



TO: Rugby Ontario Members

FROM: Ryan Jones – Rugby Development Manager, Rugby Ontario

CC: Myles Spencer – Chief Executive Officer, Rugby Ontario

DATE: Friday, November 1, 2019

SUBJECT: Rugby Ontario - Community Rugby Age Banding Change

Dear Rugby Ontario Members,

Since the mandated age banding change in 2018 from even age banding (U8, U10...U16, U18) to odd age banding (U7, U9...U17, U19), Rugby Ontario has taken a deep look at and engaged in consultation with stakeholders regarding the impact on the game over the two years since the odd age bands were implemented.

At the end of the 2018 season Rugby Ontario reviewed the state of the game. The review took into account growth or regression in a number of areas including; registration numbers in individual age bands, registration numbers in birth years, regional registration numbers, registration numbers in girls and boys and the number of teams entering in competitions. The review highlighted many positive areas of our game and outlined some areas that require attention moving forward. We also identified the need to research further into our game to truly understand the landscape of rugby in Ontario. As a result, Rugby Ontario made the decision to remain with the odd age banding for 2019.

Throughout 2019, Rugby Ontario conducted a deeper review of the age banding and the impact on the community. After numerous encounters with stakeholders sharing their views of the age bands throughout the 2019 season, we decided to put together a formal review process. This process would provide Rugby Ontario with evidence-based solutions for the 2020 season.

In August 2019, Rugby Ontario struck an Age Banding Review Committee composed of six minor and junior representatives from six regions across the province. The Rugby Ontario Age Grade Banding Review Committee was responsible for reviewing the minor and junior age bands across Ontario to provide a recommendation regarding age banding moving forward. The committee was tasked with gathering information from players, coaches and parents in their region to help the decision-making process. The focus of the committee was to set effective age bands that will help to assist in keeping players in the game and attract new players to the game for years to come.

In addition to the committee work, Rugby Ontario reviewed the registration data over the last four years, the number of teams in competitions, how many games were played in each competition and surveyed coaches and administrators, of which 208 responded. As a result of the review

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process, Rugby Ontario will be implementing the following changes to the age banding structure, effective January 2020:

- U6 – Minor Flag
- U8 – Minor Flag
- U10 – Minor Flag
- U10 - Minor Introduction to Tackle Option (single age band)
- U12 – Minor Introduction to Contact
- U14 – Junior Introduction to Contact
- U16 – Junior Contact
- U18 – Junior Contact (eligible U19 players will be permitted to play in the U18 age grade)

Rugby Ontario has determined it is important to continue to introduce the game with flag rugby at U8 and U10 age bands to allow athletes aged 6-10 years the opportunity to learn how to play the game without the pressures of contact. The decision to offer contact to the U10 age group provides the opportunity for athletes aged 9 years turning 10 to learn how to tackle at the same age they were introduced to the game in 2018 and 2019, which was well received in the community and largely successful in 2019. It will also help to prepare those U10 players in a single age category for U12 rugby.

The age grade change will allow rugby in Ontario to match the high school system which should allow clubs to target their recruitment efforts in schools more effectively: U16 includes grade 9 and grade 10 athletes, U18 includes grade 11 and grade 12 athletes. Eligible U19 players will also be able to participate in U18 rugby to ensure players who aren't ready for senior rugby have a place to play. It is also felt this change will alleviate the pressures of fielding adequate numbers of U19 teams across the province to facilitate a meaningful competition for athletes in the U18 age band.

This change to the Rugby Ontario age banding will help to provide security and structure to junior rugby across the province. We believe there will be a positive immediate impact as players will be moving up into the age categories together (i.e. U16 & U17 players from 2019 will move into the U17 & U18 category in 2020). It will also continue to provide the opportunity for younger age groups to play variations of the game that are age and stage appropriate that effectively prepare players for junior rugby, and in keeping with the directives set by World Rugby and Rugby Canada.

Should you have any questions regarding the age banding change please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

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Manager, Rugby Development

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Rugby Ontario Age Banding Change FAQ

Why did Rugby Ontario make the change to odd age bands in the first place?

