

In other words, Rugby, football game was played with an oval ball by two teams of 15 players (in rugby union play) or 13 players (in rugby league play). Both rugby union and rugby league have their origins in the style of football played at Rugby School in England. According to the sport's lore, in 1823 William Webb Ellis, a pupil at Rugby School, defied the conventions of the day (that the ball may only be kicked forward) to pick up the ball and run with it in a game, thus creating the distinct handling game of rugby football. This "historical" basis of the game was well established by the early 1900s, about the same time that foundation myths were invented for baseball and Australian rules football. While it is known that Webb Ellis was a student at Rugby School at the time, there is no direct evidence of the actual event's having taken place, though it was cited by the Old Rugbeian Society in an 1897 report on the origins of the game. Nevertheless, Rugby School, whose name has been given to the sport, was pivotal in the development of rugby football, and the first rules of the game that became rugby union football were established there in 1845. Rugby is now a popular sport in many countries of the world, with clubs and national teams found in places as diverse as Japan, Côte d'Ivoire, Georgia, Uruguay, and Spain. Rugby among women is one of the world's fastest-growing sports. At the turn of the 21st century, the International Rugby Board (IRB; founded in 1886 as the International Rugby Football Board), headquartered in Dublin, boasted more than 100 affiliated national unions, though at the top level the sport was still dominated by the traditional rugby powers of Australia, England, France, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, and Wales.

Historical perspective

Origins

Different forms of football have existed for centuries. (For more on the development of football sports, see football) In Britain, football games may have been played as early as the time of Roman occupation in the 1st century BCE. During the 14th and 15th centuries CE, Shrove Tuesday football matches became annual traditions in local communities, and many of these games continued well into the 19th century. These localized versions of folk football (a violent sport distinctive for its large teams and lack of rules) gradually found favour within the English public (independent) schools, where they were modified and adapted into one of two forms: a dribbling game, played primarily with the feet, that was promoted at Eton and Harrow, and a handling game favoured by Rugby, Marlborough, and Cheltenham. Game playing, particularly football, was encouraged at Rugby School by influential headmaster Thomas Arnold (1828–42), and many boys educated at this time were instrumental in the expansion of the game. Rugby football soon became one of the most significant sports in the promotion of English and, later, British imperial manliness. The game's virtues were promoted by books such as Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857). The cult of manliness that resulted centred on the public schools and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, where boys were sent to learn how to become young gentlemen. Part of the schoolboy's training was a commitment to arduous physical activity, and, by the late 19th century, rugby and cricket had become the leading sports that developed the "civilized" manly behaviour of the elite. It was believed that rugby

football instilled in the "muscular Christian" gentleman the values of unselfishness, fearlessness, teamwork, and self-control. Graduates of these public schools and of Oxford and Cambridge formed the first football clubs, which led to the institutionalization of rugby. Once they had left school, many young men wanted to continue playing the game of their youth, and the early annual matches between alumni and current senior students were not enough to satisfy these players. Football clubs were formed in the mid-19th century, with one of the very first rugby clubs appearing at Blackheath in 1858. Rugby enthusiasm also spread rapidly to Ireland and Scotland, with a club founded at the University of Dublin in 1854 and the formation by the Old Boys of Edinburgh of the Edinburgh Academicals Rugby Football Club in 1858. In 1863 the tradition of club matches began in England with Blackheath playing Richmond. Representatives of several leading football clubs met in 1863 to try to devise a common set of rules for football. Disputes arose over handling the ball and "hacking," the term given to the tactics of tripping an opponent and kicking his shins. Both handling and hacking were allowed under rugby's rules but disallowed in other forms of football. Led by F.W. Campbell of Blackheath, the rugby men refused to budge over hacking, calling those against the practice "unmanly." Though Campbell's group was in the minority, it refused to agree to the rules established for the new Football Association (FA) even though many elements of rugby rules were included in early compromises. Ultimately, rugby was left outside the FA. Despite the initial reluctance to abandon hacking, rugby clubs began to abolish the practice during the late 1860s. Blackheath banned it in 1865, and Richmond supported a similar prohibition in 1866. Rugby received bad publicity after a Richmond player was killed in a practice match in 1871, prompting leading clubs to respond to Richmond and Blackheath's call for an organizational meeting. Thus, in 1871 members of leading rugby clubs met to form the Rugby Football Union (RFU), which became the governing body for the sport. By this time, hacking had largely disappeared from club rugby, though it remained a part of the game's "character building" qualities at Rugby School. As a result of its continued adherence to the practice, Rugby School did not join the RFU until 1890.

