



March 6, 2023

SUBJECT: Rugby Ontario High Performance Committee Statement – 2023 Provincial Programming

Dear Rugby Community,

During the pandemic, Rugby Ontario (RO) held eight town hall meetings to collect feedback from the rugby community. From these meetings along with input from over 800 respondents to community outreach surveys, over 1000 responses from players, stakeholders and partners and input from 70 clubs and branches, the 2022-2025 Rugby Ontario Strategic Plan (Rugby for All) was created and implemented, starting in February 2022.

A key recommendation within the Strategic Plan was to create a High Performance (HP) Committee, tasked with “integrating club, branch, provincial and professional rugby systems”. This committee was struck by the Board of Directors and started to examine how RO can meet the mandate set before it. The committee is composed of four branch representatives, who were appointed by their branch presidents, four members who were invited to join the committee and four RO Board members - Graham Brown, Barb Gillie, Tim Matthews and Marius Felix (HP Committee Chair). The committee has a broad range of rugby experiences as players, in coaching, in rugby administration and in some cases, all of these. The committee members are:

Marius Felix, Chair	RO Director
Graham Brown	RO Director
Barb Gillie	RO Director
Tim Matthews	RO Director
Kevin Brenders	NRU Appointee
Don Maillet	TRU Appointee
Ryan Clancy	SWRU Appointee
Geoff Tomlinson	EORU Appointee
Jenn Russell	
Ian Fitzgerald	
Colette McAuley	
Jamie Mackenzie	

The committee started meeting weekly at the end of October 2022, faced with addressing the significant HP issues identified and leading up to the creation of the Strategic Plan, summarized below.

1. Cost: the cost of playing for Ontario provincial / high performance programs limited who could play.

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2. Scheduling: At times, the scheduling and frequency of RO events and training sessions limited players from representing their clubs or had players training far too much. These programs required significant travel for many athletes and, in addition to time and cost, may have been the cause for other identified athletes not to engage. For junior club teams who play games on the weekends, it put some players into the difficult situation of having to choose between club or province.
3. There was a clear split between those who support and believe that club rugby is a resource to develop potential representative players and the high performance program, which stated that the centralized RO programs was the best approach and must be a player's top priority. The Strategic Plan calls for the right balance in this regard.
4. Unfortunately, a lack of trust towards RO emerged, which had been openly discussed during town hall meetings and with the Board and management.
5. Out of requests from the rugby public, two committees were struck. One is the Grassroots and Club Development Committee (GCD) and the other is the High Performance Committee.
6. These two committees have been tasked with improving and evolving how rugby is delivered in the province and both have a high level of responsibility to work within the 2022-2025 RO Strategic Plan (Rugby for All).

The HP Committee meetings have been passionate, spirited and ultimately productive, although there is still significant work to do over the next year. This year, a lack of time, turnover of personnel and a need to get provincial and high performance plans to the rugby community became the top priority. On February 2, the HP Committee voted to approve plans for 2023. The plans for the U16/17/18 girls and U/18/19 boys are different by design. In addition, a boys U16 inter-branch competition will provide players with additional, higher level games in the Fall. Both the U19 girls and boys teams will be participating in the Canadian Rugby Championships this summer, which is an exciting prospect for both groups. The Senior Women's Program Plan is already in the process of being implemented with talent identification opportunities underway. The recommendations were delivered to the RO staff in early February and I know the team has been working hard to roll out the plans leading up to this update. What follows is a summary of the decisions that have been made as well as the next steps for the HP programs.

2023 Action Plan

- The HP Committee has voted to make three programs actionable: the Sr. Women started in late January with two evaluation camps (Toronto and Kingston), the Junior Boys and Junior Girls.
- Overlap and scheduling conflicts into the club rugby season has been significantly lessened in the boy's program, which was a key request coming out of the town halls and the clubs.
- The girl's plan involves a series of evaluation and selection camps scheduled to spread out across the regions to reduce, if not eliminate, major travel barriers, and largely limits impact on club competition.

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The short-term future and next steps:

- As the chair, I believe there is still work to do to try and find balance between HP rugby and Grassroots and Club Development (GCD) rugby. Nonetheless, time and a need to get plans out to the rugby community required decisions, which have led to the current plans being adopted. Both the boys and girls plans have been thoroughly debated and scrutinized by the HP and GCD committees and will fall under further and careful scrutiny from the rugby community as they unfold. Valuable lessons will come out of the end results that will both validate what worked as well as identify what we will be able to do better. I am both hopeful and enthusiastic about the prospects ahead.

HP Chair's Summary:

- Overall, I believe this is a step forward.
- The HP Team will now concentrate on working toward the plan to be implemented in January 2024.

I am happy to hear from the rugby community at large. Please send me an email at mfelixhhs@gmail.com and I will respond as soon as possible. For inquiries related to specific programming, please contact the RO staff (aandres@rugbyontario.com).

In the meantime, I wish everyone who has a hand in playing, coaching, volunteering and administrating the very best as the 2023 season approaches.

Sincerely,

Marius Felix

Board Member, Rugby Ontario

Chair, High Performance Committee

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