- The decision to move to odd age bands in the 2018 season was to provide the opportunity for players to be introduced to contact a year earlier (U11 vs U12) and to attempt to keep U19 players, who weren't ready for senior rugby, in the game. This was a national initiative led by Rugby Canada which was implemented in all provinces across Canada.

Why is Rugby Ontario making a change back to even age bands now?

- Rugby Ontario is making the change back to even age bands now due to evidence of a significant decline in U18 and U19 rugby since the change was made. There are also concerns at the U15 age group as grade 8 athletes, who had yet to play contact rugby in schools, were playing with grade 9 athletes, who have played a year of high school rugby.
- The even age bands allow junior rugby to mirror the high school rugby system allowing clubs to better access players in the Fall and Spring high school seasons. This change better creates the capacity to provide U10 athletes the opportunity to be introduced to contact / tackling at an earlier age to better prepare them for U12 introduction to contact.

What will the competition look like for each age band in 2020?

Age Band	Birth Years	Competition type	Law Variation
U6 – 2-year age band	2015 & 2014	Fun activities & games (e.g. tag)	U7/U8 variations
U8 – 2-year age band	2013 & 2012	Minor Festivals	U7/U8 variations
U10 – 2-year age band	2011 & 2010	Minor Festivals	U9/U10 variations
U10 – 1-year age band	2010	Minor Festivals	Modified U11/U12 variations
U12 – 2-year age band	2009 & 2008	Minor Festivals	U11/U12 variations
U14 – 2-year age band	2007 & 2006	Tournaments/ Triangular Fixtures	U13/U14 variations
U16 – 2-year age band	2005 & 2004	Single Game Fixtures	U15/U16 variations
U18 – 2-year age band	2003 & 2002	Single Game Fixtures	U17/U18 variations
U19 – 1-year age band	2001	Senior rugby/ play down request to U18	Senior/U18 variations

My child was in the lowest age category in 2019, will they be in the lower age category again in 2020?

- Yes, as Rugby Ontario will be transitioning into even age banding anyone who is currently the youngest in an age band will remain the youngest in the age band for 2020. The age bands changed from even age groups in 2017 to odd age groups in 2018. Any child who is in the lower age category in 2019 will have been in the higher age category in 2017 and 2018 and will be in the higher age category in 2021. If a child wants to participate in an age category, they are not registered in they must complete the

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application form for a junior to participate in a different age category. These applications may or may not be approved based on the eligibility criteria.

Can clubs offer a U6 programming?

- Yes, clubs are encouraged to offer U6 rugby to introduce rugby to a lower age group. This programming should follow the Canadian Sport for Life – Long-Term Athlete Development Framework. The U6 age group, which is in the Active Start stage, should be competing in fun activities and games (e.g. tag, catch), non-competitive, multisport/multi-movement activities, and self-challenging environments. It is encouraged that the players in the U6 age group are playing fun games that may or may not include a rugby ball. The LTAD Framework can be found here: <https://sportforlife.ca/portfolio-view/canadian-sport-for-life-ltad-pamphlet/>.

At what age are players required to participate in the gender category they register in?

- As per the World Rugby Mixed Gender Guideline, participation in mixed gender teams is to be permitted only up until the end of the season (including the following off-season) in which the player turns 12 years of age. When players enter the U14 age group (birth year 2007 in 2020) they are to play in the gender they are registered in. As was the case in previous years there will be an opportunity for all athletes over the age of 12 to apply to participate in a different gender category should they choose. These applications may or may not be approved based on the eligibility criteria.

Why are U19 players still considered junior players?

- The transition from junior rugby into senior rugby is a big leap for a number of athletes, especially those who do not play university rugby. Recognizing that many U19 athletes will play for their senior team, opportunity must be given for those not ready for senior rugby to continue to play the game at their level. Athletes who register in the U19 age category can play senior rugby with no additional paperwork. For players who register in the U19 category who wish to play U18 junior rugby, the application form for a junior to participate in a different age category must be completed. These applications may or may not be approved based on the eligibility criteria.