

WOMEN'S RUGBY LEAGUE - COMPETITION RULES 2026

1. **APPLICABLE OPERATIONAL RULES**

- 1.1 The "Women's Rugby League" (WRL) is part of the RFL Competition Structure within the National Community Rugby League (NCRL). Governance of this competition sits with the RFL through its Operational Rules for Tiers Three and Four, while day-to-day management is delegated to the Women's Management Group. All teams must comply with the RFL Operational Rules applicable to Tiers Three and Four.

2. **MEMBERSHIP**

- 2.1 Membership of the WRL is open to all clubs who are capable of meeting any Annual Entry Criteria as specified by the RFL and Women's Management Group.
- 2.2 Applications from clubs must be submitted in writing to the Competition Administrator by the December of each year. Membership shall be granted to a club for one season only and all clubs must reapply for membership each year.
- 2.3 The annual subscription for membership of the League shall be £60 per first team and £30 for any additional teams from the same Club. This should be paid by 1st March.
- 2.4 Each Club will be required to ensure that the Volunteers listed below are appropriately qualified (where applicable) and registered on GameDay:
- Coaches
 - Club Welfare Officer
 - First Aiders
 - Game Day Manager
 - Club Secretary
 - Club Chair

3. **START AND END DATE OF THE COMPETITION**

- 3.1 The RFL shall determine the commencement date of its competition and the date upon which it shall cease. These dates will fit between the 1st March and 31st October in any year.

4. **STRUCTURE OF THE COMPETITION**

- 4.1 The RFL, in conjunction with the Management Group, will determine the structure of the competition including its format and size, any play-off structure and matters relating to relegation.
- 4.2 Promotion and relegation issues throughout the divisional structure will be determined annually by the League's Management Committee. The Grand Final winners for each league will be granted promotion, if there is no playoff structure, the League Winners will be granted promotion. In the Championship, the Grand Final winners will have the opportunity to play off against the bottom team in the WSL for the position.

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- 4.3 Any team that finishes bottom of their division shall be at risk of relegation the following season. Any team that forfeits more than two fixtures during the season, shall be at risk of relegation the following season. In the Championship, any team that has forfeited one or more fixtures, shall be at risk.
- 4.4 The WRL will operate a Championship, League 1, League 2, League 3 and a Merit League Competition.
- 4.5 The Management Group shall have the final decision on the composition of the divisions prior to the season commencing.
- 4.6 If two or more clubs finish level on points at the end of a season the application of competition rule 4.13.2 will decide which team finishes above the other.
- 4.7 If a club withdraws from the League having failed to complete 50% of its scheduled games, then the club's record shall be expunged. If a club completes 50% or more of its scheduled games, the points will be awarded to the opponents in line with competition rule 4.13.3.
- 4.8 If a club is expelled or suspended, its record will be expunged, irrespective of how many games that club has played.
- 4.9 The intention is that the Championship, League 1 and League 2 competitions will have top four Play-Offs to decide the champion. The Semi Finals should be hosted by the highest placed finishers in the respective leagues. The Championship Grand Final should be hosted by the highest ranked finalist. The League 1 and League 2 Grand Finals will be hosted centrally by the RFL.
- 4.10 Only players who have played in at least one league fixture are eligible for the Play-Offs.
- 4.11 The play-off format will see the top 4 teams contest the national play offs.
- SEMI FINALS**
1v4
2v3
- 4.12 For the Championship, teams who have forfeited one or more games through the season shall be at risk of not being eligible to participate in the play-off stages of the competition. In this event, the next qualifying team will be entered into the play-off stages. For League 1 and League 2, teams who have forfeited two or more games shall be at risk of not being eligible.
- 4.13 **League Tables**
- 4.13.1 The League competition tables shall be compiled by the RFL. The position shall be determined by the number of completed matches with points being awarded as follows: two points for each Match won; and one point for each Match drawn.

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4.13.2 The League placings will be determined calculated as follows:

- The Club with the highest number of points shall be at the top of the league table and the Club with the lowest shall be at the bottom.
- Where Clubs have an equal number of points their relative positions shall be determined by points difference so that the Club having the greater points difference is placed above the Club with the lesser points difference.
- Where Clubs have an equal number of points, and their points difference is equal then relative positions shall be determined by the head-to-head record in League matches only. Where their head-to-head record is even, then the aggregate score of all head-to-head league fixtures will decide the team on top.
- If the positions are still equal, positions will be determined by the toss of a coin which shall be carried out at such time and place as the RFL shall direct and those Clubs concerned shall be entitled to witness the toss.

