

DEVON RUGBY

Richard Hunt Appointed Director of Representative Rugby

Devon RFU is delighted to welcome Richard Hunt as our new Director of Representative Rugby, leading the development of our representative programme and working with clubs to broaden opportunities for players across the County.

More info on Page 6.

Player Numbers Continue to Grow Across Devon

Rugby participation continues to grow across Devon, with more than 12,000 registered players and particularly encouraging increases in the adult and girls' games. The county's growth reflects a wider national rise in women's and girls' rugby following four years of Impact '25 investment.

More info on Page 3.

New Regional Growth Partnership Board to Help Grow Rugby in the South West

The RFU has established seven new Regional Growth Partnership Boards to bring new people, partnerships and investment into rugby. Devon RFU looks forward to working with the new South West Board and ensuring the voice of Devon's clubs is represented as its work develops.

A New Chair for the South West

The first independent Chair of the South West Regional Growth Partnership Board is Sarah Farrar, who will lead the establishment of the new Board and its partnerships across the region.

Speaking following her appointment, Sarah highlighted the South West's passionate clubs, strong junior programmes and deep community connections, and the opportunity to bring those strengths together to remove barriers and create new opportunities for players, coaches and volunteers.

The Board itself will bring together representatives from within rugby and independent members with experience and expertise from outside the game. Recruitment for these positions is now progressing, with Game Representatives intended to bring the voice and experience of rugby into the Board's strategy and investment decisions.



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New Regional Growth Partnership Board to Help Grow Rugby in the South West

The RFU has established seven new Regional Growth Partnership Boards across England as part of its ambition to grow the community game and increase the number of registered players by 50,000 by 2030.

The Boards form part of the RFU’s Plan 2030 – More Than A Game strategy and have a clear purpose: to build stronger regional partnerships and secure additional investment that can help take rugby to new people in new places.

For the South West, this means looking beyond the structures and resources already available within rugby and building relationships with businesses, funders, education providers, local organisations and other potential partners. By working at a regional level, the Board will seek to unlock opportunities that may be difficult for an individual club or county to achieve alone.

The RFU has identified initial areas of focus including schools, colleges and universities; growing the girls’ game following the Rugby World Cup; T1 Rugby in new places; and developing more playing opportunities, alongside priorities specific to each region and new fundraising opportunities.



Devon Part of a Growing National Picture

The Devon figures come at an exciting time for women’s and girls’ rugby nationally. The RFU has recently published the final outcomes from Impact ‘25, the four-year Rugby World Cup 2025 legacy programme delivered with UK Government, Sport England and UK Sport.

More than £14.55 million of Government investment was committed to the programme, supporting participation, facilities and the development of coaches and match officials.

The results demonstrate significant progress. Around 40,000 girls aged 6–12 have been introduced to rugby, while girls’ club participation nationally has increased by 49% – from around 18,000 to 26,800 players. Women’s participation at supported universities has also risen by 38%.

Investment has extended beyond player numbers. More than 5,400 coaching and match official courses have been completed by women, while 1,078 facility grants have been awarded to 607 clubs to help create environments better suited to women and girls.

Here in Devon, the 14.1% increase in registered age-grade girls provides further evidence of that momentum reaching our own clubs and communities.

The RFU is now looking to build on the foundations created by Impact ‘25, with a target of reaching 100,000 active female players by 2030, including 70,000 registered club players.

ADULT PLAYER REGISTRATION - NATIONAL

	UNIQUE PLAYERS	POSITION YoY	END OF 24/25
MEN	89,932	+1%	88,946
WOMEN	21,574	+10%	19,565
ALL	111,406	+2%	108,519

Positive Growth Across the Game

The adult male game in Devon also enjoyed significant growth. RFU figures presented to Devon clubs in July showed 3,510 unique adult male players, compared with 3,227 at the end of 2024/25 – an increase of 8.8%. Of those, 863 were new players and a further 75 had returned to the game.

Encouragingly, this growth is also translating into more rugby actually being played. The completion rate across the RFU Men’s Leagues involving Devon clubs reached 93% in 2025/26, four percentage points higher than the previous season.

