

# What is Retirement from Elite Sport?

Retirement from elite level sport marks the beginning of a transition process out of the sport you love. Leaving a career is a key lifestyle change, impacting multiple aspects of day-to-day life including roles, relationships with others and daily routines.

This can be a distressing and uncertain time not only for you, the athlete, but also for those you are close with, having had supported you throughout your journey.

The current leaflet will help inform your transition from elite rugby player to retiree, outlining positives, negatives and also potential future steps you may take on your way out of sport.



# What Comes Next?

In order to achieve the most from your retirement, you should:

- **Plan ahead** – planning what may lie ahead for you can help frame your next steps in retirement.
- **Speak with friends** – speak with those close with you as they understand you best and will listen to what you have to say.
- **Explore your options** – look for a new focus to commit to like a business project or hobby.
- **Stay active** – keeping busy and doing other exercise as a form of escapism. This can also help maintain weight management as you have now left training routines.

This leaflet is to be used by elite men and women rugby players to assist them in moving away from the sport or provide further support for those already retired. Being open with family, friends and team members is key to a successful transition away from rugby.



Life Beyond Rugby:  
Guidance for Elite  
Rugby Players



## Challenges Beyond Retirement

Leaving elite level rugby can bring a period of uncertainty. It is worth remembering that this effects each athlete differently.

Potential challenges may include deterioration of physical fitness, coping with the loss of athletic identity and potential substance abuse but the most common test faced by rugby players is psychological distress.

Athletes with psychological distress may suffer from mental health issues such as anxiety or depression both during and after the retirement process. Those at higher risk include; multiple concussions, enduring injuries and involuntary retirees. Talking with others may help the transition process.



## Why do Rugby Players Retire?

Elite rugby players retire for a wide variety of reasons and are specific to each player. There are two types of sporting retirement:

- ✚ **Voluntary** – this is where retirement was *your* decision and internally controlled, when *you are ready* to move on from rugby. This may be because you feel satisfied with your career or you no longer want to continue.
- ✚ **Involuntary** – this is where retirement was *not* your decision and externally controlled, when retirement is forced upon you. This may be because of a severe injury or increasing age.

Typically, voluntary retirements are more desirable for the transition process therefore understanding why *you* are retiring is an important factor in your decision making.

“When the crowds stop roaring, the silence can be deafening.”

- Brian O’Driscoll

## Positives Beyond Retirement

Although, initially, retirement from the sport you love may be interpreted as a challenge, you must remember the numerous positive aspects associated with leaving elite rugby:

- ✚ **Increased time off** – taking a step back from training and competition means you will naturally have more time to fill with whatever interests you. This is an opportunity to explore.
- ✚ **Reduced stress** – without high-stress competition scenarios, you will have reduced stressors to worry about in day-to-day life.
- ✚ **Lower instances of injury** – much reduced risk of injuries as you leave training behind.

Being retired offers many opportunities and liberties you previously didn’t during your career. *You* can now decide what lies ahead.