



Rugby Canada
High-Performance Program Review
March 22, 2022



RUGBY CANADA **HIGH-PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rugby Canada's High-Performance program is at a critical crossroads. This sentiment is echoed across Rugby Canada's athletes, coaches, support staff, leadership, and the Canadian rugby community. The organization has arrived at this moment because of both on-field and off-field challenges: failure of the Men's 15s team to qualify for the 2023 World Cup, disappointing results at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, and multiple recent public-facing internal team issues. Tension around the High-Performance program and Rugby Canada has been brewing for several years.

To gain a more fulsome understanding of its high-performance challenges and opportunities, Rugby Canada's Board of Directors commissioned the High-Performance Review. The scope for the review was focused on three key areas: strategy, structure, and culture of the High-Performance program. Review activities took place from November 2021 through January 2022 and consisted of research into emergent high-performance rugby trends coupled with a broad stakeholder engagement effort consisting of an online survey, 1-on-1 interviews and focus groups with a cross-section of current and alumni athletes, coaches, leadership, support personnel and external stakeholders.

Fundamentally, the review's findings are that the High-Performance program's problems are systemic in nature and cut across all three of the review's areas of focus. Lending power and urgency to the problems of the High-Performance program is that, to a remarkable degree, participants in the review see many of the same problems and point to many of the same root causes. Amongst these shared sentiments is the view that the program's failures in Tokyo and disqualification from the 2023 Men's 15s world cup have a "silver-lining": Rugby Canada can no longer avoid making long-needed changes.

This need for change is further underscored by the impact of external forces shaping the global Rugby and sporting environment. The level of competition Rugby Canada's senior teams are facing is increasing as Tier 2 and Tier 3 nations continue to evolve and improve. Off the field, rugby organizations are becoming more sophisticated in both their approach to athlete development and their business operations. The athlete community is also evolving in what it expects and is demanding to be included in new and different ways and, most importantly, expecting new types of leadership. These external forces require Rugby Canada to evolve key elements of its organization including its leadership structure, how it manages its funding and its high-performance strategy.

The key insights identified by the review are:

#	CATEGORY	KEY HIGH-PERFORMANCE REVIEW INSIGHTS
1	Strategy	Rugby Canada does not have a high-performance strategy.
2	Strategy	High-performance development pathways are inconsistently effective and limit short and long-term program aspirations.
3	Strategy	Distrust arising from Rugby Canada's opaque management of its general fund has negative impacts across the High-Performance program.
4	Strategy	Rugby Canada's unclear national governance role limits High-Performance program effectiveness.
5	Structure	Rugby Canada's current organizational structure and resourcing are unable to support four high-performance teams.
6	Structure	Ineffectiveness of corporate and organizational governance exposes Rugby Canada to significant risk.
7	Culture	Rugby Canada's poor relationship with the Canadian rugby community is a constraint on the High-Performance program.
8	Culture	Rugby Canada has failed to create a healthy and effective high-performance culture.
9	Culture	Athletes do not view the High-Performance program as a safe and inclusive environment.
10	Culture	Rugby Canada's communication practices worsen High-Performance program issues.
11	Culture	The High-Performance program's approach and support to leadership and coaching must evolve.
12	Culture	Change is possible and many hope to be a part of it.

The dysfunction of the system is ultimately a failure of leadership. Either through acts of "omission or commission" the leadership of the organization – Board, executive, operations, and coaches – have not effectively managed the short-term and long-term needs of the High-Performance program. Leadership has also failed to cultivate and nurture an environment that truly supports and enables high-performance athletes. As it currently stands, Rugby Canada's high-performance athletes, support staff and even coaches are effectively revolting against the program's system, leading to growing organizational dysfunction and a continued worsening of high-performance results.

The culture of Rugby Canada and the High-Performance program is described as 'empty' or 'nonexistent'. In this vacuum of culture and leadership, bad behaviours take hold across all areas of the program. The High-Performance program is described as unhealthy or unsafe by many. Current players and High-Performance program alumni confess that they are not proud to wear the Rugby Canada jersey.

Over the past years, Rugby Canada has started to evolve itself (particularly around organizational governance) and this effort must continue as the organization will need to change on a broad scale. This change will require letting go of the past, embracing innovative approaches and empowering new voices. While not forgetting its history, the organization must look forward and support a different

leadership approach with a different sense of what drives high-performance. Ultimately, addressing the challenges of the High-Performance program will require courageous leadership, with a willingness to make a material change to the organization's system. The change required in Rugby Canada's High-Performance program starts with the issue sitting at the heart of the organization's current dysfunctional system – the lack of a high-performance strategy. Creating and articulating a clear high-performance strategy should be the program's top priority. With this strategy defined, improvements to the program's culture and structure – including rebuilding trust with a diverse stakeholder community - can progress and be sustained.

Key recommendations arising out of the review are:

#	CATEGORY	KEY HIGH-PERFORMANCE REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS
1	Strategy	Establish a high-performance strategy & clear national governance role.
2	Structure	Accelerate internal governance improvements.
3	Structure	Establish/improve foundational internal people processes.
4	Strategy	Improve transparency of management of the general fund.
5	Structure	Evaluate current leadership and coach effectiveness.
6	Structure	Establish and hire a High-Performance Director distinct from coach roles.
7	Strategy	Prioritize development pathway coherence and linkage to the high-performance strategy.
8	Culture	Articulate and make real a clear view of Canada's unique rugby culture and identity.
9	Culture	Repair and improve the relationship with the athlete community.
10	Culture	Prioritize the creation and sustainment of a truly inclusive culture.
11	Culture	Prioritize proactive, consistent communication with athletes and the community.
12	Structure	Optimize for or shift Rugby Canada's geographical presence.

The High-Performance program's challenges are systemic in nature and can only be addressed over time through thoughtful and dedicated leadership. Responding to the review's recommendations will also require courageous leadership that is willing to 'break from the past'.

The initial priority of the board should be the articulation of a clear high-performance Strategy. This strategy will serve as the guide for following actions including the hiring of a new CEO and High-Performance Director, culture-building initiatives and deeper improvement to the organization and program's organizational structure.

It will be critical for Rugby Canada to communicate this report fully and transparently in both response and respect for the time given by its stakeholders across Canada. This first step is intended to demonstrate Rugby Canada's willingness to take accountability, its willingness to change and its commitment to moving forward with inclusive intentions. The journey ahead will be difficult and will likely 'get worse before it gets better' but with consistent effort Rugby Canada can chart a brighter future for the High-Performance program.

APPROACH

Triggered by concerns raised about the effectiveness of the culture within its High-Performance program, in November 2020 Rugby Canada initiated a review of the program. The purpose of the review was to analyze Rugby Canada's current high-performance environment inclusive of its strategy, structure, and cultural elements, and how those elements enable the four national senior teams. Specific areas of focus for the review included:

- Refinements to the high-performance strategy
- Equity strategy across the four national senior programs, accounting for the challenges posed by funding and related factors
- Training and other initiatives required to develop an inclusive and supportive high-performance culture
- The rugby department staff structure, including support functions
- Support for player development outside rugby
- A review of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games quinquennial with key lessons learned for the Paris 2024 triennial and Los Angeles 2028 quadrennial

Except where information may provide context for the review, evaluation of performance pathways, age-grade programs, prior staff resignations and prior formal complaints that have been investigated were not in scope for the review.

A committee and panel were formed to facilitate and support the review. The role of the committee was to assist with the flow of information to the Review Panel and ensure it has access to relevant stakeholders and participants while ensuring the entire process remained inclusive and independent. The role of the Review Panel was to generate a report on the state of the High-Performance program and to provide a list of practice and achievable recommendations to improve the program.

REVIEW COMMITTEE	REVIEW PANEL
Sally Dennis, David Fortier, and Bill Webb: Rugby Canada directors	STRAAD Consulting: led by Megan Luu and Curtis Andrews
Sue Hylland: Director, Varsity Athletics, University of Ottawa – independent committee member	Mel Davidson: Canadian high-performance team sport expert
Robert Boland: Administrator & Professor, Penn State University, Sports Attorney and President of Culture in Sports - independent committee member	Mike McGovern: high-performance rugby union expert
Allen Vansen: former Rugby Canada CEO	

Figure 1: Review Committee and Review Panel membership

All efforts were made to ensure that the Review Panel had access to an appropriately broad and representative group of Rugby Canada stakeholders. Ultimately, the Review Panel conducted over 50 interviews/focus groups with ~80 individuals participating and received 108 survey responses.

