monday to Friday all year round. All other National Teams operate within the facility on a seasonal basis.

The HPC provides the following facilities to all teams:

- High Performance gym (531 m<sup>2</sup> floor space)
- Player monitoring area
- Rehab/Treatment suite with 6 bed capacity
- Medical consultation room
- Hydrotherapy suite

- Player lounge
- Dining facility
- Indoor 4G Pitch (75-metre-long, Posts one end)
- 3 outdoor pitches
- Pitch Pavilion which also has additional analysis, medical and player monitoring facilities

The HPC also became the new home for IRFU High Performance Department Staff Offices, Performance Analysts Office, and includes a number of Conference/Meeting room facilities.

### National Men's XV

The squad's preparations for Rugby World Cup 2019 (RWC19) commenced in mid-June. The Guinness Summer Series across August and September saw victories over Italy (29-10) and Wales (19-10) while there was a loss to England (15-57) in London and a further win over Wales (17-22) in Cardiff ahead of RWC19.

At the Rugby World Cup, Ireland recorded pool stage victories over Scotland (27-3), Russia (35-0) and Samoa (47-5) but lost to host nation Japan (12-19). Qualifying as the second ranked team from Pool A, Ireland lost to New Zealand at the quarter final stage (14-46).

Andy Farrell succeeded Joe Schmidt as Ireland Head Coach following RWC19 with Mike Catt and John Fogarty joining the coaching group.

In the 2020 Guinness Six Nations, Ireland won their opening two fixtures against Scotland (19-12) and Wales (24-14) before losing away to England (12-24). The home fixture against Italy and away to France were postponed due to COVID-19.

The two Test summer tour to Australia was also cancelled due to COVID-19.

### Provincial Teams

Leinster lifted the Guinness PRO14 trophy after completing the tournament undefeated. In a season of improvements at Ulster, a final appearance was testament to the work done this year.

In the EPCR Heineken Champions Cup, Leinster topped Pool 1 with six wins but came up short during a home quarter final against a determined Saracens side. Ulster qualified from Pool 3 and travelled to France where they were unable to overcome a Toulouse side, in front of a crowd of 5,000, in a fast-paced quarter final.

Munster (Pool 4) and Connacht (Pool 5) did not qualify for the knock-out stages of the competition.

Leinster A beat Ulster A in the final of the Celtic Cup.

## Women's XVs

The National Programme and Players of National Interest was prioritised for the 2019/20 season as a result of the Women's Rugby World Cup Qualification Tournament scheduled for December 2020. The Women's XVs programme has worked closely with clubs and provinces to ensure player load, medical status and performance is monitored to ensure the small playing base will be in the best position possible for the WRWC Qualification Tournament.

The programme has benefitted from having access to the IRFU High-Performance Centre, enabling the players to have more access to a performance environment and a more intensive training schedule. This has been well received by the players and management group and provided greater access to the playing group with an increased number of training camps.

The addition of Steve McGinnis (IRFU IQ Talent Coach) and Kieran Hallett (Leinster EPDO) as Forwards and Defence Coach, respectively, to the coaching team has provided the Head Coach, Adam Griggs, with full time IRFU staff to support the IRFU Women's XVs National Programme.

In preparation for the Six Nations the squad played, and lost, one Test Match against Wales (13-15) in November and worked closely with Scotland and France with practice matches across training weeks that provided a larger squad of players exposure to a higher level of training and preparation. These opposed training programmes proved to be of enormous value and will be something we will continue to pursue in the future.

Another warm-up match with Wales in January completed the squad's preparation for the 2020 Six Nations Championship.



The Women's XV's commenced the Six Nations with victories over Scotland (18-14) and Wales (31-12) with strong performances that were indicative of their preparation. The team lost to England (27-0) before the Championship was postponed due to COVID-19.

A detailed plan that included Test matches, a tour and training camps ahead of the WRWC Qualification Tournament has been reshaped as a result of COVID-19.

The IRFU National Programme assembled an U18s team for the first time in 2020 and embarked on a rugby education weekend and game against Scotland U18s in Glasgow. The programme and weekend were a huge success and the talent of the U18s continues to demonstrate the need for high quality competitions and greater accessibility to games.

## Ireland Age-grade Programmes

### Under 20 - Six Nations 2020

Noel McNamara's Irish U20's completed three of their Six Nations games to date. Home victories over Scotland (35-27) and Wales (36-20) was followed with a (39-21) win away to the England 20s. As with the men's and women's Six Nations, the tournament was postponed with remaining fixtures as yet to be rescheduled against Italy 20s (h) and France 20s (a). At the time of writing it had been decided that the remaining fixtures would not be played due to COVID-19 related challenges. No winner of the tournament was declared.

### JWC 2020 - Italy

The Junior Championships to be held in Northern Italy were cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

### Under 19

The annual two game series against the France U19s, due to be played on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of April was cancelled.

### Under 18's - Under 18 Clubs v Italian U18 Academy Selection

This season's match was against an Italian U18 Academy Selection, with Ireland performing well and losing to a last-minute score (22-19).

### U18 Six Nations Festival – Paris 2020

This festival was cancelled due to COVID-19 and may be held again in Paris in 2021.

### Ireland U18 Clubs and Schools

COVID-19 forced the cancellation of the U18 Clubs and Schools fixtures against England U18 Counties scheduled for the 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April.

