

Memorandum

To: Member Clubs of the Alberta Junior Rugby Association
CC: Rugby Alberta, Calgary Rugby Union, Edmonton Rugby Union
From: Alberta Junior Rugby Association (AJRA)
Date: 4/14/2015
Re: AJRA Mixed Gender Policies

It is the opinion of the AJRA that rugby is a unique sport; particularly in regards to its full contact nature with little to no equipment. In evaluating our Mixed Gender Policy we carefully considered the nature of the sport as well as World Rugby (IRB) guidelines and Canadian law precedents. Through this process we concluded that we fully agree with World Rugby as well as the recent Canadian rulings related to sex discrimination in sport and seek to uphold their positions with our conclusions.

At any age, the primary concern with mixed gender rugby is a question about the contact aspect of the game; particularly the safety of the players and appropriateness (“decency”) between sexes. We endorse World Rugby’s position that, in a pre-puberty environment, both of the concerns are non-issues as related to mixed genders. Puberty, in general, is considered to be at the age of 12 as such mixed gender rugby at U12 and under would be considered appropriate by World Rugby.

Safety

Regarding safety, the main concern is the size and skill of players. It is our opinion that safety can be reasonably addressed by any player who has received dispensation. Dispensation is the process of evaluation a player’s ability to play in a certain league and once approved, deemed capable of playing in the league they are requesting to play. As such all safety concerns of girls playing in boy’s leagues should be addressed through the dispensation process (it is important to note that dispensation addresses the safety issue of females playing in male leagues at any age including senior). As such we do not consider safety to be an argument to restrict mixed gender rugby at age grades. It is important however to also note that, because of safety concerns, that a portion of players, particularly female players, would be unable to play if a boy’s league was their only option.

Decency

With the concern of safety sufficiently addressed, in our opinion this leaves only the issue of appropriateness (decency) of mixed gender rugby to be considered. As such we evaluated the following question: Is the contact regularly involved in the game of rugby appropriate between mixed genders after U12?

In evaluating the contact involved in rugby we reviewed both intentional and unintentional contact related to areas of the body that would be consider sexual in nature (specifically the breasts, genitals, buttocks and areas surrounding). We considered intentional contact being contact that was specifically intended or “taught” to occur opposed to unintentional contact which would be contact that naturally occurs in the game but was unintentional.

In the area of incidental contact it was concluded that it is reasonable for every rugby player to expect incidental contact with sexual body parts during the course of a game. Regarding intentional contact, it was considered that the skills involved in the scrum, lineout, tackle, ruck and maul are typically taught in a manner that would involve contact of some sort with sexual parts of the body. Highlighting these concerns are actions involved in scrums when locks bind to the props and in lineouts when a lift of a player occurs (although it was noted that there are no lifts in U15 and under). We reviewed adjustments to how these skills are taught however determined that any adjustment that decreases the decency concern also creates a greater issue of safety. It is our opinion that intentional and unintentional contact with sexual parts in any game of rugby is unavoidable and we further concluded that the overwhelming majority of rugby players would endorse this conclusion.

Since the contact of sexual parts is unavoidable in rugby, the question really comes down to whether the contact is considered appropriate or not by the general public. If we remove mixed gender and look at a gender specific leagues we concluded that the contact of concern is a regular and unavoidable part of the sport and rugby players have a reasonable expectation of this contact during a match. As such, we concluded that this contact is considered appropriate within the context of the game and those playing it. With that said, in a single gender league situation where a group of opposite gender players wish to play, is it reasonable to conclude that the general public, in this case the rugby players themselves, considers the resulting contact between mixed genders appropriate? It is our position that there is a portion of our rugby players in any post-pubescent age grade that would, at minimum, be uncomfortable with this contact required and, at worst, have a major negative experience as a result (even within the boundaries of the rules of the game).

Conclusion

With thorough consideration of all the information above we have concluded that World Rugby’s position is synonymous with Canadian Human Rights whereas post-pubescent age grade players (U13 and above) should play in gender specific age grade except “where no other option in continuing to play Rugby other than this exists” up to the age of 15 (U15). We also endorse World Rugby’s position that “Any Mixed

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Gender Rugby policy implemented by Unions should be developed as part of a larger player pathway plan for girls and women's rugby.”

In evaluation of the development of girl's rugby in Alberta it was concluded that both Sub-Unions have enough players to create a functional league that can be built into a sustainable option. **The AJRA has recently decided that it is in the best interest of female rugby to establish this league for the 2015 spring season.** This league will involve six fixtures in May and June; three of which will be North (ERU) vs South (CRU) combined teams playing the XV's version of the game and three of which will be an 8v8 transition variant of the game that will include club and combined teams. It is our position that this league is a viable “option” by World Rugby standards and as such **effective immediately the AJRA policy is that U13 and U15 boys and girls should play in their gender specific leagues as per World Rugby Mixed Gender Guidelines.**

We acknowledge that this decision will not be the opinion of every person involved and particularly U13 and U15 girls seeking to play in the boy's league. It's a hard decision to understand, particularly for players who have already played in these leagues, as it seems that what was appropriate yesterday is no longer appropriate today. We have given deep consideration to these issues and found ourselves in the position of trying to choose a “more right” position between respecting the right of a player to continue playing rugby and the right of other players who have concerns regarding appropriateness. We concur with World Rugby that when no other option to play is available, the right to play is the greater priority. In reviewing the sensitivity of a “more right” solution we do not wish to restrict any player's development, if possible, and since the boys leagues will have more games than the girls it is our position that **we will accommodate requests to play in the Boy's U13 and U15 leagues provided female players receive AJRA dispensation and there is no scheduled girls event within 24 hours before or after the fixture.** Please note that the AJRA reserves the right to rescind this accommodation without notice if due cause is presented and validated by the board.

Any questions regarding the content of this memorandum can be sent Attn: Kenton Poelzer @ info@ajra.ca.

Sincerely,

Kenton Poelzer

AJRA President