Evolution and Growth of the Game

Rugby rapidly spread from its elitist origins in England, Scotland, and Ireland to middle- and working-class men in the north of England and in Wales and to the British colonies in South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. It also spread to North America, where it was transformed into a new style of football.

Northern Hemisphere

Unlike association football (soccer), which embraced player payments and league play in the 1880s, the RFU staunchly resisted professionalism, cup competitions, and leagues, though international rugby between England and Scotland began immediately. As soon as the six Scottish clubs heard of the formation of the RFU, they issued a challenge to it for a match to be held in Scotland on March 27, 1871. The match was played in front of 4,000 spectators, with each side scoring a try, though only Scotland could convert the try with a goal (*see below* Play of the game). Ireland began playing England in 1875 and Scotland in 1877. The three

national teams formed what became known as the “Home Nations.” Significantly, club rugby matches remained ad hoc in England until the latter decades of the 20th century, and, as a result, international matches took on a special meaning.

Northern England and the split

In the north of England, rugby was organized somewhat differently from in the south. Teams became the focus of civic pride, and league and cup competitions quickly arose in Yorkshire. The game spread throughout Yorkshire to Cumbria and parts of Lancashire, and many working-class men were playing by the mid-1880s. Northern clubs campaigned for “broken time” payments for their working-class players who lost time from work in order to play. Matters came to a head at an 1893 general meeting of the RFU, where the legalization of broken time payments was soundly defeated by southern clubs, which controlled most of the votes. On August 29, 1895, in the town of Huddersfield in Yorkshire, 22 of the leading clubs in the north of England resigned from the RFU and created the Northern Rugby Football Union, which became the Rugby Football League in 1922. Most northern clubs joined the Northern Union, but it failed in efforts to expand its influence farther afield within Britain.

Wales

In Wales rugby clubs were established as town clubs in both large communities and small mining towns during the 1870s and '80s. Many early players had some experience of the game in the north of England and took their interest with them to Wales. By the early 1880s rugby had become a vital part of working-class culture in south Wales, which distinguished the game there from its upper-class association in other parts of the British Isles. Wales had high levels of immigration in the late 19th century, and rugby emerged at this time as a focal point of a new modern Welsh nationalism. As a result, the Welsh Rugby Union formed in 1881, and Wales soon entered the Home Championship, competing with England, Ireland, and Scotland. Wales won its first title in 1893. Unlike England, a more competitive system arose in Wales, with a South Wales Challenge Cup being contested between 1878 and 1897 and an unofficial league system appearing by the 1930s. As the only team to defeat the powerful New Zealand team on its first tour of the British Isles, in 1905, Wales cemented its place as a dominant rugby power. Rugby remained central to modern Welsh identity, particularly in the period between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s, when players such as Gareth Edwards, Barry John, Phil Bennett, Gerald Davies, J.P.R. Williams, and others kept Wales at the top of Northern Hemisphere rugby. During the 1980s many coal mines were closed, which led to the deterioration of mining valley communities that had been the cradle of Welsh rugby for a century. Since that time Wales has struggled to regain its position as a leading rugby nation.

