



**Canada Rugby League Association
(CRLA)**

Strategic Plan

2024-2027



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Mission Statement:

Canada Rugby League Association is committed to providing accessible, inclusive contact and non-contact versions of Rugby League that help participants to become the best that they can be.

Principles / Values:

The CRLA supports the principles identified by True Sport:

- **Go for It**
 - Rise to the challenge - always strive for excellence. Discover how good you can be.
- **Play Fair**
 - Play honestly - obey both the letter and spirit of the rules. Winning is only meaningful when competition is fair.
- **Respect Others**
 - Show respect for everyone involved in creating your sporting experience, both on and off the field. Win with dignity and lose with grace.
- **Keep it Fun**
 - Find the joy of sport. Keep a positive attitude both on and off the field.
- **Stay Healthy**
 - Place physical and mental health above all other considerations - avoid unsafe activities. Respect your body and keep in shape.
- **Include Everyone**
 - Share sport with others. Ensure everyone has a place to play.
- **Give Back**
 - Find ways to show your appreciation for the community that supports your sport and helps make it possible.



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GOVERNANCE

Objective:



To become a Full Member of the IRL in 2024, the Canada Rugby League needs to complete the formalization of policies and by-laws adopted in the last Strategic Plan. This includes both National and Provincial Bodies to have adopted, and be following, a full set of governance documents including, but not necessarily limited to, Constitution, By-Laws, Rules and Regulations.

Above this, the organization strives for a more inclusive Board governance, that reflects the diversity of Canada. The Board should also include Independent Director(s) to provide valuable outside perspective to Board decisions.

Intent:

By adopting first-class governance programs, CRLA Directors, staff, volunteers, and participants will have clear directions on actions required to fulfill CRLA Mission Statement. Governance mechanism will be in compliance with requirements of Canadian governmental organizations and sports regulatory bodies (e.g. ERL, IRL), allowing CRLA to access support including funding. A diversity of individuals and backgrounds will lead to better decision making overall.

How:

- Governing bodies to assign policies to responsible Directors
- Governing bodies to share documentation
- Governance documentation to be standing item on each governing body agenda
- Provide key documentation in English and French (where possible)
- President of each governing body to be responsible for setting / meeting targets
- CRLA National Board to elect one (1) Independent Director and additional female representation
- Complete IRL requirements for Full Membership

KPI's:

- Election of one (1) Independent Director at April 2024 AGM
- Board make-up of at least four (4) of nine (9) Board positions to be filled by females at April 2024 AGM



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- Set and follow a schedule of audits to evaluate compliance with policies / by-laws by 30 April 2024
- Provincial governing bodies to prepare Strategic Plans consistent with CRLA Strategic plan for 2024 – 2027 by 30 June, 2024
- Full Membership acceptance by IRL within 2024

PARTICIPATION

Objective:



To approach participation numbers required for Rugby League to be recognized as an official sport by Sport Canada by meeting eligibility requirements of the Sport Funding and Accountability Framework. Participation growth should also focus on increasing the sustainability of the sport in Canada with a focus on all age groups – especially building out junior and female programs.

Note: as of October, 2020 the SFAF is under review. SFAF V: 2013-2017 requirements, for sports not on the Olympic or Paralympic Calendar, were for sports to be established in a minimum of 8 Provinces/Territories and for the sport to have a minimum membership of 5,000.

Intent:

By increasing participation numbers, the CRLA will:

- Enable sport to be recognized by government bodies
- Widen public awareness of Rugby League
- Increase potential sponsor awareness of Rugby League
- Increase competition / matches
- Reduce operating costs / participant
- Provide larger player pools for National selection

How:

The CRLA recognizes that increasing participation numbers is a significant challenge and will require a multi-faceted approach. Programs and initiatives that work in some areas may not be successful in other areas or with certain target populations.



