



# 2025/26 SEASON BRIEFING

**RFU WOMEN'S  
COMPETITIONS AND  
PLAYING OPPORTUNITIES**

# WELCOME TO THE 2025/26 SEASON.

In this briefing, you will find information to help your team, including updates and links to regulations, the competition structure, and administrative tasks such as Electronic Match Card. If you have new or developing players in your team there are links to our Inner Warrior offer to help introduce players to rugby and competition. You will also find a list of contacts who can help if you can't find what you're looking for.

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# 1. COMPETITION STRUCTURE

The diagram and tables below show the current structure and the differences you can expect at each level.



## CHAMPIONSHIP 1 (LEVEL 2)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| How many leagues?  | 2 Leagues (North & South)  |
| How many teams?  | No more than 10  |
| How many matches will we play?                                 | 18 League matches  |
| Which laws apply?  | <a href="#">Full World Rugby Laws</a>                              |
| Are there any law variations?                                  | No   |
| Where can I find the regulations?                              | <a href="#">Here</a> . See Regulation 6                            |
| How many effectively registered players should we have on GMS? | 32 Active players<br>50 Active players for clubs running two teams |

## CHAMPIONSHIP 2 (LEVEL 3)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| How many leagues?  | 4 Leagues (North, Midlands, South East & South West)               |
| How many teams?  | No more than 10  |
| How many matches will we play?                                 | 14-18 League matches   |
| Which laws apply?  | <a href="#">Full World Rugby Laws</a>                              |
| Are there any law variations?                                  | No   |
| Where can I find the regulations?                              | <a href="#">Here</a> . See Regulation 6                            |
| How many effectively registered players should we have on GMS? | 32 Active players<br>50 Active players for clubs running two teams |
| Registration Type  | RFU Registration   |

## NATIONAL CHALLENGE 1 (LEVEL 4)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| How many leagues?  | 8 Leagues                               |
| How many teams?  | No more than 10                         |
| How many matches will we play?                                 | 10-18 League matches                    |
| Which laws apply?  | <a href="#">Full World Rugby Laws</a>   |
| Are there any law variations?                                  | No                                      |
| Where can I find the regulations?                              | <a href="#">Here</a> . See Regulation 6 |
| How many effectively registered players should we have on GMS? | 25 Active players                       |
| Registration Type  | RFU Registration                        |

## NATIONAL CHALLENGE 2 (LEVEL 5)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| How many leagues?  | 10 Leagues                              |
| How many teams?  | No more than 10                         |
| How many matches will we play?                                 | 10-18 League matches                    |
| Which laws apply?  | <a href="#">Full World Rugby Laws</a>   |
| Are there any law variations?                                  | No                                      |
| Where can I find the regulations?                              | <a href="#">Here</a> . See Regulation 6 |
| How many effectively registered players should we have on GMS? | 22 Active players                       |
| Registration Type  | Club Registration                       |

## NATIONAL CHALLENGE 3 (LEVEL 6)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| How many leagues?  | 21 Leagues   |
| How many teams?  | 6-10   |
| How many matches will we play?                                 | 10-18 League matches   |
| Which laws apply?  | <a href="#">World Rugby U19 Variations</a>   |
| Are there any law variations?                                  | All World Rugby <a href="#">Under 19 Law Variations</a> will take precedence over any conflicting <a href="#">Game On</a> principles. E.g. Match length will be at most 70 minutes |
| Where can I find the regulations?                              | <a href="#">Here</a> . See Regulation 6  |
| How many effectively registered players should we have on GMS? | 18 Active players  |
| Registration Type  | Club Registration  |