### National Talent Squad

The NTS programme continues to grow and has been resourced over the past season with 50 players, aged 17-20, from across the four provinces.

### Women's 7s

The National Women's 7s programme continues to demonstrate its significance and importance in a fully integrated National Women's Programme with several players representing Ireland in both 7s and XVs.

The National 7s squad were disappointed not to qualify for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games through the Rugby Europe qualification process with a loss to eventual winners, England in the quarter final.

The Programme relocated to the IRFU High-Performance Centre which provided a real positive for staff and players to be able to work in a world class facility.

The 2019/20 World Series proposed a new challenge for the squad with an extended series, including eight events including back to back tournaments. At this stage the series has been disrupted and postponed as a result of COVID-19. The series to this point has provided the opportunity for several younger squad members and new players to be exposed to this level of competition.

The U18s 7s programme, through the Provinces and National Programme, has continued to grow and provide opportunity for some of our most talented young athletes. The programme provided four quality tournaments for the National team in 2019/20 and as a result of the extended season players have progressed to the senior team or are recognised as potential players for the following season.

## Men's 7s

The Men's 7s programme achieved its performance outcomes during the 2019/20 season. Firstly, by winning the Sevens World Series qualification tournament in Hong Kong to become a core team on the World Series for the first time and secondly by qualifying for the final repechage tournament for Tokyo 2020.

The programme now provides another pathway for the best young rugby talent in Ireland and an opportunity to participate and represent Ireland at the highest level.

The team has shown some quality performances in the series and demonstrated they are very worthy of core team status with competitive performances in all series legs before COVID-19.

The National 7s Programme continues to work closely with the four Provincial Academy Programmes and we would like to thank them for their continued support. It is important to recognise the potential of the Ireland Youth U18s National 7s team that compete in Rugby Europe U18s 7s Championships. The U18s team won the Rugby Europe Championships in 2019, the third time in four years that Ireland have won this event.

## IQ Rugby

The IQ Rugby programme continues to fulfil its objectives of adding value in the provision of opportunities and support for Irish qualified, male and female athletes who have the potential, drive and ability to play in or for Ireland.

Built on a solid foundation laid down by the IRFU Exiles volunteers over many years of service, the IQ Rugby performance staff are seeing the fruits of this labour with Irish qualified athletes now representing Ireland at every level within both the male and female national 7s and XV's squads.

## Professional Referees

This season saw five professional referees represent the IRFU across all competitions with Andy Brace being appointed to referee his first Six Nations match, and Frank Murphy being appointed to his first Champions Cup games. The new coaching structure has delivered a positive impact on the team resulting in consistent performances and positive selections.

We continue to work with referees who have been identified as having potential to break into the professional game and established an exchange programme with FFR to benefit both Unions.

Despite no rugby being played, in addition to their physical training, the team continued to work on the technical side of the game. Each week was broken into technical sessions with review towards the end of each week to ensure consistency around interpretations. We were very fortunate and grateful to have contributors such as:

- Andy Farrell
- Joe Schmidt
- John Fogarty
- Paul O’Connell
- Felix Jones
- Neuro Agility Specialist from South Africa

Combined with the World Rugby “refocus” on the breakdown, the above sessions were very useful in helping the team prepare for the return to the pitch.

In addition to the above, the team have been working with our Provincial Teams as they prepare to return to professional competitions.

While still a challenge to recruit and retain referees, numbers have increased to a record of over 550 across the four provinces. A successful promotional campaign was conducted this year to aid recruitment.

Since March, the RDM team have worked on a number of long-term projects that will make significant improvements to how we operate.

## Athletic Performance

The Irish Rugby Athletic Performance Department has made significant progress in three key areas:

### Creating a Community of Competitors

The athletic performance and development coaches have made significant strides in integrating and sharing best practice across all levels (pathway, academy, senior, and national) and teams (Connacht, Leinster, Munster, Ulster). This spirit of collaboration comes down to the quality of the people within our system and the structure provided by our National Standards.

### Interdisciplinary Work Practice

In addition to growing the connection across athletic performance coaches, it is equally important that this same integration is nurtured across discipline areas. As such, national initiatives, like the creation of a National Standard for Physical Robustness, have allowed key stakeholders across disciplines and teams to come together and identify best practices for the given topic.

We continue to identify ways to improve the integration of our off-field teams.

### Sports Data Science

There is no denying the rise and importance of data within sport generally and rugby specifically. However, with data comes responsibility, especially if you want to scale its collection across four professional teams and a national body. For this reason, we have gone to great lengths to normalize the hardware we use, the way we use it, and the interpretation of the information it provides. From GPS to strength, wellness to recovery, we are collecting data in a consistent manner that allows us to build normalized data sets – insights – for every player in the country. With the groundwork done, we are now in a position to mine the data for practical insights that can support player welfare and performance.

### Analytics and Innovation

The performance analysis area and the installation of 11 remote cameras is now complete at the High-Performance Centre at The National Sports Campus in Abbottstown.

This season saw the launch of the IRFU Data Centre with the goal of collecting comparable information on our players and teams from pathway through to senior international rugby.

Video footage from the Energia All Ireland Leagues (Division 1A and 1B and Women's Division 1) is now centrally shared and managed by the IRFU. Data collection projects are underway to understand more about the demands of the club game when viewed against professional competitions.

Finally, a number of exciting projects, such as the launch of an online 'IRFU Performance Analysis Certification' are underway. Background academic research in the areas of data analytics and predictive modelling is ongoing with our IRFU analysts.

