

5 ways rugby is positively impacting society

Mastercard has launched its Future of Rugby report and Future XV squad: a celebration of the remarkable individuals from around the globe who are shaping the future of the sport, with the Rugby World Cup 2023 tournament currently underway.



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On the 200th anniversary of the sport, the Future of Rugby report identifies five ways rugby is positively impacting society, acting as a 'force for good' through inclusivity, health, education, the fan experience, and sustainability. The report forecasts a 10% growth in global followers and fans of rugby by 2025, along with a 17% increase in participation in this World Cup year.



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Danette Breitenbach 8 Sep 2023



For each social impact trend identified, the report suggests a focus for the future, led by the current examples making a difference today. Highlight findings include:

- **Inclusivity:** By 2027, the report predicts the top ten ranked rugby nations will all hold national festivals or competitions focused on the participation of individuals with disabilities.

Female participation levels are also at an all-time high, totalling 2.7 million players globally, a +28% increase in registered female players since 2017. Elsewhere, growth in participation is also being seen in wheelchair rugby, with the sport now played in around 40 countries across the world since its inception less than 50 years ago.

- **Health:** Player associations and rugby-based charities are leading the charge in destigmatising mental health through rugby, particularly amongst men – using the sport as a vehicle to promote better physical and mental health. Rugby is starting to be viewed as a safer sport than it was in 2021, with a 10% increase in fans in emerging markets believing the sport has been made safer.
- **Education:** Across the world, rugby is being used as a force for good to drive better educational outcomes and empowerment, in particular for young people. The report suggests that even more should be done to champion small-scale projects already making a difference, such as the UmRio in Brazil, or the VUSA Rugby Academy in South Africa.
- **Fan Experience:** World Rugby's commitments to growing the game's global influence amongst fans has led to a 32% increase in interest in emerging rugby nations – two-thirds also see the game as more exciting. The report presents ideas for growing the game's influence amongst fans, such as through in-stadia live analytics, the roll-out of VR technology and using player holograms.
- **Sustainability:** Rugby can play a positive role in responding to climate change, with World Rugby leading by example being one of the first international federations to sign the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework and launching its own World Rugby Environmental Sustainability Plan 2030.

Based on its research, the report predicts that by 2027, 50% of clubs in elite competitions around the world will be signatories to the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework each pledging ambitious actions.

Penned by world-leading rugby academics at the University of Bath, the report features exclusive interviews from rugby legends and Mastercard ambassadors Bryan Habana, Dan Carter, Maggie Alphonsi, Portia Woodman-Wickliffe, Safi N'Diaye and Sébastien Chabal, plus a host of personal stories of innovators from around the world doing remarkable work to drive the game forward.



SAB and SABC secure rights to televise key 2023 Rugby World Cup matches

8 Sep 2023



Trailblazing rugby players

To bring to life the five key areas identified as driving the growth in the game, Mastercard has assembled a team of remarkable individuals who are shaping the future of the sport – the Future XV.

This squad of pioneers, selected with assistance from the University of Bath and international stars of the game, embody the positive changes being made for rugby's future growth, championing activity at all levels of the game, from grassroots to professional, in countries from all around the world.

The global trailblazers paving the way for future generations of rugby players are:

- **Zintle Mpupha (South Africa)**, the female rugby star who holds the national try-scoring record for the Springbok Women and is passionate about leveraging her platform as a professional rugby player to help drive grass roots rugby in South Africa.