## INNER WARRIOR SERIES (IWS)

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| What is the IWS?                    | The Inner Warrior Series is the first step to organised regular rugby in the women's game, where teams come together locally to determine the format and structure that they want to play. The Series are designed to be a great introduction to rugby for all levels of experience, from those who have never played to those who want to get back involved. The Inner Warrior Series is organised on a regional basis throughout the country |
| How many matches will we play?      | The number of playing opportunities will vary based on player needs in each area   |
| What formats of rugby will we play? | Expect to be involved in a range of formats, depending on your needs and the teams in your local group. This could be everything from T1 Rugby, to Sevens, Tens, or 15s and more besides   |
| Where can I find the regulations?   | <a href="#">Here</a> . See Regulation 6  |
| Registration Type                   | Club Registration  |

If you have any questions about the Inner Warrior Series, please get in touch via [womenscompetitions@rfu.com](mailto:womenscompetitions@rfu.com) or contact your local Competition Development Officer. You can read more about the IWS [here](#).

# WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CUP

Once again, in the 2025/26 season, teams at Championship 2 and below have the option to enter and compete in the Women's Community Cup competitions. As in previous seasons, there will be two Cup competitions and two associated Plate competitions. All competitions will follow a straight knockout format, with teams losing in Round 1 of the Cup moving into the respective Plate competition (unless the result is a walkover).

Regulations for the Women's Community Cup can be found on the England Rugby website [here](#).

## Intermediate Cup

- Open to teams in Championship 2 and National Challenge 1
- Round 1 losers will move into the Intermediate Plate (except in cases of walkovers)
- Played under full World Rugby Laws

## Junior Cup

- Open to teams in National Challenge 2 and below (including Inner Warrior Series teams)
- Round 1 losers will move into the Junior Plate (except in cases of walkovers)
- All matches will be played under full World Rugby Laws, regardless of a team's normal competition laws (e.g., U19 variations in NC3 and below)



# WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP PLAYOFF (CHAMPIONSHIP 1)

The top two teams in Championship 1 North and Championship 1 South will qualify for the post-season Championship Playoff.

This will also be a straight knockout competition with the top team from Championship 1 North and South hosting the second place team from the other league in the semi-finals.

## 2. SUMMARY OF REGULATION CHANGES FOR 2025/26

This section of the briefing document will outline some of the key changes, however it is strongly recommended that you fully read Regulations 6, 13 and 14 to increase your understanding of the regulations of the women's competitions.

Regulation changes for 25/26 include:

### Kick Off Times

- 6.41: All matches shall kick off between 2-3pm (as determined by the home Club). Matches played in November, December, January, and February, shall kick off at a time specified by the Organising Committee. In the event of adverse Weather conditions, matches may kick-off between 1-4pm to allow for multiple matches to be played on Artificial Pitches, at all times at the discretion of the Organising Committee.

### Player Matching

- 6.57: At Women's Level 5 and below, there must be the same number of players from each team on the field of play, subject to the Laws of the Game. If a team drops below 10 players, the match will be abandoned and the team responsible for causing the abandonment shall be deemed to have lost the match. The winning team will receive 5 League points with a 0 points difference. A team only being able to start a fixture with less than 15 players is not a reason for non-fulfillment of a fixture (provided that team is able to start a fixture with no fewer than 10 players).

### Walkovers

- Referenced in Regulation 6 Appendix 3, the following Walkover Protocol shall apply at Women's Level 2 and below:

(a) a team is required to fulfil a league match with the requisite number of eligible players specific to that league in accordance with Regulation 6 and the Laws of the Game. In all matches a team must commence with a suitably trained and experienced front row and contested scrums.

(b) If a team has insufficient players to fulfil this requirement, they will be liable to a 5 point deduction for an unjustifiable failure to fulfil the fixture in accordance with Appendix 3 to Regulation 6. However, they will be able to avoid the deduction of points if they offer to play, and duly honour a friendly with a minimum of 10 players. This option will be available to a team a maximum of three times during the season.

(c) The non-offending team MUST accept the offer to play a friendly in which event they will be awarded a 5 - point walkover. Should the non-offending team decline to play the friendly, or fail to honour the friendly once accepted, they will not be awarded any league points.