## Coach Development

There has been considerable evolution across all coach development contexts with further advancement in the resourcing and delivery of a flexible, blended education and training development framework. This framework is designed to better meet the needs of coaches at all levels of the game.

There is an increased focus on coaching youth and children in the domestic game.

The support and assistance provided to all professional, high performance coaches continues to expand, as does the overall upskilling and alignment of coaching practice across all player development programmes.

## Provincial Teams

### Rugby Development

Nobody could have predicted or have prepared our rugby community for how our season has ended. The impact of COVID-19 has brought real change and hardship on us all, and by working together we will come through it. While sport takes a back seat for now, sport will also play a vital role in the country's recovery as we bring our communities back together in an active, fun, and social environment.

This year, we have seen some real growth within our game. With the launch of the IRFU Women in Rugby action plan, supported with new staff on the ground, we have increased participation numbers across the country in both the mini and youth sectors. In the male game, we have maintained adult participation numbers together with growth in mini and youth. The IRFU ran the "Sustaining Irish Rugby Forum" to bring current and future club leaders together with experts in sports administration and thought leaders to share best practice, and to identify and discuss strategies that will ensure the sustainability of club rugby in the coming years.

As demographics in Ireland continue to change, rugby must meet these challenges and opportunities of new and evolving communities throughout Ireland. This day was not about the operational needs of the clubs but rather informing clubs of trends in wider-society and learning how different clubs are dealing with the challenges and opportunities which we all face, or are likely to face, in the coming years.

### Age Grade and Third Level

This season, over 2,000 participants from 120 clubs participated in the Provincial Aviva Mini Rugby Festivals at Bangor RFC, Galway-Corinthians RFC, De La Salle Palmerstown FC and UL Bohemian RFC. Grassroots sponsor, Aviva, is incredibly supportive of the mini rugby programme and is also encouraging other areas to assist with development of skills.

The IRFU continues to support schools rugby through the Schools of Ireland Scheme. This season 82 schools received financial support to operate rugby programmes with over 19,700 participants across 770 teams, supported by over 1,270 coaches. This season these schools participated in 11,952 matches. Moreover, all schools are compliant with Injury Reporting and Concussion Protocol Education.

Over the past few seasons the IRFU has increased the investment into Third Level Rugby and entered into partnerships with institutions for the provision of development officers, as well as Funding Agreements with Student Sport Ireland (SSI) and the Irish Universities Rugby Union (IURU). The IRFU works closely with Student Sport Ireland (SSI) to manage men's and women's rugby across third level institutions.

In total over 40 men's and 16 women's teams participated in the Leagues with 43 teams participating in Cup competitions which were halted before the finals' day which was due to be played on March 18<sup>th</sup>. League Winners included: IT Carlow (Men's Division 1), Galway-Mayo IT (Men's Division 2), UCC (Men's Division 3), University of Limerick (Women's Division 1) and UL B (Women's Division 2). The O'Boyle Cup (Freshers) was hosted by CIT on October 16<sup>th</sup> and was a one-day festival format for the first time. IT Carlow won the event from Athlone IT and UCC.

UCD won the U20 Conroy Cup in October in Terenure College RFC and NUIG RFC won the Maughan-Scally (Junior) Cup which they hosted on March 7<sup>th</sup>. The Kay-Bowen Cup (Women's) which was due to be rescheduled after it succumbed to the weather in February.

The season started off with Dudley Cup holders Queen's University losing the Cup to Maynooth University. The Cup was then forfeited to UCC, before UCD (the current holders) took the trophy home from the Mardyke on November 30<sup>th</sup>.

## Women's Rugby

Women's and Girls' rugby continues to grow. The women in rugby action plan continues to be the focus for both the IRFU and Branches in driving the Women's/Girls' game. The Give It A Try programme increased from 67 to 91 clubs initially however with the onset of COVID-19 the programme was reduced. 51 clubs eventually went on to run the programme. Growth continues in girl's Youth rugby with more clubs providing rugby for girls at 14s, 16s and 18s. There has also been an increase in the number of girls only mini teams in the provinces. Rugby again proves popular amongst schoolgirls and is a successful way of introducing rugby to secondary schools. This season the X7s finals day was unfortunately cancelled due to COVID-19.

The Women's Interprovincial series was expanded to a five-game series to include a final and semi-final. Leinster won back to back titles for the first-time overturning Connacht on a score line of (25-12) at Energia Park. The U18s XV Interprovincial Series was also expanded this year to a five-game series which mirrored the Senior XV Interprovincial. Munster overcame Ulster in the final.

The girls U18s Sevens Interprovincial development series was cancelled due to COVID-19.

## Coach Development

The 2019/20 season saw the introduction of the IRFU's newly aligned course offerings with an additional focus on developing the person. This season saw 55 formal coaching courses offered with over 1,500 coaches gaining or working towards a new coaching qualification. Coaches have been offered an enhanced experience this season with the introduction of the IRFU's E-learning platform – GainLine.

The formal education of coaches has been further supplemented by provincial and national development programmes for coaches aimed at establishing an ongoing learning experience for all rugby coaches in Ireland. Quality offerings continue to be developed assisting growth in 7s rugby and the non-traditional school markets.

The female game has been in focus with ongoing support for the Women in Rugby action plan with coach development initiatives being delivered provincially and nationally. The Women's AIL clubs had access to nationally delivered seminars and workshops throughout the season including athletic development, nutrition and 7s were 28 coaches availed of this learning opportunity.