4.13.3 The notional scores in forfeited games shall be 48-0 and a points deduction of 1 point. However, this shall only be used as last resort.

4.14 Cup Fixtures

4.14.1 Normal competition rules apply.

4.14.2 Cup entry is optional, clubs must apply via the Competition Officer, once applications are open.

4.14.3 In accordance with Operational Rule B3:2:2 Cup ties will take precedence over League Matches.

4.14.4 The Women's League will run the following Cup Competitions: the 'Challenge Shield', with a supplementary competition, the 'Challenge Plate'. These operate separately to the Betfred Women's Challenge Cup.

4.14.5 Only players that have played in at least one fixture for their club are eligible to play in the playoff stages of the Cup Competition. For avoidance of doubt, the playoffs will be counted as the Semi-Final and Final rounds.

4.14.6 A player cannot play for more than one team within the Cup Competition. After this, they will be deemed as "cup tied" and eligible to play.

4.14.7 Should a team not complete their first-round fixture, they will not be eligible to progress through to the supplementary Cup Competition.

5. FIXTURES

5.1 **Rearrangements** – We ask that all teams let the RFL know of any dates that they are unable to play a fixture prior to the commencement of the season.

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- 5.2 All fixtures should be played as scheduled in the fixture list. Requests to rearrange a fixture will be considered in exceptional circumstances directly affecting player welfare or competition integrity. Teams must contact their opponent at least 14 days prior to the scheduled fixture to request a postponement or rearrangement.
- 5.3 If both teams agree to rearrange a fixture on a free weekend, the home team must contact the Competition Administrator for approval.
- 5.4 If a club does not agree to a fixture re-arrangement request, then the fixture will be referred to the League Management where both clubs can submit their justification. The Management will then decide the outcome of the fixture.
- 5.5 **Postponements**
- 5.5.1 Any teams contacting their opponents to postpone a fixture within 14 days of the scheduled fixture will be at risk of being given a fine, 48-0 loss and a point deduction. Postponement requests made with less than 14 days' notice will not be granted for matters not considered exceptional. The Management Group will consider reasoning for the late postponement, before deciding the outcome.
- 5.5.2 A team postponing a game must have a new date for the fixture submitted to the Competition Administrator within 14 days of the original fixture date. If a date is not agreed in this timeframe, then the Competition Officer will issue a new date for the fixture.
- 5.5.3 Any Championship teams will be at risk of being ineligible to participate in playoffs or be promoted to Super League if they have postponed a fixture during the season.
- 5.6 Late postponement fines will be of different values depending on the league the team is involved in:
- Championship = £500
 - League One = £250
 - League Two = £100
 - League Three = £50
 - Merit League = No fine
- 5.7 Where programmed into the fixture programme, backlog dates should not be considered as a free weekend. Teams should be prepared to be allocated fixtures on these days subject to rule 5.5.1
- 5.8 Any club desiring to arrange a friendly must seek permission from the Competition Administrator. No friendly fixtures shall be arranged on a League fixture date without prior approval of the Competition Administrator.
- 5.9 Clubs must accept fixtures given at seven days' notice by the Competition Administrator.
- 5.10 Any club failing to fulfil a fixture must pay reasonable expenses to the non-offending club, as determined by the RFL. This may include the referee's full fee and expenses. For the avoidance of doubt, if a game is called off after 5pm on a Friday for a weekend fixture, or 5pm the day before a midweek fixture, then this rule will come into force.

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- 5.11 Any club which fails to notify their opponents of its inability to raise a team 60 minutes before the scheduled kick-off, shall also be liable to pay any expenses, up to a maximum of £100, which their opponents may incur, including kit washing, or medical costs such as strapping.
- 5.12 In the case of a home club failing to fulfil a fixture, a visiting club that has travelled, may claim up to a maximum of £250 towards transport costs.
- 5.13 48 – 0 will be used as a last resort, every effort must be made between the clubs to get the game played.

5.14 **Grounds Unfit to Play**

- 5.14.1 If the home club suspects that its ground may be unfit for play due to adverse weather or other causes, it must immediately contact a Match Official from the RFL-approved list to conduct a ground inspection.

If the Match Official deems the ground unfit for play and determines that it is unlikely to become playable before the scheduled kick-off, this decision must be communicated immediately to:

- The visiting club
- The appointed Match Official
- The Competition Officer

Failure to follow this procedure may result in the home club being found guilty of Misconduct. In addition to any sanctions, the home club will be responsible for reimbursing reasonable travel expenses incurred by any Match Official or club that was not notified in accordance with this rule.