CATEGORY	SURVEY	INTERVIEWS & FOCUS GROUPS
ATHLETES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All current athletes across Men's and Women's 15s and 7s athletes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select current athletes • Select athlete alumni • Players Association representatives
COACHES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All current head coaches and coaching staff members • Select head coach and coaching staff alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All current head coaches • Select coaching staff members • Select head coach and coaching staff alumni
RUGBY CANADA HIGH-PERFORMANCE SUPPORT STAFF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Rugby Canada High-Performance program support staff (SSSM, Athletic Performance, etc.) • Select Rugby Canada High-Performance program support staff alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select Rugby Canada High-Performance program support staff (SSSM, Athletic Performance, etc.) • Select Rugby Canada High-Performance program support staff alumni
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Rugby Canada Board Members were interviewed, except newly appointed board member, Kathleen McGinn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Rugby Canada Board Members were interviewed, except newly appointed board member, Kathleen McGinn • Select past Board Members
EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select Provincial Rugby Union representatives • World Rugby representatives • Own the Podium representatives • Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada (SDRCC) representatives • Coaching Association of Canada representatives • Canadian Sports Institute - Pacific representatives

Figure 2: High-Performance review participants

The creation of the High-Performance Review report document was independently led by STRAAD and was conducted in alignment with qualitative and quantitative assessment and analysis best practices.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

Rugby Canada and its High-Performance program do not operate within a vacuum. The organization and the program exist within a complex competitive environment shaped by forces that largely exist outside the organization's control but must be responded to. The organization, the program, and its stakeholders (internal and external) are also keenly aware of the organization and program's rich history.

While the purpose of this review was not to conduct a deep strategic analysis of Rugby Canada's environment or an in-depth review of the organization's history, Rugby Canada's leadership should be aware of the forces that have shaped, are shaping and will help shape the strategy, structure, and culture of their High-Performance program going forward. Deeper analysis of all or some of the issues highlighted here is a likely next step following the High-Performance Review.

1. ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

Rugby Canada's recent history has been shaped by four key forces: 1) An increase in breadth and intensity of competition post-Rugby Union professionalization; 2) emergence of domestic, international competitions along with Major League and Super Series teams; 3) shifting high-performance approaches driven by fitful changes to Rugby Canada's high-performance leadership and coaches and 4) shifting and often challenging relations with the athlete community.

In totality, the last 15 years have been a period of both increasing strategic complexity and organizational turbulence for Rugby Canada's High-Performance program. In responding to a turbulent competitive environment, Rugby Canada has struggled to balance the need for stability and the need to evolve. The evolution of the High-Performance Director into an Operations role is a notable example of this struggle to effectively adapt.

2. CURRENT HIGH-PERFORMANCE STRATEGY

Rugby Canada has established an organizational strategy that speaks to its goals in growing rugby in Canada, promoting sports safety, supporting developmental pathways, and enabling the national team's performance.

Rugby Canada has an established, public-facing organizational strategy. While referring to performance targets (Strategic Pillar 2) the strategy does not appear specific to high-performance (in fact, the phrase "high-performance" does not appear in the 2021-23 strategy document).



Figure 3: [Strategic Pillars from the Rugby Canada 2021-23 Strategic Plan](#)

3. HIGH-PERFORMANCE FUNDING MODEL

Rugby Canada's funding is derived from corporate sponsors, events, registration fees, fundraising and support provided by the Government of Canada (via Own the Podium and Sport Canada), and World Rugby. The specific interests and focuses of the funding sources are not always consistent and require Rugby Canada to navigate a relatively complex funding system. In the harsh light of its relatively limited and niche popularity, rugby in Canada must prioritize careful management of relationships with its funding partners.

The inherent tension within its funding system - and how this shows up in actual organizational priorities - means the organization will likely always have to leave some stakeholders (within or outside the organization) unhappy.

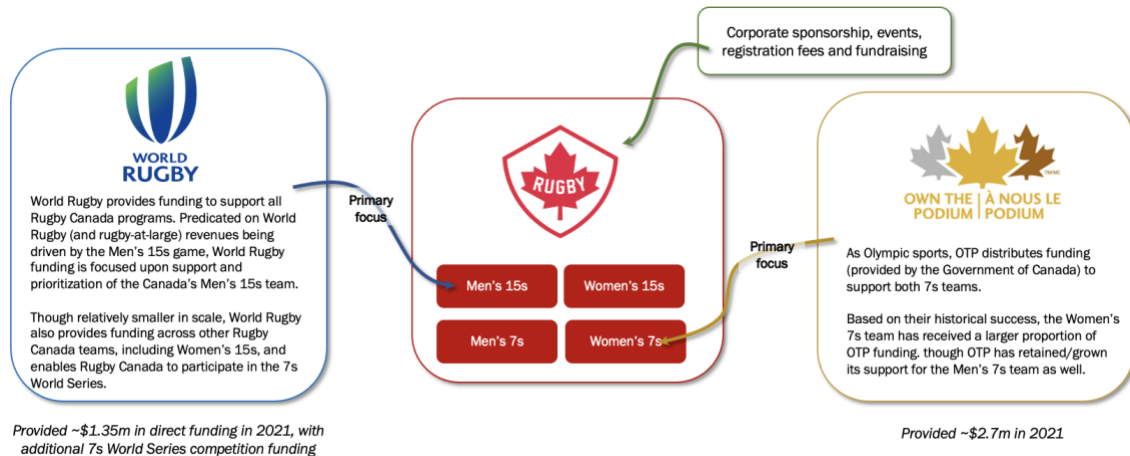


Figure 4: Simplified high-level visual summary of the Rugby Canada High-Performance funding model

4. POSITIVE INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL TRENDS

Rugby Canada is experiencing a challenging moment in its history and the issues at play within its organizational system are a common focus. Despite this, Rugby Canada and the High-Performance program do have some positive themes to be proud of. While negativity at times predominates, Rugby Canada has many positive organizational trends that it can build upon.

TREND	RUGBY CANADA INSIGHTS
Re-establishment of the academy will make a positive impact on Rugby Canada's future success	Internal and external stakeholders agree that reestablishing Rugby Canada's Academy program has been an important step for the organization to take to support the future of rugby in Canada. The culture within The Maple Leaf Academy Program has been celebrated for its focus upon broadly supporting athletes, providing clear structure, building off athlete strengths (athlete-centric approach) and creating a safe space for players to develop.
Concussion management response seen as superior in sporting community	External stakeholders have recognized Rugby Canada's work to progress concussion management through the PlaySmart Player Welfare program. Stakeholders have stated that the organization needs to replicate this model in its approach to athlete safety, citing "what has been done is phenomenal".
Rugby Canada seen as taking meaningful steps to progress IDEB issues	The establishment of the Idea Group has been received as a positive step to progressing IDEB issues at Rugby Canada. It is recognized that Rugby Canada is working to create an environment to encourage people within the BIPOC community to play rugby, increasing awareness and advocacy, and creating a forum for players and leaders to learn from each other's experiences. There is a strong desire and hope for these forums and groups to continue as they are a steppingstone to help spark change within Rugby Canada.
Athletes, coaches, and staff are passionate about being part of the change	There is a strong sense of commitment and desire to be part of the change at Rugby Canada. Despite the existing challenges athletes, coaches, leaders, and support personnel have shared, their sentiment about helping Rugby Canada succeed, both from the grassroots to the high-performance level is universal. Interviewees recognize the huge undertaking this process will be, but a common thread through all interviews remained the importance of taking time to address the current landscape, rectify the system and reestablish Rugby Canada's strategy, structure, and culture.
The organization should be proud of its resilience through covid	Through the COVID period, Rugby Canada and its people have participated in World Cup qualification, the Tokyo Olympics, and various tours. The High-Performance program and its staff have adapted to challenging circumstances and have demonstrated commendable resilience throughout the experience.

Figure 5: Positive internal organization trends summary

5. EXTERNAL RUGBY AND SPORT TRENDS

The sport of rugby and the sporting world at large has evolved significantly over the last two decades. This evolution has manifested in significant change across strategy, structure, and culture areas. Some critical trends that Rugby Canada's leadership should be aware of and consider within the context of this review are:

CATEGORY	TREND	RUGBY CANADA INSIGHTS
STRATEGY	Changing high-performance 'landscape'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-professionalization, the sport of Rugby Union has continued to grow apace, with the sport gaining footholds in new national landscapes, including across South America, Russia and the USA. The emergence of the 7s variant - including its addition to the Olympics in 2016 - and the women's game has also driven increased interest, particularly in North America. Rugby Canada experienced some notable high-performance achievements early in its history and, particularly on the women's side, even in recent history. However, as the overall rugby environment has grown more complex, Rugby Canada has struggled to sustain its Tier 2 rugby nation status.
STRATEGY	Increased competition across Tier 1, 2 and 3 nations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rugby Union has long been dominated by a set of traditional Tier 1 powers followed by a group of Tier 2 and 3 competitors. As the sport has evolved, successful Tier 1, 2 and 3 nations often frame their success as being driven by their commitment to a consistent team identity and culture (e.g., shared behaviours, beliefs, artifacts) matched with a willingness to evolve and innovate on and off-the-field (e.g., tactics, coaching, leadership, player development).

