



**England  
Rugby**

**RFU Men's Leagues  
Pre-Season Briefing  
2023/24**

## Introduction

This document has been produced to update clubs on key information for the upcoming 2023/24 season. It will contain updates on both the leagues and Papa Johns Men’s Community Cup Competitions. Additionally it will also offer information on other processes such as Appeals. Also offered is guidance and information on other useful topics such as Game On and Floodlights.

If there is any conflict between this document and Regulation 6 or ROC Admin Instructions, then Regulation 6 or the ROC Admin Instructions will take precedence.

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## Allocation of Clubs to National 2, Regional 1 and 2 Leagues for Season 2024-25

After promotion & relegation has taken place, clubs will be allocated to leagues with a view to minimising travel across the country.

The following process will take place when a determination between 2 or more club needs to take place:

- (a) Club(s) with the Lowest Total Mileage between it (them) and all the Clubs in the League to be augmented shall be moved.
- (b) Where two Clubs have an identical Lowest Total Mileage (see definition) and a choice between those Clubs has to be made the following will apply in sequence:
  - (i) the Club(s) with the Lowest Total Mileage in the league they would otherwise remain in shall stay in that league and the other Club(s) shall move to the league to be augmented;
  - (ii) Where two clubs have an identical Lowest Total Mileage in the league they would otherwise remain in, if one of the Clubs competed at a lower league Level in the previous season then that Club shall be asked if it wishes to move, if not the Club that competed at a higher league level shall be moved; or
  - (iii) if both Clubs competed at the same level in the previous season, then the Club with the Best Playing Record shall be asked if it wishes to move and if not, the other Club shall be subject to the move.

All clubs will be eligible for these determinations, not just those promoted or relegated at the end of the previous season

## Relegation from Counties 1 and below Leagues (Potential Cascade Effect)

A total of 32 clubs will normally be relegated from the Counties One leagues at the end of each season in accordance with Regulation 6, Appendix 2, Paragraph 4.

Two factors determine where these relegations will fall:

- i) The number of clubs relegated from the Regional Leagues into each of the Counties One leagues. Clubs are relegated into the Counties One league consistent with their CB affiliation.
- ii) Which 6 Counties One leagues provide the Best Playing Record runners-up which will reduce the relegation from each of those leagues by a single club.

The potential relegation ranges from each Counties One league for season 2023-24 are as below:

Actual Relegation 2022-23	Counties One Leagues	Potential Relegation 2023-24	
		Min	Max
0	Tribute Western West	0	3
2	Tribute Western North	0	7
3	Tribute Southern South	0	6
5	Tribute Southern North	0	6
0	Herts/Middx	0	3
1	Eastern Counties	0	3
1	Essex	0	3
2	Kent	0	3
0	Surrey/Sussex	0	6
0	Hampshire	0	3
2	Midlands West (North)	1	4
2	Midlands West (South)	1	4
3	Midlands East (North)	1	4
3	Midlands East (South)	1	4
3	adm Lancashire/Cheshire	1	5
0	Cumbria	No relegation – bottom league	
3	Yorkshire	0	3
2	Durham/Northumberland	0	3

It is entirely possible that the exact number of clubs relegated from a Counties One league will not be known until the last day of the season.

The higher the maximum figure is the less likely it is to happen but it will nevertheless remain a possibility.

The impact of relegation from Counties One will continue down through the leagues in each respective leg.

## Non-Fulfilment of League Fixtures – Points Deductions and Friendlies (Counties 1 & below)

If a team has insufficient players to fulfil a league fixture with the requisite number of eligible players, they will be liable to a 5-point deduction for an unjustifiable failure to fulfil the fixture. However, they will be able to avoid the deduction of points if they offer to play, and duly honour, a friendly with a minimum of 10 players. This option will be available to a team a maximum of three times during the season.

The non-offending team **MUST** accept the offer to play a friendly in which event they will be awarded a 5-point walkover. Should the non-offending team decline to play the friendly, or fail to honour the friendly once accepted, they will not be awarded any league points.

