



PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME GUIDE



CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction: Supporting the Person Behind the Player | 3 |
| 2. Best Practice Principles | 4 |
| 3. The Rugby PDP Framework | 6 |
| 4. Role of the Personal Development Manager | 7 |
| 5. What Good Looks Like | 9 |
| 6. Setting Up a Personal Development Programme | 10 |
| 7. Final Thoughts | 11 |



*"Rugby is something a person **does**, not who they **are**."*

CHAPTER 01

1. INTRODUCTION: SUPPORTING THE PERSON BEHIND THE PLAYER

Personal Development Programmes (PDPs) are designed to support the holistic development and wellbeing of players throughout and beyond their rugby careers. They recognise that rugby is something a person *does*, not who they *are*. At their core, PDPs equip and empower players to:

- Build meaningful identities beyond sport
- Develop personal and professional skills
- Navigate transitions with confidence
- Engage with education, career pathways, and wellbeing supports

By creating safe, confidential, and player-focused environments, PDPs ensure that each individual has the opportunity to thrive on and off the pitch.

THE CASE FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing the person behind the player has real benefits and is both good for the player and for the game. When conversations with players around off-pitch development have been individualised, holistic and meaningful to them, engagement increases, and players feel motivated for action.

The role of a **Personal Development Manager** is to promote the personal development and wellbeing of players on and off the field. Engaging in personal development activities alongside sport, whilst sometimes difficult to balance, can bring a sense of wellbeing to players by helping them to develop a more well-rounded identity, and provide an alternative focus and positive distraction from the pressure of sport. While players who prepare for retirement from sport often report more positive transitions, focusing solely on retirement can reduce engagement — especially for younger players. Personal development conversations should also emphasise making the most of opportunities during a rugby career, helping players build transferable skills and strong identities that serve them both now and in the future.

A player's career should be viewed as part of, and contributing to, their life career. Players can develop many resources (skills, behaviours, competencies, relationships) during their sporting careers that can lay positive foundations for their lives beyond sport.

CHAPTER 02

2. BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

These eight principles guide how Personal Development Programmes are delivered globally.

01

VIEW PLAYERS AS PEOPLE FIRST

- Players are individuals first. Rugby is something they do, not who they are.
- A narrow identity can increase vulnerabilities. PDPs help expand self-identity.
- Wellbeing is multifaceted: physical, social, emotional, intellectual, occupational, spiritual, financial, environmental.
- Encourage meaningful pursuits beyond rugby.

02

EMBRACE A WHOLE CAREER APPROACH

- A rugby career should be seen as part of, and contributing to, a lifelong career.
- Sporting experiences develop skills and networks valuable beyond the game.
- Focus on maximising present opportunities, not just planning for retirement.
- Self-awareness is crucial to understanding strengths and interests for future careers.

03

RESPECT CULTURAL & SYSTEMIC CONTEXTS

- Players exist within wider cultures, not just rugby subcultures.
- Development is influenced by systems like education, policies, and societal norms.
- PDPs should be adaptable to different contexts, while grounded in consistent principles.

04

SUPPORT LIFE TRANSITIONS

- PDPs reflect and support transitions into high performance environments, dual career support, relocation, injury, and eventual transition out of the game.
- PDPs should be introduced early and remain available post-retirement.
- Referral to external service providers must be provided, when required.

05

APPLY AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED APPROACH

- Apply an evidence-informed approach to athlete career development.
- Address multiple domains: athletic, psychological, academic, financial, legal, and social.
- Core elements: self-awareness, life skills, education, career planning, and mental health.
- Optional areas: community, family, spirituality, and vulnerability management.

06

EMPOWER ETHICAL PDMS

- PDMs help players take ownership of their personal growth.
- Relationships built on trust, confidentiality, and respect.
- PDMs will only offer support for which they are trained and will signpost to specialist services when needed.
- Ongoing training and development for PDMs is essential.

07

ENGAGE PLAYER ROLE MODELS

- Senior and former players can normalise and champion personal development.
- Highlighting off-field achievements builds confidence and incentivises others to engage.
- Former players can share their experiences to mentor and inspire current players.