CATEGORY	TREND	RUGBY CANADA INSIGHTS
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rugby Union is a game built upon a base of tradition, but the game has not stayed static. Successful rugby nations place emphasis upon sustaining consistent, positive high-performance cultures, while also refusing to stay stagnant in the pursuit of competitive advantage.
STRATEGY	Need for greater strategic sophistication and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Like many, if not all major sports, on-field rugby tactics and overall competitive strategy have rapidly evolved over the past 20 years. As the game of Rugby and its revenues have steadily grown, there has also been a growing need to evolve off-field, including implementation of more sophisticated athlete development tactics and more advanced marketing and business administration functions. The growth of women's rugby has been exponential and the game's competitive and commercial systems are continuing to adapt to this reality. On-the-field and off-the-field, rugby organizations are managing a more sophisticated game requiring innovative strategy and tactics. Rugby Canada will continue to face pressure to keep up with the game's evolution, lest it falls behind its competitors.
STRUCTURE	Evolution/modernization of organizational structure and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rugby organizations and High-Performance programs have continued to evolve. National rugby programs have begun to seek focus and integration across their teams, including choosing to focus high-performance efforts in one or two primary team contexts and tightly integrating their development pathways with professional or semi-professional clubs. Organizations are seeking to maximize the time their athletes spend together and the coherence of guidance they receive during that time. Rugby organizations are also focused upon improving their organizational governance practices (inclusive of external oversight mechanisms and Board governance), particularly relating to ethics and policy. Many of Rugby Canada's competitors and partners have evolved their organizational structures to be more integrated and focused. This enables these organizations to make the best use of finite resources and more easily adopt innovative practices. Organizations are also not neglecting management of their 'own houses' and have placed emphasis on improving their governance practices.
CULTURE	Need to prioritize athlete safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The safe treatment of athletes within sports organizations is of increasing public concern. Governmental/regulatory attention regarding the treatment and well-being of athletes is also growing. Organizations must focus on the physical safety of athletes, but also their mental health. The consequences for failing to keep athletes safe are increasingly severe. Rugby Canada is seen as having an exemplary response to the 'concussion crisis'. The need to replicate this effort in response to the broader concept of athlete safety will be critical for Rugby Canada in the years ahead. Broad public and governmental concern about athlete treatment will continue, if not increase, in the years ahead.
CULTURE	Need to prioritize Inclusion, Equity, Diversity and Belonging (IDEB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The world of sport must act to address the systemic issues that drive (or, more pointedly, do not drive) diversity and inclusion within their respective contexts. Rugby organizations across the world are working to address issues within their organization's system. IDEB is an emergent and likely permanent priority for all organizations. Rugby Canada has made efforts to address its systemic IDEB issues but must be prepared to continue this journey with more meaningful action. IDEB work cannot simply be for public relations purposes.
CULTURE	Implementation of 'athlete-centric' and 'psychological safety' practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport is ultimately about athletes. Accepting and building off this reality, there is a growing movement focused upon aligning the culture, values, programs, policies, resources and priorities of sports organizations to emphasize the holistic (emotional, psychological, physical) needs of athletes. Relatedly, sports cultures are increasingly seeking ways to build environments that are 'psychologically safe'. Psychological safety is a deeply research-backed concept that is highly linked with effective team performance. 'Athlete-centred' and 'psychological safety' are not synonyms for 'nice'. Rather, these are concepts that emphasize trust, respect, and openness so that ideas, concerns, and difficult topics can be raised in an effective way. Critically: 'athlete-centricity' and 'psychological safety' are trends in sport because they are strongly correlated with high-performance success.
CULTURE	Changing views on effective leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The requirements of leadership in high-performance sport - whether leadership demonstrated by coaches or individuals in executive roles - are unique and demanding. Broadly speaking, leaders in sports organizations are evolving from traditional authoritative leadership approaches to more collaborative, development-focused 'coaching-styles' of leadership. Leaders in sports organizations are also beginning to adopt practices inspired by concepts like 'athlete-centricity', psychological safety and trauma-informed approaches. Leadership sits at the heart of a high-performance organization and is a skill that must be carefully cultivated by organizations to support and protect their cultures and values. Rugby Canada cannot rely on a generic or outdated view of what it requires of its leadership and must think carefully about the specific leadership approaches and skills the organization requires.

Figure 6: External environment trends summary

Rugby Canada and its High-Performance program exist within a complicated environment. Pro-actively engaging with questions around what these forces mean for Rugby Canada and its High-Performance program will enable the organization to respond and predict more effectively and avoid falling into an ongoing reactive 'trap'.

Insights and recommendations identified in the review should be considered in tandem with the realities of the broader 'Rugby World'. Action planning conducted by Rugby Canada in response to this review should include deeper analysis of all or some of the issues highlighted here.

INSIGHTS

Arising from the broad range of interviews and focus groups conducted as well as data arising from stakeholder surveys and documentation/research review, the Review Panel has generated a set of insights relating to the current state of the High-Performance program. These insights have been categorized in alignment with the review's three key focus areas – strategy, structure, and culture – though some of these insights will cut across each of these categories.

Taken as a whole, the key insights identified by review indicate that Rugby Canada's High-Performance program problems are systemic in nature. This means that rather than being about singular root causes, the challenges the organization faces are about the complex relationship between parts of the organization and the shifting forces that impact them. Systemic problems are inherently messy and require patience and dedication to understand and to address. These are the sorts of problems that benefit from collaboration, creativity, and empathy. It is important to maintain awareness of this complexity while considering the meaning of the review's key insights and, later, how to respond.

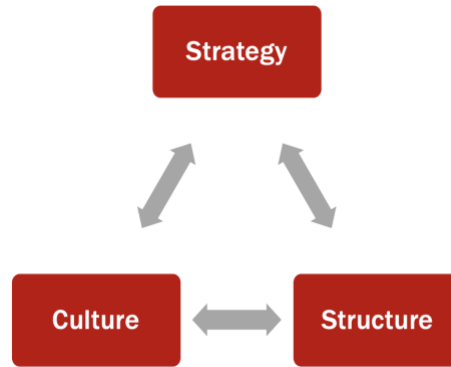


Figure7: Visual representation of strategy, structure, and culture systemic interaction

Content in this section has been structured as follows:

- 1. **Numbered thematic categories**
 - i. *Roman numeral labelled key insights*
 - Bolded sub-insights that support the key insight**
 - Bulleted data points explicating the sub-insights

1. STRATEGY

I. RUGBY CANADA DOES NOT HAVE A HIGH-PERFORMANCE STRATEGY

Rugby Canada's high-performance vision is unclear or unknown to Rugby Canada's athletes, coaches, employees, and rugby in Canada stakeholders

- There is no clarity amongst Rugby Canada stakeholders on what programs/teams are Rugby Canada's true priority (if indeed there is one).
- Lacking a high-performance strategy and experiencing a general continuing decline in on-field results suggests there is a shared belief that Rugby Canada is at an important strategy crossroads and may even potentially be heading in the direction of rugby in Canada becoming a community sport rather than a high-performance sport.
- Rugby Canada coaches, athletes and employees do not have clear individual performance or developmental objectives that link to a clear high-performance strategy.

Rugby Canada has not taken a clear position on – and aligned the organization to – how it distinctly prioritizes 15s and 7s; this creates confusion across the High-Performance program

- There is a difference of opinion - and no clear Rugby Canada opinion - on whether Rugby 7s is a pathway to 15s or a distinct pathway/program.
- There is a shared belief that the 15s and 7s games are unique and require a unique strategy. There is not a shared belief on which of the programs is truly the organizational priority and how to align the organization's activities and resources to the decision.
- Particularly as each variant evolves, high-performance in the 15s and 7s requires differentiated development pathways. Failure to delineate (if not clearly prioritize) the programs significantly limits Rugby Canada's ability to develop high-performance talent for both 15s and 7s.
- Rugby Canada is 'caught' between the differing priorities of its two primary funding partners - World Rugby seeks prioritization/bases funding upon 15s, while OTP prioritizes/bases funding upon 7s.

The High-Performance program's desire to link its strategy to actual on-field high-performance results is unclear

- A commonly referenced and real strategic tension:
 - Women's 15s and 7s are likely to be competitive on the world stage; Men's 15s and 7s are unlikely to be truly competitive on the world stage.
 - Men's 15s - Canada's least competitive high-performance team - receives the greatest share of direct funding; Women's 15s - Canada's most competitive high-performance team - receives the smallest share of funding (albeit the Women's 15s team receives the highest amount of funding that is not derived from outside sources).