- 5.14.2 This clause aligns with Operational Rule B2:4. Clubs must also refer to the [RFL's Grass Pitch Inspection Form](#) and guidance on hard ground protocols. A common-sense approach should be applied, prioritising player welfare and fixture fulfilment. Where appropriate, clubs are encouraged to consider alternative venues (e.g., local schools or parks).
- 5.14.3 In the case of a no-fault postponement, if clubs cannot agree on a new date within 14 days of the original postponement, then the Competition Officer will issue a new date for the fixture. This will be on the next available Sunday, or if there are no Sunday dates available, the fixture will be set for a midweek evening. If the new fixture is not played as instructed by the Competition Officer, sanctions will apply.

6. **PLAYER REGISTRATIONS**

- 6.1.1 All players should annually register to the Club using the RFL GameDay system. The League will circulate a link to the registration portal to the Clubs to commence the registration process. During this process a Player must become an Our League Active member.

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6.1.2 There is no restriction on the maximum number of players allowed to register per team in the WRL, however fifteen is the minimum number per team and scheduled fixtures will be refused until 15 players are registered.

6.1.3 The RFL may introduce, from time to time, new registration processes.

6.2 Transfers

6.2.1 Clubs may register or transfer players from other clubs using GameDay. It is the responsibility of the Club the player is moving to initiate the transfer. The player has final sign off of the transfer. The process must be completed in full, including player sign off, before a player plays. The Club shall follow any other policies issued by the RFL in relation to the registration of players. The RFL in conjunction with the League's Management Group will support Clubs in monitoring the volume of transfers requested across the course of a season, in the interest of player and Club welfare.

6.2.2 A player must fulfil all agreed financial obligations to their current Club before a transfer is approved.

For the purpose of this Rule, "financial obligations" refers only to fees the player has formally agreed to pay, including:

- annual membership or registration fees
- weekly subs or match fees
- fines issued in accordance with the Club's published disciplinary or conduct policy

Financial obligations do not include:

- the cost of kit, equipment, or apparel unless the player has explicitly agreed in writing to purchase those items
- sponsorship funds paid to the Club by third parties, regardless of whether the sponsor is linked to the player

Sponsorship provided to a Club remains the property of that Club and does not transfer with the player under any circumstances.

Clubs must not withhold or delay a transfer on the basis of disputed kit costs or sponsorship arrangements. Any dispute shall be referred to the Competition Officer.

6.2.3 The deadline date for transferring of players shall be the **31st of August**. For the avoidance of doubt after this date, players must play for the Club who holds their primary registration, unless an application for dual registration has already been processed by the Competition Administrator.

6.3 Dual Registration with the Women's Super League Clubs

6.3.1 Clubs can register players that are currently registered to a Women's Super League Club (WSL) provided that the following regulations are adhered to:

- (a) A Player's primary registration must be with the WSL Club.

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(b) Talent Transfer Players may dual register with any Championship, League 1, League 2 Club of their choice.

6.3.2 A maximum of three Super League players can play for a team in any Championship, League 1, League 2, or Merit League match. In exceptional circumstances, the Management Group will have the means to allow discretion on the total number of players.

6.3.3 **WSL Under 19s Programme:**

WSL clubs will hold the primary registration of the player. Players will be, where possible, dual registered with the Community Club they have played (unless they don't have a team for that player to be part of U18/Open Age). WSL clubs will be responsible for managing the player workload appropriately.

7. **MATCH DAY OPERATIONS**

7.1 All games shall, unless there is mutual agreement between competing clubs to the contrary, be organised and staged on Sunday afternoons with a kick off time scheduled for 2.00pm. If fixtures need to be played mid-week, then the Competition Administrator must be notified at least one week prior to the scheduled fixture.

7.2 To maintain the continuity of the playing programme the Competition Administrator shall be empowered, if necessary, to bring forward to an earlier date fixture scheduled for later in the season.

7.3 **Contacting Opponents and Kit Obligations**

7.3.1 In accordance with the Operational Rules it is the responsibility of the home Club, during the week preceding a game, to contact both its opponents and the relevant Match Officials regarding team colours and ground directions by no later than 8pm on the Thursday before the following Sunday's fixture. Away clubs should acknowledge any correspondence received and confirm their intention to travel, no later than 24 hours before the scheduled kick off time.

7.3.2 In the event there is a clash of colours the away team must wear an alternative strip.

7.4 **Team Sizes**

7.4.1 A maximum of 20 players may be named for each side taking part in a fixture including cup fixtures, play-off games and finals. For the Championship, the maximum should be 17 players named for each side taking part in a fixture.