Promotion and communication of the coach development programme has increased this season across the game, with several articles transmitted through the media channels to promote the game from mini to performance; highlighting the work of coaches both male and female.

### Participation Rugby

The IRFU Participation department continues to service the International and Domestic game, most notably with its participation programmes and event management at all levels.

The **IRFU's Tag Rugby programme**, proudly sponsored by Volkswagen is being played by players in 14 venues despite the Pandemic and those clubs who weren't able to restart it this year have confirmed they will return next season.

The **IRFU Touch Rugby programme** which is proudly sponsored by Lucozade continues to have a very positive partnership with the **Irish Touch Association** who lend their expertise to the Touch Rugby Programmes.

The Aldi Play Rugby programme continues to go from strength to strength and despite the pandemic still had over 119,000 players take part this season. This programme is driven by the department through the provincial staff on the ground and through their excellent work the programme is more popular than ever.

Finally, the Participation Dept. undertook the role of Match Management in a number of International and Domestic games.

### Technology

Over the last season the IRFU sought to create a formal technology roadmap for the Rugby Department. Process streamlining workshops were conducted with IRFU and provincial staff and continued to engage with the Club Rugby Technology Group on how to utilise technology and reduce the administrative burden of paper-based processes on clubs and staff alike. As a direct result the IRFU launched several collaborative improvements for IRFU, provincial and club processes. A Safeguarding Incident Reporting and Case Management tool was also launched at the start of the season.

However, the most substantial outcome of the workshops was the clear desire from all involved to modernise and reduce the current suite of software applications within the Rugby Department.

The new Competition and Game Management System 'RugbyConnect' will connect the IRFU, provinces, clubs and their members in one system. Moving processes online and establishing many self-service modules should see a reduction in the administration burden on clubs.

The most positive aspect of the season was the expansion of the Club Rugby Technology Group to over 60 clubs nationwide. Their input and involvement proved critical in determining where the priorities should be, and their continued engagement will be pivotal in the success of the 'RugbyConnect' implementation.

### Energia All Ireland League

In light of COVID-19 the decision to conclude the domestic rugby season was made on March 19<sup>th</sup> by the IRFU Rugby Committee.

The decision was then taken to leave the league as it was with no promotion/relegation. This was a difficult decision. Many clubs had played some superb rugby to be at or near the top of their respective leagues but overall this was felt to be the most equitable decision for all clubs involved.

Up to this point Cork Constitution were unbeaten in Division 1A winning 14 out of 14 matches and were certainly the team to beat as the league headed into the business end of the season. Highfield, only promoted in 2018/19 had recorded 12 wins from 14 and sat nine points clear at the top of Division 1B.

Division 2A leaders MU Barnhall who came up from Division 2B last season without losing a game, stretched their unbeaten run to 28 games before eventual defeat away to Rainey Old Boys in January. Queen's University and Cashel were just five points behind MU Barnhall when the season concluded. It would have been a pulsating end to the campaign.

In Division 2B, Malahide only dropped three matches on their way to top spot at the conclusion of the season. Wanderers were hot on their heels in second place. Skerries and Enniscorthy finished up with three points between them after 14 matches in Division 2C and played some great rugby along

the way. The bottom of this division was set for a close finish with six teams separated by only four points.

The Energia Women's All-Ireland League reverted to eight teams this season and saw UL Bohemian go unbeaten in 12 games with 59 points from a maximum of 60. Defending champions Railway Union sat in second place.

The Energia Women's All-Ireland Cup finals day was set for March 21<sup>st</sup> with Cup, Plate and Shield competitions down for decision in Buccaneers RFC with Westport, the only non-AIL team in the finals, due to play Galwegians in a Connacht derby for the AIL Shield.

### All Ireland League Forum

At the end of last season, the IRFU committed to holding regular meetings with the AIL clubs to further build on ways to continually improve the competition, to find the best structure and to adapt to current trends and issues. The AIL Forum was created and meetings were held on November 20<sup>th</sup> and February 12<sup>th</sup> with a mix of club and Committee representatives, from all four provinces across all Energia All-Ireland League divisions and IRFU staff. The meetings were open and constructive and covered areas such as transfers, Club Support Scheme, participation criteria, regulations and season planning.

### Spirit

The Spirit of Rugby continued throughout the season to promote the values of Irish Rugby with the provision of training and workshops for players, coaches and volunteers.

### Safeguarding

The maintenance of a robust safeguarding programme continued throughout the season with the delivery of 43 safeguarding courses along with continued support for Club Welfare Officers through the four Spirit of Rugby Officers, the implementation of vetting systems and the introduction of a new case management system. An important part of the implementation of a safe and fun environment for Age-Grade players is hearing the voice of the child. The IRFU Youth Council completed a consultation project, gathering research from players in twenty clubs on their involvement in the youth game. The findings will be published in September 2020.

## Disability

The Tag programme for players with an intellectual disability expanded to 38 clubs, with many players taking part in a series of blitzes hosted by participating clubs. The Mixed-ability rugby programme expanded from three teams in the pilot phase to six teams across three provinces. It was to climax in the hosting by Sunday's Well RFC of the International Mixed Ability Tournament in June 2020, that unfortunately had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis. Disability Inclusion training was delivered for staff and volunteer coaches, including staff and volunteers working on inclusive summer camps.