Maintaining equity across four high-priority senior teams is perceived as a steep high-performance strategic challenge – a challenge not being currently met

- Rugby Canada's pursuit of equality/equity across four high-performance teams is not well understood and does not outwardly manifest in decision-making around resources, personnel, etc.
- It is observed and true that, in general, Tier 1, 2 and 3 nations do not equally prioritize four high-performance teams.
- Rugby Canada appears to be avoiding decisions on what its high-performance priorities are.

Rugby Canada's high-performance strategic incoherence is, at least partly, a product of being 'stuck in the past'

- Rugby Canada's past successes, particularly in the 1990s, were largely prior to the sport's rapid post-professionalization evolution. The evolution of the sport does not allow for the organization to easily leverage/repeat its historical approach. New thinking is required because the game has evolved overall.

Without a strategy to guide it, Rugby Canada appears to be in a constant state of crisis and overall performance suffers as a result

- Rugby Canada's leadership is very broadly seen (by others and themselves) as being highly reactive and unable to be proactive.
- Constantly having to manage crisis and keeping a short-term view strains organizational resources and stresses all stakeholders. This strain and stress negatively impact high-performance.
- Rugby Canada is unable to effectively 'work on the organization' due to it being overwhelmed by day-to-day issues.

II. HIGH-PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS ARE INCONSISTENTLY EFFECTIVE AND LIMIT SHORT AND LONG-TERM PROGRAM ASPIRATIONS

Rugby Canada's high-performance developmental pathways are not well-structured and do not/cannot generate the required quality or quantity of talent

- The linkages (up/down and across) between developmental programs are not adequate/effective.
 - Practices and culture of developmental programs significantly vary including in comparison with the High-Performance program.
 - Rugby Canada's partnership with provinces, universities and clubs is not well structured/coordinated and beset with communications issues.
 - Rugby Canada's partnership with the Toronto Arrows is seen as a positive step forward – and aligns with prevailing rugby trends – but the relationship remains under-developed and beset with similar cultural problems as Rugby Canada.
- Due to limited scope of centralization, the realities of Langford's geographical location along with the developmental system's lack of general coherence, Canadian athletes have (comparatively) little practice time together.
- Lacking a clear high-performance strategy, coaches craft independent/isolated strategies and the development of athletes aligns to those independent/isolated agendas. This leads to short-term developmental focus rather than long-term high-performance success. This is further exacerbated when coach turnover occurs as the development approach for teams must be wholly reset.
- Identification and intake of talent through the development pathways is inadequate; the way talent is identified is seen as outdated and/or not aligning to the actual needs of Rugby Canada's teams. This is exacerbated by the High-Performance program's unclear prioritization of 15s vs. 7s.
- Rugby Canada's talent assessment and identification process is overly biased (particularly in favour of traditional Canadian rugby geographies/locales) and/or ineffective, as it is not capable of enabling the development of players across both 15s and 7s teams.
- The structure and focus of Rugby Canada's developmental system has shifted several times over the past 10 years and led to long-term damage to the development of high-performance athletes; present circumstances are often contextualized as being a result of past poor development pathway decisions, particularly the standdown of the academy in 2005.
- The restart of the Academy in 2019 has had a positive impact on the High-Performance program (along with aspects of the programs below the high-performance level) but remains a work-in-progress and still limited by an incoherent overall strategy.
- Inclusive of the restart of the academy, there are aspects of the developmental system that are effective and even provide greater focus on holistic athlete support. While occurring in pockets, these programs are effective.

Rugby Canada's developmental 'philosophy' and actual developmental tactics are lacking in scope

- High-performance athletes are not provided with well-rounded developmental support; athletes (in alignment with emergent high-performance sport practices) are seeking broader support for their personal and athletic development.
- If not in the centralized programs, athlete developmental/support and engagement are inconsistent; when centralized, the environment is isolating, and support remains limited.
- When not on-tour or in Langford, majority of athletes effectively receive no communication from the organization.

Canada does not appropriately prioritize the development of coaches exacerbating systemic high-performance system issues

- Canadian rugby 'coaching culture' (outside of Rugby Canada but also within) appears to be generally 'outdated' and not conducive to enabling high-performance.
- Existing coach development pathways are seen as very difficult to navigate, nonsensical in credentialing standards (many former/prominent athletes/stakeholders report being unable to attain certification).
- A broader, more sophisticated ongoing developmental program for rugby coaches at a grassroots level is seen by many as critical for long-term High-Performance program success.

Canada has no development system for referees

- Often overlooked, the lack of referees is a major impediment to Rugby Canada developing athletes and coaches along with being able to organize and run matches and tournaments.

III. DISTRUST ARISING FROM RUGBY CANADA'S OPAQUE MANAGEMENT OF ITS "GENERAL FUND" HAS NEGATIVE IMPACTS ACROSS THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

Rugby Canada stakeholders - internal and external - do not understand Rugby Canada's funding/resourcing decisions

- Stakeholders frame Rugby Canada's revenue as being managed via a central 'general fund' where all funds are placed and then distributed based on decisions of leadership. While the realities of Rugby Canada's financial management practices are more nuanced than this framing, it is notable that there is a broad shared perception of the existence of the general fund and that leadership has a 'hidden' or unclear way of managing distribution of these funds.

- The principles and practices guiding management of Rugby Canada's funding are not understood and it does not appear that leadership has prioritized education on Rugby Canada's financial realities and how it impacts decision-making.
- Guidelines and principles regarding the distribution of resources are not clear and consequently are perceived as unfair by athletes, coaches, and staff. Funding decisions are characterized as 'unfair' and 'secretive'. Instances of resources raised by a team being used by another team are commonly referenced along with perceptions of 'entitlement'.
- The requirements to 'win' to secure funding and the negative impacts to funding if teams do not win are openly discussed by coaching staff with athletes.
- Many narratives around the realities and use of Rugby Canada's funding exist. These narratives thrive without clearer communication from Rugby Canada on the management of the general fund (e.g., rules, logic, linkage to goals, etc.).
- Scarcity of funding, real or perceived, drives hoarding of resources across the organization generating inter-group distrust.
- Lack of trust, confusion and misunderstanding of the organization's financial management generates deep animosity across the organization with many reporting deep frustration with at times relatively minor inequities (e.g., group-specific cutlery, use of in-stadium camera, etc.).

Rugby Canada will always be relatively 'under-funded' but the High-Performance program does not appear grounded in this reality

- Rugby Canada does not do enough to explain the financial challenges of its operating environment to its internal or external stakeholders.
- It is frequently observed that other richer rugby nations have determined that they cannot maintain four teams and expect high-performance. Rugby Canada has not explained how it will achieve this considering its relative financial constraints.

Rugby Canada has allowed its financial constraints to cloud its focus on high-performance results

- It is a common sentiment that Rugby Canada is constrained by World Rugby and OTP's 'golden handcuffs'. Whether or not this is true, Rugby Canada does appear to be neglecting its ability to define a high-performance strategy in favour of juggling demands of its funding partners.
- An inability to articulate a clear, inspirational high-performance vision for rugby in Canada has negative effects on the organization's ability to fundraise.
- Fundraising efforts are described as overly reliant on a small set of donors with narrow, outdated interests. Key organizational alumni involved in fundraising are perceived as ineffective and potentially inappropriately benefitting through these efforts.

Financial management issues drive distrust between athletes and Rugby Canada

- While athletes understand that variances in funding will drive different resource approaches across teams, they do not understand why current decisions are being made.
- Many athletes and staff report receiving "paycheques" (e.g., appearance fees) late; athletes report having missed or downward adjusted "paycheques"/meal cards right at the onset of tournaments including at the World Cup.
- Inconsistency in elements of basic athlete support - notably nutrition - is viewed as something that should be consistent regardless of team.