08

FORMALISE WITH PDAS

- Where possible, Personal Development Agreements should be integrated into national Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs).
- World Rugby support may be needed in nations lacking structured Player Associations.
- Secure, multi-annual funding is necessary for long-term success.



CHAPTER 03

3. THE RUGBY PDP FRAMEWORK

At the heart of any successful PDP is a clear structure built around seven key areas. This framework can be adapted to suit national, cultural, and organisational contexts:

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>WHO AM I? / SELF-AWARENESS</p> <p>Exploring values, strengths, interests, motivators and personal identity beyond the athlete role.</p> | <p>LIFE & PROFESSIONAL SKILLS</p> <p>Developing critical life skills (e.g., communication, problem solving, digital literacy) and transferable workplace competencies.</p> |
| <p>EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Supporting formal and informal learning opportunities, vocational training, and the pursuit of personal interests.</p> | <p>CAREER PLANNING</p> <p>Guiding players through exploration, goal setting, work experience, and transition into meaningful post-rugby careers.</p> |
| <p>FINANCE</p> <p>Promoting financial literacy, budgeting, long-term planning, and connection to expert advice and services.</p> | <p>WELLBEING</p> <p>Encouraging proactive mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. Providing safe pathways to expert care when needed.</p> |
| <p>TRANSITIONS</p> <p>Helping players navigate changes within and beyond rugby, including injury, deselection, retirement, and life events. This thread runs through all other areas of the framework.</p> | |

This flexible structure allows PDMs to tailor support to the needs of individual players and national systems. Bespoke considerations include social and community engagement, faith and family, cultural awareness and professional rugby obligations.

CHAPTER 04

4. ROLE OF THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

The Player Development Manager (PDM) plays a vital role in supporting the personal and professional development and overall wellbeing of current and former players. By building strong, trusting relationships, the PDM empowers players to take ownership of their development both during and beyond their sporting careers.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

- Current and former players, including players' families and wider support networks
- Coaches, management, and support staff
- Player agents / advisors
- Educational and training institutions
- Financial and wellbeing service providers
- Player association colleagues (local and international)

QUALIFICATIONS

- Qualifications in psychology, sports management, education or related fields
- Certification in counselling, mental health, mentoring, or coaching
- Athlete lifestyle or wellbeing qualifications

VALUES & ATTRIBUTES

- Demonstrates empathy, integrity, and a strong sense of purpose
- Passionate about helping others
- Respects confidentiality and builds trust
- Open-minded, adaptable, and resilient
- Authentic and professional in interactions

CORE COMPETENCIES

| COMPETENCY | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------------------|---|
| Relationship-Building | Builds rapport quickly and networks effectively. Strong influencing, negotiation, and advocacy skills. |
| Communication | Excellent listener and communicator. Skilled in 1:1 interactions and group facilitation. |
| Cultural Competence | Creates inclusive, culturally sensitive environments. Understands the unique cultural and familial dynamics in rugby. |
| Organisation & Delivery | Plans and manages workload effectively. Strong reporting, data management, and follow-through. |
| Learning Orientation | Committed to lifelong learning and personal growth. Encourages development and reflection in others. |
| Professionalism | Acts with integrity, empathy, and confidentiality. Demonstrates authenticity and role-model behaviour. |

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

| AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Programme Development & Delivery | Design and implement PDPs based on player needs and evidence-informed practice. Deliver workshops and resources across areas such as life skills, education, financial literacy, and mental fitness. Regularly consult players to ensure programme relevance and responsiveness. |
| Career & Life Transitions | Support young players in their transition into professional rugby. Assist players in navigating key moments (injury, selection changes, career uncertainty). Guide players transitioning out of rugby into fulfilling post-playing lives. |
| Wellbeing & Identity Support | Facilitate referrals to mental health and wellbeing providers, as needed. Help players develop a broader sense of identity beyond sport. Foster self-confidence, purpose, and resilience. |
| Culture & Advocacy | Promote the values and strategic objectives of the Player Association. Advocate for player development within the club and broader rugby community. Contribute to inclusive and psychologically safe environments. |

INDEPENDENCE MATTERS

PDMs remain independent from team performance decisions. They do not manage contracts, team reviews or surveys, nor influence selection.