France

Rugby union football spread more slowly outside the British Empire, though it was played in France as early as 1870. There were 20 or more French clubs by 1892, mostly in and around Paris. Soon the game diffused to southwestern cities such as Bordeaux, Lyon, and Perpignan, where it became the most popular team sport. France joined the British Home

Championship in 1910 to create the Five Nations Championship. In France, the game was governed by the Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques, a multisport group, from 1887 and by the French Rugby Federation from 1920. French attitudes toward professionalism were much more relaxed than in the British Isles, which led the Home Nations unions to sever relations with France in 1932, though they were restored in 1945. France broke with the traditional British practice in rugby union of holding series of “friendly” matches rather than formal league competitions and in 1892 formed a national club championship. In 1978 France was finally admitted to the IRB, joining England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Following the inharmonious split with the Home Nations in 1932 over questions of professionalism, France embraced rugby league, known there as *jeu à treize* (“game of thirteen”). In 1934 the French rugby league federation (Ligue Française de Rugby à XIII) was formed. Like rugby union, the league game in France is largely confined to the southern part of the country. During World War II, rugby league play was outlawed in France by the Vichy government, but the sport made a comeback in the post-war era.

Italy

In the 1920s rugby also gained a foothold in Italy, particularly in the north-western part of the country. The Italian Rugby Federation was founded in 1928. In the 1980s clubs supported by large companies began to organize payment of players in their club competition, and leading international players such as Naas Botha of South Africa, David Campese of Australia, and John Kirwin of New Zealand played rugby union in Italy. Italian rugby advanced significantly by the 1990s, and in 2000 Italy joined the Five Nations competition, which was then renamed Six Nations.

Canada and the United States

Rugby rules appeared in North America before the 1870s and were used in a famous game between McGill University of Montreal and Harvard University of Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1874. In 1876 representatives of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia universities formed the Intercollegiate Football Association, which, in general, agreed with the RFU’s 1871 rules. Rugby rules were soon modified in the United States and later in Canada, however, to create the distinct codes of gridiron football played in North America. Although gridiron football had largely supplanted both association football and rugby in the United States by late in the 19th century, rugby enjoyed a revival from 1905 on the Pacific Coast after gridiron football was banned there in the aftermath of a public furore over violence and player deaths and injuries. Rugby remained popular there after the gridiron sport was restored to its preeminent position. West Coast players largely made up the national rugby teams that won at the 1920 and 1924 Olympic Games, after which rugby was dropped as an Olympic sport. Rugby also retained a foothold in British Columbia in Canada. Into the 21st century a large proportion of players on the U.S. and Canadian national teams came from the West Coast region.

Southern hemisphere

It was in the Southern Hemisphere that rugby assumed new levels of cultural meaning and innovation. In New Zealand

and South Africa, the sport became an integral part of national identity and at times a flash point for social and political issues.

Australia

In Australia, the game was strongly associated with the eastern coastal region. The Southern Rugby Football Union was formed in Sydney in 1874. Only five clubs played in Sydney at that time, but by 1900, 79 clubs existed, with a senior and four junior competitions. The Metropolitan Rugby Union, later the New South Wales Rugby Union (NSWRU), was founded in 1897 to administer league competitions in Sydney and devised a district system that led to increased spectator interest. By the 1880s matches between teams representing New South Wales and New Zealand began, as rugby in Australia remained largely confined to the big east coast cities of Sydney and Brisbane. The national Australian Rugby Union was not formed until 1949. In other parts of Australia, Australian rules football had already established itself as the dominant sport. The issue of payment to players appeared in Australia by the early 1900s, centring on compensation for injured footballers. Alex Burdon, a barber by trade, injured his shoulder in July 1907; however, the NSWRU refused to pay compensation. At the same time, a professional team of New Zealand rugby players, known as the All Golds, prepared to travel to England to play against Northern Union clubs. The tour inspired Sydney clubs and players to form the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL) on August 8, 1907. The NSWRL adopted the rules of the Northern Union and organized an Australian team to play against the All Golds before they left for England. In 1908 a rugby league competition began in Sydney with working-class clubs leaving rugby union to play by the new rules. The first Australian rugby league players toured Britain in 1908–09, followed by another tour of Britain in 1911–12, thus establishing international links between Northern and Southern Hemisphere breakaway groups. The main centres of rugby league in Australia are Sydney and Brisbane, though it is widely played in cities and towns throughout the country and has a larger following than has rugby union.

