

RUGBY VICTORIA

2026 Senior Competition

March Update

2025 SENIOR COMPETITION REVIEW OVERVIEW

- Clubs strongly supported the introduction of divisional Rugby.
- Clubs in unanimous agreement that a circuit breaker is needed in Victorian Rugby and change is needed.
- Competitive rugby and competitions the key outcome desired from any recommended changes.
Minimisation of forfeits and creating an environment where all teams are a chance to compete and score each week the focus.
- Development of a competition structure that provides sustainability and competitiveness key. Specifically, the agreed outcome for all clubs was divisional Rugby, which provides a strong and competitive premier division, promotes new club growth, facilitates club improvement and development, and provides club the opportunity to rebuild in a competitive environment.
- Growth and development of Colts teams a high priority for clubs and RV.
- Introduction of more social rugby offerings (including the extension of the Under 85 model) strongly supported by clubs.

2026 SENIOR COMPETITION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Introduction of Divisional Rugby, with promotion and relegation implemented
- Dewar shield to become a minimum 6-team competition once two divisions established. Long term, 8 teams is seen as the preferred number
- 2nd Division to return to its original name, Ward Shield from 2026.
- Introduction of a player points system, focused on minimising movement between clubs, to be introduced in 2027.
- Target is to have three divisions by 2029, with all clubs to have at least two Senior teams across all divisions.
- Conference to become regional from 2026, with a view to decrease travel and reduce forfeits.
- Compulsory thirds to be removed, however three senior teams, (1st, 2nd, Colts) or (1st, 2nd, 3rds) strongly recommended for club's long-term sustainability.
- Introduction of a Premier thirds grade and regional (geographical thirds) from 2026.
- Return of the club referee program from 2026, with each club to provide a minimum of one green shirt referee for every two teams and at least one qualified Assistant referee.
- Introduction of a qualified sports trainer/medic at every club by end of the 2026 season, in readiness for the 2027 season. RV to seek external funding and to deliver at no cost to clubs.
- Significant investment and focus on referee recruitment, development and retention to match growth and provide the best match

DEWAR / WARD SHIELD

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

- Divisional Rugby to be in place by no later than 2028.
- Phased in approach, building capacity for clubs both on and off field, ensuring long term sustainability and viability.
- Clubs have 18 months to prepare.
- Promotion and relegation will then begin once divisional structures are implemented.
- Player point system implemented to minimise player movement and encourage junior development.
- Whole club development (including Women's and Colts) to be prioritised.
- Clubs will be required (and supported) to meet a set of minimum standards by the conclusion of the 2026 season/start of 2027 season to be considered for entry to Dewar Shield.

PHASE 1 - 2026

- Implementation of the Rugby Victoria Championship for season 2026, aimed at building the capacity and depth of clubs, closing the gap between clubs.
- Introduction of player points system, to minimise player movement, in readiness for 2027
- Club compliance and governance standards for all clubs.
- Development and support of Conference Clubs to enter the divisional structure when they are ready.
- Introduction of a Senior Competition Working Party to meet regularly to monitor, review and provide recommendations as required
- Club governance and compliance a priority in Phase 1, to ensure clubs are viable and sustainable long term.

TEAM ENTRIES 2026

- 1 FOOTSCRAY
- 2 POWER HOUSE
- 3 ENDEAVOUR HILLS
- 4 HARLEQUINS
- 5 MELBOURNE UNICORNS
- 6 MOORABBIN
- 7 BOX HILL
- 8 MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY
- 9 KIWI HAWTHORN
- 10 BRIMBANK

PHASE 2 - 2027

- Introduction of Shepparton into the Rugby Championship in 2027
- Introduction of a 12th team (by application) to the Rugby Championship
- Rugby Championship to move to 6 and 6, with a top 4 finals system
- Club compliance and governance standards for all clubs.



RUGBY VICTORIA CHAMPIONSHIP

ALL TEAMS START IN DEWAR

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----|----------------------|
| 1 | FOOTSCRAY | 7 | BOX HILL |
| 2 | POWER HOUSE | 8 | MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY |
| 3 | ENDEAVOUR HILLS | 9 | KIWI HAWTHORN |
| 4 | HARLEQUINS | 10 | BRIMBANK |
| 5 | MELBOURNE UNICORNS | | |
| 6 | MOORABBIN | | |

- All Clubs to start in Dewar, with the competition split in half following all clubs playing each other once (5 and 5)
- Clubs will then play a return fixture (5 games) against clubs in their division.
- RV will fixture 3rds accordingly to align best we can around this model
- Top 5 will be determined via a “Championship” model, with overall performance (accumulated points) across first and second grade

RUGBY VICTORIA CHAMPIONSHIP

- Qualification for Dewar Shield will be based on the overall performance of 1st and 2nd Grade.
- Points will be awarded for wins and draws.
- Bonus points will be awarded for four (4) tries and losing by (seven) 7 or less.
- For the purposes of this Championship, first-grade competition and bonus points will be counted double.
- The system is to identify overall strength of club and suitability and sustainability in Dewar Shield.
- The club who finishes first will be awarded the Rugby Victoria Championship Shield.
- This is separate to the Cowper Shield, which considers all grades, including women's.