CHAPTER 05

5. WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Success in Personal Development Programmes (PDPs) relies on collaboration between PDMs, players, and the organisations that support them.

| WHAT PDPs PROVIDE | WHAT PDMs DO IN PRACTICE | HOW PDMs OPERATE EFFECTIVELY |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A confidential, impartial space for players to reflect and plan. • Tailored individual plans that reflect each player's unique goals and needs. • Access to trusted expert services in finance, education, and mental health. • Guidance through key career and life transitions. • Collaboration with families, clubs, and agents. • Encouragement of sustainable personal and professional habits beyond sport. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a strengths-based and individualised coaching approach. • Approach all interactions with professionalism, approachability, and confidentiality. • Stay within their scope: equipping, empowering, and supporting players. • Maintain independence from performance, selection, and representation matters. • Stay current with all player services, support programmes, and entitlements. • Co-create development pathways and workshop topics with players. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in continuous professional development. • Clearly communicate their role within the high-performance environment. • Keep accurate, up-to-date player records using approved systems. • Participate actively in PDM networks and conferences. • Access professional supervision for wellbeing and reflective practice. • Refer players to specialist support when needed. |

ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT EXPECTATIONS

- Recognise PDMs as essential contributors within high-performance teams
- Ensure coaches and HP staff understand the scope and value of the PDM role
- Provide PDMs with consistent access to training environments and team settings
- Resource the PDP to meet the real needs of athletes and staff
- Promote dual-career environments that respect and support long-term personal growth

CHAPTER 06

6. SETTING UP A PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Establishing a PDP requires planning, collaboration, and commitment to player-centred values. Whether in a new organisation or growing an existing initiative, the following steps offer a roadmap.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>01</p> <p>DEFINE THE RATIONALE</p> <p>Clarify the purpose of your PDP and the benefits to players and the game. Use real stories, research, or player feedback to understand current levels of engagement, needs, and interests.</p> | <p>02</p> <p>ENGAGE KEY STAKEHOLDERS</p> <p>Include players, coaches, federations and high-performance staff early. Promote the PDP as a person-focused programme that enhances performance by supporting personal growth, wellbeing and life balance.</p> |
| <p>03</p> <p>SECURE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING</p> <p>Integrate funding into CBAs where possible. Identify sponsors whose values align with player development. Position the PDP as essential within existing high-performance budgets.</p> | <p>04</p> <p>RECRUIT & SUPPORT A PDM</p> <p>Appoint qualified and trusted Personal Development Manager(s). Consider regional or multi-team coverage where needed. Ensure clear role boundaries, supervision, and ongoing training.</p> |
| <p>05</p> <p>BUILD THE FRAMEWORK</p> <p>Use the Rugby PDP Framework (or adapt it) to cover all seven core development domains. Adapt activities and delivery to local culture, context, and player needs.</p> | <p>06</p> <p>DEVELOP OPERATIONAL SYSTEMS</p> <p>Set up secure record-keeping and player tracking tools. Create policies around data, budgeting, provider vetting, and referrals.</p> |
| <p>07</p> <p>DESIGN PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES</p> <p>Offer 1:1 Player Action Plans, workshops & seminars (financial literacy, resilience, interview skills), mentoring & coaching, and experiential learning such as job shadows, volunteering, and internships.</p> | <p>08</p> <p>EMBED INTO RUGBY ENVIRONMENTS</p> <p>Ensure PDMs have visibility and access in team settings. Align PDP touchpoints with training blocks and off-seasons. Encourage collaboration so development is seen as part of performance, not an add-on.</p> |
| <p>09</p> <p>MONITOR AND IMPROVE</p> <p>Track engagement and outcomes. Use player feedback and team reflections to evolve the programme.</p> | <p>10</p> <p>COMMUNICATE AND CELEBRATE</p> <p>Share examples of players benefitting from the programme. Keep the PDP visible in newsletters and performance environments.</p> |

CHAPTER 07

7. FINAL THOUGHTS



Personal Development Programmes are not a luxury – they are essential to modern rugby.

They serve the player, the person, and ultimately the game.

The PDP is a space for reflection, planning, and action. It is a bridge between rugby and the rest of life, empowering players to shape their future with clarity and confidence.



PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME GUIDE