(d) Terms for the `friendly` match, which shall be played at the time and venue of the scheduled League match, should be as agreed between the two teams which shall not be unreasonably withheld. These may be broadly in line with `Game On` principles save that the result will not be recorded other than as a 5-point walkover to the non-offending team.

(e) In the event that the appointed referee withdraws from the friendly fixture then it will be the responsibility of the offending team to supply a referee who must be in addition to the minimum of 10 players.

(f) The offending team must inform the Results Agent (Women) and their opponents of their offer to play a friendly at the earliest opportunity and save for exceptional circumstances by no later than 20:00 on the Thursday prior to the match. The non-offending team prepared to play a friendly must respond by 12 noon Friday.

(g) An Electronic Match Card cannot be used to record matches under this Protocol.

Playing regulations can be found in Regulation 6, whilst Registration regulations can be found in Regulation 13 and 14. Anything capitalised within these regulations may be a defined term, a definition of which can be found in Regulation 1.

All teams should also familiarise themselves with the Sanctions Table in Appendices 3 and 4 of Regulation 6, which will be utilised in the women's game this season.

### **Key information:**

Fixture change request (following written email mutual agreement between teams) – [www.rfuwomen.co.uk/newdate](http://www.rfuwomen.co.uk/newdate)

Transfer deadline (including loans and waiting period) - Friday 27th February 2026, the Waiting Period (if applicable) having been completed before the Transfer Deadline is reached.

Fixture deadline (Championship 1) – 12th April 2026

Fixture deadline (Championship 2 to National Challenge 3) – 3rd May 2026

## 3.READY TO COMPETE CHECKLIST

The checklist below will help ensure your team is ready to compete in RFU Women's Competitions and Playing Opportunities.

### BEFORE THE SEASON STARTS

- ☐ Effectively Register your players on the Game Management System ([GMS](#)).
- ☐ Ensure appropriate contacts have relevant GMS roles for your club. Find out how to do this [here](#).
- ☐ Ensure your team has at least one match card administrator on GMS.
- ☐ Find out who your club referee coordinator is OR link with your Referees Society.
- ☐ If you have 17-year-olds\* playing in your team, complete the playing adult rugby – club and player approval forms and send to your constituent body (CB) for approval. These can be found [here](#) under Regulation 15.
- ☐ Read the Club Guide for 17-year-olds playing adult rugby [here](#) (see Regulation 15). Included is a checklist to help your club demonstrate readiness to play a 17-year-old in adult rugby.

### BEFORE MATCH DAY

- ☐ Speak to your opposition and referee – Confirm the match date and time. Agree any Game On principles, if applicable.
- ☐ If you're changing the match date, let the results service know ([here](#)) as well as the appropriate referees' society.
- ☐ Assign players to your squad on GMS. Find out how to do this [here](#).
- ☐ Input your line up on Electronic Match Card (EMC).

### MATCH DAY

- ☐ Check-in with the referee and confirm which regulations/law variations are being used.
- ☐ Let the referee know if you'd like to use Game On principles (IWS/NC2/NC3 only).
- ☐ Log scorers, subs and any yellow or red cards on EMC match events tab to update match centre.
- ☐ Log any suspected concussions in match card.

### AFTER THE MATCH

- ☐ Submit your final score (if you're the home team) by 5:30pm (daytime match) or 10pm (evening match).
- ☐ Confirm your completed EMC (if you're the home team), including match card events (E.g. Try scorers).

## 4. ELECTRONIC MATCH CARD (EMC)

Electronic Match Card (EMC) is the method used throughout RFU Women's Competitions to input your line-up and submit scores for matches played. Please note that for Levels 2-6 (Championship 1 – National Challenge 3), inputting the line-up, submitting the score and submitting the EMC itself are all mandatory by regulation. It also offers the ability to input Match Events, which include scoring, substitutions and disciplinary events. Match Events are not mandatory.

### Access:

There is both a desktop and mobile version of EMC. There is not currently an app, but both are accessible through any internet browser.

