

2024 AGM Staff Report

Over the past year, Rugby Alberta's programs in Alberta have experienced remarkable growth, nearly doubling in size thanks to the ongoing support of the CRU and ERU. Building on prior successes, here are some key highlights from 2024:

Alberta Regional Championship 7s

This year's Alberta Regional Championship 7s saw an impressive 16 teams compete across boys' and girls' divisions at Foote Field. Due to increased participation, we introduced a new format, splitting the tournament into two separate events, each hosting eight teams. University competitions ran alongside these events, providing an added layer of excitement and opportunities for aspirational athletes.

Alberta Regional Championship 15s

Held in Lethbridge, the Alberta Regional Championship 15s broke records with 800 participants, marking it as the largest ARC 15s event to date. New regions, including the County Warriors and Big Country Storm, joined the competition, showcasing the expansion of regional rugby. Special thanks to the Lethbridge Rugby Club and the City of Lethbridge for their support. In 2025, the event will return to CRU.

North vs. South: Battle of Alberta Series

The Women's Wolf Pack returned for the North vs. South Battle of Alberta series, which expanded to include three games for both men's and women's teams. Matches in Calgary, Red Deer, and Leduc highlighted the series, resulting in one player earning their first national cap in 2024. Notably, interprovincial participation included teams from Saskatchewan and Manitoba, adding a dynamic element to the competition. What started as a Women's only 2 game trial for nation exposure has become a 6 game male and female challenge. We have interest from other provinces to play the U23 WP. We will work with the sub unions to get clarity on each of our responsibilities moving forward.

Blue Card Pilot Program

In 2024, we launched the Blue Card pilot program for U16 and U18 male and female rugby to enhance player safety through standardized concussion management. While the program provided valuable data on injury rates, challenges in implementation—such as incomplete team sheets and reporting errors—underscored the need for better training and resources. These insights will need and will guide improvements for future rollouts.

Age-Grade Wolf Pack Programs

The U16 and U18 Wolf Pack programs excelled in the Prairie Cup, dominating the competition in Winnipeg. The U19 teams delivered mixed results at the CRC in Halifax, with the women narrowly missing the top spot and the men securing their first win in two years. Several players

gained valuable experience and are eligible to return in 2025. Additionally, Albertan athletes earned spots at U18 national camps held in BC. Despite the cancellation of the Prairie Cup for the U16 girls age group, the girls toured Abbotsford in October, beating the Fraser Valley Rugby Union Selects in a fantastic game and also attending the WXV match between Canada and England at BC Place.

Alberta Women's Premier League and Alberta Cup

The Alberta Women's Premier League concluded with the Edmonton Leprechaun Tigers RFC Women triumphing over the Calgary Rams RFC in Edmonton. The Alberta Cup followed a double round-robin format, with the Edmonton Leprechaun Tigers RFC defeating the Calgary Hornets in the final. We had some clubs struggle with numbers and travel which resulted in fines and incurred costs. For some membership is not there now.

Provincial Junior Rugby Championship (PJCC)

Launched in Red Deer as a season finale for U16 and U18 clubs, the PJCC aimed to extend the season and offer meaningful competition for eliminated teams. With over 300 participants each day, the event successfully showcased the first-ever Provincial Junior Rugby Championship in these age divisions while maintaining affordability and accessibility. We look forward to continuing the PJCC in Red Deer to help with Club development across the province.

Membership Growth

Membership increased by nearly 11% in 2024, marking the highest numbers since pre-COVID. This growth is attributed to a targeted spring marketing campaign and revitalized interest among the 16–20 age group. Our charts are included in the AGM materials.

Communication

We had a focus on improving communication in the province through website improvements and social media information. We made great strides in this although not as fast as we hoped and have now reached a point with regular newsletters and social posts and our marketing Campaign we are getting to where we want to be. Regular highlights of Alberta successes on the international scene, Referee profiles and tournament updates have vastly improved. Our YouTube channel has been cleaned up and continues to be improved. We helped with the Veo cameras in Calgary and will work more closely with ERU on a strategy towards more games being broadcast.

As Darren highlighted, significant investments made in 2023 have contributed to our success this year. While such investments will not always be feasible, their impact is clear and will continue to benefit the sport.

Looking forward to 2025

Our calendar for 2025 has been quickly filling up with tournaments, training sessions and certification courses. Canada Summer games will add a lot to the opportunities on the National stage including Vancouver 7s and the CSG tournament in NFLD. With our hosting of the CRCs in July and many more components still being worked on. Budgets will be far more followed this coming year with contingencies built in for unforeseeable problems like dropouts and cancelations.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Board, our dedicated staff—including Christi Sue, Breanne, Roisin, and Steph (in Communications)—our summer students, sessional coaches, especially our Zone Volunteers, and countless others for their contributions. Here's to building on this year's achievements as we look ahead to 2025!

Peter Houlihan

Director, Rugby Operations
Rugby Alberta

Chris Sandy Nesbitt

Executive Director
Rugby Alberta