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- Regularly update / maintain the CRLA website and social media platforms
- Provide key documentation in English and French (where possible)
- Focus on development of clubs that have facilities (changing rooms, bar etc.) on same site or adjacent to pitches
- Identify and target populations in accordance with Rugby League history and principles (ex: indigenous)
- Target schools, particularly schools in the neighbourhood of existing professional and amateur Rugby League clubs
- Stepped approach to growth in each type (junior, women, men etc.) – 9s tournament, 9's season with representative, 3 team at 13, 4 team – target up to 6 teams
- Use National / International matches to drive sign-ups in domestic programs – ability to leverage experience with Heritage players
- Update this strategic plan annually;
- Utilize key role models in promotional material (e.g. Ravens, Wolverines players);
- Work in close co-operation with the Toronto Wolfpack (particularly the clubs development officers)
- Regularly review progress towards targets with Provincial governing bodies;
- Set up and maintain a spreadsheet listing key contacts (coaching staff, administrators, heritage players etc.) within Canada and overseas
- Develop and maintain guides to setting up Provincial Bodies and successful amateur Rugby League clubs
- Grow through partnering with like minded organizations with junior or tag programs



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Projected Participation Numbers:

Body	Item	2024	2025	2026	2027
ARL	Clubs	1	5	8	9
	Senior Men	0	20	30	40
	Senior Women	10	20	30	60
	Juniors	0	30	40	50
	Masters	0	5	10	20
	Tag / Flag	0	40	50	60
	TOTAL	10	115	160	230
ORL	Clubs	9	15	15	17
	Senior Men	80	100	120	140
	Senior Women	30	60	80	100
	Juniors	100	120	140	160
	Masters	30	40	60	80
	Tag / Flag	0	60	80	100
	TOTAL	240	380	480	580
RLBC	Clubs	8	13	15	17
	Senior Men	125	150	160	170
	Senior Women	20	30	60	80
	Juniors	30	40	60	75
	Masters	20	30	40	50
	Tag / Flag	0	60	80	100
	TOTAL	195	310	400	475
CRLA	TOTAL	445	805	1040	1285

NOTE: Each Provincial Body may submit alternative targets to CRLA Board for approval. Additional Provincial Governing Bodies to set targets and submit to CRLA for approval on formation.

KPI's:

- Launching of Juniors program with RLBC and ORL in 2024
 - Four (4) U-17 boys contact
 - Launch of age 4-12 youth program in Ontario by partnering with Iroquois Roots Rugby
- Expansion of women's game
 - Launch 9's season in Ontario
 - Re-launch 9's season in British Columbia
 - 9's domestic Alberta tournament in Alberta
- Expansion of men's gam
 - Launch of 4th men's team in ORL season
- Merger with one (1) touch league in Canada with CRLA



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FINANCE

Objective:



By 2024, for the CRLA to have a stable operating model, capable of meeting operating expenses, while growing the sport throughout Canada. Assets to exceed liabilities, paying off of debt by the end of the strategic plan and ongoing annual surpluses.

Intent:

For the CRLA financial position to be in legal compliance for a National Sports Organization and meet the liquidity guidelines of Full Membership status with the IRL. CRLA financial position should not hinder provision of events and programs to maintain and grow the sport of Rugby League in Canada:

- Work towards moving away from National team selection based on a pay-to-play model
- CRLA to be in a position to fully support growth of an America's Confederation
- Pay off existing Director and GST debts

How:

- Grow participation numbers, while maintaining dues as low as possible
- Maximize transparency with respect to CRLA income and expenses
- Apply new financial controls and governance process
- Develop long-term sponsorship agreements with donors who share CRLA principles

KPI's:

- Debt retirement
 - 2024 - GST balance cleared with Revenue Canada
 - 2026 – Remaining Director loan paid off by EoY
- Per IRL policies, and in the interest of fiscal transparency, post annual financial statements on website
- 3 year rolling budget forecast adopted each year
- Adoption of IRL financial control policies
- One national team title sponsor per year



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ELITE

Objective:

Provide a sustainable “supply-chain” of elite Canadian* male and female Rugby League players to feed into professional clubs and to return standing of Canada Ravens within world ranking top 6 and improve Canada Wolverines standing to top 30 (from 46th) in world rankings. Partner with heritage players to help further develop the skills of domestic participants, with an ongoing, sustainable international calendar to help fulfill these goals.