- Desktop - <https://gms.rfu.com/GMS/Account/Login>
- Then find the Competition Management tool, which will take you to the EMC section.
- Mobile - <https://gms.rfu.com/mobile/>

The mobile version is a streamlined version optimised for mobile devices and smaller screens. The mobile version does not have 100% of the features of the desktop version. However, all tasks generally associated with filli g in the EMC each week can be achieved on either.

### Points to note:

EMCs need only be completed for matches that are either fully completed or abandoned partway through. You do not need to complete EMCs if your match is postponed or if a walkover is claimed. In this instance you should contact the Results Agent so that they can update the EMC appropriately

Scores must be confirmed via EMC by 5:30pm (daytime match) or 10pm (evening match).

Support guides, including FAQs for EMC can be found [here](#).

If a club chooses to input their Match Events via the EMC then they will be able to reap the benefits of the RFU Stats Centre. Statistics that can be tracked include try scorers, kick scorers, minutes played, and yellow/red cards. This information is fed live on the Fixtures & Results section of the website for all to see (personal opt-outs are available by request). Statistics can then be used for individuals, as well as to compare across a team and the competition they compete in. This information will also be downloadable reports via GMS. These reports will help to track information such as appearances, playing time, and points/tries scored. Entering Match Events are not mandatory but are encouraged as they can offer help with player welfare, coaching and marketing.

Another useful feature of the EMC is the ability to flag players with suspected concussions. Any player flagged with a suspected concussion will be sent information on how to manage a suspected concussion. Information will also be sent to the GMS RugbySafe Lead for that player's club. Suspected Concussions can be flagged up on the 'Score' tab of an EMC.

These new features will put helpful data in the hands of clubs, which has uses in various areas such as coaching, player welfare and marketing.

## 5. REFEREEING

Match Officials (referees) are an integral part of the game. Below are some key pointers to help when organising these for your matches. There are also some links to additional resources that may be of interest.

How do I find referees for my matches?

For league matches the home team is responsible for making every attempt to organise a qualified referee for the game (See Regulation 12 for further details). This can be done directly with the society or through your club.

Ideally your Club Referee Co-ordinator (CRC) will be the contact point with your local referee society to ensure that all referee appointments are allocated. If your club has someone else, other than the CRC, we recommend you find the relevant person and do this well in advance of the match or event to ensure that referees are in place.

If the referee is not appointed by a society, there may be referee expenses which need paying on the day.

Will the referee know what law variations we play?  
(National Challenge 2 and below)

This is worth including in your conversations when welcoming the referee before your match.

Also highlight any law variations to your Club Referee Co-Ordinator.

My players are new to the game, how can I help them to understand refereeing calls and signals?

Check out the [Why Did The Whistle Blow](#) section on the World Rugby website.

It also has some clips showing [Match Official Signals](#).

Visit our [Refereeing page](#) for more information on courses, societies and development resources.

Follow @RFURefs on social media! This is good for ALL referees. For tips from the Top Refs and signposting to free webinars.

We have women and/or non-binary people at our club interested in becoming referees. How can they do this?

There is a [Facebook Group](#) for women and non-binary people interested in, or who are already refereeing. The England Rugby Training Courses booklet and information on referee courses can be found [here](#). All match officials go through the same course process. However, we have an additional Support Framework / Package for women and non-binary people involved in refereeing.

For more information, join our Facebook Group above.

## 6. ADULT PLAYER REGISTRATION

In accordance with [RFU Regulation 13 and 14](#), players are required to register themselves annually to play rugby for RFU member clubs. Players must register using their Game Management System ([GMS](#)) account and clubs will approve or deny their registration.

At the start of each season, players are required to renew their registration. Club registrars will uplift to RFU Registration if necessary.

### Player Registration Types

RFU Registration – for players in NC1 and above

Club Registration – for players in NC2, NC3 and IWS

Further guidance on Adult Player Registration can be found on the [England Rugby website](#).