Behind every one of these numbers is a player choosing to pull on a rugby shirt – and a huge network of coaches, team managers, administrators and volunteers creating the environment that enables them to do so.

Devon RFU would therefore like to thank our clubs and their volunteers for the tremendous work being undertaken to recruit,

welcome and retain players across the county.

There remains more to do. Our challenge now is not only to attract new people into rugby, but to ensure those already playing continue to enjoy the game and have opportunities that meet their needs.

With 3,118 new players joining Devon clubs during 2025/26 and an overall player retention rate of 75%, we have a strong foundation from which to build.

As the new season gets underway, Devon RFU will continue working alongside our clubs to build on this momentum and ensure rugby in Devon remains a game for everyone.

<https://www.englandrugby.com/follow/news-and-media/four-years-growth-womens-and-girls-rugby-through-impact-25-investment>

Representing Devon Rugby

For Devon RFU, the creation of the South West Board is an opportunity to complement—not replace—the work already being undertaken by our clubs, volunteers and the County.

We are committed to developing a strong relationship with Sarah and the new Board and, importantly, to representing the interests of rugby clubs across Devon as regional priorities and investment opportunities are developed.

Our clubs understand their communities better than anyone. As the Regional Growth Partnership develops, we want to ensure that their experiences, challenges and

ambitions help inform the conversation, while making sure Devon clubs are well positioned to benefit from new partnerships, funding and opportunities created through the regional approach.

The RFU envisages the Boards developing over the next three years, moving from building relationships and understanding regional opportunities, through collaboration and ultimately to fully established regional partnerships.

There is therefore plenty still to develop, but Devon RFU looks forward to playing an active and constructive role in this new chapter and working with the South West Board to create

more opportunities for people to discover, play and remain involved in rugby.

Help Us Find 150 Heroes of Devon Rugby

150 years. 150 stories. 150 people who helped shape rugby in Devon.

As part of Devon RFU's 150th Anniversary celebrations, we are launching 150 Heroes of Devon Rugby – a county-wide celebration of the people whose passion, commitment and dedication have helped make our game what it is today.

Across 150 years of rugby of Devon RFU, thousands of people have given their time to the game. Some pulled on a Devon or club shirt. Others coached from the touchline, refereed matches, marked pitches, washed kit, served behind the bar, raised funds, ran committees, supported generations of young players or simply became the person their club couldn't have managed without.

We want to tell their stories – and we need our clubs to help us find them.

Celebrating Our Heroes Throughout 2027

Throughout our anniversary year in 2027, we want to share these stories across Devon RFU's communications, creating a celebration not simply of 150 years of county rugby, but of the people who made those 150 years possible.

The stories will also help us create a lasting archive, preserving the characters, memories and contributions that form the history of rugby across Devon for future generations. 150 Heroes Proposal

Now it's over to our clubs: who are your Rugby Heroes? Please send your nominations and brief case studies to secretary@devonrfu.com.

Help us find 150 people. Help us tell 150 stories. Help us celebrate 150 years of Devon Rugby.

Who are your three Rugby Heroes?

We're asking every Devon club to identify up to three people from its past or present whose contribution to rugby deserves to be remembered.

We would particularly like clubs to consider at least one person making a difference within their club today and at least one person from their history, with the third Hero entirely up to you. 150 Heroes Proposal

A Hero doesn't have to be someone who scored the most tries, won the most trophies or held the most senior position.

It might be the volunteer who has quietly given 40 years to their club. The coach who inspired generations of youngsters. The person who kept the club going through difficult times. A referee, administrator, player or supporter who changed something for the better.

Every club has those people. We want to hear about yours.

Tell Us Their Story

For each nomination, we're asking clubs to send us a brief case study telling us who the person is, their connection with the club and why they deserve to be one of Devon Rugby's 150 Heroes.

importantly, what would your club have lost without them? 150 Heroes Proposal

Think about the difference they made. What did they give to rugby? Who did they inspire or support? Is there a particular story that sums up their dedication or character? And, perhaps most

Photographs, testimonials, newspaper cuttings and extracts from club records are also very welcome where available. 150 Heroes Proposal

Our Club Voice meetings provide an important opportunity for clubs to come together, share their experiences and help influence the work and priorities of Devon RFU.

