



WELSH RUGBY MEDIA RELEASE

WRU Pathway to Participation



The Welsh Rugby Union has published its Pathway to Participation for community rugby. The detailed plan, with an initial focus on a summer of fun formats of the game to help ease players of all ages back into contact rugby, is set to give the National Game a much-needed boost following the understandable impact of the COVID pandemic, and to ensure the community game bounces back to full health and strength.

Players under the age of 18 are already set to return to organised training from Saturday 27 March, pending confirmation from Welsh Government this week. And now, providing the public health conditions remain favourable, tag and touch rugby fixtures for those players (u18s) could be sanctioned from April 1 within their own districts. Measures around training and matches will remain subject to Welsh Government guidelines including access to facilities and any relevant travel restrictions. There will be no spectators at this time and it will be vital that parents / guardians attending for safeguarding reasons continue to abide by all Welsh Government guidance.

All levels of the game, including youth and senior teams (male and female) can look forward to a phased return of modified, limited contact training from May 1. Full details will be provided around what limited contact training entails along with coaching support. For example, there will be no scrums at all at this time.

From mid June, players of all ages can look forward to a month of summer sevens and tens rugby - under modified laws. Clubs and teams will be able to utilise the mid summer period to arrange midweek and weekend matches within agreed, modified formats to ease players back into competitive contact rugby and provide some

of the camaraderie that comes with competitive rugby that has been greatly missed so much over the past year. This period will lead into the phased return of 15 a-side rugby and will incorporate full contact training.

A set of modified laws has been agreed in order that friendly 15-a-side matches can be sanctioned from mid July, and formal WRU competitions are set to kick off in August. The exact format of the Competitions is being finalised and could include some form of knock-out competitions for all ages (male and female). Full guidelines around the modified laws and format of the competitions will be provided in due course. There is a planned winter break from December to mid-January, which has been identified as potentially a high risk period from a public health perspective. If Welsh Guidelines are flexible at this time, clubs may choose to play friendly matches during this window. WRU League rugby for male senior and youth teams is set to kick off from mid-January and run through to May 2022. The new season for the female game will start at the same time - mid January. Unquestionably, safety and adherence to strict COVID protocols will remain of paramount importance throughout this whole period to help Welsh Rugby move through each step and remain on course to achieve full participation in the game once again, with the clear aim of re-establishing the benefit that community rugby brings to the physical and mental well-being of players, coaches, volunteers and supporters.

WRU chair Rob Butcher said, "We know there is a strong desire within the community game to get back on the field. Rugby clubs are at the heart of our communities and we all miss the social interaction they provide. As soon as Welsh Government guidelines allow, we will sanction the gradual and safe return of rugby activities, provided the clubs have all the necessary protocols in place. We will continue to support the hundreds of community rugby volunteers in doing this. They have played such an important role over the past year as always. We had around 300 WRU clubs when the pandemic hit us a year ago and our priority is to come out of this with all those clubs and other community teams in a position to welcome back their players, coaches, volunteers and members to their facilities. We are confident this can be achieved having worked closely with clubs on all matters including funding streams, Welsh Government and Local Authority support, help accessing additional equipment needed at this time including PPE, and guidance in putting appropriate systems and protocols in place to keep everyone as safe as possible."

WRU Operations Director Julie Paterson said, "Our Pathway to Participation is a major step on Welsh rugby's road to recovery. Our rugby family is more enthusiastic than ever to get back to a stage where matches can take place and players, volunteers, families and supporters can benefit, once again from all the physical, social and mental benefits rugby uniquely provides within our communities. We hope this plan provides reassurance that we are on the right track to achieving that. We are grateful to our partners within Welsh Government, Welsh Sports Association, Sport Wales and Commonwealth Games Wales for their support in getting to this point and we acknowledge the patience and hard work of all our rugby volunteers who have implemented our safety protocols throughout the past year to allow some rugby activity to take place whenever it has been permitted. We know they will continue to do that during this next phase in order to help us move through the steps in the timeline as we return to full participation within the community game."

WRU Community Director Geraint John added: "With competitive community rugby having been on hold for 12 months, enjoyment is key now and the activity planned over the next few months should help all clubs, Female Hubs and all other teams get back on their feet and start enjoying rugby again, providing they feel they can provide a safe environment for all. After more than 12 months without contact rugby, it is very important all players complete at least six weeks of modified return to contact training before engaging in full contact training or matches in any format. We will be on hand to provide support on a number of levels, from coaching plans to help with managing facilities safely and our community team throughout Wales is looking forward to delivering competitions again, safely as we move towards the return of the 15-a-side game."

Pathway to Participation – Seven Steps: *

- **April 1. Return to Tag and Touch fixtures for players under the age of 18**
- **May 1. Youth and senior teams permitted to return to modified contact training (no scrums)**
- **From mid June. Return of competitive contact rugby at 7 and 10 a side for all ages and full contact training (male and female)**
- **From mid July. Friendly, 15-a-side matches sanctioned under agreed set of modified laws**
- **August – November. Return of some 15-a-side WRU-organised competitions at all levels (male and female).**
- **Dec – mid Jan. Winter break**
- **Mid Jan. Return of WRU League rugby (male game); start of new Female Hub season.**

***Providing public health conditions remain favourable and in line with Welsh Government guidelines. Dates subject to change.**