The emergence of the 7s game and its revenue disrupted the traditional Rugby Canada system and Rugby Canada has not fully adapted

- The emergence of the 7s game, particularly after its addition to the Olympics, disrupted Rugby Canada's organizational culture. OTP's consequent increased funding of the Women's 7s team and the shift in 'carding' practices created many real and perceived changes to team-level resourcing decisions. This shifted many traditional 'cultural hierarchies' (again, real or perceived) and created cultural tensions that the High-Performance program does not effectively manage.
- Members of the 7s teams - particularly Women's athletes - are frequently described as 'entitled' predicated on a perception that the 7s athletes do not understand their relative financial privilege. In contrast, the 7s team (correctly) defends its funding as being based on its recent history of on-field achievement. They compare their funding to the Men's 15s program which remains more highly direct funded and prestigious despite a long-term lack of on-field success.
- At times, Rugby Canada has attempted to clarify which of the variants (15s or 7s) is its high-performance priority, but this prioritization has not been felt in real terms (through transparent funding decisions or other organizational behaviour) by athletes, coaches, and support staff.

iv. RUGBY CANADA'S UNCLEAR NATIONAL GOVERNANCE ROLE LIMITS HIGH-PERFORMANCE PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Rugby Canada does not have a clear national governance role and the High-Performance program has far less to work with as a result

- Rugby Canada outwardly claims to be a national governing body of rugby in Canada, but its governance role is unclear to its partners in Provincial Unions, Universities and Clubs. It is not perceived as a governor of the sport in Canada.
- Communications and collaboration practices between Rugby Canada and its Canadian partners are ineffective, infrequent or non-existent.
- Rugby Canada is more often described as an administrator of the national senior's teams versus an over-arching coordinator of the sport in Canada. Rugby Canada is not seen as running a coherent truly national program/High-Performance program.
- Absent of a clear high-performance strategy of its own, Rugby Canada encourages a commonly shared perception that it is the manager of programs that are ultimately owned by others (e.g., World Rugby 'owns' the 15s; OTP 'owns' the 7s).

Rugby Canada's funding partners are confused by the decisions/indecisions of the organization, resulting in damage to the High-Performance program's reputation and consequent diminishment of funding support

- Rugby Canada has intermittently requested support/input from OTP and World Rugby but has inconsistently adopted or executed on this feedback and advice. Rugby Canada's funding partners describe Rugby Canada as frequently 'going dark' in communication particularly when difficult questions/issues are raised.
- While Rugby Canada representatives participate and collaborate with global peers/World Rugby, there is a belief that Rugby Canada cannot or will not think about what is possible beyond Rugby Canada's typical approaches. There appears to be a culture of 'helplessness' that prevents the organization from being more creative/innovative.

2. STRUCTURE

i. RUGBY CANADA'S CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND RESOURCING IS UNABLE TO SUPPORT FOUR HIGH-PERFORMANCE TEAMS

High-Performance program-related roles are unclear, or even unfilled, with negative knock-on impacts to the program and its people

- Rugby Canada lacks clarity of high-performance leadership roles, types of roles that other high-performance rugby nations possess.
- Rugby Canada has left many critical high-performance roles unstaffed despite requests and recommendations to fill these roles. The absence of individuals in these roles is highly visible outside the organization.
- Comparative to other rugby High-Performance programs and based on feedback from stakeholders, high-performance leadership and coaching staff is under-resourced.
- Athlete support staff have wide-ranging, ill-defined responsibilities and are often performing tasks outside core expertise (typically logistical/administrative support tasks).
- The CEO role appears to be deeply involved in administrative and operational activity and is unable to maintain a view of the broader organization.
- Role-based KPIs, metrics and expectations of roles are not known or are non-existent.
- Regular role-based feedback is reported as infrequent or not provided; established feedback processes are not adhered to.
- Many employees – including those in senior leadership roles - report never having had or many years passing without an individual performance review.

High-Performance program employees are often overmatched for their roles

- With Rugby Canada continually drawing down its resources by not filling empty roles, existing employees must take on additional duties. Often these existing employees were under-qualified for their roles without taking on the additional duties, thus creating a negative cycle of diminishing performance returns.

Inconsistent/ineffective execution of administration services is creating significant frustration and program turbulence

- Many athletes and staff report receiving “paycheques” late; athletes report having missed “paycheques”/meal cards at the onset of tournaments including at the World Cup.
- Frustrations with the performance of basic administrative functions reported as poor and generate mistrust in the organization and its leadership. In addition to “paycheque” issues, other examples include:
 - Inexplicably drawn-out individual job contract negotiations.
 - Long-term waiting for resolution of HR processes (e.g., mat leave requests).
 - Meal cards not received or late.
 - Requests for feedback/collaboration on organizational events (e.g., Orange Shirt Day) are made at ‘the last minute’. Once provided, input is ignored.
- The size of the Rugby Canada operational leadership team is under-sized relative to scope of operations and complexity of organizational activities.

The realities of Canada’s geography are an undeniable challenge and Rugby Canada’s physical structure at times exacerbates this challenge – the benefits of Langford are not being realized

- Langford appears to be a true ‘double-edged sword’ for the High-Performance program:
 - The effects of isolation in Langford (combined with the current cultural challenges in high-performance) are seen as being detrimental to the holistic development of athletes.
 - Langford is not viewed as a positive place to live with it being framed as ‘expensive’ and ‘isolated’.
 - The isolating feeling of Langford is seen as potentially heightening cultural pressures and demands greater involvement of responsible leadership.
 - In comparison to Langford, many have questioned if there truly is an overall benefit to removing athletes from effective club/university/provincial development programs in favour of a centralized Langford-based program.
 - Langford’s physical location on the extreme edge of Western Canada maximizes its geographical remove and generally exacerbates already challenging Canadian travel logistics.
 - Conversely, the ability to centralize athletes is seen by some as the only way for Canada to establish a competitive advantage.
- Significant communication and cultural gaps between Rugby Canada’s administrative and sport departments contribute to organizational tension
 - Absence of the CEO from Langford is frequently referenced as a major problem particularly relative to the need to oversee the behaviour of coaches.
 - Despite Rugby Canada consolidating operations in Langford there is a widespread sense of Rugby Canada maintaining a split (figuratively and literally) between its administrative offices and sports departments. There is strong disaffection between athletes, athlete support staff and operations staff.

II. INEFFECTIVENESS OF CORPORATE & ORGANIZATIONAL GOVERNANCE EXPOSES RUGBY CANADA TO SIGNIFICANT RISK

Ineffectiveness of corporate governance increases organizational risk

- Governance appears to be failing across certain levels. Board members, leadership and coaches are all consistently operating outside of their defined roles and abrogating standard communication practices (e.g., confidential board decisions are leaked; coaches lying to the board; board intervening in operations; etc.) while personnel issues continually recur and the High-Performance program operates without a long-term strategy or effective operational policies.
- Many within leadership or board roles noted that role-based responsibilities are not adhered to in times of difficulty and Rugby Canada has been in ‘crisis mode’ continually for several years.
- Broadly across the organization, lines of reporting are unclear and appear to have eroded.
- Rugby Canada stakeholders are generally unable to delineate the differences between Rugby Canada’s leadership functions and roles; “Board” and “leadership” are seen as a singular, poorly perceived group.

Ineffectiveness or effective organizational policies and practices, particularly those relating to HR/people practices, require board members and leadership to be deeply involved in operational issues leaving strategy neglected and athletes and employees disaffected

- Lack of or ineffectiveness of existing HR/people-related processes leaves stakeholders feeling unsupported and at risk.
- Consistent failures of HR policy and practice administration (e.g., payroll, maternity leave management, etc.) expose Rugby Canada’s employees to mistreatment and Rugby Canada to corporate risk.
- Organizational support programs - particularly onboarding and performance management – are poorly designed or inconsistently executed. There is a need to revise these programs to re-enforce culture and policy concerns.

The Board’s lack of long-term focus enables the High-Performance program’s lack of focus and general ineffectiveness

- The Board is perceived as being very frequently deeply involved in operational issues resulting in them being overwhelmed with the day-to-day and unable to focus on the long-term.

- The Board is perceived by some as being 'in conflict'. Specifically, their personal interests prevent collective focus on the success of the long-term high-performance strategy.
- The Board has taken steps over recent years to improve organizational governance including policies and practices to guide its own activities. The Board has made progress to better demonstrate a 'nose-in, fingers-out' mentality.
- Despite real progress in evolving its governance, this progress has not been well understood and has not resulted in widespread shared feelings of improvement. There remains a need to communicate and explain the evolution of the Board and what that means for the organization going forward.
- Lack of communication on the evolution of the organization's governance leaves in place a continued widespread belief that the Board's operational involvement remains high.

3. CULTURE

i. **RUGBY CANADA'S POOR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CANADIAN RUGBY COMMUNITY IS A CONSTRAINT ON THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE PROGRAM**

There is broadly shared negative sentiment across the Canadian rugby community regarding Rugby Canada and the High-Performance program

- There is not a cohesive Canadian rugby community insofar as the community has agreed to focus on/support a shared high-performance goal or strategy, common culture, or identity.
- The current, past, and prospective athlete community has little interaction outside formal completion – even current members of the various senior teams interact very little. Rugby Canada does not make efforts to facilitate connection with or across the athlete community.
- Akin to its lack of engagement with the athlete community, Rugby Canada's communication with its partners is extremely inconsistent.
- Commentary from the rugby Canadian community regarding their relationship with Rugby Canada can be characterized as follows:

Alumni

- It is reported that many alumni have a strong dislike/distrust of Rugby Canada due to the organization's perceived "history of over-promising and under-delivering for players".
- Many alumni are reported to have left the High-Performance program not due to their inability to play high-performance sport but rather their dislike for Rugby Canada as an organization.