# 7. PLAYER WELFARE

## PITCH SIDE CARE STANDARDS (PSCS)

- PSCS are the MINIMUM levels of cover that must be provided (unless identified in a club's first aid risk assessment).
- Clubs should aim for best practice – this will provide a safer experience for the players and reduce the risk of disruptions and stoppages in play.
- Whilst the home club is responsible for organising first aid cover when the provision is one first aider per match, a pitch side first aid plan should be agreed by both teams as part of their pre-match communications.

## FEMALE HEALTH & WELLBEING

- The Female Health and Wellbeing resources cover aspects of health which female rugby athletes and their coaches should consider when planning to participate in rugby related activity. Topics include:
  - Breast Health
  - Pelvic Health
  - Menopause
  - Menstrual Health
  - Postpartum
  - Puberty
  - Mental Health & Mental Skills
  - Optimising Performance
  - Nutrition
- They provide information on these topics as well as helpful tips and guidance for individuals to manage their health alongside the physical demands of rugby.

## HEADCASE – CONCUSSION AWARENESS

- The RFU's HEADCASE programme aims to increase understanding and provide information on concussion and other related topics, including how to prevent and manage suspected concussions.
- It is recommended that all coaches and players complete the HEADCASE eLearning at the beginning of every season.

## RFU REPORTABLE EVENT

- To allow the appropriate support to be put in place, it is crucial that all reportable injury events are submitted to the RFU. This is any injury that results in the player being admitted to a hospital (*It DOES NOT include those that attend an Accident or Emergency Department and who are then allowed home*).
- A reportable event can be submitted via the webform link below or, if your club has access, via the Proactive App.
- Access the form here: [RFU-Reportable-Injury-Event-Form](#)

All the information and resources referred to above, along with more player welfare information can be found in the player welfare of the website. Click on the link below or scan the QR code.

[Player Welfare and RugbySafe](#)



**CRISP** >

COMMUNITY RUGBY INJURY  
SURVEILLANCE AND PREVENTION PROJECT

**2025-26 SEASON**

# INJURY DATA WANTED!

The CRISP Project team is hungry for injury data to help us develop our understanding of injuries across all levels of the English community game.

We seek data from the following teams:

- **Adult Male Community**
  - National, Regional & Counties Levels
- **Adult Female Community**
  - Championship & National Challenge Levels
- **Age Grade Boys and Girls**
  - Clubs, schools, colleges (U13-U18)

Submitting your injury data helps us to improve player safety. It allows us to understand the:

- Continued impact of the lowered tackle height on injuries
- Differences in injuries across age groups
- Differences between the male and female game

**LEARN MORE.** >>>>>

**REGISTER YOUR TEAM. SUBMIT YOUR DATA.**



# 9. SAFEGUARDING AND PLAYER WELFARE

## SAFEGUARDING POLICIES, GUIDANCE & REGULATION 21

[Regulation 21](#) sets out the regulatory requirements of clubs and individuals specific to safeguarding in rugby, including how allegations of abuse and harm are dealt with, and the safer recruitment of those working with children and adults at risk in rugby. [The RFU Safeguarding Policy](#) supplements Regulation 21 and sets out best practice methods to help those involved in rugby meet their obligations, responsibilities, and comply with its terms. Those working or volunteering in rugby should familiarise themselves with these key documents and also access the RFU's suite of guidance and resources for best practice found on the [Safeguarding](#) webpage.

## SHARING CONCERNS

Any person involved in rugby union must report all safeguarding concerns of which they become aware to the RFU Safeguarding Team. It is natural to feel a little nervous about sharing concerns, but it is important to remember that it is not your responsibility to decide if abuse or neglect is happening, it is your responsibility to share your concerns. The online RFU Safeguarding Referral Form has been designed to allow anyone to submit safeguarding concerns securely and directly to the RFU Safeguarding Team. The online form and further guidance can be found on the [Sharing Concerns](#) webpage.