We want our work to reflect what is happening across rugby in Devon – the opportunities clubs are seeing, the challenges they are facing and where greater support may be needed. Club Voice meetings give us the opportunity to listen directly to those delivering the game within their communities.

We therefore strongly encourage every club to ensure they are represented at least their local Club Voice meeting during the season.

· **Wednesday 28 October 2026 – Old Techs RFC**

· **Wednesday 27 January 2027 – Torquay RFC**

· **Wednesday 28 April 2027 – Okehampton RFC**

· **Thursday 29 July 2027 – Devon RFU AGM, Withycombe RFC**

Further information and meeting details will be shared with clubs ahead of each date.

Your voice matters. Please get involved, represent your club and help us shape the future of rugby in Devon.

If your Club is interested in attending any of the meetings please email secretary@devonrfu.com

Richard Hunt Appointed Director of Representative Rugby

Devon RFU is delighted to announce the appointment of Richard Hunt as our new Director of Representative Rugby, taking responsibility for the development and coordination of representative rugby across the county.

Richard brings considerable experience of the community game, having previously served as Director of Rugby at Paignton RFC, where he is now Chair. His experience at club level will be particularly valuable as we look to strengthen the relationship between Devon's clubs and our representative rugby programme.

A key priority for Richard will be working directly with clubs to increase representation from across the County, ensuring that players from as many Devon clubs as possible have the opportunity to experience the pride of representing their county.

Richard will oversee our three senior representative teams — Senior Men, Senior Women and Under 20 Men — alongside our Girls' and Boys' Age-Grade programmes.

He will also support the continued development of some of the newest areas of Devon representative rugby, including Devon Deaf Rugby, our Club XV for players from Counties 8 and 9, and our Super Vets programme for players aged 50 and over.

Together, these programmes demonstrate our ambition to make representative rugby accessible to a broader range of players and to create opportunities to wear the Devon shirt at different ages and levels of the game.

Over the coming months, Richard will be speaking with clubs across Devon to hear their views, identify potential players and strengthen the pathways between club and county rugby.

Clubs wishing to speak to Richard about representative rugby, player opportunities or how they can become more involved are encouraged to contact him at: headreprugby@devonrfu.com



Road to Allianz Begins for Devon Under 20s

Devon Under 20s will begin their 2027 Jason Leonard County Championship campaign with a home clash against neighbours Cornwall, as the next generation of Devon representative players set their sights on another exciting county campaign.

The newly released fixtures place Devon alongside Cornwall and Somerset in Pool D of the South West Division, with two group

matches deciding who progresses to the divisional knockout stages.

First up is one of county rugby's great rivalries, as Devon welcome Cornwall on Sunday 21 February 2027. Devon will then travel to face Somerset on Sunday 14 March, before Cornwall and Somerset complete the pool fixtures in April.

The Road to Twickenham

There is plenty at stake. The winner of Devon's pool will progress to the South West Divisional Final on Sunday 2 May, where they will meet the winner of Pool E.

Victory there would secure a place in the national semi-final on Sunday 16 May, with the South West champions travelling to face the winners of the London & South East Division.

And beyond that lies the ultimate destination – the County Men's Under 20s Final at Allianz Stadium, Twickenham, on Saturday 22 May 2027.

The Under 20 programme provides an important bridge between age-grade and senior rugby and an opportunity for talented young players from clubs across Devon to represent their county on the national stage.

With our new Director of Representative Rugby, Richard Hunt, looking to increase representation from clubs across the county, the Jason Leonard Championship will once again provide an exciting opportunity to showcase the depth of young rugby talent we have here in Devon.

Save the date for Devon v Cornwall on 21 February – venue and kick-off details will follow.

Devon Under 20s – Jason Leonard County Championship

- 21 February 2027: Devon v Cornwall
- 14 March 2027: Somerset v Devon
- 2 May 2027: South West Divisional Final
- 16 May 2027: National Semi-Finals
- 22 May 2027: Final – Allianz Stadium, Twickenham