Provincial Unions, Universities, Clubs

- Rugby Canada is not perceived as a standard-bearer for rugby culture and values in Canada.
- Rugby Canada is seen as a very poor communicator that does not seek to listen or coordinate with partners.
- Managing relationships within Canada due to geography is challenging but this is also seen as an excuse to avoid trying to improve.
- Rugby Canada is seen as not making the "difficult decisions" needed to be made to achieve high-performance success; what these decisions are is not entirely clear but generally, speaks to the need to focus Rugby Canada's limited high-performance resources.
- Rugby Canada is not present in conversations relating to rugby in Canada that it should be present for, e.g., U Sports is reportedly considering ending university-level 7s programs and it is believed that Rugby Canada has not had a voice in this decision (note: Rugby Canada has in fact submitted a U Sports application for Women's 7s).

Donors

- Without a clear, inspirational strategy there is no clear inducement to support Rugby Canada.
- Rugby Canada is not seen as effectively governing the sport particularly due to their lack of organizing/supporting national competitions.
- Rugby Canada's discernible organizational culture – unfocused, 'stuck in the past' and resistant to change – is also perceived as being reflective of Canadian rugby's general culture.

Rugby Canada's poor relationships and coordination with the Canadian rugby community impairs the effectiveness of high-performance athlete, coach, and referee development

- Lacking a clear national governor, provincial unions, universities, and clubs are unable/unwilling to align to a truly national High-Performance program via aligned competitive philosophy or athlete/coach development standards.
- Broadening the high-performance talent pipeline (athletes, coaches, referees) is critical to ensuring long-term High-Performance program success. The only way to achieve this is broader and deeper relationships with the Canadian rugby community though, in real terms, stakeholders report that this is not happening.

ii. **RUGBY CANADA HAS FAILED TO CREATE A HEALTHY AND EFFECTIVE HIGH-PERFORMANCE CULTURE**

In contrast to many successful High-Performance programs, Rugby Canada does not have a distinct, overarching organizational culture or guiding set of values

- As a sport, rugby is rich in values and tradition; however, Rugby Canada is seen as not doing enough to teach, emphasize and rally around these values, particularly at the high-performance level.
- Rugby Canada's overall organizational culture is described as 'empty', 'bankrupt' or 'nonexistent'.
- While culture and values are present in other parts of Rugby Canada or rugby in Canada, they disappear within the High-Performance program.

Lack of a clear culture has detrimental effects on the short and long-term cohesion of the High-Performance program and its athletes

- In absence of declarative cultural guidance, bad behaviour flourishes; instances of bad behaviour on the part of leadership, coaches, alumni and athletes are commonly cited. Fundamentally, the current culture appears to be one of exclusion, mistrust and miscommunication.
- Without a well-defined culture to continuously bind the organization's system, the impacts of coach and player turnover are magnified.

Rugby Canada has not supported the development of a unique Canadian rugby identity

- Rugby Canada does not take action to mitigate this and articulate what a unique Canadian rugby identity might look like.
- While constrained by old approaches, Rugby Canada does have a rich history with many success stories to celebrate and build a broader, deeper culture upon, but it doesn't do enough to celebrate its own history. Even artifacts displayed at Langford are seen as inadequate or poorly done.
- Challenges of training schedules, centralization, COE in Langford, etc. can make 'culture building' difficult, but Rugby Canada does not take meaningful action to mitigate this. More must be done to have Canadian players across all four teams spend more time together.
- Rugby Canada's unique approach to equity/equality appears to be part of its unique identity.
- It is suggested by many that Rugby Canada should consider making Canada's indigenous cultures a more visible part of its culture.

The influence of certain Rugby Canada alumni has a divisive effect on High-Performance program's culture

- It is felt that people who do try and instigate change are pushed out or 'blacklisted' by Rugby Canada and are not asked to contribute to the organization and its programs. Differences of opinion on strategy or approach are not well tolerated.

Many current or recent high-performance athletes directly state that they are not proud to wear the Rugby Canada jersey

- The jersey more clearly represents the poor treatment they receive while in the High-Performance program rather than feelings of pride in Canadian rugby.

iii. ATHLETES DO NOT VIEW THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE PROGRAM AS A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

The realities and requirements of high-performance sport are unique and challenging but Rugby Canada is not effectively preparing athletes for the environment

- High-performance sport environments are uniquely intense and generate intense pressure on individuals; this can be especially difficult for young men and women newly entering a high-performance environment.
- Athletes entering the Rugby Canada High-Performance program are shocked with how (poorly) they are treated when joining the High-Performance program, particularly relative to their experience in the developmental pathway.
- When athletes raise concerns, they either feel they are unheard/respected/punished, or they are viewed as entitled.
- Coaches and support staff commonly refer to athletes – particularly on the Women's side – as not 'understanding' what is required in high-performance sport. They do not express similar sentiments about their own need to better understand the needs of athletes.

Effective high-performance teams demonstrate high levels of trust; within the High-Performance program athletes do not trust Rugby Canada to effectively support and develop them

- Athletes do not feel listened to by leadership, coaches and, at times, the support staff.
- General lack of communication but particularly when not on tour leaves athletes feeling forgotten and unappreciated.
- Developmental support is perceived as being inadequate and limited in focus, including a lack of mental health support - though this has been noted as something progressively improving.
- Athletes in the High-Performance program are required to make personal sacrifices (and they acknowledge this personal choice) but they do not feel the reality of their situation is respected by the organization.
- Athletes frequently refer to not receiving adequate support from Rugby Canada following their playing careers.
- Pay and support for athletes are perceived as unequal and/or unfair; gradual diminishment of athlete pay over time, coupled with administrative errors delaying issuance of athlete "paycheques", has generated significant frustration and mistrust.
- Rugby Canada has, onset of tours or tournaments, negatively altered financial support for athletes. The decline in pay but also the timing and manner of its announcement has further generated mistrust.
- Arising from lack of trust in and poor communication from leadership and coaches, athletes have begun to rely on 'external' channels/methods (e.g., social media, player strike) to be heard.
- It is known and widely believed that High-Performance program athletes have left the program early due to lack of trust in the organization.

Effective high-performance teams are inclusive and generate strength through their differences; within the High-Performance program, Women's athletes and athletes from diverse backgrounds feel excluded

- Women's athletes feel that their success is under-valued relative to the Men's teams.
- Despite their comparative success, Women's athletes point to the lack of equity in marketing and sponsorship of their teams as a source of frustration.
- The Women's 15s feels it receives inequitable treatment with lack of facilities access as a major frustration.
- Rugby Canada and high-performance leadership have made recent efforts to facilitate discussions and hold events relating to IDEB issues. Some participants have noted that these efforts were inadequate, hastily organized and lacked follow-through. This has left a perception of the organization engaging in 'tokenism'.
- Rugby Canada and the High-Performance program have attempted to progress IDEB efforts but have also not yet made demonstrable systemic change.

Rugby Canada's inability to clarify high-performance objectives for 15s and 7s and the relationship between the two game variants has left athletes feeling disrespected and weakens development pathways

- Lack of clarity on Rugby Canada's support for the 7s game (is it fundamentally a path to 15s? Is it a distinct high-performance pathway?) has resulted in the Men's 7s team describing themselves as mistreated, undervalued, under-supported and not respected.
- Athletes on the Women's 15s team, despite being the highest-ranked high-performance team, are provided relatively fewer resources despite their being the most likely to achieve high-performance outcomes. Without a clear explanation for this contradiction, these athletes feel undervalued and not respected.
- Men's 15s athletes do not feel Rugby Canada is appropriately supporting their ability to have a career in the broader rugby world and see Rugby Canada's unwillingness to be clear on the relationships between 15s and 7s as hurting their career potential.
- Women's 7s feel unfairly resented for their success, seeing this resentment as stemming from their gender but also their success in the traditionally less prestigious 7s game.

There is a desire to speak honestly about and learn from the Tokyo Olympic experience

- Stakeholders at all levels and roles reference their Tokyo experience as deeply negative and even traumatic. Stakeholders want to be heard and want to have a deeper discussion about what happened.

iv. RUGBY CANADA'S COMMUNICATION PRACTICES WORSEN HIGH-PERFORMANCE PROGRAM ISSUES

Effective communication is a critical element of high-performance teams; as an organization, Rugby Canada appears to deeply struggle to communicate effectively

- Broadly speaking, athletes receive infrequent or no communication from Rugby Canada when not directly preparing for or being on tour. As an exception to this, athletes on the Men's 15s, particularly those playing in Europe/MLR, are engaged when not on-tour.
- Coaches are unclear on why organizational decisions are made and/or on the organization's high-performance strategy.
- Rugby Canada conducts organizational reviews but nothing or very little is shared back to participants and consistently meaningful responses do not happen.
- The organization has had numerous crises in recent history and has failed to share insights and updates on what happened either to internal or external stakeholders.
- Rather than answer tough questions - privately or publicly - Rugby Canada communicates in an unclear way or simply avoidant of communication.
- Support staff have frequently been 'left in the dark' on what is happening and are caught within contentious organizational problems; support staff describe being blamed by athletes for decisions that support staff didn't even understand.
- Partner organizations, including funding partners, are not effectively or regularly communicated with.