Terms for the 'friendly' match, which shall be played at the time and venue of the scheduled League match, should be as agreed between the two teams which shall not be unreasonably withheld. These may be broadly in line with 'Game On' principles save that the result will not be recorded other than as a 5-point walkover to the non-offending team.

In the event that the appointed referee withdraws from the friendly fixture then it will be the responsibility of the offending team to supply a referee who must be in addition to the minimum of 10 players.

The offending team must inform the League Secretary and their opponents of their offer to play a friendly at the earliest opportunity and save for exceptional circumstances by no later than 20:00 on the Thursday prior to the match. The non-offending team prepared to play a friendly must respond by 12 noon Friday.

This process is noted in each Regional Organising Committee's Admin Instructions.

## Papa Johns Men's Community Cups Update

Following a review at the end of last season's competitions, the Community Game Board and Council approved the following recommendations:

- The Papa Johns Men's Community Cups will continue to be scheduled at the end of the league season
- Clubs will be communicated with about the competitions from the summer, including any changes being made
- The entry windows will open earlier and be open longer

Year	Entries Opened
22/23	November/December
23/24	October/November

- The draw will also be published earlier and thus be based on league positions earlier in the season (approximately halfway through the season)

Year	Draw Published
22/23	End of league season
23/24	Early January (from league positions in early December)

Clubs to have 2-3 week window to reconfirm entry  
**Final draw: early February**

- Where possible, a 'run to the finals' will be shown where a draw is published to aid clubs in their planning.
- The structures and formats of the competitions will remain as they were delivered last season
- The competitions will remain 1st XV only for 2023/24. The inclusion of Lower XVs will be considered in the wider FCS review
- There will be an attempt to better link in with county and CB cup competitions
- Increased communication & visibility of support offered for competitors
- Additional regulations to be in place to allow for fixtures to be flipped home and away 'if necessary'
- There will continue to be no sanctions to be given for late dropouts/walkovers

### Webinar

The RFU will be hosting webinar at the beginning of the season to offer further detail with respect to the recommendations noted above. These will take place on:

Monday 11<sup>th</sup> September

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> September

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> September

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September

## Game On

Game On is a flexibility in rules, not a change in the game we all love. Game On works for those teams which, for whatever reason, cannot put out a full 15. Game On is available at Counties 1 and below in the Men's game.

Using the different options it allows teams, as long as they have ten players, to get a game. Keeping players returning each week not only helps retain them but also recruits them. 10v10 one week, 11v11 the next; you'll soon be up to 15-a-side.

Game On is here to help you get the game played, ensuring your players get the game time they crave and be able to spend time at your club.

The Game On Principles (as set out below) may apply as follows:

- (i) Men's League matches at Counties League 1 and below (formerly Level 7 and below) provided prior approval of the Organising Committee is obtained;
- (ii) (ii) Women's League matches at National Challenge 2 and below without further approval;
- (iii) (iii) in non-RFU Competitions (including merit tables and friendlies) without further approval.

Subject in all cases to both teams agreeing which of the Game On Principles will apply to the match, and notifying the Referee accordingly at least 30 minutes prior to kick-off. If both teams cannot agree whether a Game On Principle will apply, the match will proceed without the application of that Game On Principle.

## Game On Principles

### *Law 3.2: Team Numbers*

A match can take place with a minimum of 10 players on each team at the start of the match. It is encouraged that the number of players on each team is equal, subject to the laws of the game.

### *Law 5.3: Match Duration*

A match can be a minimum of 40 minutes in duration.

### *Law 3.34: Rolling substitutions*

Are permitted.

### *Law 3.34: Half Game rule*

Where rolling substitutions are adopted, teams are encouraged to apply the half game rule to ensure each player in every match day squad plays at least half of the available playing time.

### *Law 18: Line outs*

Teams may agree not to contest or lift in the line out.

### *Law 19: Scrums*

Teams may agree that scrums can be contested push and strike (maximum 1.5m push) or uncontested.

