

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 NZRFU was formed. Inaugural members were the Provincial Unions of Auckland, Hawke's Bay, Manawatu, Marlborough, Nelson, South Canterbury, Taranaki, Wairarapa, Wanganui and Wellington. At the time, three major South Island Provincial Unions – Canterbury, Otago and Southland – resisted the creation of a central authority.

NZR'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 idea of 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 1884 is recognised as a New Zealand team and its players are recognised as All Blacks.)

By 1895, the Bush, Canterbury, Horowhenua, 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, with many players not returning or being seriously injured, preventing them from taking the field. Some matches were organised, though they were confined to players who were under military age. Inter-island and Ranfurly Shield challenges were cancelled. It was up to schools to keep rugby going and from 1917 representative fixtures featured these younger players. During the War, the NZRFU continued to hold meetings, although fewer than in previous years and the enlistment of Management Committee member William Perry in 1916 as a non-commissioned officer.

At the Annual General Meeting in 1921, New Zealand elected its first Life Member: George Dixon, manager of the 1905 "Originals" All Blacks and our first Chair (appointed in 1904). Provincial delegates 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, NZR was admitted as a member of the then-International Rugby Football 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 (as it then was) came into formation at this time. We were each given one seat on the Board.

The move to professionalism

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

NZR 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.

NZ Rugby, 2020

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