COMPETITION STRUCTURE 2026

10 team Comp

- The top 5 clubs, based on accrued points after 9 rounds will enter Dewar Shield
- The remaining 5 clubs will enter Ward Shield.
- Clubs will play return fixtures against the clubs in their division
- A top 5 finals system used in 2025, due to a loss of a home and away fixture
- Ladder points will return to Rugby Vic Competition base format, in both first and second grade.
- Head-to-head will remain for season 2026 (Rationale: for and against from matches played against teams in other division may impact ladder position significantly)
- The competition will reset at the beginning of 2027

COMPETITION STRUCTURE 2027

12 team Comp

The Rugby Championship will be structured as follows in 2027

- The top 6 clubs, based on accrued points after 10/11 rounds will enter Dewar Shield
- The remaining 6 clubs will enter Ward Shield.
- Promotion/relegation to begin from 2028 Season
- Clubs will play return fixtures against the clubs in their division
- A top 4 finals system to be utilised
- Ladder points will return to Rugby Vic Competition base format, in both first and second grade.
- Head-to-head will remain for season 2027 (Rationale: for and against from matches played against teams in other division may impact ladder position significantly)

RUGBY VICTORIA CHAMPIONSHIP COMPETITION POINTS

Result	Points
Win 1sts	8
Win 2nds	4
Draw 1sts	4 (for each team)
Draw 2nds	2 (for each team)
Byes	0

Bonus Points	Points
Four (4) tries or more scored (1 st Grade)	2
Loss by seven (7) pts, or less (1 st Grade)	2
Four (4) tries or more scored (2 nd Grade)	1
Loss by seven (7) pts, or less (2 nd Grade)	1

FORFEITS

Result	Points
Forfeit Awarded (1st Grade)	10 (8 points + 2 Bonus)
Forfeit Awarded (2nd Grade)	5 (4 points + 1 Bonus)

Result	Points
Forfeit Penalty	-4

TIE BREAKER

During the Rugby Vic Championship (first 9 rounds of the Dewar Shield Season) For and scored Against will **NOT** be considered in a ladder tie-break.

Should clubs finish equal on competition points, promotion to Dewar Shield will be decided on the head-to-head (match result) between the two clubs during the first 9 rounds.

Should a draw occur the results against the next highest ladder position will be utilised (e.g. If 4th and 5th are equal, results against 3rd place will be compared)

This removes impact of any forfeit, as well as decreasing the need for teams to win by a higher margin than teams in similar ladder positions. Bonus points for 4 tries (28 points remain in place)

PLAYER REGISTRATIONS

Clubs wishing to enter the Rugby Victoria Championship must have a minimum of Forty (40) registered players by April 1st, 2026.

Monthly and Yearly registrations only. Weekly registrations will not be included in the overall tally.

Clubs agreed that should a club fail to meet this baseline qualification, Rugby Victoria may choose to move the club into the Conference Cup for 2026.

CLUB FINANCIALS

Clubs must remain financial throughout the Rugby Victoria Championship.

All clubs will be notified when they fall outside of terms (30 days) and must resolve this by 5pm Friday of the next fixtured game.

Should a club breach this

- They will be awarded no points for any game played whilst non-financial
- Will be deducted -10 points from their Championship tally

Breach of being a non-financial club will be announced the week following the round. Clubs they play will be allocated points as per normal (win/loss/bonus)

INTEGRITY-REFEREES, JUDICIARY, DISCIPLINE

- Rugby Victoria's A panel will referee the Championship Fixture, along with Lindroth. The panel, made up of 8 Referees can cover both competitions
- All matches will be filmed and live streamed in 2026, ensuring all incidents can be managed by Rugby Victoria Integrity team.
- Judiciary and cards will be monitored. Should a club receive a significant number of cards and/or judiciary incidents through the Rugby Victoria Championship, clubs may be requested to meet with Rugby Victoria and be provide an explanation.
- The use of Uncontested Scrums will be monitored. Continued use of Uncontested Scrums will require explanation to Rugby Victoria

If a club's conduct in a match, or across multiple rounds, is deemed as a significant breach of competition integrity, safety, the values of Rugby, or competition rules, Rugby Victoria may require the club to appear before the Rugby Victoria Competition Management team.

Any serious and proven breach may see a club's qualification to Dewar revoked (at RV's discretion)

CLUB HEALTH REVIEW

REQUIREMENTS FOR 2027 AND BEYOND

Clubs will be expected to meet a set of key governance and club standards by the conclusion of the 2026 season, in readiness for season 2027.

These standards will be across a set of key metrics including governance, financials, committee structure, compliance, club structure, facilities (including future plans), female rugby and pathways.

Rugby Victoria will provide the details of this prior to the start of the 2026 season and will work with clubs to achieve these minimum standards.