New Zealand

In New Zealand, the first rugby match was played at Nelson in 1870. However, rugby spread slowly owing to problems of distance and sparse population, and while regional unions appeared throughout the country by the mid-1880s, a national union, the New Zealand Rugby Football Union (NZRFU), was not founded until 1892. A New Zealand “Natives” tour (1888–89) of Australia and the British Isles was organized by an entrepreneur keen to exploit British perceptions of the “exotic” Maori population of New Zealand. A team made up mostly of Maori players toured Britain, winning 49 of its 74 matches, including many matches against clubs in the north of England that largely consisted of working-class players and that had become the best club teams in the country. In 1902 the Ranfurly Shield was presented by Earl Ranfurly, the governor of New Zealand, to serve as a trophy for a challenge competition between provincial rugby teams. The shield remains one of the most prized trophies in New Zealand’s domestic competition. In 1903 New Zealand played a truly national Australian team for the first time. New Zealand’s national team, known as the All Blacks for their black uniforms,

defeated a visiting British national team in 1904, and on the All Blacks first tour of Britain, France, and North America the following year, they posted a stunning 34–1 record. Success in international rugby supported by strong domestic teams formed the backbone of New Zealand rugby and cemented its place as the country’s top sport. Indeed, there are few countries whose national identity is as tied to a single sport as New Zealand’s is to rugby. Pride in the country, its history, and its culture commingle in New Zealanders’ rabid support for the All Blacks, who enact a ritual before each match that is the embodiment of this national spirit; the *haka*, borrowed from the country’s indigenous Maori culture, is a traditional war dance and chant that inspires the All Blacks while issuing a challenge to their opponents to do battle.

South Africa

A form of rugby football was played in South Africa in 182, and the game was first played in Cape Town in 1875. British regiments helped found a club at King William’s Town in 1878. The expanding population that followed the Kimberley diamond discovery spread the game into that region (1883–86), and rugby was being played in the Johannesburg and Pretoria areas by 1888. The Western Province formed a union in 1883; the South African Rugby Football Board was established in 1889. South Africa too has leagues for clubs and a national competition between provincial teams for the Currie Cup, first given in 1891 by Sir Donald Currie. From the 1930s through the ’60s, the South Africa national rugby union team could make arguable claims to being unofficial world champions. After 1960, however, the issue of apartheid, under which South Africa sanctioned racial segregation and discrimination against non-whites, began to infringe on the team’s reputation and on international rugby. Black South Africans were excluded from playing in the whites-only rugby competitions run by the South African Rugby Board and were forced to play in separate competitions over the course of the 20th century. Pivotal to the success of South African rugby, as well as to its continued segregation, was the controversial Danie Craven, a legendary player who also served as coach of the national team and president of the Rugby Board. As a core cultural activity of white South Africans, rugby became the target of protests by black South Africans and international antiapartheid protesters, who called for boycotts of both South Africa and its national rugby team. Significant protests first emerged in New Zealand in 1959–60 when the NZRFU did not select Maori players for the 1960 tour of South Africa to comply with apartheid restrictions. New Zealand postponed a planned visit to South Africa in 1967 because South Africa still would not accept Maoris as part of New Zealand’s national team. The tour was rescheduled for 1970 after South African authorities permitted Maoris to tour as “honorary whites.” By this time South Africa had been expelled from the Olympic movement, and the focus on South African rugby intensified. In response to disquiet among black Commonwealth countries, the New Zealand government cancelled a planned 1973 tour by South Africa, to save the 1974 Commonwealth Games in Christchurch. In 1976, 23 African countries boycotted the Montreal Olympics to protest New Zealand’s presence because the All Blacks had played against South Africa that year even after the June 16 massacre of black protesters, many of them children, in