A framework for the development of disability rugby has been agreed by the Spirit Committee and the appointment of a Disability Inclusion Officer was approved that will see further expansion of the disability programme in the coming seasons.

## Leadership

Year two of the Spirit of Rugby Leadership programme started in September 2019 with 19 volunteers and 18 staff completing the programme, of which 17 were female.

A female specific version of the Leadership Development Programme was unveiled at the LiveWIRE: Women in Rugby Conference on International Women's Day, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Thirty women were due to take part in a three-day residential course in May 2020, that was postponed due to COVID-19, the plan is to move the course online in 2021.

## Commercial and Marketing

The Commercial and Marketing function of the IRFU continues to operate soundly in what has been a challenging season. We would like to acknowledge the work and effort of Chairman of the Commercial & Marketing Committee, Damian Devaney, who relinquishes the post after three years at the helm to concentrate on personal business interests. On behalf of the Union we thank him warmly and wish him well for the future.

Looking back at this past season, we extend heartfelt thanks to all our commercial partners and sponsors for their support. Anchored by our recently extended Team sponsors Vodafone, we thank CEO Anne O'Leary and her team for their continued support and promotion of our game. Canterbury

have also continued to provide financial support and exceptional kit for our teams, and we were delighted to announce a new multi-year partnership arrangement over the summer.

We thank Diageo, one of our longest standing partners and title sponsors of the Guinness Six Nations and Guinness Autumn Series.

The Aviva Stadium remains the iconic home and fortress for Irish rugby and this past season has hosted some very memorable matches. I thank Aviva for their continued support.

On the 7s front, our first season to have both men's and women's representation on the World Rugby 7s circuit, Elverys Intersport and Blackrock Expert Services have made an important contribution and I thank them warmly. This past season, we have also renewed arrangements with our official fresh food provider Aldi, and U20 team sponsor PWC.

Thanks also to our family of partners including Aer Lingus, Energia, Aon, Lucozade Sport, Glenisk, Volkswagen, Dove Men + Care, Specsavers, Eden Park, DHL Express, Gilbert and all our suppliers.

### Marketing and Game Promotion

Attendances at matches in Aviva Stadium remains an imperative financial performance indicator and a key promotional opportunity for Irish Rugby. Our Patrons Club and Corporate box holders remain an integral and vital part of the Irish rugby family and I thank you warmly.

Without your continued support, we cannot deliver rugby in Ireland to this level.

We are also delighted to report strong crowds for all international home matches this season. Ireland U20s played to full houses in Irish Independent Park, Cork, and Ireland Women enjoyed tremendous levels of support in Energia Park, Dublin.

On the domestic front, the Aviva minis festivals around the country caters for kids in clubs and gives them the opportunity to play in Aviva Stadium later in the year. The 'Aldi Play Rugby' initiative goes from strength to strength with over 105,000 children having enjoyed the programme at primary schools' level, participating in regional festival days around the country. Aldi's sticker campaign has been a hugely successful in-store activation giving schools the chance to win sports equipment and cash prizes towards developing sporting facilities in their schools. The Energia sponsored 'Your Club

Your Country' IRFU Grand Draw has seen over €4m raised for the club game over the past six years. Despite the enforced shortening of the Energia AIL, we thank and congratulate Energia for their support as we look forward to the forthcoming season, the 30-year anniversary of the AIL.

### Irish Rugby Supporters Club

The Irish Rugby Supporters Club continues to deliver a value for money proposition for supporters and provide an important revenue stream for the Union.

This past season membership numbers held steady and we were delighted to once again offer them an opportunity to purchase tickets for the Guinness Six Nations.

## Communications

The 2019/20 season was the busiest yet for the communications team. The 2019 Rugby World Cup, the advancement of the men's 7s onto the HSBC World Rugby World Series and the on-going preparations of our Women's XV's to qualify for the 2021 Rugby World Cup saw our people travel the globe.

The communications team that travelled with the team to the 2019 Rugby World Cup helped to deliver behind the scenes access that drove some of our best digital performances. During tough games and our eventual defeat to New Zealand fans continued to stand with our team with heartfelt messages of support across social media.

The continued drive for quality, engaging content, across our professional, domestic and participation games allows us to tell the story of rugby to fans worldwide. A measure of the work is evident as Irish Rugby, and the four provincial brands consistently record the highest levels of fan engagement in the monthly Sport for Business Social Media Report.

Following a strategy of quality over quantity the Irish Rugby Communications department makes our highs higher and provides a strong and trusted platform to amplify our voice.

COVID-19 presented a huge communications challenge and opportunity for the organisation. The IRFU and our players played a vital role in assisting governments and health service executives to amplify health messaging and guidance direct to important audiences, such as young supporters.

When we look back at this period, we can say that we stood shoulder-to-shoulder with our governments to protect public health.

The creativity of our team came to the fore when our games stopped, with a mixture of engaging content including home workouts, cooking and nutrition advice, player challenges and the delivery of the Energia All Ireland League awards in a very successful online broadcast. The challenge to communicate effectively and in a timely manner with our clubs was a priority for our team. Using digital resources such as webinars allowed us to connect with, listen to and work with our clubs to ensure a safe return to rugby.

The addition of an in-house journalist to our team provided feature interviews with the courageous rugby people who are assisting the national efforts on the frontline, in our hospitals, and with people from across the IRFU and the provinces who were instrumental in getting our provincial professional teams back to training and playing.

