OUR HISTORY

New Zealand Rugby (formally the New Zealand Rugby Union) was formed in 1892 to administer the game of rugby union at the national level.

Formation of New Zealand Rugby

On Saturday 16 April 1892, at a meeting held in Wellington, the NZRU was formed. Inaugural members were the Provincial Unions of Auckland, Hawke’s Bay, Wairarapa, Marlborough, Nelson, South Canterbury, Tararua, Wanganui and Wellington. At the time, three major South Island Provincial Unions – Canterbury, Otago and Southland – realised the creation of a central authority.

NZRU’s strongest advocate and first secretary, Ernest Hoben, was a driving force behind the formation of the national union. Hoben had spent 1891 travelling around New Zealand putting his case for a national union to the local Unions, explaining how having a New Zealand headquarters would give huge benefits to the game.

In 1893, at our first AGM, we formally adopted the black jersey as the national playing strip and selected the first officially sanctioned national team for a tour of Australia (although they were not selected by the national body, the earlier New Zealand team selected to tour New South Wales in 1886 had been recognised as a New Zealand team and its players were recognised as All Blacks).

By 1895, the Tasmanian, Hawkesbay, Otago, Poverty Bay, Southland and West Coast unions signed up and the NZRU was considered to be a complete and united collection of all New Zealand rugby players. However, the New Zealand rugby map would be repeatedly redrawn in the following decades.

After the War

Rugby, like all of New Zealand, was affected by World War One. Many players were away fighting on the front lines and those who returned were often physically and mentally scarred. Matches were often cancelled, and when they were played, there were often no full teams. The representative side that toured Australia in 1919 included only 40 players.

At the Annual General Meeting in 1917, New Zealand elected its first Life Member: George Potts, manager of the 1905 “B” team. His first Chair (appointed in 1906), Provincial delegations also met prior to the AGM to arrange representative fixtures for the season ahead, introducing a new level of national coordination.

A seat of our own

In 1948, NZRU was admitted as a member of the then International Rugby Board (now World Rugby), at the same time giving up its representation on England’s Rugby Football Union (RFU) Committee. We were admitted alongside South Africa, while the Australian Rugby Football Union (ARFU) was not admitted until 1954.

The move to professionalism

In 1995, following the Rugby World Cup in South Africa, international rugby became professional. As such, the NZRU negotiated with and contracted the professional rugby players in New Zealand.

NZRU also joined with Australia and South Africa to form SANZAR (now SANZAAR) after the addition of Argentina, which sold the television rights for major southern hemisphere rugby competitions and helped begin the commercialisation of the sport.