What makes for effective communication, particularly around the provision of effective feedback and criticism, appears to not be well understood or practiced

- Coaches, athletes, support staff and other stakeholders all speak to a desire for space to be created to receive feedback, offer feedback and to not be fragile. All groups are unable to establish this connection.
- All groups perceive others as being unable to receive honest feedback. All groups say that they feel unsafe to provide honest feedback. All groups also demonstrate high sensitivity (e.g., defensiveness, blaming) when provided direct feedback.
- There is a common organizational practice of issuing surveys (particularly coaches) but what is done with information arising from these tactics is often unclear or even inappropriate (e.g., violation of stated survey anonymity).
- Feedback and criticism behaviours are highly-indicative of a deep lack of trust across coaches, athletes, and support staff.

Lacking normal, healthy organizational communication norms, athletes instead make frequent use of external, public-facing communication channels

- Athletes' use of social media should not be viewed as an anomaly but rather a symptom of a long-standing internal Rugby Canada culture/communication problem. Having an inability to be heard and listened to within the organization and to not see meaningful discussion or demonstrable change because of feedback, has resulted in athletes making use of other available channels. These channels do generally generate responses from the organization and its leadership re-enforcing the behaviour.
- Rugby Canada has not adapted to the realities of social media and how it is integrated (or not integrated) into a high-performance environment.
- It is widely acknowledged that better rules - with a suggestion to have athletes generate these rules - should be set for social media use throughout competition periods.

Ineffective communication practices of recent and current coaches have generated distrust and disaffection amongst athletes

- While communication problems cut across the organization, communication practices of coaches are uniquely problematic.

v. THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE PROGRAM'S APPROACH TO AND SUPPORT OF LEADERSHIP AND COACHING MUST EVOLVE

The High-Performance program's coaching philosophy and system is generating a team atmosphere not conducive to high-performance

- Rugby Canada's lack of a coherent high-performance strategy and supporting program structure, combined with minimal rules guiding development of Canadian coaching talent, ensures that coaching will remain a high-risk, turbulent element of Rugby Canada's High-Performance program.
- Though not unique to a Tier 2 or 3 Rugby nation, a systemic feature of Rugby Canada's coaching system is that effective and successful coaches will rapidly leave the program for more prestigious opportunities. This reality is exacerbated when the coach is non-Canadian.

Leadership and coaches also do not feel supported and safe to provide required high-performance leadership

- Resources provided to coaches constantly tighten without clarity on why. Coaches and leadership are strained to fulfill required duties and often have unusually expansive duties. In particular, coaches lack an adequate number of assistant coach personnel.
- A coach and high-performance leader require different competencies. Effective High-Performance programs have generally separated these roles. Rugby Canada coaches are aware of this reality and feel what is being asked of them in their roles is unfair or unrealistic.
- The Board is perceived by coaches as not understanding the unique needs of a high-performance sport environment. This sentiment is shared across athlete, support staff and external stakeholder groups.

Understanding of what it means to be a high-performance leader is inconsistent across the High-Performance program

- The expectations of a leader at Rugby Canada must be clarified. Currently, leadership is framed purely by the 'what' (e.g., results) but the 'how' is missing. What is expected of leadership in real terms (skills, behaviour, etc.) has not been made clear.
- In many instances, leadership behaviours and beliefs appear reflective of outdated practices that are now generally deemed unsuitable for high-performance environments.
- Rugby Canada has experienced several issues regarding the behaviour of coaches. While this has not often resulted in the finding of formal breaches of policy, it is simultaneously observed that Rugby Canada has a poorly defined policy.
- Rugby Canada has a critical need to improve the IDEB-linked skills of its high-performance leadership and empower those leaders to try and make systemic change.
- When looking to the future, many have observed that Rugby Canada's High-Performance program requires leadership that is credible, capable, and courageous.
- High-performance sport trends have put greater focus on evolving culture and leadership. Rugby Canada is seen as either being incapable or unwilling to have this conversation.

vi. CHANGE IS POSSIBLE AND MANY HOPE TO BE A PART OF IT

There is a belief that with the right leadership, Rugby Canada can create an effective high-performance culture

- Many across the organization and externally, demonstrate deep passion and commitment for Canadian rugby.

- It is widely believed that with the right leadership – leadership that has high-performance experience ('credibility') but also prioritizes people and community – Rugby Canada's High-Performance program can be righted even if it takes another World Cup/Olympic cycle.
- Many in the community also point to the successes of 2014 and 2016 as indications that High-Performance program success is possible for Rugby Canada.
- It is generally believed that, even with effective action-taking to improve development pathways, Rugby Canada's High-Performance program will require another World Cup/Olympic cycle before it can regain its competitive footing.

There is also a belief that Rugby Canada must be courageous and in many ways be willing to break with the past

- It is frequently observed that Rugby Canada is either unwilling or unable to evolve its approach – on or off-the-field.
- Despite some change in leadership of the organization over time, there is a belief that individuals on the periphery of the High-Performance program are able to guide and influence the organization in such a way that disempowers voices of change and evolution.
- It is believed that for Rugby Canada to truly evolve it must end the overt influence of these external voices and decisively empower those that seek change.

Taken in consideration together with the internal and external forces present in the organization's context, the insights arising out of the High-Performance Review call for Rugby Canada's leadership to act to resolve the High-Performance program's systemic problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The systemic nature of the High-Performance program's problems requires a response that addresses specific strategy, structure and culture problems while also evolving the organization's overall system. Actions taken will also have to be contextualized in the external forces shaping the reality of the High-Performance program. To support development of this kind of response, the Review Panel has identified 12 key recommendations to be considered by Rugby Canada's leadership:

#	KEY HIGH-PERFORMANCE REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS	Category
1	Establish a high-performance strategy & clear national governance role.	Strategy
2	Accelerate internal governance improvements.	Structure
3	Establish/improve foundational internal people processes.	Structure
4	Improve transparency of management of the general fund.	Strategy
5	Evaluate current leadership and coach effectiveness.	Structure
6	Establish and hire a High-Performance Director distinct from coach roles.	Structure
7	Prioritize development pathway coherence and linkage to the high-performance strategy.	Strategy
8	Articulate and make real a clear view on Canada's unique rugby culture and identity.	Culture
9	Repair and improve relationship with the athlete community.	Culture
10	Prioritize creation and sustainment of a truly inclusive culture.	Culture
11	Prioritize proactive, consistent communication with athletes and community.	Culture
12	Optimize for or shift Rugby Canada's geographical presence.	Structure

Figure 8: Key Recommendations

These recommendations are strategic in nature and will require deeper analysis and planning by Rugby Canada leadership. To support more detailed planning the Review Panel has also developed a set of recommended tactics to support each of the 12 key recommendations.

Tactics contained in the below table have been categorized in two ways – 1) light red indicating 'high priority/value tactics' and 2) light yellow for 'lower priority/supporting tactics':

#	KEY RECOMMENDATION	TACTICS
1	Establish a high-performance strategy & clear national governance role (Strategy)	<p>a. Establish a distinct high-performance strategy that establishes a clear set of high-performance goals. These goals must then link to and shape the organization's priorities, resourcing decisions, developmental pathways, and organizational structure.</p> <p>The development process of a distinct high-performance strategy should include coach, athlete and support staff representatives and stakeholders from the Canadian rugby community. Inclusion of the community should be done thoughtfully with an aim to empower stakeholders' voices that have not traditionally been heard, and stakeholders with a shared commitment to consider new approaches.</p> <p>Development and unveiling of this strategy is an opportunity to rally and inspire the Canadian rugby community; inspiring the community will not be achieved if the strategy is developed in isolation and then dictated to these stakeholders.</p>