The values of our game continue to provide direction for our work, and it is very pleasing to once again be recognised as one of the most reputable organisations in Ireland, indeed, the most respected sport in Ireland, in the RepTrak 2020 survey from The Reputation Agency.

## Medical

### Research

The IRFU Medical and Science Research Committee has now been active for over a year. Seven studies have been approved to date with four more currently under review. The committee set out its Research Strategy which it will continue to develop throughout 2020.

The IRFU and provinces are cooperating with EPCR and PRO14 in their injury surveillance research which aims to provide competition specific injury information.

The IRFU Performance Nutrition Department continues to link work with the School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sports Science at UCD to facilitate dissertation projects for students undertaking the MSc Clinical Nutrition & Dietetics UCD Masters students.

### Injury Surveillance

The IRFU Medical Dept, along with Rugby and Athletic Performance, have migrated to a new athlete monitoring system called The Sports Office for use within the High-Performance Unit. This new system allows for improved monitoring of players' injuries and illnesses and a greater scope for analysis of player data and its relationship to player workload.

### Irish Rugby Injury Surveillance (IRIS) Study

The second annual report was published by the IRIS group for injuries to club players in September 2019. This report contained injury surveillance data for the 2018/19 season for 35 men's clubs and 7 women's clubs in the AIL, making up a total of 1,154 players. This year they also published a report on injury surveillance in Schools Rugby for the 2018/19 season (11 teams, 305 players). The group had publications in academic journals and presented at conferences worldwide.

### Injury Reporting

The IRFU medical department in conjunction with the provinces, continues to gather injury information from the domestic game via our online injury reporting system. The numbers using this reporting system is rising each year indicating increased compliance. This information helps to guide the IRFU's injury prevention programmes.

### SAFE

The SAFE Rugby programme is the IRFU's Standard Approach to Field Emergencies, our in-house pitch side immediate care training programme providing first aid and medical care education to medical and non-medical personnel involved in Irish Rugby, at all levels, across the four provinces.

Following the establishment of the three SAFE Rugby hubs in Leinster, Ulster and Munster/Connacht during 2018-19 to provide training, the 2019/20 season is on track to be the busiest so far for our SAFE Rugby team.

Towards the end of the 2019/20 season, SAFE Rugby will pass a significant milestone with the 5,000<sup>th</sup> participant to our course.



### High-Performance Centre (HPC)

The Centre has specially designed and equipped medical and rehabilitation areas. Medical and Nutrition staff working with Nationals 7s, U20s, Women's and Men's teams are now based out of HPC.

### Staff Professional Development

The IRFU is committed to developing the expertise of its service providers to deliver efficient and effective performance impacting support through embedding a learning culture.

The IRFU medical department developed a three year 'Learning and Development Programme' in 2018 for staff focusing on developing excellence in technical and non-technical areas. A key part of the strategy has been to enhance the management of muscle injuries. This began with a two-day muscle injury symposium that welcomed experts from around the world (UK, Belgium, Qatar, Australia, Spain) who shared key insights with medical and athletic performance staff. Additional staff development workshops have included sleep management as well as a national symposium focused on player robustness and effective strategies to prevent injury and enhance performance.

A bespoke leadership programme has been completed for the lead provincial and national team physiotherapists to develop non-technical expertise and promote greater development across each of the national and provincial teams.

Frameworks for nutrition protocols have been developed to support injury rehabilitation in collaboration with Medical and Athletic Performance colleagues. This has been rolled out across high performance programmes and its implementation will be audited later this year.

### COVID-19

In March, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cessation of all rugby activities and the country entered a prolonged period of lockdown. The IRFU medical department has provided constant updates and advice to staff, provinces and competition bodies during COVID-19. This included a joint document with Athletic performance advising on how the players could best maintain conditioning and ongoing injury management and rehab during the period of government lockdown. Working with other departments, we developed a return to train and play document for both the Professional and Developmental games. This was submitted to Government and approved. The Medical Department has collaborated closely with the other Six Nations, EPCR and PRO14 in developing protocols and

monitoring the ongoing pandemic. Dr Rod McLoughlin, IRFU Medical Director is a member of The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Expert Group on Return to Sport and the IRFU has been instrumental in the development of COVID-19 cross sport protocols (e.g. International Travel for High Performance Sporting Activities During The COVID-19 Pandemic).

### Anti-doping

There were 42 anti-doping workshops held in 2019 throughout the four provinces for both senior and under-age players, some including parents and athlete support personnel as well as current players.

The IRFU once again commissioned anti-doping tests through the Sport Ireland, supplementing Sport Ireland's National Anti-Doping Programme. One anti-doping violation was recorded and investigated by EPCR. The player received a one-month ban.

Details of the tests performed are outlined below:

#### Note: Total number of tests (not players tested)

Team	In Competition	Out of Competition
Senior	14	41
Provincial (including Academy)	19	71
U20s	9	4
Age-grade	8	12
Women's XV	4	0
Women's 7s	6	13
Men's 7s	11	20
AIL	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>159</b>

#### Note:

- 1: Figures above are for number of tests carried out between 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019 – 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020 (15-month testing period instead of 12), thus not comparable with previous seasons.
- 2: Reduced number of tests due to cancelled or rescheduled matches (for In Competition Tests) and Out-Of-Competition testing was curtailed due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- 3: All Ireland League – tests usually occur In-Competition at semi-final and final stages, leagues cut short due to COVID-19, semi-final and finals weekend(s) cancelled.
- 4: There was one Anti-Doping Rule Violation.