Soweto. The most-dramatic events surrounding rugby occurred in 1981 during the South African tour of New Zealand. The second match of the tour was cancelled when protesters occupied the field. Flour “bombs” were dropped from a plane during the final Test match, and police barricades went up throughout the country as the tour progressed. In 1985 the New Zealand courts stopped a proposed tour of South Africa at the last minute, and in 1986 a “rebel” tour of New Zealanders went there. During the 1980s, however, South Africa became progressively isolated as the sports boycott took effect. Notably, it was excluded from the first two Rugby World Cups in 1987 and 1991. The dismantling of apartheid began in 1991, and South Africa was again accepted by the international sports community. The country hosted the rugby union World Cup in 1995 and won the championship with a nearly all-white team, which, with the open support of then president Nelson Mandela, unified the country in a brief moment of transracial national identification.

Other countries

Other countries where rugby has developed to a high level include Argentina and the Pacific Island nations of Samoa, Fiji, and Tonga. Rugby was introduced to Argentina in the 1870s, and by the turn of the 20th century four clubs based in Buenos Aires had formed the River Plate Rugby Football Union. The Argentine national team, known as the Pumas, has a reputation for being particularly physical in the scrum. Although rugby did not reach the Pacific Island countries of Samoa and Tonga until the 1920s, it had been played in Fiji since the 1880s. In 1924 Fiji and Samoa (then Western Samoa) met in the region’s first Test match. All three countries continue to focus on their individual national teams, but in the early 21st century they also began to play together periodically as a single team representing the Pacific Islands.

Rugby’s modern era

In the latter part of the 20th century, both rugby union and rugby league were affected by the growing influence of commercialism and television. The development (and success) of World Cup competitions was a spur to the enormous growth of rugby football in the decades leading into the 21st century. The first Rugby World Cup competition organized by the IRB was held in 1987 in New Zealand and Australia and was a popular and financial success. It was staged four years after a failed attempt to launch a global “rebel” (that is, outside the control of the IRB) professional championship. Rugby union thus embarked upon a road toward professionalism and new levels of commercialism that eventually led to the full professionalization of the sport in 1995. The 1991 World Cup, held in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and France and won by Australia, had confirmed its place as a major international sporting festival. By 1995 the chairman of the Rugby World Cup could claim that the event was the fourth largest international televised sporting event as the tournament reached an estimated 124 countries and 2.7 billion viewers. Just prior to the 1995 cup, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia Rugby, Inc. (SANZAR), was formed to develop what it called “the perfect rugby product,” including the Super Rugby provincial competition and the Rugby Championship international series. SANZAR then sold exclusive global television rights to Rupert

Murdoch’s News Corporation for \$555 million over 10 years. In rugby league, television became crucial to the wider promotion of the game. In the late 1980s and ’90s the premier rugby league competition in Australia expanded from Sydney to include teams from other parts of Australia and then a team from New Zealand. In 1980 the State of Origin competition between New South Wales and Queensland began, and it soon became one of the most-watched sporting events in Australia. In England, this model was followed through the creation of the Wars of the Roses series between Yorkshire and Lancashire. In 1995 a revolution took place in rugby league as the News Corporation tried to buy global rights to the game to secure the rugby league product for Murdoch’s pay television services in Australia. The end result was a much-needed cash infusion of £100 million into the game in England, though at the cost of creating a controversial “Super League” there and the development of a rival “Super League” competition in Australia that ran during the 1996 season. While compromise was reached in Australia, the game suffered significant damage as spectators turned away from rugby league in disgust, with some preferring to watch rugby union or Australian football. With professionalization of rugby union in 1995 and the now relatively free movement of players between sports, it appears that a rapprochement between union and league might be possible. Several people have devised compromise rules that seek to create uniform rules for both codes, but these have been resisted thus far. Despite professionalization, at grassroots levels rugby retains a strong social and cultural atmosphere where play on the field is only a part of the experience. Rugby players are notorious for heavy drinking and singing sessions, particularly when on tour. Moreover, in rugby-playing countries, success on the field often translates into success in professional life, as rugby clubs and associations form the basis for strong local, national, and international social networks. To adherents, rugby union is known as “the game they play in heaven,” while rugby league, with similar club-based cultures, is called “the greatest game” by its followers.

