



17 June 2016

Dear Presidents and Parents,

We are writing to update you on SJRU's approach to the issue of weight-based modifications for junior players given recent coverage in the news media.

SJRU is Australia's largest union, with more than 11,000 players representing 60 Clubs from all parts of Sydney. The safety and well-being of our players is paramount and SJRU has regularly reviewed its policy around the registration process to reflect changes in the different rates that young Australians are maturing and Sydney's changing population make up.

As parents and Clubs will be aware, the ARU allows individual unions to put their own policies in place to allow players to play either above or below their chronological age. The ARU stipulates that policies must take into account physical development and capability and the level of experience of the participant.

SJRU's current policy around weight is:

- To play down, a male player has to be assessed in the lowest 25% for weight in their age group provided there is a team in the player's chronological age group (50% for females) or the lowest 50% for weight if there is not a team in the player's chronological age group (75% for females).
- Previously to play down, a male player had to be in the lowest 10% for both height AND weight (10 years ago) or the lowest 20% for both height AND weight (5 years ago).
- Ten and five years ago there was no dispensation criteria for females.

Additionally, SJRU is now a Sydney-wide competition rather than a geographical competition so wherever possible, teams are playing other teams of comparable ability.

As part of the on-going review of the registration policy, SJRU surveyed Clubs on the issue last year providing background information on how weight / age rugby operates in Auckland, Canterbury and Wellington in NZ. It was clear from Club responses that there were a range of strong views in our community with no definitive position emerging. With that in mind and with current published height and weight charts out of date, the Board took the decision to collect data, analyse it and present it back so that a fact-based discussion could be had by the SJRU community. It has been planned to collect the weight data through the registration process next year.

SYDNEY JUNIOR RUGBY UNION

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This week we have been advised that the ARU has convened a panel of experts to address a range of safety issues in Junior Rugby including the issue of weight / age competition based on the latest international research. The ARU will develop an updated national policy on weight / age that will be available for the 2017 season.

Given the importance of this issue to players, parents, Clubs, and the SJRU we have written formally to ARU CEO Bill Pulver seeking both an outline of this process and given our relative size to be included in the policy development and consultation.

If it is necessary to collect data earlier than previously planned to provide input to the ARU process, SJRU will consult with Clubs to evaluate the best way of achieving this.

In the interim, we would encourage any concerned players, parents or Clubs to take advantage of the age dispensation rules already in place. Clubs need only approach the SJRU Competition Manager outlining their specific instances and they will be addressed. If Clubs and Coaches need support around education and implementation, it may be possible to provide NSW Rugby Development support.

To re-iterate: we understand that views in the SJRU community differ on weight / age. If you have ongoing concerns or questions, please contact me or SJRU Director John O'Farrell (john@ofarrells.org) who is leading the SJRU Board Sub-Committee on this matter.

Regards

Tony Fisher
Chairman
Sydney Junior Rugby Union

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