## Charitable Trust

The number of seriously injured players being supported by the Trust in Ireland is 36. As anticipated, costs are increasing particularly for home renovation and for new technology beneficial to our players however continuing the close contact with each player and his family is most important.

The research in which the Trust are partnering in is ongoing with World Rugby and Leinster Schools Rugby. Both projects are being conducted by researchers from RCSI.

Fundraising can be difficult but the Trust benefits greatly from sponsorship with large companies like Vodafone, AON, Diageo, KPMG and Northern Trust, Bank of Ireland, Daily Mail Group and Newstalk.

COVID-19 has since thrown a further challenge which we are addressing with regular meetings and some new ideas. We appreciate your support.

## Committee

The IRFU Committee and sub-committees have worked diligently over the past months in difficult circumstances and we have managed to maintain proper governance and committee oversight through video conferencing solutions put in place by our IT Department. The same situation pertains in the Branches where business continues to be conducted despite the restrictions imposed by COVID-19.

There will be two notable departures from the IRFU Committee, firstly Ian McIlrath Immediate Past President who has served on the IRFU Committee since 2008. He has been a standard bearer for the club game over the years and was Chairman of the Rugby Committee from season 2012/13 to 2016/17. A former international, his contribution both to the game in Ballymena RFC, Ulster and Ireland has been immense and best wishes to Ian and his wife, Pamela, on his retirement from the IRFU Committee.

Tom Grace, who has been Hon. Treasurer since 2007, stands down this year after 13 years in one of the most demanding posts in the IRFU. The professional experience that Tom brought to bear on the finances of the IRFU and Irish rugby have been essential in dealing with the challenges that faced the game during his tenure. The financial crisis and recession that engulfed Ireland in the early part of his tenure were unprecedented and Tom's steady hand on the tiller steered the IRFU through very choppy

waters. It is ironic that his tenure is now book-ended by another financial crisis arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Once again Tom's experience and steady hand has been important in helping guide the IRFU through the most difficult of financial circumstances helped by the robustness of the IRFU finances thanks to the policies and financial strategies he has been instrumental in putting in place. Tom excelled as an international player of repute and he has excelled as Hon. Treasurer serving Irish rugby with distinction. His immense contribution is greatly appreciated and best wishes to him and his wife, Anne, on his retirement from the IRFU.

## Obituaries

Dr. Tony Browne	IRFU Past President (1991-92)
John Lyons	IRFU Past President (2008-09) IRFU Hon. Treasurer (1996-2007)
Cecil Pedlow	Ireland and Lions Player (1953-63, 30 Caps)
Tom Nesdale	Ireland Player (1961, 1 Cap)
Patrick Agnew	Ireland Player (1974-76, 2 Caps)
Garrett Fitzgerald	UCC RFC and Cork Constitution Player CEO Munster Rugby (1999-2019)
Judge Richard Chambers QC	Former Ireland Player (1951-1952, 6 Caps)
Jim Stevenson	Ireland Player (1958, 9 Caps) IRFU Committee Member (1994-99)
Michael Cuddy	IRFU Past President (1993-94) Past President of Leinster Rugby (1984-85) Past President of Bective Rangers (1981-82)

## Hon. Treasurer's Report

### Tom Grace

Once again it is my privilege to present to you the Union's financial statements. The last six to eight months have been extraordinary and outside the experience of most, if not all of us, and not surprisingly this has had a significant impact on our accounts. Normally at this point I would be saying that Rugby World Cup distorts our result when compared to the previous year but this impact is dwarfed by the effect of COVID-19 and the change to our accounting period and we will see the impact that these have had as we go through the accounts. The change to our accounting period to 31<sup>st</sup> July arose for two reasons, namely, the desire to align our financial year to the actual season which now stretches to July to accommodate the summer tour and also to get closer alignment with Branch year ends.

As in previous years it is my intention to focus on the Union accounts rather than the consolidated accounts. As can be seen in the income statement the Union suffered a deficit for the fifteen months of €35.7m. Income falls from €87.5m to €79.2m whilst expenditure increases from €84.2m to just under €115m and we will now go into the causes underlying these changes in more detail. One thing to highlight in respect of expenditure is the effect of the three additional months of payroll costs which impacts many of our cost centres as we will see.

International Rugby income (which you will see in schedule 1 to the accounts) includes gate receipts, broadcasting income and any net surplus arising from participation in Rugby World Cup. Gate receipts fell by c. €5.8m due to the replacement of the normal Guinness series of three test matches with two warm-up matches for Rugby World Cup and of course the postponement of the Ireland v Italy match. This postponement also impacts against our broadcasting income as does the relative attractiveness of the warm-up matches compared with the normal Guinness Series matches. The net surplus arising from Rugby World cup participation exceeded expectations by c. €0.8m.

Commercial income improves due to a new additional sponsorship, contractual increases and the extension of the accounting period to fifteen months. We have been very fortunate that almost all of our commercial partners have maintained their financial relationship with us throughout this crisis and we are profoundly grateful to them for their support.

Amortised income falls by just under €4m due to the postponement and the quality of the matches held over the 15 months compared with last year. Provincial income increases by €2.7m but this figure includes €5.6m in respect of the CVC deal with PRO14. When this receipt is stripped-out we can see that income for this area fell by almost €3m despite the additional three months. This is due primarily to the impact of COVID-19 which resulted in neither competition being completed by our period end date.

