

## **President letter to clubs for the upcoming season**

It gives me great pleasure to write to you for the first time in the capacity of President of the Irish Rugby Football Union for the upcoming season, 2024/25.

As we head into a landmark year of celebrations to mark our 150<sup>th</sup> year of playing international rugby, it is a tremendous honour for me to represent my family, my club Garryowen FC, and my home province Munster as President of the IRFU and I will continue to work hard to represent all of Irish rugby in an appropriate and fitting manner during the season ahead. I would like to pay tribute to the outgoing President Greg Barrett, who has represented us so well throughout the year and who has been a stalwart of Irish rugby since joining the Union Committee back in the 2013/14 season.

Last season was another brilliant one for the Union, both domestically at Club level and internationally with a Rugby World Cup and Olympics 7s alongside the regular tournaments. A huge word of thanks for everyone who contributed in any way over the past season, be that as a volunteer or a staff member.

I cannot say it enough, I cannot thank them enough, but the volunteers are at the heart of every Clubs success. The heartbeat of Irish rugby is in our clubs and schools system this is the core of our game. The coaches, the match officials, the people feeding players after games or the parents driving children to games all over the country, without that free discretionary effort, rugby simply would not be the thriving game it is. The club game is the foundation of the Irish rugby eco system, we all know what happens if you try to build a house without a strong foundation.

For the first time ever last season both finals for the Men's and Women's Energia AIL leagues were held in Aviva Stadium and a magnificent day was had. This was a real statement of intent by the Union and a testament to the growing popularity of the Club game. We look forward to continued success at Club level, both on and off the field. The impact seen last season and the player welfare benefits of the lower tackle, has created a new, exciting, and dynamic game at Club level, tackles are missed, offloads happen, this has really opened up our game.

A huge word of thanks to the many sponsors of rugby in Ireland, who support our clubs our provinces and the IRFU, without their contribution at every level, we simply would not be able to run our successful programmes or prepare our teams as well as we do for tournaments.

The recent release of the Rugby in Ireland strategy for the next four years and its vision to inspire, connect, and thrive demonstrates an ongoing commitment by the IRFU for the further development of our game encompassing our core values of inclusivity and respect for all. Also, there is an increasing focus on the development of the women's game, and I encourage all clubs to embrace these initiatives and get involved. I was delighted to see our Women's National Team secure qualification for this year's Rugby World Cup in England. With WXV1 on the horizon, a Celtic Challenge title to defend and another Guinness Six Nations to come, the year is shaping up to be a busy but exciting one for women's rugby so I would like to wish Scott Bemand and his team all the best.

Our Men's National Team secured back to back Guinness Six Nations titles this year, a huge achievement and we look forward to an exciting Autumn Series with four huge home games before the attention turns to defending our title. Andy Farrell takes on the huge honour of being the British & Irish Lions Head Coach for the tour to Australia at the end of the season and everyone in Irish Rugby wishes him well.

A new season brings new focuses and new energy, and I am very much looking forward to visiting and engaging with everyone in the Irish rugby community over the coming season.

Lastly, I would like to wish all Clubs and their members the very best for the season ahead.

Yours in Rugby

Declan Madden