#	KEY RECOMMENDATION	TACTICS
		<p>b. Rugby Canada should clarify its distinct position and support for each of the 15s and 7s as high-performance sport. Ideally, this clarity would be achieved in collaboration with partners and athletes but ultimately a clear decision must be made, communicated, and the high-performance resources aligned to support.</p> <p>c. Rugby Canada should seek to 'reset' its relationship with its partners inclusive of provincial unions, universities, clubs, OTP, and World Rugby. This 'reset' should clearly share Rugby Canada's go-forward decision/choices, acknowledge, and address historical challenges, shared opportunities for improvement and shared commitment to a collaboration and communication structure.</p> <p>d. Rugby Canada should clarify, in collaboration with its partners, what its national governance role is and align its resources and efforts to demonstrate that.</p> <p>e. The Board should seek out counsel and support from comparative groups across the Canadian high-performance sport world, with a focus on understanding approaches to leading and transforming high-performance sport organizations.</p> <p>f. The organization must conduct a Tokyo Olympics Lessons Learned session involving all involved coaches, athletes and support staff. Core 'lessons learned' and an action plan to respond should be developed and communicated back to High-Performance program stakeholders.</p> <p>g. Rugby Canada should examine the root causes of the program's success in 2014-16. Lessons learned from this era can be used to inform go-forward action planning.</p>
2	Accelerate internal governance improvements (Structure)	<p>a. Rugby Canada should establish and communicate/make available a more robust HR/leadership issue resolution process that aligns with its regulatory obligations. Tactics to consider include appointment of an ombudsman and establishment of an externally managed 'hot line'.</p> <p>b. The Board should continue to embrace its renewed Charter and pursue a broader organizational and strategic focus on the long-term success and health of Rugby Canada and the High-Performance program.</p>
3	Establish/improve foundational internal people processes (Structure)	<p>a. Rugby Canada must clarify with all staff, though with a focus on coaches, the HR/leadership issue reporting process. Clarification must address the Board and leadership's role and how participants are supported and treated within this process.</p> <p>b. Rugby Canada must establish better governance and structure around the High-Performance program hiring processes (at all levels, for all roles) to limit bias, clarify required expertise and improve quality of hires.</p> <p>c. Rugby Canada should look to establish a High-Performance program 'onboarding process' that establishes expectation for treatment, communication, and an understanding of core Rugby Canada organizational processes. This onboarding program should also speak honestly to the unique realities of high-performance sport.</p> <p>d. Rugby Canada should seek to examine governance practices of the formal performance review process to determine root causes of ongoing lack of adherence to process. Based on findings, the process should be re-designed to support adoption and documentation of critical discussions.</p> <p>e. Rugby Canada should investigate and prioritize resolution of issues relating to the late issuance of employee/athlete compensation.</p>
4	Improve transparency of management of the "general fund" (Strategy)	<p>a. Rugby Canada must shift its current approach to management of the funding decisions to be more transparent with particular attention to acknowledging and addressing where imbalances in resourcing appear and why.</p> <p>b. Rugby Canada should take particular care to ensure that team-specific fundraising efforts are either applied directly to the team that has conducted the fundraising effort or acknowledging and addressing where a variance to this has occurred and why.</p>
5	Evaluate current leadership and coach effectiveness (Structure)	<p>a. Rugby Canada should carefully consider qualifications of current leadership team members to ensure behaviour and performance effectively serves the High-Performance program.</p> <p>b. Rugby Canada should establish and share clearer expectations on what is required (e.g., behaviour, skills, etc.) of High-Performance program leadership and align its hiring and performance evaluation processes accordingly.</p>
6	Establish and hire a High-Performance Director distinct from coach roles (Structure)	<p>a. An experienced High-Performance Director, reporting to the CEO, should be hired to lead design and management of the high-performance strategy. A High-Performance Director may be required across each of the Men's and Women's athletic areas. This role must be separate from any coaching role.</p> <p>b. In support of the High-Performance Director, Rugby Canada should establish a High-Performance Advisory Panel consisting of internal and external (including non-rugby) representatives and player/alumni player representation. This panel retains exclusive focus on the High-Performance program and its independent focus on this issue must be reflected in its reporting relationship.</p>
7	Prioritize development pathway coherence and linkage to high-performance strategy (Strategy)	<p>a. Rugby Canada must prioritize clarity and coherence across its developmental pathways and more tightly link development to the high-performance strategy's goals.</p> <p>b. Rugby Canada should prioritize the establishment of distinct developmental pathways for coaches and referees.</p> <p>c. In alignment with the high-performance strategy's goals, Rugby Canada should work with provincial unions, universities, clubs, and the Toronto Arrows to establish a shared developmental philosophy and clarified development pathway 'structure'.</p>

#	KEY RECOMMENDATION	TACTICS
		d. Rugby Canada should establish greater structure to support the development of Canadian coaching talent within the context of core Rugby Canada programs. This structure would include formal rules/requirements for direct involvement of Canadian talent at all coaching/leadership levels.
8	Articulate and make real a clear view on Canada's unique rugby culture and identify (Culture)	<p>a. Rugby Canada should collaborate with current and past members of the High-Performance program to articulate a clear statement regarding Canadian rugby's unique, shared values and desired cultural norms.</p> <p>b. Care must be taken to ensure that this activity is conducted in an inclusive manner that balances past, present and future and that the outcome is reflective of Rugby Canada's commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and belonging.</p> <p>c. Rugby Canada should seek to eliminate both 'unnecessary' visible inequities (e.g. kit, separate utensils, first-class plane tickets) and inequities within elements of basic athlete support (all athletes should be provided with the same level of nutritional and mental health support).</p> <p>d. Rugby Canada should prioritize culture-focused conversations within High-Performance program elements and work to make cultural/historical artifacts more visible at the COE and other Rugby Canada events/facilities.</p>
9	Repair and improve relationship with the athlete community (Culture)	<p>a. Rugby Canada should continue to collaborate with the Players Association to establish more holistic foundational athlete development and support practices inclusive of athlete pay, nutritional support, mental health support and post-retirement guidance.</p> <p>b. Rugby Canada should, in collaboration with athletes, establish a High-Performance program policy on team/athlete use of social media. This policy must balance the need for focus within a high-performance environment and individual expression of organizational members (athlete and non-athlete alike).</p> <p>c. Rugby Canada leadership should establish an over-arching 'athlete-centric' philosophy and require the principles of athlete-centric coaching to be adopted by its leadership, support staff and coaches. Hiring and training of leadership, coaches and support staff should be done in alignment with this philosophy.</p>
10	Prioritize creation and sustainment of a truly inclusive culture (Culture)	a. Rugby Canada should more seriously prioritize its IDEB efforts with more meaningful action both in execution of IDEB tactics and in follow through on outcomes arising from the tactics. Rugby Canada should be careful and conscious of token-actions taken without appropriate consideration and demonstrable 'follow-through'.
11	Prioritize pro-active, consistent communication with athletes and community (Culture)	<p>a. Rugby Canada should look at its broader athlete communication approach and seek to engage the athlete community (particularly current roster players) in a more consistent manner, inclusive of communication with athletes when not on tour.</p> <p>b. Rugby Canada should examine the current philosophy underpinning its internal and external corporate communication practices. These practices and related processes should be revised to be more consistent and proactive.</p> <p>c. While seeking to prioritize culture and cultural discussions, Rugby Canada should ensure that High-Performance program team members at all levels and all roles are provided support/training to understand and apply practices relating to IDEB, psychological safety in sport and values/culture-demonstration.</p>
12	Optimize for or shift geographical presence (Structure)	a. Relative to the high-performance strategy, Rugby Canada should carefully examine the benefits and drawbacks of the Langford COE relative to effective management of the High-Performance program, centralization of athletes, management of the broader development pathway system and working location of the CEO.

Figure 9: Key recommendations and supporting tactics

The High-Performance program's challenges are systemic in nature and can only be addressed over time through thoughtful and dedicated leadership. Responding to the review's recommendations will also require courageous leadership that is willing to 'break from the past'.

The initial priority of the board should be the articulation of a clear high-performance Strategy. This strategy will serve as the guide for following actions including the hiring of a new CEO and High-Performance Director, culture-building initiatives and deeper improvement to the organization and program's organizational structure.

It will be critical for Rugby Canada to communicate this report fully and transparently in both response and respect for the time given by its stakeholders across Canada. This first step is intended to demonstrate Rugby Canada's willingness to take accountability, its willingness to change and its commitment to moving forward with inclusive intentions. The journey ahead will be difficult and will likely 'get worse before it gets better' but with consistent effort Rugby Canada can chart a brighter future for the High-Performance program.

CONCLUSION

The High-Performance Review has identified external forces, key insights and linked recommendations that will help shape the decisions Rugby Canada leadership needs to make to evolve the High-Performance program. Responding to the High-Performance Review will take hard work on the part of the organization and its leadership. It will require prolonged and focused action over the coming years.

Recommendations have been provided in this report, but leadership must be prepared to establish its own point-of-view and adjust the plan as time progresses.

The review has uncovered some difficult truths about the current state of the program, but the fact remains that there is broad interest across the Canadian Rugby community in contributing to setting the program on the right path. With the right leadership and committed action, this community can be rallied to support the writing of a new positive chapter in Rugby Canada's proud history.