- **Bárbara Pichot (Argentina)**, the general manager of women's rugby for Sudamérica Rugby (SAR), who is helping to promote the development of the Women's game in the region and enabling pathways for the future.
- **Deb Coulthard (Australia)**, who has devoted her career to Deaf Rugby, has taken the Australian national team overseas twice as a manager.
- **Shaunagh Brown (England)**, former England player using her platform to help tackle inequalities in gender, ethnicity, and sexuality in the game.
- **Alex Bassan (England)**, who created visually impaired rugby, works for The Change Foundation, which uses sport to create social change. He has trained more than 2,000 coaches, trainers and managers in using sport for social change across the globe.
- **Ayaz Bhuta MBE (England)**, a Paralympic gold medallist, double Paralympian and double European Champion, he is a driving force behind changing the perception of disability within rugby and sport more widely.
- **Jérémy Clamy (France)**, the first active professional rugby player in France to speak publicly about his homosexuality.
- **Julien Pierre (France)**, a lifelong ecologist, Julien has oriented his career on creating the first label for sports clubs to help promote their eco-performance: Fair Play For Planet.
- **Sene Naoupu (Ireland)**, is a former professional rugby player and Irish international in Sevens, XV's and touch. Off the pitch, she has helped lead game-changing national and global strategic projects in women's rugby, Pasifika rugby, emerging nations, brain health education and mental wellbeing.
- **Richard Fagan (Ireland)**, is president of the Emerald Warriors, Ireland's first LGBT+ Inclusive rugby club. He advocates that rugby is a sport for all and combines his business expertise and passion for the sport to drive the diversity and inclusion message in Ireland and beyond.
- **Martino Corazza (Italy)**, the creator of the International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament, where players with and without disabilities play the same mainstream rugby game as equal teammates, without the use of special or adapted rules.
- **Kelly Evans (New Zealand)**, the first New Zealand female accredited rugby agent, Kelly has dedicated over a decade working to drive positive change around the way in which women in sport are valued and visible. She is passionate about female equal opportunities both on and off the pitch, working towards a more equitable future, not just in rugby, but sport as a whole. She manages advocacy and welfare, contract negotiation, commercial partnerships, strategic career planning and more for the athletes on her roster.
- **Maia Marshall-Amai (New Zealand)**, is the sole woman in the Wheel Blacks team and a driving force behind Wheelchair Rugby, her goal is to encourage greater female wheelchair rugby participation.
- **Jamie Farndale (Scotland)**, who campaigns for a more sustainable sport, and researches how sports can influence the behavioural changes required to transition to a net zero economy.
- **Jo Perkins (Wales)**, the Head Physiotherapist for the Welsh Women's Rugby team, who is on a mission to grow the sport by supporting women through injury, as well as illness prevention and management strategies.

Commenting on the report, lead author and rugby science specialist Professor Keith Stokes, said: "The report and the Future XV squad uncover extraordinary people and organisations working hard to create positive change at all levels of the game. On rugby's 200th anniversary, now is the time to celebrate these innovators as well as all that rugby has achieved,

but also to build on that to propel the sport forwards into the decades ahead. That means rugby continuing to innovate to attract more people into the sport, demonstrating its positive influence in society, and taking a lead on key issues.

“Guided by rugby’s core principles of solidarity and respect, we hope this report can act as a springboard that helps to drive lasting and impactful change, which in turn will help ensure rugby continues to be a force for good in the years ahead.”

Raja Rajamannar, chief marketing and communications officer of Mastercard, added: “This year, we celebrate 200 years of rugby. And while it’s a chance to look back, it’s more importantly an opportunity to look ahead to the next 200 years of the game. As sponsor of the men’s and women’s Rugby World Cups, and programmes like Women in Rugby, we’ve seen the incredible passion rugby evokes among players and fans alike. Mastercard is proud to be part of the legacy of this great sport—and to invest in rugby’s bright future.”

Bryan Habana, on how to continue growing rugby in future: “There are a lot of things rugby has to overcome in the years ahead. We need to keep player welfare as a top priority, while also opening up rugby to these new opportunities, such as looking at innovative ways of creating an enjoyable fan experience in stadia but also at home.”

Alan Gilpin, World Rugby chief executive said: “This year, we are celebrating 200 years of rugby, and it is an important moment to reflect, challenge and harness the pioneering spirit of our beginnings to shape a bright future for our sport. From promoting inclusion and diversity to fostering a sense of community, rugby has the power to bring people together and create positive social change. This fascinating Mastercard Future of Rugby report does more than simply bring this to life, but it demonstrates that we have the passion and expertise to continue to move forward to shape a better game and set a positive example.”

View the full report: [Future of Rugby Report](#).

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