* Eligible to represent Canada in international fixtures in accordance with IRL rules.

Intent:

By generating a stream of elite Rugby League players the CRLA will:

- Strengthen the sport of Rugby League within Canada
- Provide role models for junior players
- Enable government recognition / funding
- Maintain / enhance standing of national teams in world rankings
- Provide players for existing and future Canadian professional rugby league teams

KPI's:

- Two (2) international matches per national team (men and women) per year – one home, one away – one focussing on developing domestic players, one split with heritage
- At least three (3) heritage players attend one match per year
- Increase men's ranking to above 40 by end of year 2024, above 30 by end of year 2025
- Return ranking to 6th globally for women

RESOURCES:

Coaching Association of Canada <https://coach.ca>

National Rugby League (Australia) – Coaching
<https://www.playrugbyleague.com/coach/coaching-courses/>

Rugby Football League (UK) – Coaching https://www.rugby-league.com/get_involved/coach/coaching_courses/

Sport For Life <https://sportforlife.ca>

True Sport <https://truesportpur.ca>



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SWOT ANALYSIS

To reduce inherent risks in developing a Strategic Plan to grow the game of Rugby League in Canada a SWOT analysis has been carried out:

Strengths

Rugby League is undoubtedly a resilient sport which has survived despite enormous obstacles that it has historically faced and continues to face. Rugby League as a sport has, and continues to be, innovative. The game is fast-flowing, easy to understand and exciting – making it fun to watch and to play. Rugby League “brand awareness” in Canada has never been higher due to the Toronto Wolfpack and excitement amongst expats on the NRL series launching in Las Vegas.

The Ravens are presently ranked 7th in the World and the playing standard within the Women’s game is arguably equal to or better than that in most countries.

Canadian Rugby League is heavily dependent on volunteers who tend to be fiercely proud of their association / affiliation with Rugby League and ardent supporters.

Rugby League continues to be, inclusive – versions of the sport have been developed that allow disabled, wheelchair, and older players to participate, along with women, girls and anyone who wishes to play a non-contact version of the sport. Born in the north of England, the sport has traditionally been made available to persons of low socio-economic status and participation costs in Canada are typically lower than those of other sports.

As an Affiliate Member of International Rugby League (Rugby League’s international governing body), the CRLA has the support of the IRL and other member countries – in particular, support from Romeo Monteith of the Jamaica Rugby League Association.

The CRLA has a solid constitution and is adopting key by-laws that not only act as a guide for the organization but which also set the foundation for future growth – including for Rugby League to be formally recognized as a sport by government bodies allowing access to funding mechanisms, and potential Full Membership status with the IRL.

Weaknesses

Participation numbers are low, approximately 200 senior men, 100 senior women and 75 junior players. Spectator numbers are also low. While the professional Toronto Wolfpack have attracted 5 figure crowds these spectators presently have a low appreciation of amateur rugby league in Canada, and the disappearance of the UK version of the team have lowered the spotlight on the sport.

The majority of Canadians are broadly aware of “Rugby” – many have played or know someone who has played Rugby Union but do not differentiate between Rugby League and Rugby Union.



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Provincial governance was inconsistent, and though improved, strong provincial organizations are required for on the ground strength for sustained growth.

The present Board has a wide range of relevant experience and skills however there is a recognized weakness with respect to the key area of fundraising. CRLA financing is of significant concern as the organization cannot access government funding. Budgeting processes have now been improved, but this was a challenge for the organization previously.

On membership and recognition, Sport Canada presently has a moratorium on eligibility applications under their Sport Funding and Accountability Framework (SFAF). Reportedly, Sport Canada is in the process of designing a new funding framework. With the IRL, a lack of Full Membership – and subsequent ability to play in qualifiers for the RLWC has made it more difficult to attract sponsors and heritage players – thus the focus on obtaining full membership in order to make a stronger governing body.