Global rugby organizations and competitions

Rugby Union

The rapid spread of rugby union throughout many parts of the British Empire led to the establishment of the International Rugby Football Board (since 1997 the International Rugby Board; IRB) in 1886 to determine the laws of the game and settle any disputes that arose between countries. The initial members were the Rugby Football Union plus the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh national unions. In classic imperial fashion, the RFU held six seats on the board, and the other member unions held two each. In 1926 Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa joined with one seat each. In 1958 representation changed to two seats each for member countries, but when Argentina, Canada, Italy, and Japan joined in 1991, they received only one seat each on the board. The IRB became the recognized international governing body and has been active since its formation in policing and modifying the laws of the game. Test (international) matches (a series of two or more games between national teams) have historically been the pinnacle of rugby union. In 1888 a British team toured New Zealand and Australia, and in 1891 an English team toured South Africa, thus beginning the pattern of international

competition in rugby union. Colonial rugby tours of the British Isles by official national teams began with visits by New Zealand in 1905, South Africa in 1906 and 1912, and Australia in 1908. In 1905 the New Zealanders shocked the British media as they won every match leading up to their final Test against Wales, overwhelming some good English teams by 40 to 60 points. Wales narrowly defeated the All Blacks 3–0 near the end of the New Zealanders' tour, restoring some pride in the Home nations. In 1906 the first tour by the South African team, known as the Springboks, was nearly as successful, as they defeated Wales. In 1908 the Australians also played well and won the Olympic gold medal in London. After the successes of the first New Zealand and South African touring teams in Britain, most observers thought the two countries were the leading exponents of the game. Competition between them soon became recognized as the unofficial world championship. When the All Blacks and Springboks met in 1921 and 1928, both series ended in draws, and it was not until 1937, when South Africa triumphed in a series in New Zealand, that debates about the better team first were resolved. Competition with Australia also became important, especially for New Zealand. In 1931 Lord Bledisloe, the governor-general of New Zealand, donated a trophy for competition between New Zealand and Australia. New Zealand has largely dominated the competition, though Australia enjoyed an extended run of Bledisloe Cup victories between 1998 and 2002. During the period between World Wars I and II, official international tours by a combined team from the Home Nations began. The first tour by the British Lions (now called the British and Irish Lions)—as that composite team of players from England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland was known—took place in 1924, when they lost to South Africa. The Lions have existed only to undertake international tours of South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand and were not particularly successful against the Southern Hemisphere powers until 1971, when they defeated New Zealand. That success was followed by their famous series win against South Africa during their undefeated tour in 1974. In the last quarter of the 20th century, touring continued to be popular for rugby union teams. South American teams became a new force, even beating the team from South Africa. Romania also rose in stature as a touring team, winning the 1999 European Nations Cup. Rugby union continued to grow as an international game, highlighted by such new tournaments as the Pacific Rim Championship and the African Top Six Tournaments. The highest level of international competition for rugby union teams is the IRB Rugby World Cup, played for the William Webb Ellis Trophy. The World Cup has been held at regular four-year intervals since 1987. New Zealand won the inaugural cup, and the Australian team, the Wallabies, became the first team to win two World Cups (1991, 1999). The three Southern Hemisphere powers along with England and France dominated the early history of the World Cup, with each team reaching the final on multiple occasions. However, rapid improvement by countries such as Argentina and Samoa have expanded the next level of competitive national teams. In the professional era, competitions at club, provincial, and national levels have increased. The Southern Hemisphere season centres on the Super Rugby provincial competition between teams from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Argentina, and the