Should a club not meet the minimum standards for Dewar Shield, Rugby Victoria will place the next highest ranked club into Dewar Shield once competitions move to divisional format

RULE ALIGNMENTS

1. Squad Sizes + Replacements

Squad sizes, reserve movements and game length will remain consistent across first and second grade

- *All matches are to be played with a maximum of 23 players (15 on the field, plus 8 reserve players). The following illustrates the number of replacements or movements each grade is permitted to have within the maximum of 23 players.*
- *Dewar Shield + Ward Shield: 8 Movements*
- *Half length: 40 minutes*

Note: Ward Shield 2nd Grade will move to 35 minute halves for the final five (5) rounds and Finals. Dewar 2nd grade will remain at 40 minute halves.

RULE ALIGNMENTS

1. FRESH RESERVES

The Fresh Reserve rule will remain in place and unchanged in season 2026

- *A maximum of three (3) fresh reserves are permitted in the Dewar Shield 1st Grade and Ward Shield 1st Grade teams during minor rounds. There is no cap on fresh reserves during finals series.*
- *A fresh reserve is a player who has not played (or will not play) in any other match on that match day or round.*
- *A non-fresh reserve is a player who has played at least 50% of game time in any other match on that match day or round.*

Note: Fresh Reserves only applies to all 1st Grade and will continue after the split at Round 9

MOVING TO DIVISIONAL RUGBY

The Rugby Championship will be utilised in 2027 to decide the divisional structure for 2028.

If club numbers increase and entry in the divisional Rugby structure allows it, implementation of Divisional rugby may be brought forward to Season 2027.

For this to happen the following would need to occur

- If 13 club entries will see 7 teams in Dewar Shield and 6 in ward.
- If 14 Club Entries will be 8 in Dewar and 6 in Ward.
- Ladder placement in 2026 and compliance across all key metrics will be used should divisional be brought in 2027. It is incumbent on clubs to meet on and off field performance metrics to enter Dewar Shield once divisional Rugby is implemented.

BENDIGO BANK
CONFERENCE CUP

TEAM ENTRIES 2026

METRO

- 1 CASEY
- 2 ELTHAM
- 3 MELBOURNE CHARGERS
- 4 MONASH
- 5 POWER HOUSE 4TH XV

COUNTRY

- 6 BALLARAT
- 7 BENDIGO
- 8 GEELONG
- 9 MELTON
- 10 SHEPPARTON

CONFERENCE CROSSOVER

- 10 Teams split into 2 Conferences Metro/Country
- Play each team within your conference twice (Home and Away)
- Play each team in opposing conference once (Home or Away)
- 13 Round Season

- Top 4 Finals - 3 Weeks
 - M1 vs M4, M2 vs M3, C1 vs C4, C2 vs C3
 - M1 vs M2, C1 vs C2
 - M1 vs C1

RULE ALIGNMENTS

Squad Sizes + Replacements

Squad sizes, reserve movements and game length will remain as follows

- *All matches are to be played with a maximum of 23 players (15 on the field, plus 8 reserve players). The following illustrates the number of replacements or movements each grade is permitted to have within the maximum of 23 players.*
- *8 Movements (Rolling)*
- *Match length: 40 minutes*

STORELOCAL
LINDROTH CUP
+ 3RD GRADE

TEAM ENTRIES 2026

LINDROTH

WESTERN DISTRICTS

ENDEAVOUR HILLS

FOOTSCRAY

MELBOURNE UNICORNS

MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY

POWER HOUSE

3RD GRADE

HARLEQUINS

ENDEAVOUR HILLS

FOOTSCRAY

MELBOURNE UNICORNS

MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY

POWER HOUSE

LINDROTH / THIRDS

- With 6 teams entering both the StoreLocal Lindroth Cup, and the Premier 3rd grade, clubs with both teams will follow the same fixture.
- For the purpose of the fixturing, Western Districts (Lindroth) have been matched with Harlequins (3s)
- Both competitions will be a 15 round season playing each side 3 times starting on April 11 inline with the Dewar/Ward season.
- The StoreLocal Lindroth Cup finals will be held over two weeks with a standalone marquee Grand Final on August 8
- The 3rd Grade finals will be held over three weeks, with the Grand Final on August 15 (along with Dewar/Ward)
- RV has aimed to align 3rd grade sides to their 1st and 2nd grade a minimum of 75% of the season

LINDROTH
DEVELOPMENT +
SOCIAL RUGBY

LINDROTH DEVELOPMENT

- A Women's Development competition is returning in 2026
- This will be held fortnightly on a Saturday afternoon beginning April 18 at a centralised hub, rotating around different clubs on each match day.
- This will be an XVs competition, with Game On Variations applied when needed.
- Centralised hubs will also enable players to be shared between teams

SOCIAL RUGBY

- A new competition launching in 2026, Social Rugby will allow for players to turnup and play for a bit of fun
- This competition will be held at a centralised location beginning on Friday May 1
- Modified rules will be introduced to enable XVs laws to still be implemented, but reduce the need for specialised training

BOLTON CUP COLTS

BOLTON CUP COLTS

- The Bolton Cup Colts will return in 2026.
- There will be an expansion of the age bracket to include U18s player into the Under 20s Colts competition.
- The exact structure and fixtures are TBC as we get confirmation from clubs about what teams are being entered.