7.5 **Game Day Manager**

7.5.1 Each Club must appoint a "Game Day Manager" whose duties on match days include, and may extend to, acting as a touchline steward in support of the Match Officials while play is in progress. Match Officials must receive the same level of hospitality as the visiting club.

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7.5.2 To prevent abuse or other unacceptable behaviour, Match Officials appointed by the RFL must be escorted to and from the dressing rooms, and onto and off the field of play, by a club official designated for that purpose.

7.6 Technical Areas and Dug Outs

7.6.1 The listed Head Coach shall ensure that registered officials ONLY, together with players and substitutes, occupy the dugouts.

7.6.2 Each team shall ensure the following:

- **Maximum Officials:** Only 12 people (including substitutes) allowed in the technical area during play.
- **Dugout Conduct:** Everyone must remain seated, except substitutes warming up or authorised personnel wearing designated bibs (e.g., Medical - Red, Coach - Yellow, Substitutes - Orange).
- **Technical Area:** Must be clearly marked (10m max length, 1m from touchline).
- **Dugout Priority:** If there's one dugout, it must be given to the visiting team.
- **Team Sheet:** All dugout personnel must be listed on the Official Team Sheet.
- **Dismissed Personnel:** Dismissed individuals must leave the dugout/field area and not return.
- **Penalties:** Non-compliance results in fines and/or suspensions for individuals and clubs.

7.7 Medical Requirements

7.7.1 Each home club is required to ensure that a first aider attends each game. The first aider should make themselves known to the Match Official before the start of any Match and shall remain for a minimum of 15 minutes after the end of the Game and shall speak directly with a designated Official from both clubs, if necessary, to ensure that the correct reporting paperwork is completed. If there is no first aider, then the Match Official will not permit a game to take place.

7.7.2 First aiders should be listed on the team sheet and are required to register on the GameDay system as a volunteer.

7.7.3 In the event a player sustains an injury to the head or displays signs or symptoms of concussion, the Match Official will stop the game and ask for the first aider to attend to them. If the first aider suspects a concussion, the player MUST be removed from the field of play and remain off the field. If the player refuses to follow the first aider's advice, then the Match Officials can hold up play until the player follows the instructions of the first aider. Advice for managing a concussion can be found [HERE](#). The RFL is supportive of and follows the SRA concussion guidance – please read through the guidance in full [Concussion Guidelines](#) and ensure they are applied to matches and training at all times.

7.8 Reporting Injuries and Concussion

7.8.1 In the event there is a serious injury or concussion at a Match this must be reported using the GameDay system. Reports are added in the post-game section which is the same area as where results are added. It is imperative that any head injuries are reported on the system as this information has to be provided to the insurers.

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7.9 Post Match Arrangements

- 7.9.1 The home club shall be responsible for supplying all the competing players, club officials and appointed Match Officials with a suitable post-match meal. The visiting club is obligated to accept such hospitality.
- 7.9.2 In the case of away clubs failing to fulfil a fixture the home club may also claim up to a maximum of £50 towards refreshment costs. Any club which will not be requiring refreshments should notify its opponents in advance of the game, otherwise the club will be liable to pay £50 compensation to the home club.

7.10 Team Sheets and Reporting Results

- 7.10.1 Teams will be required to enter their team sheet online, on GameDay, no later than 30 minutes before the scheduled KO time, this should include shirt numbers and positions. Failure to do so will result in an £20 administration fine. Any changes after that point must be reported to the Match Official on the day.
- 7.10.2 The home club, in consultation with the Match Official and designated Administrator from the opposition, must agree the result immediately on completion of the game and enter the result on to GameDay within 60 minutes. Failure to comply will result in a £20 administration fine.
- 7.10.3 Each club is responsible for ensuring their points scoring information is updated within the player stats area on the GameDay system within 48 hours following the completion of the game. Failure to do so will result in an £20 administration fine.

7.11 Abandonment of Games

- 7.11.1 If a game is abandoned with more than three-quarters of the playing time elapsed, the result shall stand unless otherwise determined by the RFL. If less than three-quarters of the playing time has elapsed the RFL (via the League Management), at its sole discretion, may order a game to be re-played.

8 DISCIPLINE, SUSPENSIONS AND FINES

- 8.1 All disciplinary matters, suspensions, fines and appeals shall be dealt with in accordance with Section D of the RFL Operational Rules and the F9 On-Field Sentencing Guidelines.

9 APPEALS

- 9.1 Appeals against disciplinary sanctions shall be conducted under Section D of the RFL Operational Rules, with reference to the F9 On-Field Sentencing Guidelines where applicable.