Northern Hemisphere exception Japan, followed by the Rugby Championship series between national teams from those countries other than Japan. In the Northern Hemisphere the Six Nations (England, France, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, and Wales) tournament remains the most significant, followed by the European Club Championship and national and supranational leagues, such as the Celtic League. Indeed, the professional era has led to conflicts between clubs and national unions. In the Southern Hemisphere leading players are signed to both national and Super Rugby contracts, whereas in England players are contracted to their clubs, as is the case in English professional association football. Another, more-recent and less-prestigious, annual Northern Hemisphere competition is the Americas Rugby Championship, which features national teams from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, the United States, and Uruguay.

Rugby League

In rugby league, major competitions are held in England and Australia, and the pinnacle of the game has been international tours involving the Australian and British national teams, along with the Rugby League World Cup, which began in 1954 in France and has been held at irregular intervals since then. Australia won six consecutive World Cups between 1975 and 2000, establishing itself as the international powerhouse in rugby league. The rugby league 2000 World Cup, held in Britain, featured teams from 16 countries. Rugby league saw tremendous growth in the Pacific area during the 1990s; Fiji, Samoa, the Cook Islands, Tonga, and Japan all field league teams. Club play continues to thrive in the European Superleague, the National Rugby League (Australian and New Zealand), the Rugby League Championship (Britain), and the French Rugby League.

Rugby Sevens

Another popular form of rugby, a variation of rugby union, is rugby sevens. It is played on a standard-sized rugby union field but with only seven players on each side. At 15 minutes, the length of a rugby sevens match is also much shorter than its 80-minute rugby union counterpart. Rugby sevens originated in Melrose, Scotland, in 1883; today it is played in dozens of countries, with its principal competitions being the Rugby World Cup Sevens and the IRB Sevens World Series. Rugby sevens became an Olympic sport in 2016.

Women and Rugby

While rugby was being professionalized during the 1990s, a parallel revolution was under way in the sport. Because the relationship between masculinity and rugby has been passed between fathers and sons, and rugby participation became synonymous with learning to be a man in the public schools of England and the private schools in the settler societies of the British Empire, women historically were excluded from playing competitive rugby. There was a short-lived attempt to establish a women's rugby league in Sydney in the early 1920s, but for the most part, as in association football, women were not allowed to play and were actively discouraged. In the United States and Canada, women's rugby gained popularity in the 1980s, primarily on college campuses. In 1983 the Women's Rugby Football Union formed in England with 12 member clubs. By 2000 there

were more than 120 clubs and more than 2,000 women playing organized rugby in England. The Women's World Cup began in 1991 and then shifted in 1994 to years preceding the men's World Cup. The competition is held every four years. While the United States was an early powerhouse, winning in 1991 and losing in the final in 1994 (to England), by the late 1990s women's international rugby was dominated by the New Zealand national team, known as the Black Ferns, who won both the 1998 and 2002 World Cups. The Black Ferns' success can be attributed to the NZRFU's providing the national team with leading coaches and training facilities, as well as operating the game in a professionalized manner not dissimilar to the men's game. In the 1990s rugby was, along with association football, the fastest-growing sport for women in Europe and the fastest in Australia and New Zealand. Women play the game by the same rules as men.^[2]

Conclusion

Rugby Sevens has become increasingly popular around the world and is played at major Regional and Multi-Sport competitions including the Pan American Games, Asian Games, Pacific Games, Commonwealth Games, World Games, Universiade and, from 2015, the All African Games. World Rugby strongly believes that Rugby Sevens will add value to the Olympic Games by attracting an engaged international audience, young and old, to a globally popular sport which embodies the Olympic ideals of friendship and fair play. The aspirations of the Rugby family to realise the original dream of the founder of the modern Olympics are set to be fulfilled^[3].

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