## SAFER RECRUITMENT

As part of our safer recruitment procedures, the RFU require all persons over 16 years old who are volunteering or working with children to undergo a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) Enhanced Disclosure with Children's Barred List check if working in Regulated Activity (or without the Barred List check if they do not meet the criteria or frequency of Regulated Activity).

The DBS process is a key aspect of the procedures and a factor in reducing the risk of abuse and harm to children and adults at risk. Under Regulation 21, all clubs providing Age Grade Rugby, 17-year-olds playing up in the adult game, or activity for adults at risk, must comply with safer recruitment procedures; further guidance can be found under the [Safer Recruitment](#) webpage.

## SAFEGUARDING TRAINING

The RFU encourage all those who work with children and adults at risk to carry out regular safeguarding training. The Introduction to Safeguarding eLearning course is for anyone working or volunteering with children in rugby union to ensure a basic understanding of safeguarding. It is mandatory prior to all DBS applications, England Rugby Coaching or Refereeing Award Courses, and the Play It Safe course.

The RFU offers rugby-specific, face-to-face safeguarding training for coaches and volunteers on our Play It Safe course. All club safeguarding officers must undertake the virtual In Touch course within six months of taking on the role. Information on these courses and how to book on can be found on the [Safeguarding Courses](#) webpage.

## CLUB SAFEGUARDING AUDIT

Under Regulation 21, it is mandatory for all clubs providing age grade rugby and/or have 17-year-olds playing up in the adult game to complete the RFU Club Safeguarding Audit on GMS. It is run for clubs on an annual basis and information on how to complete the Audit can be found via the [Community Rugby Help Portal](#).

## CODE OF CONDUCT

The RFU is committed to the ongoing promotion of the welfare of all its participants, who are entitled to feel protected, having the right to take part in a safe, respectful, and enjoyable environment. To help clubs manage poor practice within their club, the RFU created a [Code of Conduct](#) template for clubs to utilise.

## SPEAK UP

The RFU is committed to developing a culture where it is safe and acceptable for everyone involved in rugby union to raise concerns about any unacceptable practice, behaviour, wrongdoing, or misconduct. Details on how to raise concerns via your club or directly with the RFU can be found via the [Speak Up Policy](#) webpage.

## USEFUL LINKS

If you have questions on safeguarding, please contact the RFU Safeguarding Team via [safeguarding@rfu.com](mailto:safeguarding@rfu.com).

[RFU Safeguarding Webpage](#)

[Child Protection in Sport Unit \(CPSU\)](#)

[Ann Craft Trust \(ACT\)](#)

[UK Coaching – Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)

[Young Minds](#)

## 10. USEFUL CONTACTS

Can't find what you're looking for?

| I HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT   |  | CONTACT                    |
|---|--|----------------------------|
| Player Registration<br>Player Transfer<br>Problems with submitting match card                     |  | rfuwomen@firsteleven.co.uk |
| General Women's Competition queries   |  | womenscompetitions@rfu.com |
| YOU CAN CONTACT YOUR LOCAL COMPETITIONS DEVELOPMENT OFFICER                                       |  |                            |
| North - Aaron Howorth   |  | aaronhoworth@rfu.com       |
| Midlands - Liz Fletcher   |  | lizfletcher@rfu.com        |
| London and South East - Josh Bence  |  | joshbence@rfu.com          |
| South West - Olivia Jenkins   |  | oliviajenkins@rfu.com      |
| TO JOIN YOUR LOCAL ALLIANZ INNER WARRIOR SERIES PLEASE CONTACT ONE OF OUR COMPETITIONS ACTIVATORS |  |                            |
| North - Matthew Dent  |  | matthewdent@rfu.com        |
| Midlands - Claire Antcliffe   |  | claireantcliffe@rfu.com    |
| London and South East - Kesha Drain   |  | keshadrain@rfu.com         |
| South West - Kirstin James  |  | kirstinjames@rfu.com       |



England  
Rugby