Under other income in schedule 2 you will note that revenue grants increase by c. €1.9m. This is due in large part to amounts received from the Irish and UK Governments for the temporary wage subsidy and furlough schemes, respectively. These amounts together with the tax warehousing scheme have been hugely important to the Union and we are sincerely grateful for this valuable and timely support.

Turning to expenditure one of the first things to note here is the movement in bad debt provision of just over €16m. This arises due to the impact of COVID-19 on the four Provinces where restrictions around match attendances has left them unable to pay their share of the player salary costs paid by the Union. It would be very important to note that this represents a movement on a provision and should not be interpreted as a forgiveness of any part or all of this debt. The Union is working on an appropriate financial package to assist the four Branches in getting through these difficult times.

No tour took place during the period due to Rugby World Cup and the preparation costs for the tournament are charged against Rugby World Cup income resulting in the €1.1m decrease in national tours, camps and squad costs in schedule 3. Match costs decrease due to fewer Guinness Series matches and the postponement of the Ireland v Italy match. Player and management costs increase by €4.8m due to additional three months of payroll less savings in relation to bonuses. A special grant of €1m was also paid out to the Branches in 2018/19.

Men's sevens costs increase to €1.2m due to players being put onto contract, increased activity and three additional months of payroll but it should be noted that new grant income was received in respect of this programme during the period. Age-grade team costs fall sharply due to COVID-19 curtailing their programmes. The increase in women's representative teams, academy and high-performance costs is due in large part to three additional months of payroll costs. In addition, high performance costs increase due to over €1m in new costs in relation to running the high-performance centre in Abbottstown as well as staff increases agreed in the 2019/20 budget.

Domestic and community game costs are up by c. €3m for a number of reasons including the appointment of four women's development managers, the club COVID-19 emergency fund and the effect of three additional months of payroll and other activity together with agreed budgeted increases.

Grounds costs increase significantly due to three additional months of license fees paid to Aviva Stadium together with floodlighting costs carried out in Kingspan Park. Wages and salaries increase due to the extended accounting period whilst rent costs fall due to the purchase of our offices at 10/12 Lansdowne Road during the period. Office maintenance costs increase due to additional IT costs incurred to cope with remote working. Professional fees increase due to legal and taxation advice in relation to property purchase, PRO14 and COVID-19.

The decrease in net assets of over €36m is almost entirely due to our loss for the year. In note 5 to the accounts you will see additions to fixed assets amount to just over €23m made up of the purchase of the office building and works out at Abbottstown both of which result in an increase in depreciation. The decrease of c. €22m in debtors and prepayments is due to the bad debt provision movement of €16m, no broadcasting amounts due at period end together with reductions in corporate box and ten year ticket debtors.

Creditors, accruals and deferred income increase by c. €11m due to c. €8m in respect of payroll taxes the payment of which has been deferred under the Revenue's warehousing scheme, ticket amounts payable in respect of the Ireland v Italy match, deferred broadcasting income, World Rugby loan and deferred payroll sums less the reduction from normal year end accruals due to COVID-19.

Elsewhere on the Union's statement of financial position you will see the longer-term element of the loan received from World Rugby together with the pension liability which has increased by just under €1m due to changes in the assumptions underlying the scheme.

At the beginning of this period our main concerns were Brexit and the structure of international and other cross-border competitions. Whilst these concerns have not gone away, they are dwarfed by the looming shadow that is COVID-19. For the Union the effects to date have been felt in terms of postponed matches and a reduction in income from the two provincial/club competitions. The greatest impact however is that with no crowds permitted in the foreseeable future Branches have

not been able to sell their season tickets and as a result will not be able to pay their share of player salaries to the Union. As we have seen this resulted in a €16m movement in bad debt provision for the Union and this amount will continue to grow month by month unless remedial action is taken.

When this crisis first hit the Union took immediate action by agreeing salary deferrals with staff and players. As time passed with no sign of crowds being permitted to return it was agreed that the deferral scheme would be replaced by cuts and reductions in working time ranging from 10% to 20% which is the situation we find ourselves in now. We are very fortunate to have cash in the bank and an asset strong balance sheet at the moment. However, these resources won't last forever and any amounts that we are forced to spend now will affect what we will have to spend in the future when some semblance of normality returns. At present we are able to fund ourselves and the Provinces for the next 12 months even without further remedial action, but this needs to be kept under constant review and our next major review date will be in December.

Crowds being permitted to return to sporting events is vital to the Union and indeed to the four Branches. In the absence of this, the funding and assistance that we have received to date from the Governments both here and in the UK have contributed enormously to our being able to keep the show on the road but it would be important that such support continues and indeed be enhanced if possible. I would also like to thank our sponsors, partners and customers for the patience, understanding and support that they have shown us over the last six months.

The Union has always prided itself on being able to adapt to changing financial circumstances and whilst the scale of the challenge facing us is enormous, I am confident that we can meet it but there will be pain across all aspects of the game. It is essential that we emerge from this crisis in a strong, competitive position and the Union will continue to work toward that end.

In conclusion, I would like to thank our Finance Director Conor O'Brien who along with Fiona O'Flaherty, Sharon Coffey and the rest of the Finance team has done an enormous amount of work over this period and I am very grateful to them for their efforts.



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