Click for [Game On Information](#)

## Floodlight Guidance

Further to the removal of regulations pertaining to lux levels of floodlighting, the guide linked below has been created to support clubs with the execution of appropriate risk assessments. This should be read in conjunction with the existing RFU Floodlighting Installation and Management Guide which is also linked below .

[RFU Floodlighting Installation and Management Guide](#)

[Floodlights Risk Assessment Guidance](#)



## Regulation Update Reminder

1. For the 22-23 season the RFU put in place a regulation review strategy, the objective of which is to develop and implement regulations which: (a) are necessary, proportionate and pragmatic; (b) achieve the agreed upon objectives of the relevant regulation; (c) by adopting a structured, targeted and periodic review of regulations. This regulation review strategy is a rolling 3 year strategy to ensure the RFU plans its meetings and focus accordingly, to ensure it identifies and prioritise certain regulations based on an ongoing assessment and allows sufficient planning and time within meetings to discuss the relevant regulations.
2. The table below sets out an executive summary of the key changes which have the more material impact on the Game and on volunteer burden. The below provides a summary but for more detail, please also refer to the full regulations which will be on the website from 1 August 2023: <https://www.englandrugby.com/governance/rules-and-regulations>

<p><b>Regulation 4 (Club Membership, Mergers &amp; Acquisitions).</b>  <b>to be renamed: "Club Membership, Material Reorganisations and Members' and Directors'")</b></p>	<p>This Regulation had been due for a full review in season 22-23, which was timely given the insolvencies in the men's professional game. This Regulation was wholly rewritten, and benefitted from discussions with other sports.</p> <p>A updated Owners' &amp; Directors' test has been introduced at the professional level and will be at least as rigorous as other professional sports whilst there remains a much more simple test for clubs in the community game, and in particular members' owned clubs, with routine reporting only required in specific circumstances. For the professional game, the principal changes are the introduction of a set of Disqualifying Conditions against which certain individuals must self-certify their compliance as part of their ownership or management of a club.</p> <p>A growing regulatory area is women's teams moving as a whole between clubs, and therefore regulations around mergers and other reorganisations have been simplified to accommodate this. The events which would ordinarily have triggered regulatory approval under Regulation 4 have been widened to include material financial support and the incorporation of subsidiaries to hold Club assets, amongst other events, but otherwise remain largely unchanged from the current Regulation 4. All Clubs should still refer to Regulation 4 for the relevant regulations around merger, de-mergers, acquisitions and material re-organisations, all of which require the consent of the RFU.</p>
<p><b>Regulation 5 (Financial / Club Insolvency)</b></p>	<p>Following the insolvencies in the Premiership, this Regulation was reviewed as a "lessons learned" process. It operated effectively on the whole, but some clarification of existing principles has now been included. We have tightened the definition of Rugby Creditors (including defining the process, burden of proof and timescale for the payment of Rugby Creditors so that this is enshrined in regulation), in order to protect those within the original definition who would ordinarily be most vulnerable on an insolvency, such as players and staff. We have also removed any duplication between the main regulation and its corresponding schedule in relation to the purchase of an insolvent club by a Phoenix Entity.</p>
<p><b>Regulation 6 (Adult Competitions)</b></p>	<p><b>Floodlights:</b>          We have deregulated the provisions pertaining to lux levels of floodlights which has resulted in their removal from Regulation 6 for</p>