Opportunities

The low participation rates can be seen as an opportunity as there is effectively a “blank sheet” at present allowing much easier introduction of radical ideas than would be possible in a well-established system.

In 2019, the South London Silverbacks, a UK based Masters Rugby League team, organized a tour of Canada playing games against (officially) a Toronto Wolfpack Masters team and an Ontario Greybeard Masters team. Players involved in these matches subsequently set up a permanent Masters’ team in Ontario, which then led to the creation of a national team – the Grizzlies. The Masters format is very inclusive as it allows older (and injured) players to participate using a tag/touch system mixed with full contact for younger players. The format is attractive to older Rugby Union players as the RU veteran’s game does not allow a progressive physicality system as Masters RL does.

In BC and Alberta there has been a greater willingness to link to Rugby Union clubs than in Ontario. In BC these links have been used to allow teams to develop and clubs are now looking to set up their own infrastructure. While development of clubs should be on a case-by-case basis, linkage with Rugby Union clubs in Ontario (e.g. Brampton, Balmy Beach) is seen as possible due to links between amateur RU clubs and the Toronto Wolfpack and the struggles of RU clubs to retain sustainable numbers (making them open to welcome RL teams as partners). Brampton Beavers are the latest example of this successful partnership.



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Costs of sport participation tend to be very high, even though many sports are receiving funding from Sport Canada. These costs can be driven by a number of factors, particularly by staff costs and subsidizing international teams. As the CRLA is run entirely by volunteers, staff costs are zero. International team costs are a significant concern with present CRLA debts being due to costs of fielding international teams, however the recent tours were run on a pay-to-play basis. Provided that funding of international teams can be arranged by mechanisms other than subsidization by ordinary members, costs for participation in CRLA activities can be maintained at much lower than competing sports (e.g. Soccer, Rugby Union).

Worldwide there is a reported high rate of drop-out from organized sport which is largely attributed to a perceived lack of focus on participants. As Rugby League structure is in its infancy, there is an opportunity to make focus on participants a fundamental aspect of the sport in Canada.

Partnerships with academia and third parties (e.g. marketing companies) have not been exploited historically, there is an opportunity to explore and develop partnerships with outside bodies.

Threats

Other sports such as Rugby Union and Soccer are well established in areas of interest to Rugby League meaning that we are competing for participants against sports that are not only better known but which also have many more resources – including volunteers.

Physical sports are increasingly being viewed as posing an unacceptable risk to participants by parents/guardians, school boards, and government agencies due to concussion risk. It is considered likely that full contact will be banned from schools by Provincial Governments in the relatively near future.

Rugby League is presently a tiny sport in Canada with total participants (i.e. players, coaches, match officials, and administrators) numbering less than 1,000 and these volunteers are spread across Canada – a massive country. Volunteers are spread so thinly geographically that teams/clubs are in grave risk of failure in the event of loss of even a small number of volunteers as it may be difficult to access support.

In addition to the issue of thinly spread resources, Rugby League is highly reliant upon part-time volunteers – issues with home / work life may therefore adversely impact health of clubs/teams.

With the exception of parts of BC, outdoor playing opportunities are limited due to weather and seasons therefore tend to overlap with competing, well established sports. In most Provinces / Territories acceptable indoor facilities (full size 3G or 4G pitches) are limited, in popular demand and therefore prohibitively expensive.

There also appears to be an overconfidence in overall playing competence, particularly with respect to the men's game. Given that most players competing at the upper level leagues in Australia and the UK will have played Rugby League for most of their lives with years of experience playing junior Rugby League and that, prior to 2019, there was absolutely no junior Rugby League in Canada it should be no surprise that the domestic playing standard is



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significantly lower than in Tier 1 nations. There will, of course, be exceptions where players have played Rugby Union for years and are more suited for Rugby League – but even here these players have a disadvantage with respect to the level of opposition from week to week. Furthermore, domestic seasons are presently very short, typically involving no more than 10 games per season whereas players in Australia and the UK may play as many as 30 games per season.