	<p>this season – this will instead be dealt with by way of guidance which will be available in due course.</p>
<p><b>Regulation 9 (Player Safety)</b></p>	<p><b>Mandatory pitch side care:</b> As agreed last season, this regulation has been updated to make mandatory the RugbySafe First Aid and Immediate Care Provision Standards into the adult game for the 23-24 season.</p> <p>This regulation is supplemented by additional guidance and supporting materials which are available here: <a href="https://keepyourbootson.co.uk/rugbysafe/">https://keepyourbootson.co.uk/rugbysafe/</a></p>
<p><b>Regulation 15 (Age Grade Rugby)</b></p>	<p><b>Tackle Height and Summer Framework changes</b></p> <p>The key changes relate to introduction of the Summer Activity Framework (similar to the one introduced during Covid) to allow for adjustment to the lower tackle height in the Age Grade Rules of Play.</p> <p>Regulation 15 is supplemented by additional guidance and supporting materials which are available here: <a href="https://www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/age-grade-rugby">https://www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/age-grade-rugby</a> <a href="https://www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/age-grade-rugby/summer-activity">https://www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/age-grade-rugby/summer-activity</a></p> <p><a href="#">Tackle Height Hub</a></p>
<p><b>Regulation 19 (Discipline)</b></p>	<p><b>Appeal Grounds</b></p> <p>There have been a number of competition appeals over the previous seasons on the grounds that sanctions are excessive. It is right that this appeal ability is retained in most cases but where there is already a fixed sanction in place for a regulatory breach, parties will no longer have the ability to appeal based on a sanction being excessive however the remaining appeal grounds would remain unchanged.</p>
<p><b>Regulation 20</b></p>	<p><b>Illicit Drugs Policy</b></p> <p>Whilst there are no changes to the regulation itself, a number of changes have been made to the Illicit Drugs policy, the most notable one being that ketamine is be added to the list of Prohibited Illicit Drugs listed in Schedule of the Policy.</p> <p>The revised policy will be available from 1 August here: <a href="https://www.englandrugby.com/governance/anti-doping-and-illicit-drugs/illicit-drugs-programme">https://www.englandrugby.com/governance/anti-doping-and-illicit-drugs/illicit-drugs-programme</a></p>
<p><b>Regulation 21 (Safeguarding)</b></p>	<p><b>Safeguarding Audit</b></p> <p>The deadline for clubs to complete the safeguarding audit has been changed from 31 December to 29 October. This is to enable ensure that clubs have in place the relevant safeguarding measures in place earlier in the season.</p> <p>This regulation is supplemented by additional guidance and supporting materials which are available here: Details on how to complete the Safeguarding Audit: <a href="https://help.rfu.com/support/solutions/articles/103000064031-how-to-complete-the-club-safeguarding-audit-in-gms-2023">https://help.rfu.com/support/solutions/articles/103000064031-how-to-complete-the-club-safeguarding-audit-in-gms-2023</a></p>
<p><b>County Championship Regulations and</b></p>	<p>Any changes to these regulations will be presented to Governance and Council in the Autumn and will be communicated thereafter.</p>

<b>Adult Male Cup Regulations</b>	
<b>Women's Premier 15s Regulations</b>	<p><b>Mandatory number of England Qualified Players</b> A number of changes have been made to introduce the mandatory selection of a minimum number of England Qualified Players in a match day squad and the removal of the concept of Foreign Players (as defined in Regulation 1).</p> <p><b>Introduction of Premier Women's Rugby Limited</b> Given that Premier Women's Rugby Limited has now been appointed as the organising committee for the competition and that certain delegated powers have been granted to them, a number of changes have been made to regulations to include greater specificity as to which decisions and powers rest with the RFU and which are delegated to Premier Women's Rugby Limited.</p>
<b>Premiership/ Championship Cup</b>	<p>The key changes relate to the addition of Championship Clubs into the Premiership Cup for the 23-24 season. Some regulatory variations are required to cater for the variance in minimum standards between the Championship and Premiership clubs and this has resulted in an additional Appendix 7 setting out these variations. Save for this, the Premiership Cup Regulations largely remain unchanged.</p>
<b>Premiership League Regulations</b>	<p>The key changes pertaining to the Premiership league competition are that the references to SRUK Panel within the regulations will now be replaced by the newly-constituted PRL Sporting Commission.</p> <p>The regulations have also been amended to reflect the play-off between the top placed team in the Championship (provided it meets the minimum standards criteria) and the last placed team in the Premiership at the end of the 23-24 season. This was part of the agreement when the moratorium from relegation was agreed by Council in June 2021. This change will also be reflected in the Championship league regulations.</p>